Rebecca Amato
City University of New York, The Graduate Center
rebecca.amato@gmail.com
Case Statement for NCPH Working Group
Public History and Gentrification: A Contentious Relationship

Developing the East Village

Land use is on the minds of New Yorkers. Since 2002, more than 9400 blocks of the city have been rezoned by the Department of City Planning, comprising about 108 neighborhoods. The massive and rapid rezoning project is part of Mayor Michael Bloomberg's PlaNYC 2030, the first city-wide proposal to imagine a comprehensive city plan in New York since 1961. Indeed, most of the neighborhoods under review for zoning changes have not seen such alteration *since* that year, and for several of them left abandoned by infrastructural improvements like subway lines and parks, a new look from the Department of City Planning appears to be a boon, heralding new investment and better services. Other neighborhoods, however, have reacted to rezoning with trepidation. Known as a "pro-development" mayor, Michael Bloomberg's PlaNYC sounds to many like a call to raze old neighborhoods and build anew. Preservationists and residents (often, these are the same people) fear a loss of historically significant buildings and a more intangible element, "neighborhood character." As one New Yorker put it, "I believe that Manhattan dies a little each time middle and working class housing is lost to planned luxury condominium development. Without diversity, which has always made New York special, Manhattan will shortly become a dull sprawling bedroom community for celebrities, Wall Street financiers, rich out-of-towners, and foreign investors."

The focus of this case statement is Manhattan's East Village neighborhood and it involves two general areas of discussion: the ways in which public-historians-as-preservationists

have attempted to combat development efforts in the East Village, and the involvement of nearby New York University in pressuring the neighborhood to accommodate its student population through the construction of new dormitories and classrooms. Through this example, I hope to identify some of the limitations of the traditional preservationist tactic, and imagine ways that public historians -- particularly those committed to slowing gentrification -- might work differently.

The lightning-rod issue for many East Village preservationists concerned about the city's zoning process has been a fear of "upzoning;" that is, an allowance for developers to build larger and taller buildings within a neighborhood. This anxiety has not been unfounded. In November of 2005, New York University purchased St. Ann's Church, an 1847 structure located on E. 12th Street, and submitted a plan to demolish the historic building only to replace it with a 26-story freshman dormitory. The university also purchased air-rights from the nearby Peter Cooper Station Post Office to ensure that it could build tall enough to accommodate its needs. Neighborhood residents cried foul, accusing the university of obtaining the post office's air rights illegally and of ignoring community pleas to build in a way that was consistent with neighborhood scale and architectural style. "Little by little, the university is chipping away at everything—the churches, the mom-and-pop stores," said one East Villager. Indeed, according to a 2006 *Village Voice* article, the university had purchased 25 buildings and built 13 more in the East Village since the early 1980s. Andrew Berman, head of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation (GVSHP), which has expanded its purview into the East Village, voiced his dismay at the St. Ann's acquisition, particularly because both the church, eligible for listing as a National Historic site before it was demolished, and the post office, which actually *was*

listed on the National Registry, should have been more protected. In a letter to NYU President John Sexton, Berman pleaded for more consideration of the community: “Given the tremendous visual impact such a development would have, and the strong existing character of the block and its surroundings, it is of the utmost importance that the design be sensitive in its relationship to its context.” NYU responded by inviting Berman and other neighborhood leaders to discuss the project and provide ideas for a more community-approved plan. New designs that would preserve the church’s facade, for example, were shared with the neighborhood. Opened in May 2009, however, the resulting dormitory, Founders Hall, made no other compromises to its original proposal. At 26 stories, it is currently the tallest structure in the East Village. The remaining church facade stands several feet away from the front of the dormitory itself, disconnected from the new construction.

The battle over NYU’s Founders Hall was a galvanizing moment for East Village preservationists. Since then, a campaign to demand that the Department of City Planning reconsider its rezoning plans for the neighborhood and force a height limit for new development on the 3rd and 4th Avenue corridors (which would have prevented Founders Hall from being built had it been in place earlier), has been successful. In October 2010, the New York City Council voted to approve a measure that capped heights at 120 feet for the portion of the corridors that had not previously been protected. Berman’s GVSHP lauded the decision, suggesting that thanks to the new limits, “if there’s going to be new development, it will be more residential. Right now, new development is all dorms and hotels.” Following up on the rezoning victory, the GVSHP has also begun the process of surveying the East Village for a

proposal to create an East Village Historic District. Currently, the survey is being compiled into an architectural report that will be submitted to the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission for review.

While fears of "upzoning" have subsided for the time-being and NYU's eastern expansion seems to have slowed, if only temporarily, it is worth reviewing the role of public historians in the debate and considering whether preservation, as represented by the GVSHP, should be historians' only -- or at least loudest -- response to increased development and gentrification in this significant neighborhood. The changes that gentrification, in general, and NYU's investment in the East Village, in particular, have wrought are ones that have a direct impact on low-income residents and small businesses. In just the past few years, long-established "mom-and-pop" businesses like Second Avenue Deli, Rectangles Restaurant, CBGB's, and the Bouwerie Lane Theatre have been replaced by a Chase Manhattan Bank branch, a North Fork Bank ATM, a fashion gallery, and a designer clothing store, respectively. Single Room Occupancy hotels (SROs) that dotted the Bowery have disappeared, with only one remaining -- and that is located above a proposed tapas restaurant cheekily calling itself "SRO." Prior to these more cultural changes, demographic changes occurred as well. According to sociologist, Tarry Hum, the East Village, which had been notably multi-ethnic for over a century became dominant non-Hispanic White in 2000. And new research data suggests that the median-price-per-unit of a 5+ family building has more than quadrupled in the past ten years. Historic preservation will not halt this kind of neighborhood change. Some might argue, in fact, that it can only spur it on. As historian Mike Wallace warned in perhaps exaggerated terms

in his 1996 book *Mickey Mouse History*, "[If preservationists do not confront displacement,] American cities will be heavily patrolled and well-armed 'historic' ghettos, defending themselves against beggars, muggers, and squatters; the past itself will have become a hated emblem of class domination." This dystopian vision, overwrought though it is, has a ring of truth to it: rather than locating "neighborhood character" in buildings and parks, might preservationists and public historians consider preservation of people -- that is alliances with the organizations fighting displacement -- a legitimate aim? And how would this work? For example, would exhibits, walking tours, public conversations, and oral history projects focused directly on displacement be useful? Would campaigns to offer employment training in preservation to job-seeking neighborhood residents be worthwhile? Should preservationists and public historians urge city officials to offer tax benefits to property-holders in landmark districts to house low income residents? Perhaps Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs), a tactic recently adopted by

communities under assault by developers, ought to be encouraged in cases like those of NYU -- if a developer wants to build, for example, the CBA could require not only preservation, but also jobs investment. In essence, the question I wish to ask is, should we take a political position when gentrification changes a historic community and what should it be?

Case Statement: "Ethnic Renewal: Place, space and struggle in Philadelphia's Chinatown"

Kathryn Wilson, Georgia State University

Public History and Gentrification Working Group, National Council for Public History 2011

Located in the heart of downtown, Philadelphia's Chinatown has since the 1960s actively struggled against various redevelopment plans to maintain the area as a living community for resident families, preserving important community spaces (such as a much-beloved church and school), and continually drawing on a legacy of activism to mobilize against various threats. At the same time it has been "boxed in" by large-scale developments (shopping mall, convention center, and national park) on all but its northern border. Chinatown's leaders and community developers consistently must strike a balance across the area's multiple existences as an intergenerational family community, immigrant entry point, ethnic touchstone, tourist destination, and prime real estate. Their experience provides a rich example of the complicated relationship between heritage preservation and urban renewal, and the role that public history representation can play in negotiating community spaces within and against larger processes of gentrification and redevelopment.

Philadelphia's Chinatown dates back to the 1870s and for many decades consisted of a concentration of Chinese businesses and boarding houses clustered around the 900 block of Race Street. From the 1910s to the 1940s Chinese Americans began occupying adjacent blocks amid a multiethnic population, and a few families made a home here among the many "bachelors" and the city's "skid row." After World War II, liberalized immigration policies toward the Chinese transformed Chinatown into a family-oriented community. This growth of

the neighborhood coincided with emerging city plans, as early as 1945, for a cross-town Vine Street Expressway and other urban redevelopment projects in the areas bordering the neighborhood core. When plans outlined the destruction of the much-beloved Holy Redeemer Church and School and threatened the residential character of the area, a new generation of community activists challenged both ethnic community elders and city/state agencies and founded a new community development movement. Subsequently, community developers laid claim to previously confiscated land, securing Chinatown's "borders" and planning for future expansion. Two recent developments in the community relate to the issue of public history and gentrification: the proposed development of "Chinatown North" abutting (and sometimes conflicting with) an emerging loft district and its attendant adaptive reuse initiative, and efforts of the Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation (PCDC) and other organizations to draw on the preservation, commemoration, and interpretation of the ethnic neighborhood's history to promote community-driven investment.

The kind of development that often takes place in and around Chinatown tends either to serve tourism needs, which require a degree of gentrification for "visitor readiness" (yet also work against gentrification by retaining exotic ethnic flavor), or hotels and other multistory buildings converted or constructed for high end condominiums— sometimes by Chinese American entrepreneurs sometimes by others— housing that Chinatown residents cannot afford, and that contribute to a higher cost of property in the area. Since the 1960s when many Chinatown structures were demolished to make way for various city, state and federal projects, housing has been a critical issue for a historically segregated community that still serves as an entry point for new immigrants and a symbolic return for retirees. Planned expansion of the

neighborhood focuses on Chinatown North, an area north of the Vine Street Expressway. Projects have been made possible with support from a variety of government and nonprofit funding sources, including HUD and most recently the Main Street Program which is enabling refurbished storefronts and new themed streetscapes, including a plaza at 10th and Vine that bridges historic Chinatown and Chinatown North. Beginning in the 1990s, PCDC began constructing mixed income housing projects (largely rowhouses) around Holy Redeemer Church. Also planned is a community center housed in a modern glass high rise with no discernible "Chinese" characteristics, described as a "statement building" signaling the relevancy of Chinatown and resonating with contemporary Asian architecture. This proposed landscape contrasts with the historic heart of Chinatown even as it builds symbolically upon previously lost territory.

Directly west of Chinatown North lies an emerging loft district now known as Callowhill, created largely through the reuse of existing warehouse and other post industrial structures, geographically linked to the Broad Street Avenue of the Arts and inhabited primarily by white middle class artists and other urban pioneers. Residents of Callowhill began mobilizing some years ago for adaptive reuse of a massive stone railroad viaduct to create an elevated park along the lines of New York City's Highline. Proponents of the viaduct project are almost exclusively residents of Callowhill and want to preserve the whole of the viaduct as an historic artifact and unique urban green space that would bridge and transcend neighborhoods, literally rising above and spurring revitalization of the old ethnic enclaves along the rail route. Chinatown organizers see the viaduct as a looming monolith that blights the area below it and want it demolished to create a clear path for an airy and orderly housing grid. The conflict over

the viaduct is not only around use of and visions for urban space but also rooted in the conflict between competing historical legacies – one a celebration of the industrial past to create a spectacular cultural attraction, the other an attempt to overcome historical disenfranchisement and create a livable neighborhood for working families. One vision seeks to create a chic and undoubtedly gentrified area, the other to renew urban space in a class inclusive (if not necessarily ethnic inclusive) way.

On the one hand, immigrant communities like Chinatown focus – and must focus -- on community needs of the present and future, as John Chin, executive director of PCDC once commented, "we can't afford history." Early on PCDC rejected seeking historic district status for Chinatown, citing the economic burdens and other constraints it would place on residents and businesspeople. Instead, they negotiated a special zoning designation preventing development that would threaten the character of the neighborhood, including a ban against high rises. Nevertheless, public history activities have been undertaken in the last two decades by PCDC and other Chinatown organizations as a way of raising awareness of the community's contemporary issues. PCDC board members labored for over a decade to establish a state historical marker at the site of the first Chinese laundry in Chinatown. Lacking necessary historical evidence to past state criteria, the marker was eventually approved with more general text about the "only Chinatown in Pennsylvania" where "Asian cultural traditions are preserved and ethnic identity perpetuated." From 2000-2003 the Asian Arts Initiative undertook a series of projects that included the collection of oral histories and drew on historical archives to create artist installations imagining the neighborhood's future in light of its past. Both organizations collaborated with the Greater Philadelphia Tourism and Marketing

Corporation to develop a neighborhood tour of Chinatown, a process that entailed a good deal of dialogue and negotiation around sites and narratives. While the GPTMC wanted to focus on encounters with exotic Chinese culture, Chinatown groups wanted to focus on narratives of activism and struggle.

For Chinatown residents and other community members, a sense of identity in this landscape focuses on sites of struggle and places that embody remembered histories or lived community relationships, such as family homes, churches and temples, a senior citizen center, family associations, and a district fire station, sites that do not lend themselves to the experience economy of tourism. This lived neighborhood contrasts with the neighborhood as cultural attraction, which tends to represent Chinatown as out of historic time, identified primarily by restaurants, gift shops, and curiosities such as herbalist shops. Most recently PCDC has undertaken a video project "Uncovering Historic Chinatown" (for which I serve as historian), "to spread awareness of Chinatown's place in Philadelphia history and encourage investment in the community." The video project is part of the "Historic Chinatown Campaign" and was made possible by a 2010 Preserving Neighborhoods Project Competition award from the Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia. Sites and stories will highlight the enduring issues faced by Chinatown, based on some of PCDC's top priorities for investment: housing, the community center (community services, recreation and youth), and streetscapes (urban transformation), embedding the history into each thematic section. To what extent this project and others will spur investment in Chinatown that meets community needs remains to be seen.

Chinatown's experience with public history and urban renewal raise important questions for public historians. Do historic preservation and public history activities counter gentrification or engender it? Whose history gets preserved and to what end? Can the interpretation and representation of alternative histories be a means to counteract gentrification by highlighting class diverse communities of the past and drawing on them in visions for a neighborhood's future? Are these public history products viable economic drivers for disenfranchised communities? How can a community struggling in the present draw on its past for inspiration and renewal without getting trapped in a themed or essentializing vision of itself?

Public History and Gentrification Working Group Statement

Edward Roach
Historian, Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park

Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park is a multisite National Park Service (NPS) unit in southwest Ohio established in 1993 to commemorate three Dayton residents: aviation pioneers Wilbur and Orville Wright and their contemporary, poet Paul Laurence Dunbar. The NPS works with a variety of partners—some named in its enabling legislation—to manage the park's resources, and owns only one of the park's units.[1] The unit owned and operated by the NPS comprises the Hoover Block and Wright Cycle Company building (together comprising the Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center or WDIC), two of the park's most significant resources and its principal visitor center, and is located in an economically depressed neighborhood of west Dayton (the part of the city west of the Great Miami River), one mile (1.5 km) from the city center.

While the term "gentrification" was used by park proponents—mostly Caucasian individuals who did not live in the immediate neighborhood—only to deny that it was a secondary reason for creating the park, neighborhood economic revitalization was a widely recognized goal in bringing the NPS to town. The example of Lowell National Historical Park in Massachusetts, an urban multisite park with extensive public-private partnerships also in a deindustrializing city, was prominent in their minds as they worked with city officials and the

[1] Dayton Aviation Heritage Preservation Act of 1992, P.L. 102-419, as amended. The NPS owns and operates the Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center; it also operates the Huffman Prairie Flying Field Interpretive Center, which is on property owned by the U.S. Air Force. Dayton History, a local nonprofit, operates the Paul Laurence Dunbar State Memorial and Carillon Historical Park, where the national park's Wright Hall unit is located. Dayton History also operates Hawthorn Hill on behalf of the Wright Family Foundation. Ownership of the Wright Company factory unit is presently in flux. More information on the park and its units is available at www.nps.gov/daav.

National Park Service to undertake a study of potential park resources.[2] West Dayton, where the Wright brothers spent most of their childhood and lived with their father and sister until they moved to a mansion in the Dayton suburb of Oakwood in 1914, had been an economically depressed section of the city for decades (Wright biographer Tom Crouch notes that the neighborhood was "changing for the worse" as early as the 1910s).[3] During the twentieth century, west Dayton evolved from an area with an ethnically and racially mixed population to one populated principally by African Americans, forced into the area through segregated housing policies in the rest of the city.

The end of housing segregation during the 1960s allowed African Americans of means to leave the Wrights' former neighborhood, and its population fell while absentee ownership grew. Riots in 1966 and 1967 resulted in the exodus of businesses from West Third Street. The construction of two major highways—Interstate 75 and U.S. 35—cut the neighborhood from other areas of Dayton to the east and south, while the city of Dayton targeted the area for "urban renewal" and razed many deteriorated structures from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Only with the 1981 discovery of the building in which the Wrights operated their printing and bicycle sales and repair businesses from 1895 to 1897 did the city

[2] The National Park Service did not fund the study that examined Dayton-based Wright and Dunbar resources for possible inclusion in a national park; instead, the 2003 Fund Committee provided the funds. See U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, "Study of Alternatives: Dayton's Aviation Heritage, Ohio" (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1991). A list of local individuals involved in the park's creation is on page 60.

[3] Tom D. Crouch, *The Bishop's Boys: A Life of Wilbur and Orville Wright* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989), 476. Wilbur Wright, who died of typhoid fever in 1912, did not move with his father, brother, and sister to Oakwood in 1914. Two older Wright brothers maintained independent family residences.

begin to encourage the preservation of what remained of the west Dayton in which the Wrights lived and worked, an effort that led to the creation of the national park.[4]

When Congress created the park, almost 86 percent of the 182 commercial and residential structures in what was renamed the Wright-Dunbar Village were considered either substandard or deteriorated.[5] The city and park supporters hoped, though, that an economic renaissance fueled by national park tourism would ameliorate this situation. Consultants projected that 300,000 to 400,000 people would annually visit the park and patronize new businesses, establishments that would fill empty storefronts, draw new residents to the Wright-Dunbar Village, and serve the area's existing population.[6] Indeed, the city embarked upon an extensive redevelopment program for the neighborhood's commercial structures along West Third Street and for its homes on the streets south of West Third. To ensure that local residents would be supportive of the redevelopment efforts—and to avoid a situation similar to the opposition in Cincinnati during the 1970s to the proposed National Register of Historic Places

---

[4] See Fred Mitchell, "Historic and Architectural Resources of the Mound-Horace Area, Montgomery County, Ohio (Dayton)," National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, 11 July 2001; Loren Gannon, "West Third Street Historic District," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 25 January 1989; *Historic Structure Report: The Wright Cycle Company Building (HS-01)* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Quinn Evans Architects, 1999), online at www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/daav/wright_cycle.pdf (accessed 4 January 2011); and Marjorie E. Loycano, "A History of Race Relations in the Miami Valley: A Brief Overview" (Dayton: Carillon Historical Park, 2000). In 1936, Henry Ford purchased and moved the former Wright family home and the building in which they maintained their bicycle shop from 1897 to 1916 from west Dayton to his Greenfield Village museum in Dearborn, Michigan.

[5] City of Dayton Department of Planning, "Wright-Dunbar Village Urban Renewal Plan" (Dayton: City of Dayton, 1995), SD-6. While the neighborhood where the Wrights once lived is now generally known as the Wright-Dunbar Village, Paul Laurence Dunbar never resided within its boundary. I suggest that renaming and rebranding a previously depressed area is an essential component of gentrification.

[6] *Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park Multimodal Comprehensive Transportation Study Final Report* (Columbus, Ohio: Burgess and Niple, 2002), 14. Dayton Aviation's highest visitation—100,615—occurred in 2003, the centenary of the first flight; even then, only 31,527 people visited the Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center. Between 2004 and 2010, the park attracted an average of 54,120 visitors per year, while the WDIC averaged 15,828 visitors per year.

nomination of its Over-the-Rhine area—Dayton worked with a newly established Main Street, Inc., organization, Wright-Dunbar, Inc., to repair streets, sidewalks, and curbs; install decorative street lights; stabilize existing structures; and construct historically sympathetic infill housing on the area's many empty lots. [7] The city also worked with existing residents, providing the services of a social worker, individual technical assistance, grants, and tax incentives to ensure that changes in property values would not force low-income residents from their homes, essential in an area where properties appraised for $4,000 to $6,000 now stood amongst sympathetically styled new homes marketed at prices above $160,000.[8]

West Third Street and the Wright-Dunbar Village took on a gentrified appearance; most commercial structures no longer had concrete block-filled windows, and new homes filled previously empty lots. Economic success as a result of the national park's establishment, though, has proved fleeting for the commercial and residential districts. Nearly a decade after the centenary of flight, much of the commercial space remains unoccupied. There are no grocery stores, gas stations, or restaurants in the area for residents or visitors; local Sunoco and Subway outlets proved unprofitable and closed. Real estate values within Wright-Dunbar Village have fallen dramatically, with seven of the infill houses constructed in 2003 now

---

[7] See Andrew Hurley, *Beyond Preservation: Using Public History to Revitalize Inner Cities* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 28–29, for a brief examination of the proposed redevelopment of Over-the-Rhine. The matter is examined more fully in Zane L. Miller and Bruce Tucker, *Changing Plans for America's Inner Cities: Over-the-Rhine and Twentieth-Century Urbanism* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998). Much larger geographically than Wright-Dunbar, Over-the-Rhine was entered on the National Register in 1983. Wright-Dunbar, Inc., is the only Main Street organization in Dayton; its purview is limited to the West Third Street Historic District.

[8] Cathy Mong, "Welcome 'Home-comers,'" *Dayton Daily News,* 5 January 1997, 2B; 2003 Citirama Program (Dayton: Homebuilders Association of Dayton and the Miami Valley, 2003). See also City of Dayton, "Wright-Dunbar Village Vacant Redevelopment Project," c. 1997, in Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park files.

assessed at an average of 44.6 percent of their initial list price (several other village properties have sold in sheriff's sales for a fraction of their prerecession value). Wright-Dunbar Village maintains a neighborhood association to which the park sends a representative, though only 38 of the eligible 117 households pay association dues. Community usage of park facilities, including a rentable meeting room in the WDIC, is minimal, and few local residents visit park resources or attend facilitated programs. Conversely, the park's exhibits are largely static—it has no temporary exhibit space—and are not connected with neighborhood or Dayton history beyond themes directly connected with the Wrights or Dunbar. Existing lesson plans address aviation history, but not the history of west Dayton. Together, the park and the neighborhood association sponsor an annual summer ice-cream social, but the two groups have few other contacts.[9]

In a city such as Dayton where the economy has been in decline for decades, how best can neighborhood-based public historians responsible for interpreting and preserving very specific resources and stories expand their official missions to work with local residents in creating or reinforcing a sense of place inclusive of the total history of a neighborhood? How best can historians collaborate with residents and community development officials in an era of limited funding to create economic opportunities and neighborhood services while preserving existing neighborhood character? How may historians reconcile the personal histories of

[9] See "Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park: Where the Wright Brothers Conquered the Air," Teaching with Historic Places Lesson Plan (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, n.d.), www.nps.gov/nr/twhp/wwwlps/lessons/111wrightoh/111WrightOH.htm (accessed 7 January 2011). Values for 31, 34, 37, 40, 43, and 49 South Williams Street (all on the same block as the Wright-Dunbar Interpretive Center) and 4 Hawthorn Street (an exterior replica of the former Wright home at 7 Hawthorn) are taken from the Montgomery County Auditor's database at www.mcrealestate.org (accessed 7 January 2011). Wright-Dunbar Village Neighborhood Association figures are taken from the WDVNA Treasurer's Report of 5 January 2011, in the author's possession.

residents with a building's architectural history? Does a building's structural condition play any role in the matter? I look forward to discussing these matters further.

Mary Battle
Emory University
marypbattle@yahoo.com
Case Statement for Public History and Gentrification Working Group

African American History Tours and Gentrification in Charleston, South Carolina

In contrast to a classroom lecture, a tour guide's narrative of historic figures and events must always interact with a present day landscape. Guides must also entice participants to purchase tickets to their tours, rather than addressing a captive audience of students. They make their living by offering historic narratives that are accessible and appealing to as wide a range of tourists as possible. This is particularly true in the context of Charleston, South Carolina, a coastal historic destination that attracts millions of visitors a year from all over the world, generating billions of dollars in revenue. History and culture are valuable commodities in this city-- a 2007 survey revealed that the top reasons visitors gave for coming to Charleston were not golf or beach resorts, but history and food.[10] Tourism in Charleston also has a long history, beginning shortly after the Civil War, when local white elites developed and marketed a historic image of the area to attract much needed revenue.[11] Until recent decades, these representations focused almost exclusively on antebellum and colonial white elite experiences. Tour guides overwhelmingly marginalized or ignored African American history, despite Charleston's significant role as the largest North American entry point for the trans-Atlantic slave trade, which led to a significant African American population and cultural presence in the

[10] "Estimation of Tourism Economic Impacts in the Charleston Area, 2007." Charleston Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, College of Charleston's Office of Tourism Analysis, accessed November 30, 2010, http://www.charlestoncvb.com/media/tourismimpact.html
[11] Stephanie Yuhl, *The Golden Haze of Memory* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

city.[12] In 2011 African American history tours are more prevalent, but considering the priorities and dynamics of tourism, how do they address contemporary legacies of this history, such as of race and class inequalities and gentrification? This is particularly a complex issue for African American history guides in downtown Charleston, where the historic preservation efforts that continuously draw millions of tourists are also historically tied to gentrification and displacement in predominantly African American low-income neighborhoods.

Since 2007, I have conducted dissertation research on emerging representations of race, class, culture and the history of slavery in historic tourism in and around Charleston through interviews with individuals who work in this industry, as well as audience engagement and tour observations. For this working group I will discuss interviews I have conducted with tour guides in downtown Charleston that address African American history, particularly with Alphonso Brown, who has been leading "Gullah Tours" since the 1990s. In contrast to many of Charleston's downtown tours, Brown makes African American histories of enslavement, inequality, oppression and resistance from the colonial era to the present day central to his tour narratives. He encourages his tour participants to see past a "historic" landscape shaped by nearly a century of preservation efforts focused on colonial and antebellum white elite nostalgia. For example, he points out the former slave quarters beside the mansions, structures that real estate agents now called "carriage houses" or "dependencies." He ties African American experiences of the past to the present, as participants listen to his historic narrative while visually engaging Charleston's urban landscape outside his tour bus windows. This serves

[12] Walter Edgar, *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1998). Bernard E. Powers, Jr., *Black Charlestonians: A Social History, 1822-1885* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1994).

to set up questions about contemporary issues in the historic African American neighborhoods he narrates, such as gentrification. At the same time, Brown avoids making participants feel uncomfortable or confused by the topics he addresses. Rather than offering a direct critique or even using terms such as "gentrification," he uses storytelling strategies such as humor and juxtaposition of points, so that his tour participants can make, or not make, their own connections about the sites and issues he narrates. As he explains, "you definitely don't want to hurt nobody's feelings." While these priorities may seem problematic in academia, in the consumer context of tourism and the goal of accessibility in public history, Brown's strategies enable him to at least indirectly make these issues visible to a wide range of visitors, while still maintaining a thriving tour company.

Context of Gentrification in Charleston

Before further describing my interview with Brown and his tour, I will provide some context for historic preservation and gentrification in Charleston during the twentieth century. In *Historic Preservation for a Living City*, Robert R. Weyeneth describes how Charleston was one of the first cities to organize historic preservation efforts in the United States. This began in the 1920s with the Preservation Society of Charleston, which was made up of local white elites who brought in tourism revenue by preserving homes and constructing memorials and narratives that appealed to their own "Lost Cause" nostalgia, as well as new twentieth century business interests.[13] In the 1950s, the Historic Foundation of Charleston made historic preservation in a

[13] Yuhl 2005. Fitzhugh W. Brundage*, The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005). Mike Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press,

"living city" feasible through rehabilitation strategies that were groundbreaking at the time, but are now standard throughout the United States-- such as revolving funds to purchase and rehabilitate historic buildings that are then sold for contemporary use to "preservation minded" buyers, rather than turned into museums. They also sought to preserve the historic "integrity" of entire neighborhoods rather than targeting a single building.[14] But the Foundation's early disregard for African American history and interests meant that preservation often led to increased costs of living and displacement in low-income neighborhoods predominantly occupied by African Americans. For example, as Weyeneth describes, one of the Foundation's first neighborhood projects was rehabilitating the downtown Ansonborough neighborhood in the 1950s. It was seen as a success for the "preservation community, middle-class home owners, real estate brokers, downtown merchants, and the tax collector." But for the residents who were forced to move from the rehabilitated area, it was a "case study in displacement." [15] Though this was actually a racially integrated area, the press campaign to persuade voters to approve bonds for the project specifically described Ansonborough as a "Negro slum," and used "slum eradication" as a rallying cry.[16] In the 1970s and 80s the Foundation recognized the past injustices of displacement in Ansonborough, and in their efforts to rehabilitate other neighborhoods, offered easements, privileged residents' home ownership over new buyers, and attempted to use historic architecture to address inner city housing needs.[17] But the Foundation's history of gentrification and displacement in the 1950s and 60s caused many

---

1996). Robert R. Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City: Historic Charleston Foundation 1947-1997* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2000).

[14] Weyeneth, 56.

[15] Weyeneth, 68.

[16] Weyeneth, 64.

[17] Weyeneth, 106-123.

residents in low-income areas to distrust historic preservation efforts. For example when the city attempted to have the predominantly African American East Side neighborhood placed on the National Register in the 1980s, residents resisted, and ultimately the nomination was not approved. One of the most vocal opponents, Arthur K. Maybank, explained:

Many blacks used to live in Ansonborough, and now very few do. Most were forced out by rising prices…We don't want this to happen again.[18]

Alphonso Brown's African American Gullah Tour

While Alphonso Brown does not explicitly address this history of preservation, gentrification and displacement in his two-hour tour, he does take his bus through low-income historic African American neighborhoods, and sets up questions about downtown development dynamics in his distinctive narrative style. On a tour I took in January 2011, he dramatically stopped about midway through, and in a half whisper asked the van full of tourists, "Are y'all ready to go into the 'hood?" After a few chuckles Brown offered a suggestion-- "Maybe all the white folks should lean down." This lead to more laughter from the tour group, which was made up of fourteen people-- half were African American, and the rest white. No one ducked, but this humor seemed to keep everyone listening and at ease as Brown pushed on the gas and began his narrative of "the projects" in downtown Charleston. He explained that the housing projects we were viewing were the second ever developed in the United States by the Public Works Administration in the 1930s, shortly after New York City's were built. They were initially built for white residents, but today African Americans predominantly occupy them. He stated

[18] Weyeneth, 121.

that developers would love to get their hands on the subsidized housing to make condos because of its prime downtown location, and that the College of Charleston would love to turn them into dorms. He then proceeded to world-renowned African American blacksmith Phillip Simmons' home, also located in a low-income predominantly African American neighborhood. There he stopped the bus and tour participants were invited to go into his shop and purchase wrought iron pieces made by Simmon's nephew, who has continued the craft since Phillip Simmons passed away in 2009.

When I asked Alphonso Brown about gentrification during an interview after this tour, his response was actually not as critical as I expected:

…it isn't the fault of anyone about gentrification… during the time to renovate or restore, they're going to fix it up, and they're going to rent it out to people who can afford it. So that had nothing to do with trying to do somebody in. You just get money. It's all economics.

I had assumed that Brown's indication of developer interest in the neighborhoods we toured was a critique, but during the interview I realized that was a conclusion I drew myself. His tour narration only set up the question, through juxtaposing different interests and urban housing issues. I also considered that while historic rehabilitation efforts may put development pressure on low-income neighborhoods, they also help create thousands of jobs in the area, including Brown's. Can he critique the same process that makes his work possible, and draws history-consuming tourists to this city and his increasingly popular tour? Can historic tours actually be an effective venue for addressing contemporary issues such as gentrification?

I would argue that even if Brown does not directly critique gentrification, what he provides instead in a tourism context could also be seen as productive for the neighborhoods he narrates. When the Foundation was offering displacement solutions in the 1970s and 80s, the larger historic narrative of the city, as presented by tour guides and museum sites, was still focused on white elite experiences and residences. Why would African Americans in these neighborhoods believe that their interests could be served through historic preservation when African American history was still marginalized by the city's tourism narratives? And if "it's all economics," what incentive would the Foundation actually have for protecting this history, and in turn present day African American interests, if it was not a commodity to the dominant tourism industry?

Today Alphonso Brown's African American history tour is one of the most popular in Charleston. It has won numerous awards and in 2009, *Southern Living* listed it as one of the top five tours in the city.[19] He credits his subject matter and the transforming interests of new generations and demographics of tourists for his popularity, as he explained telling other city guides during a meeting:

…keep in mind that the less you mention about slavery, and don't use the word slavery, the more that is going to fill my bus up. Because people want to hear it.

Brown's tour reveals that African American history is economically valuable to the city's tourism and preservation interests. Making this history accessible and engaging to tourists could encourage preservation efforts in predominantly African American low-income

[19] Gullah Tours, accessed January 14, 2011. http://www.gullahtours.com/alphonso_brown.asp

neighborhoods that actually protect African American history and culture, rather than generating gentrification and displacement. If this history is treated as part of the city's definition of "historic integrity," the Foundation may also increasingly find it to their economic benefit to protect the financial and cultural interests of residents in the neighborhoods they seek to rehabilitate. African American history was glaringly missing from the white elite focus of Charleston's historic tourism representations until the 1990s. The success of Brown's tour, along with recent downtown developments such as the reopening of the Old Slave Mart Museum, the future multi-million dollar International African American History Museum, and tours about slavery and African American history on nearby tourist plantations indicate that transformations to the dominant narrative are taking place. Could these transformations in what history is valued in a tour narrative also enable comprehensive changes to the relationship between historic preservation, gentrification and displacement in Charleston's low-income predominantly African American neighborhoods?

Bibliography

Brown, Alphonso. Interview with Mary Battle, Charleston, South Carolina. January 5, 2011.

Brundage, W. Fitzhugh. *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005.

Edgar, Walter. *South Carolina: A History*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1998.

"Estimation of Tourism Economic Impacts in the Charleston Area, 2007." Charleston Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, College of Charleston's Office of Tourism Analysis, accessed November 30, 2010, http://www.charlestoncvb.com/media/tourismimpact.html

"Gullah Tours," accessed January 14, 2011. http://www.gullahtours.com/alphonso_brown.asp

Powers, Bernard E. Jr. *Black Charlestonians: A Social History, 1822-1885.* Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1994.

Wallace, Michael. *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory*. Temple University Press, 1996.

Weyeneth, Robert R. *Historic Preservation for a Living City: Historic Charleston Foundation 1947-1997*. Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2000.

Yuhl, Stephanie. *The Golden Haze of Memory: The Making of Historic Charleston*. Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005.

Jeff Manuel, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, jeff.manuel@gmail.com

Case Statement for Public History and Gentrification Working Group 2011 NCPH Conference

Background

This case statement considers public history sites in the Metro East region of Southwest Illinois and their relationship to economic development and gentrification. The Metro East is a multi-county region in southwest Illinois that contains the eastern suburbs of the St. Louis metropolitan region. Public history and economic development in the Metro East thus occur within the broader context of the St. Louis region, which features a crumbling and largely black inner city surrounded by sprawling and largely white suburbs characteristic of the urban crisis. At the core of the Metro East is East St. Louis, a city that is, by any definition, a hard place. As noted by political scientist Andrew Thiesing, East St. Louis was the "industrial sink" where St. Louis's unwanted pollution was deposited: industrial waste, prostitution, gambling, and crime.[1] In the searing words of a local journalist, understanding East St. Louis requires you to "assemble all the worst things in America—gambling, liquor, cigarettes and toxic fumes, sewage, waste disposal, prostitution—put it all together. Then you dump it on black people."[2] Up and down the river from East St. Louis are a string of blue-collar industrial towns: steel mills in Granite City, oil refining in Roxana, chemicals and strip clubs in Sauget. To the east, atop the Mississippi River bluff, are several middle-class suburbs, including Edwardsville, Illinois, where I teach.

Public History Sites in the Metro East

My engagement with the region's public history sites began in 2009 when I was hired at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville in a position involving public history and museum studies. Our Museum Studies program typically works with multiple community partners,

informally providing them with expertise and, more importantly, guiding our students toward their organizations for class projects and internships. Like many regional public universities, SIUE is a hub for regional economic development efforts. The university has several centers, with local organizations to grow the region's economy. The move toward entrepreneurial partnerships between university-based public historians (and public history programs) and community organizations thus fits within a broad pattern that is turning regional universities, especially public universities, into drivers of regional development. As Andrew Ross has recently argued, "research universities are becoming independent drivers of the economy— stimulating growth and development rather than merely providing trained labor and research."[3]

My closest collaboration has been with the Lincoln Place Heritage Association (LPHA), a local group dedicated to preserving the Lincoln Place neighborhood in Granite City, Illinois. Lincoln Place was a neighborhood of Armenian and Hungarian immigrants who lived adjacent to the looming steel mill. The LPHA's work has focused primarily on collecting oral histories from community elders, running an annual heritage festival, and emphasizing ethnic food and crafts from Armenia and Hungary. It likely represents hundreds, perhaps thousands, of similar ethnic preservation organizations scattered throughout the nation. Although the organization has done excellent work on a shoestring budget, it emphasizes a largely romantic portrait of the "old neighborhood" and has little connection to larger questions surrounding ethnicity, industry and deindustrialization, or other critical concerns. This becomes clear in the interactions between SIUE students and the LPHA's members. Students typically think of Granite City as a forbidding blue-collar town, while the community partners emphasize its history as a tight-knit, ethnic community. LPHA has been tangentially connected to neighborhood economic

development efforts such as a small coffee shop that opened in the neighborhood. But Granite City's limited resources are focused on reducing blight rather than active redevelopment. The presence of a working steel mill (U. S. Steel's Granite City Works) adjacent to the neighborhood also means that industry cannot be relegated to a nostalgic past. Given the region's deep investment in sustaining future industrial production, there is little of the untroubled fatalism about industry that pervades many redevelopment efforts in former industrial cities.[4]

Collaborations with East St. Louis community partners have been more challenging. One of the few public history sites in East St. Louis is the Katherine Dunham Museum. This small noting that Dunham herself moved to East St. Louis in 1964 to bring high art to a depressed inner-city community. Her home hardly represents a local-girl-made-good story, but instead could offer a complicated story about the changing, and largely failed, efforts to revitalize the city. Unfortunately the museum has little engagement with East St. Louis itself or the complex motivations that brought Dunham to the city. The museum mainly displays artifacts from Dunham's wide-ranging personal collection. One suspects that the Dunham Museum could operate anywhere. As it currently exists, its East St. Louis location is a hindrance more than anything else. The Dunham Museum was targeted by the state of Illinois as a possible hub for a regional network of African American tourism sites and the museum's director has formed an African American tourism company. The future of these efforts is unclear given Illinois's current budget crisis. There have also been a few limited attempts to commemorate East St. Louis's 1917 race riot. But in East St. Louis's ongoing civic triage, public history is rarely a high priority.

Issues for Discussion

I wish to raise two issues derived from my experiences as a university-based public historian working with community partners in the region. The first concerns the role that public history can and should play in a region's economic development strategies. Illinois's Metro East region offers a counterpoint for discussions of gentrification and its relationship to public history. Speaking frankly, much of the region is economically depressed and in need of economic development. In certain cities, such as East St. Louis and Granite City, the need for *any* development is dire. This raises the question of whether critical public historians need to worry about gentrification as a result of heritage projects in all cases. There certainly are places where public history has fueled the process of gentrification, making urban neighborhoods (and some rural communities, it should be noted) more attractive to wealthy residents and displacing poor people and minority communities. But this is happening primarily in cities that are experiencing gentrification in many different ways. These forces are far beyond the control of any public will pay economic dividends depends on how actions at the local level intersect with metropolitan, regional, and global patterns of investment, population movement, and social change."[5]At the risk of making a banal point, public historians need to be carefully attuned to the specific regional context in which their projects take place and let this context guide their response to issues of gentrification. A different set of concerns face projects in which development means displacement versus those that involve rehabilitating buildings that have been abandoned for half a century.

Thinking about the regional context for public history projects involving potential gentrification should also alert public historians to the importance of thinking at scales beyond the urban neighborhood. Debates over gentrification and urban change often take place at the

scale of the neighborhood, but urban transformations usually involve larger regional, national, or global dynamics. Public historians who wish to challenge the heritage development/gentrification paradigm must consider the larger urban and regional dynamics in which any specific project is operating. Too much postwar economic development, heritage and otherwise, has involved shuffling poor residents from one neighborhood to another. Neighborhood-level projects can ignore the larger reality that one neighborhood's success is often another neighborhood's decline.

The second issue concerns the emerging role of university-based public historians in urban and regional economic development strategies. Put bluntly, I suspect that public history is currently being enrolled as history's entry into the broader entrepreneurialization of the university. On the one hand, this move runs the risk of conflating public historians with economic developers. Real estate marketing with footnotes. But on the other hand, there is a long tradition within public history and public higher education of using academic expertise for community improvement. Is there space for public historians to participate as equal partners in development projects while still remaining critical of gentrification or development focused solely on property values? If so, how can public historians guard this critical terrain amid mounting pressures for public higher education to contribute to economic metrics of this complicated issue.

NOTES

[1] Andrew Theising, *East St. Louis, Made in USA: The Rise and Fall of an Industrial River Town* (St. Louis: Virginia Publishing, 2003).

[2] Safir Ahmed, quoted in Jonathan Kozol, *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 16-17.

Andrew Ross, "The Corporate Analogy Unravels," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 17, 2010, http://chronicle.com/article/Farewell-to-the-Corporate/124919/.

[4] Carlo Rotella, *Good With Their Hands: Boxers, Bluesmen, and Other Characters from the Rust Belt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 9. The relationship between industry and post-industrial public history is also central to Cathy Stanton, *The Lowell Experiment: Public History in a Postindustrial City* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006).
[5] Andrew Hurley, *Beyond Preservation: Using Public History to Revitalize Inner Cities* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010), 199.

National Council on Public History Annual Meeting 2011:Public History and Gentrification Working Group

Place and Displacement: Art, Performance, and Public History in Los Angeles' Skid Row

Catherine Gudis, University of California, Riverside

My interest in gentrification and public history is focused on the historic core of downtown Los Angeles and how art, history, and performance in public spaces may serve to empower and engender political support for residents of the Skid Row area. As part of this, I examine a series of projects comprising the Skid Row History Museum, created by artist John Malpede and his performance group of downtown homeless and formerly homeless people, the Los Angeles Poverty Department, or LAPD.

Contrary to what one usually associates with the term "museum," the Skid Row History Museum is not a building with objects organized by curators. Rather, it is a series of dialogues, theatrical events, gallery exhibitions, permanent site-specific artworks highlighting social figures of importance to the Skid Row community over time, and peripatetic performances. It is what I like to think of as a form of *curating the city*, a revisionist living history museum in which history is marked and illuminated in its own context, to frame that which typically goes unnoticed or is consciously suppressed.[1]

Curating the city, in the case of the LAPD, is with an agenda: to render visible a set of hegemonic forces that have historically sought to erase visual evidence of poverty as well as the rights of citizenship for the impoverished, mentally ill, and physically disabled—the ranks of which have always included large numbers of veterans and increasingly women and children. These commercial and political forces contribute to the shape of the urban environment for

sure, as they physically and violently push disenfranchised people back from the view of moneyed classes. But these forces also influence the very definition of citizenship, and attempt to hinge that preferred status of rights on those who can buy or rent property. That definition of citizenship based on capital investment leaves those without resources essentially stripped of the general rights of citizenship, and more specifically the constitutional right of assembly and community. In short, my interest is in drawing attention to how public history can expose not only the forces behind gentrification, but also the larger implications of that very process, both in terms of city building and civic engagement and entitlement.

What is called L.A.'s Skid Row today is roughly one square mile—around fifty blocks (and shrinking) of old downtown. Through the 1930s, the area served low income and itinerant laborers who occupied the small hotels that sprang up to serve them. As the public sector stepped in to provide services and regulate life in the area beginning in the Depression and post World War II years, what once might have been called "hobo culture" or denizens down on their luck became the pejoratively named "skid row."[2] Also by this time, the automobile opened areas around L.A. beyond the old Main Street and Broadway of the traditional city. Rather than raze and renew the "old," it was abandoned to more modest uses or vacancies[3] and became a magnet for the impoverished. It wasn't very long after when homeless people throughout L.A. became assisted in their migrations there by local police, as they were rounded up Gestapo style and dropped off on downtown streets.[4]

From the point of view of the county and its capital forces, Skid Row was a concentration camp with invisible walls comprised by city ordinances and their enforcement by police. But from the point of view of residents it was a location of recovery and other services,

community, and cultural network. So it was something of a shock to impoverished downtown residents when commercial interests—with the help of the City's 1999 Adaptive Reuse ordinance—became reawakened to downtown, this time to its nostalgic draw. The "old" downtown was renamed the "historic core." Commercial structures long emptied of their upper-story tenants, as well as single-resident occupancy hotels, became "adaptively reused" for market-rate loft housing, eventually displacing the poor and shrinking the number of streets to which the increasing number of homeless or those in need of temporary residency have been relegated. (The same pattern as witnessed elsewhere in the country.)

The citizens of L.A.'s Skid Row in various ways organized a voice and constituency with which to claim their rights to downtown places. John Malpede's Skid Row History Museum is comprised of and takes the view of this impoverished population, using the streets of downtown and its residents to construct and present historical narratives of the lives and communities of people in poverty, lives that are violently and continuously circumscribed by code, commercial interest, and police. The legitimacy of their presence has been erased by market-driven concepts of citizenship and residency that are blind to any definition of rights not substantiated by capital investment. But to many, *human* investment in Skid Row is quite enough to justify their rights <u>to place and community</u>.

I can here only highlight a few elements of the Skid Row History Museum and how they serve to visualize—or make public—some of the socio-political forces we can't see by walking down the street. One series of events asked different downtown stakeholders to provide their visions—utopian and dystopian—for downtown, and to provide answers to "is there history on Skid Row?" These offered a counterpoint to meetings organized by business and other chamber

of commerce styled groups that were seeking to "revitalize" downtown but without considering the historical uses and impoverished residents of the area. In LAPD's "Glimpses of Utopia," for instance, participants ranged from real estate developers, preservationists, gallery and café owners, and fashion designers to artists, activists, and others who had called the streets, SROs, and recovery centers of Skid Row home for a long time.[5] It was probably the only act of civic dialogue around downtown gentrification that included a true range of "stakeholders." This discrepancy was highlighted also in a performance held at the REDCAT Theater at Disney Concert Hall called UTOPIA/dystopia. It included actual characters and scenes from the "gentrification wars" of the previous seven or eight years, splicing together transcripts from legal briefs, court hearings, and City Council meetings with quotes by downtown redevelopers, property owners, and residents.

Another iteration of the Museum was an installation and series of performances, videotaped interviews, and commentaries by guests invited to "remember remarkable people and initiatives" related to Skid Row.[6] This was held at The Box Gallery, located about 1.5 miles from Skid Row in Chinatown's gallery row, the newest slice of urban chic and hipster heaven to be cut from a pie of poverty serving Asian immigrants of among the lowest income brackets in the city.[7] The didactic role of the objects in the Box Gallery was to recount social policies and political strategies that have historically shaped Skid Row.[8] BUT, as each presenter made clear in their stories of real people—both those on the streets and those who serve them—this educational role pales alongside the larger function of the museum: to reclaim an alternative, people's history of Skid Row and that revises negative stereotypes about Skid Row as a place solely populated by addicts in cardboard boxes, deadbeats, and criminals. As Malpede explains,

that “disregards the thousands of people who are in recovery, who are living in hotels, who are doing different things in the community—whether starting a basketball league or organizing a grass-roots effort to clean up trash...”[9] This was not an institutional history but a deeply personal and interactive one, in which heroes and heroines of the street dispute the reputation of the “down and out.”

I’m interested especially in how public performance and art can animate the city, both to draw attention to its historical development and to invest a wide swathe of the population in that history. How might this new version of the “living museum” engage audiences in a civic dialogue about the politics of place, urban development, displacement, and social policy? And how might such forms of art activate or embody both the politics and powers of place,[10] as a means of political enfranchisement? Can we thus reframe the notions of public and redefine what citizenship and community mean, especially in the context of homelessness, displacement, and gentrification? What might be the possible uses of publicly inscribing or physically commemorating the “tough stuff” of history—including violence, despair, illness, impoverishment, not to mention the vicissitudes of the market itself? Can this serve a vital and re-constitutive role or function in mapping the city, making place instead of displacement, and redeveloping historical sites with consciousness and a social conscience, a means, even, of planning for a different kind of urban future?

[1] Note that I use the term “living history” specifically. Rather than rely on historical reenactments as one might find at Plimouth Plantation or Colonial Williamsburg, my suggestion is that we consider each part of every city as an *enactment*, a site of organic, ongoing history and memory making, giving preservationists more than inert bricks and mortar to “save” and public historians ample arenas for analysis.

[2] Among others: Paul Groth, *Living Downtown: The History of Residential Hotels in the United States* (University of California Press, 1997); Jennifer Wolch, *Skid Row USA: Place and Community*, working paper 33 (Los Angeles Homeless Project, University of Southern California,

1991); Wolch and Michael J. Dear, *Landscapes of Despair: From Deinstitutionalization to Homelessness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); Todd Depastino, *Citizen Hobo: How A Century of Homelessness Shaped America* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago, 2003).

[3] In many cases, such as Broadway, the ground level of buildings dating from the turn-of-the-century to roughly the late 1920s became utilized by small retail shops or eateries, while the upper stories remained empty; earthquake damage in the 1980s and the expense of seismic retrofitting of upper stories enhanced this pattern of vacancy. Also note that the abandonment of the historic core—the old business center—facilitated by the car and by areas to the west that were not already dense and commercially developed exemplifies an important paradigm of preservation: that poverty preserves. In Los Angeles this worked particularly in areas that people simply drove away from.

[4] The practice of dumping discharged indigent hospital patients and paroled prisoners from around the city onto Skid Row streets has been the subject of press coverage and litigation in recent years as well.

[5] Their ideas were collected, set to movement, and a human chain was formed from Skid Row to City Hall—an enactment of the dreams and visions for the urban future that a wide range of rich and poor denizens of gentrifying Skid Row had to offer. It was a means of both activating the city and prompting passersby to view an invisible community. Yet it also suggested the *real* nature of urban development, which is not simply about design but about chance occurrences in real time and space.[quote John Malpede] Ephemeral, cryptic, and altogether 1970s in its neo-Situationist approach, this urban intervention has a wide range of artistic precedents from "happenings" and feminist art on city streets of LA in the 1970s to more recent interactive performances elsewhere—starting in Oakland—by Oregon-based artist Harrel Fletcher.For instance, see Vivien Green Frye, "Suzanne Lacy's *Three Weeks in May* (1977): Feminist Activist Performance Art as 'Expanded Public Pedagogy," in special edition of the *NWSA Journal* 19, 1 (2007): 23-38; writings by Lucy Lippard, artist Allan Kaprow, and others on socially engaged public art and performance art.

[6] A videographer was there to collect from people stories of both towering and diminutive characters of Skid Row; gallery space was devoted to this purpose as well as to ask participants and audience members to contribute artwork and suggestions of names for the Skid Row "walk of fame."

[7] The context of the gallery opening on Chung King Road is significant, pointing ironically or perhaps paradoxically to how "public" space and a "public" sphere were being enacted through the Skid Row History Museum. Here was an unlikely mix of people—in downtown Chinatown, a mere mile or so from Skid Row, on the north end of the original pueblo (while Skid Row is on the south end). It was built after the original Chinatown was torn down in the late 1930s to make way for Union Station, a hub for the railroads that had also helped Skid Row come into original existence in the late 19th century. Downtown Chinatown and its pedestrian mall—including, no surprise, Chung King Road—were built in the late 1930s specifically to lure tourists, hence its uber-Orientalist architectural motifs, "chop-suey" shops, and antique Asian art marts. For generations the same Chinese families have owned the commercial establishments, while recent immigrants, now from Cambodia and Vietnam instead of just China, occupy upper stories and adjacent tenements and build new temples and shrines. In recent years, business has declined, partially due to the out-migration of Chinese, who forged

sprawling strips of commerce in the more suburban Monterey Park and San Gabriel Valley's other new Chinatowns. The shock troops of gentrification— artists, designers, gallerists, and their habitués—began to move in to downtown's Chinatown, where extreme poverty and density still surround and nibble away at the edges of gallery row. The area, in other words, has a cultural geography with some parallels to Skid Row, where in the last five to ten years art galleries and design studios opened, followed by lofts, upscale restaurants and cafes, and shops catering to the new downtown denizens: not just people but "poodles and pusses" (the name of a real skid-row-adjacent store).

[8] For instance, the shopping cart in the main gallery symbolized historical developments from an era of "containment" in the 1980s to dispersal and disappearance in the last decade, when police started citing people on the street for a variety of "quality-of-life" issues: urinating in public, sleeping on the streets, jaywalking. Among the tickets they handed out or arrested people for was possession of stolen property: shopping carts. So Jeff and the Catholic Workers began to give out free shopping carts with a little sign on the front drawn up by a lawyer explaining the rights of the pusher of the cart to use it. Opening gallery presentation; interview, "Is There History on Skid Row?"

[9] Kristal, *LA News*, 2007.

[10] This paper originates in and seeks to further investigate the issues that Dolores Hayden first raised through her Los Angeles-based nonprofit organization, The Power of Place, and her book by the same title, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997).

Case statement

NCPH Working Group on Gentrification and Public History

Donna Ann Harris, Heritage Consulting Inc. Donna@heritageconsultinginc.com

I have been a working member of the historic preservation movement for more than twenty five years. During my experience, first as a state Main Street program staff member and now as a consultant, I work with grass roots community based organizations that want to improve the dynamics of their historic downtown commercial districts. This work, pioneered by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in the late 1970s, is known as the Main Street Four Point Approach™.

My case study is about how volunteers are included in setting the goals and conducting the work of local Main Street organizations. It has been my experience, working nationwide with hundreds of local programs, that gentrification plays no significant role in downtown revitalization work because the stakeholders set the organization's agenda and implement specific projects. Local Main Street work is conducted by volunteers under the direction of one paid full or part-time manager chosen by the Board of Directors, who are stakeholders themselves.

Most communities decide to use the Main Street revitalization methodology because local planners, business leaders and elected officials have made one or more attempts to try to "do something" about their downtown in the past. Even with these "top-down" past failures in mind, one person or a small handful of people in town think that the Main Street Approach™—an historic preservation based economic development program-- might just work this time to

improve the downtown commercial core, often suffering from vacancy, declining identity, and deterioration.

The Main Street Approach is, at its heart, public history. It is also a genuine public-private partnership between merchants, residents and local government that is implementation-oriented. Community residents, as well as merchants, property owners and local government make a choice by embracing this revitalization methodology to engage their key stakeholders in decision-making about the future of the downtown. Volunteers make decisions about how the downtown should look, what kind of businesses should be recruited, what kind of incentives to restore and rehabilitate their historic properties should be offered, and how the local Main Street organization will be supported. The central elements taken from public history are questions of shared identity, emphasis on public participation, genuine inclusion of diverse and spirited points of view and a sense of collective ownership.

The Main Street program is essentially a franchise. The National Trust Main Street Center (the Center) is the trademark holder and national sponsor. States enter into an annual contract with the Center which permits the state to operate a state coordinating program, to select communities, oversee the brand, and provide technical assistance to communities using the Center's branded products. In return, the state coordinating program maintains standards, is required to submit reports on progress (called reinvestment statistics) on an annual basis, take part in the annual conference, and support the historic preservation ethic that drives the Main Street Four Point Approach™. 46 states have state coordinating programs today and there are more than 2200 local communities that use this methodology.

I was the State Coordinator of the Illinois Main Street program, founded as part of the IL Lt. Governor's Office of Rural Affairs, and then moved to the state's economic development agency. Our Main Street program was founded in 1992, and like most of our peers across the country, held an annual application round where municipalities could apply to participate in the program. There was no cost to join the state program but the application process was rigorous, if only to give local communities a clear understanding of the enormous amount of volunteer work and commitment necessary to become a successful local Main Street program.

Each year the state Main Street program would accept a handful of communities from more than 20 that applied. Once accepted, towns were given no financial support from our state Main Street program. Rather they had access to staff members who would come to their committee and board meetings, assist them to begin their local organizing effort. Since this is a self-help program, state staff did not do the work for the local communities, rather the staff trained local volunteers on what to do so they could take the methodology and implement it to fit local circumstances.

Among the first activities for a group was always setting up the local nonprofit organization. The people attracted to a local Main Street effort were typically merchants and local property owners, but also nearby residents and supporters interested in making a difference in their downtown. The Main Street effort is a "big tent," anyone is welcome to serve on a committee or volunteer for a project. Committee members have considerable latitude about the activities they undertake because they implement all the events and programs under the guidance of a locally developed board of directors, stakeholders themselves. The paid manager works with the committee volunteers to help them implement their projects.

Volunteers are highly involved with interpreting the history of the commercial district through signage, brochures, events, designation and recognition activities. Local volunteer leaders recruit others to join in these activities. For mature Main Street organizations, it is not uncommon to have more than 200 local volunteers who staff the events and manage projects year-round for the benefit of the people who live, work, shop, and visit the downtown. Because the Main Street movement makes use of the best points of public history: collective ownership, public participation, and action-orientation gentrification has not emerged as a significant threat or issue.

Questions

I have worked in historic preservation field for 25 years and have heard no one mention the word gentrification at a national meeting in recent memory. Why is the public history community interested in this issue now?

The Main Street movement harnesses the economic power and impact of public history to create more livable and vibrant centers of community. It measures success in terms of new jobs, businesses, public and private projects, and foot traffic. Are these the component parts of gentrification?

Main Street organizations often choose preservation of existing historic buildings and businesses over outright “highest value” real estate development. Can public history be used as a tool to balance economic growth?

Very brief bibliography

Dono, Andrea (Ed). *Revitalizing Main Street: A Practitioner's Guide to Comprehensive Commercial District Revitalization.* Washington DC: National Trust Main Street Center, 2009.

The Main Street Board Members Handbook. Washington DC: National Trust Main Street Center, 2008.

Sarah Melton
Emory University
sarah.melton1@gmail.com
Case Statement for NCPH Working Group
Public History and Gentrification: A Contentious Relationship

Over the past year, I have been conducting research on the proposed National Center for Civil and Human Rights (NCCHR) in Atlanta, Georgia. The Center, scheduled for completion in 2013, was initially proposed by civil rights veterans John Lewis, Andrew Young, Evelyn Lowry, and Juanita Abernathy in 2004. Although the NCCHR was originally conceived of as a civil rights museum, its mission was gradually expanded to include exhibits on both local civil rights history and international human rights issues. The NCCHR, with its $125 million price tag, has a private-public funding structure, with approximately $40 million coming from city bonds, and the rest from private and corporate donations. Wachovia, Home Depot, UPS, and Delta Airlines are among the Atlanta-area companies that have pledged funding.

Notably, Coca-Cola donated 2.5 acres for the site's construction, and the Center will be located next to the Georgia Aquarium and the World of Coca-Cola. This donation has been a source of vocal criticism from journalists, residents, and activists. While some petitioned for the NCCHR to move to Auburn Avenue, an African American business district and home of the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Park Service site, other critics pointed to Coca-Cola's civil and human rights record. In the 1990s, the Coca-Cola company was embroiled in a scandal regarding its employment and promotion practices of African American workers.[20] Additionally, social justice advocates have alleged that the company's bottlers have perpetrated

[20] For more information, see Constance Hays, *The Real Thing: Truth and Power at the Coca-Cola Company* (New York: Random House, 2004).

violence against union workers in Guatemala and have polluted drinking water in southeast Asia.[21] Despite these accusations, the NCCHR accepted Coca-Cola's donation, after considering, in CEO Doug Shipman's words, the location's "land quality, transportation accessibility, zoning issues, [and] support for the Center's long-term sustainability and construction logistics."[22] Recently, the Atlanta City Council announced plans to implement a streetcar system that will connect Auburn Avenue and the future NCCHR site, thus providing a transportation link between two of Atlanta's biggest civil and human rights attractions. Concurrently, the development group Central Atlanta Progress has identified 467 acres of downtown —including the Auburn Avenue area—as "ripe for development" and "underutilized."[23] The Atlanta City Council hopes that the NCCHR and the streetcar project will make downtown Atlanta more "desirable," both for tourists and builders.

Economic benefit is almost universally touted as a reason for museum construction, and the NCCHR is no exception. With this intimate connection to Atlanta development projects, Shipman estimates that the NCCHR will bring in 650,000 visitors and a little over $100 million per year. Additionally, Shipman believes the Center will create 1100 jobs, both directly as NCCHR employees and indirectly through supporting industries. In comparison, the Georgia Aquarium receives between 2.5 and 3 million visitors a year, while the World of Coca-Cola

---

[21] Steve Stecklow, "How a global web of activists gives Coke problems in India," *Wall Street Journal*, June 7, 2005. Patricia Hurtado, "Coca-Cola Sued in U.S. by Guatemalans over Anti-Union Violence," *Business Week*, February 27, 2010.

[22] Doug Shipman, "Building a Civil and Human Rights Center for the Future," *Creative Loafing* June 16, 2010, accessed December 8, 2010, http://clatl.com/freshloaf/archives/2010/06/16/soapbox-building-a-center-for-civil-and-human-rights-for-the-future.

[23] Rachel Tobin, "Plenty of land downtown, boosters tell developers," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* November 5, 2010, accessed December 28, 2010.

receives about 1.1 million.[24] To be sure, the Center also emphasizes its proposed pedagogical and programmatic functions, drawing attention to its mission to be the "global hub for contemporary discussion on the link between civil rights lessons and human rights issues."[25] Moreover, Shipman insists that the NCCHR's donors will not have control of the site, noting that the Center will redirect or refuse funds from donors who want to exert too much power over content.[26] In this way, the NCCHR seeks to position itself not only as a critical component of Atlanta development, but also as a site that has the capacity to transcend the pressures of its donors.

It is likely obvious that I am fairly critical of these claims. As Cathy Stanton notes, the projected economic effect of cultural tourist sites often does not match the outcome.[27] Moreover, I believe the Center needs to do a better job of addressing the contradiction between its mission and its sources of funding. At the same time, I also understand the realities of public history: sites need money, corporations and wealthy donors can provide funding. Local, state, and national governments may not be able (or willing) to provide funding, and public funding often comes with its own set of constraints. In short, "selling" the NCCHR as an agent of economic development appears to be a fairly effective strategy for attracting donors and building the site. In the interest of disclosure, I also believe that the NCCHR has the potential for being a phenomenal space for education and public engagement. The site's

[24] Doug Shipman, interview by author, November 22, 2010.
[25] National Center for Civil and Human Rights, http://www.cchrpartnership.org/, accessed December 28, 2010.
[26] Doug Shipman, interview by author, September 29, 2010.
[27] Cathy Stanton, *The Lowell Experiment: Public History in a Postindustrial City* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006).

proposed content is exciting, innovative, and transformative in its approach to civil and human rights pedagogy.

Nonetheless, the NCCHR raises fundamental questions about public history, urban development, and structures of funding. How do we begin to address this complicated matrix? What will the Center's relationship with its community be? Who will economically benefit from the construction of the NCCHR? While the site claims it will create jobs, what sorts of jobs will these be—low-paying, service sector ones, or those with a living wage? Does a site with an emphasis on social justice issues bear a special responsibility to its community? If so, where does this responsibility begin and end? What are the limits of public history as an engine of economic development?

Matthew Schuld
Florida Public Archaeology Network, Southwest Region
mschuld@fgcu.edu
Case Statement for NCPH Working Group
Public History and Gentrification: A Contentious Relationship

Warehouse and industrial districts in many Midwestern cities are converting abandoned buildings into entertainment venues. Former spaces of production have become chic bars, specialty shops, and restaurants. The growing popularity and fascination with former industrial buildings has encouraged the preservation and rehabilitation of buildings even without government regulation or incentive. Convention and visitor bureaus promote dining and living in "historic downtown." Michael Sorkin, critic of architecture and urban planning, has argued that these changes are converting once purposeful environments into theme parks.[28] The move towards developing entertainment districts in many Rust Belt cities should make public historians and preservationist cautious about linking their work to economic growth and urban revitalization projects.

In recent decades the efforts of preservationists have led to a new appreciation for the aesthetics of historic structures. Taking a more careful approach than earlier decades, planners have begun to incorporate the preservation of historic building stock into urban revitalization plans. Realtors, business leaders, and city officials who finance downtown promotional campaigns now view the historic nature of downtown as an asset to be advertised.[29] Preservation organizations such as the Main Street Program claim to both preserve and

[28] *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space*, ed. Michael Sorkin (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), xiv.
[29] Alexander Reichl, "Historic Preservation and Progrowth Politics in U.S. Cities," *Urban Affairs Review* 32.4 (March 1997).

revitalize downtown. It is true that new entertainment, shopping , and residential districts have been modestly successful at attracting new middle and upper-middle class residents and visitors back to downtown (if even for a short time). Despite the success of entertainment and cultural districts, social indicators reveal that these economic changes have done little to improve the lives of long term urban residents in many Rust Belt cities. While converting industrial buildings into art galleries and restaurants preserves historic structures and provides economic benefits, many of these policies lead to the remaking communities in hopes of attracting new, wealthier residents rather than for current residents. In cities such as Benton Harbor, Kalamazoo, and South Bend unemployment and poverty rates rise while historic downtown neighborhoods are converted to art, cultural, and entertainment districts.

The case of Kalamazoo, Michigan exemplifies a primary problem with tying historic preservation to larger urban revitalization planning: how is the success of revitalization measured? By the 1960s Kalamazoo, like most upper-Midwestern cities, faced a severe urban crisis as both industry and residents departed from the inner-city. The efforts of Kalamazoo officials at counteracting the economic crises that befell the city were archetypical of those being attempted throughout the Midwest. Renowned planners and economists urged cities to focus greater attention on the entertainment, retail, and service industries.

As Kalamazoo continues to struggle with climbing urban poverty and unemployment rates[30], the downtown has witnessed a resurgence of upscale businesses. Benefitting from local and state grants, many of these businesses occupy historic buildings that once employed large numbers of residents. The former Shakespeare Company (a national leader in the

[30] Data on poverty, income, and employment can be calculated at, "SOCDS Census Data Retrieval," SOCDS Census Data, http://socds.huduser.org/Census/screen1.odb?metro=msa.

manufacturing of fishing equipment) is now a popular bar and a paper mill has been converted to an art studio and yoga center. While these upscale businesses have had mild success, the largely minority occupied neighborhoods adjacent to downtown struggle to entice even a grocery store.[31] Admittedly, the aesthetic changes do enhance the image of aging Rust Belt cities such as Kalamazoo, but they also lead to a form of commercial gentrification where urban residents have little to no access to basic commercial services. One could argue that preservation policies encouraging reinvestment in downtown Kalamazoo have led to a viable downtown shopping and entertainment district. Nonetheless, to claim these changes are a successful form of revitalization is to ignore that these policies have done little to improve measures of community health such as poverty, unemployment, and income.[32] **What does urban revitalization mean for preservation advocates? Do preservationists, business interests, and residents measure the successes and failures of revitalization differently? Are the needs of often impoverished urban residents at odds with the goals of downtown boosters, business leaders, and realtors?**

The work of historic preservationist in Kalamazoo and other Midwestern cities is commendable; it has restored blighted structures and lured new downtown businesses that allow the city to at least minimally compete with the suburbs. Nonetheless, local preservation projects will not succeed in reversing the urban decline that began after World War II. The dramatic decentralization and deindustrialization of cities was not the result of local decisions

---

[31] Al Jones, "Felpausch market to close on Kalamazoo's Northside on Saturday," *Kalamazoo Gazette*, 19 May 2009. http://www.mlive.com/business/west-michigan/index.ssf/2009/05/felpausch_to_close_market_in_k.html

[32] "Redevelopment for Whom and for What Purpose?" ed. Kevin Fox Gotham, *Critical Perspectives on Urban Redevelopment,* Research in Urban Sociology Series (Amsterdam: JAI, 2001): 6, 431–454.

and it is unlikely that local projects will impact poverty and employment on a large scale. Public historians can point out that urban decline in Rust Belt cities was not the result of an inevitable economic process. Specific government policies underpinned suburban growth and capital flight. There is a long historical record of government intervention in cities that public historians and preservationists can point to when advocating for limiting suburban growth and subsidizing business and residential development within cities. **Is urban revitalization possible without gentrification? Should public historians and preservationist advocate for major federal and state policy changes favoring urban development over suburban development? Have public historians done well to relate the history of deindustrialization, urban decline, and suburban growth to the public through exhibits and other forms of public history programming?**

Working Group Case Statement: *Amy M. Tyson,* DePaul University NCPH, 2011

Completed in 1938, Chicago's first public housing complex of 42 one and two bedroom apartments were christened the Jane Addams Homes. Poor and working class families lived in these low-rise brick buildings until 2002. Located just east of Cook County Hospital, and just west of the University of Illinois Chicago campus, the boarded up and abandoned complex [figure 1] stands in stark contrast to its neighboring structures in the gentrifying area of "The Near West Side." With a "Bar Louis" across the street, and new developments cropping up around the neighborhood, no doubt that to some these abandoned apartments serve as stoic reminders of the "failed" project that was high-density public housing.

1322-24 West Taylor Street
Chicago, Illinois

Figure 1(Above)

Soon after closing in 2002, efforts began in earnest to save the complex from demolition with the aim of converting the buildings into the National Public Housing Museum and Education Center [hereafter NPHM]. The goal of the NPHM is to tell the story of how public housing changed over time for families who lived there from the 1930s until its closing. Modeled after the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in New York, the

NPHM was armed from the get-go with the formidable task of organizing and fundraising. Ultimately, the Museum gained the political support of such Illinois luminaries as then-Senator Barack Obama, Senator Dick Durbin, Congressman Jesse Jackson Jr., and Mayor Richard Daley. The Museum also received a letter of support from 2nd Ward Alderman Robert Fioretti, in whose district the Museum would be built. Of note, many of the Museum's letters of support stress the site's potential to stimulate local tourism. Congressman Jesse L. Jackson Jr's letter, for example, notes that it has the potential to "further economic development in a once-blighted area on the West Side." [see http://www.publichousingmuseum.org/site/epage/47439_663.htm] Real estate developers and investors in the area initially pushed back, presumably because the buildings were eyesores, and also because developers would prefer to re-brand the area and not remind people that the Near West Side was the birthplace of public housing for Chicago. Even so, a successful lobbying effort led the Chicago Housing Authority to agree to turn over the property to the Museum if it was able to meet certain earmarks in terms of both fundraising and board development.

With several years of organizing under its belt (and admirably, with only two paid staff members), the NPHM is now anticipating its grand (if phased) opening in 2012. In the meantime, it has been showcasing a traveling exhibit called "History Coming Home." The exhibit features a replica of a 1950s-era Chicago Housing Project, which includes artifacts donated from former public housing tenants, photographs from the Chicago Housing Authority [figure 3], video captures, and transcriptions from oral histories of former public housing residents. Not all of the memories are fond ones. For example, this sobering quote from former public housing resident Francine Washington is featured in the replica child's bedroom: *"Sometimes the lights may have been out, the handrails may have been missing, or someone*

may have pissed in the hall."

Figure 2 (Above) [Screen capture from Chicago Tourism Center Gallery website: http://www.explorechicago.org]

In this exhibit (as well as in its inaugural exhibit in 2008), the NPHM's interpretive focus has been on showcasing historic images, artifacts, and individuals' memories in order to fulfill its charge to "illuminate the resilience of poor and working class families of every race and ethnicity to realize the promise of America." My concern is that focusing on individual stories of resilience may prevent the Museum from providing a stage for a sustained analysis of related issues: of disinvestment in working class neighborhoods, deindustrialization, urban renewal, gentrification, and so on. Promotional literature situates the Museum as a space to "provide an open and neutral forum to discuss the lessons of public housing and closely related issues such as affordable housing, poverty, race, gender, migration and immigration." It stops short, however, of suggesting that it might be a staging ground for advocacy. While I'm excited about the possibility of such a museum, I'm also concerned that individual stories of resilience will take precedence over analyses of free-market forces that fueled the conditions of public housing's decline. If this turns out to be the case, then the developers who initially pushed back

on the idea of having the National Public Housing Museum on the Near West Side may have had nothing to worry about, as it is unlikely that the Museum itself will encourage any organized coalition to stymie gentrifying forces afoot in the neighborhood. As with other public historical institutions aiming to tell the story of the working poor (i.e. Lowell, the Lower East Side Tenement Museum), the NPHM may also help to fuel the neighborhood's gentrification. It's far too early to tell, but down the street from the future site of the NPHM, advertisements for new townhomes (starting at $439,000) may be indicators of changes to come [figure 3].

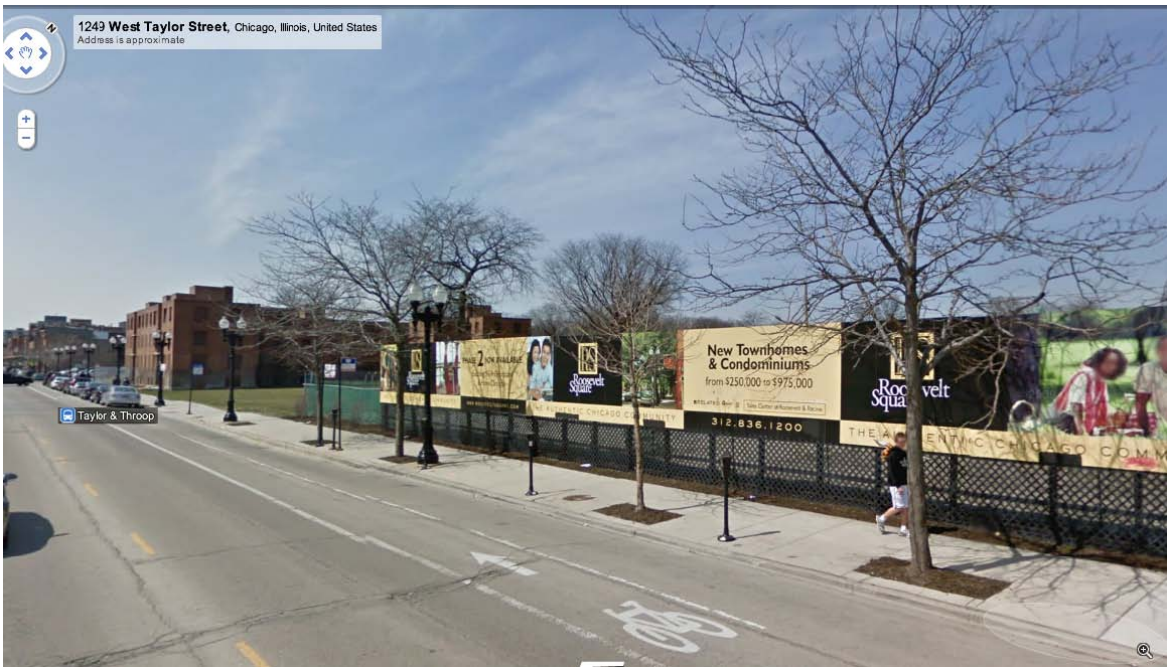

Figure 3 (Above: advertisements for new townhomes in the foreground; Jane Addams Homes structure in the background)

Andy Urban

aturban@rci.rutgers.edu

NCPH Working Group on Public History and Gentrification

Historians or Agents? The Involvement of Historic Sites and Museums in Gentrification

I think it is important to call attention to the ways in which public history and gentrification intersect, and often rely on the same market-driven logic. I do not mean to suggest that history museums and sites are driven by a singular focus on generating profit, in the ways that realtors usually are. Nonetheless, the emphasis that developers and realtors, politicians, and in some cases, community activists, place on themes such as "market value housing," "profitability," and "economic self-sufficiency" – in reference to neoliberal strategies of urban governance – also resonate among public historians. Funders expect public history projects and institutions to prove their financial viability and "worth" in order to receive financial support. Even before the current economic recession, museum professionals have long been acutely aware of the limited pool of resources available through local, state, and federal government agencies, a situation that has turned increasingly dire during the last three years.

In this context, it is not necessarily surprising that there seems to be a dearth of public history sites and institutions that are willing to interpret or contest the destructive forces of the free market on the ground. Cultural institutions tend to be more comfortable addressing the history of neighborhood transformation – and the attendant economic and cultural changes that accompany this transformation – after the fact. The Lower East Side Tenement Museum, where I used to work, embodied this approach during my time there, by fostering disconnect between research and an intellectual engagement with gentrification, and the institutional

prerogatives being advanced by the Museum's upper administration and executive board. At the same time the Tenement Museum implored visitors to make connections between the experiences of nineteenth-century immigrants to the Lower East Side and their late-twentieth century counterparts, it actively worked to acquire more real estate in the area, in order to expand its operations (displacing longtime tenants in the process), continually raised its price of admission, and reduced public programming aimed at public school children and immigrant residents. The Tenement Museum's claim to "promoting dialogue" and conversation about difficult issues, as opposed to directly lending its voice to a particular position, allowed it to escape a firm commitment to advocacy or activism.

As Lena Sze argues in a recent article, the role of cultural institutions in facilitating gentrification cannot be narrated as simplistic process of outsider/insider exploitation, or as a battle for resources that pits a wealthier, majority white population against a less affluent population of color. Sze documents that the newly renovated Museum of the Chinese in the Americas (MoCA), despite being an "ethnic-specific" museum with close ties to the surrounding Chinatown community – a population immediately threatened by displacement – has employed what she calls selective "gentrification consciousness." As she notes:

> MoCA sees that gentrification is present and warily notes the displacement and other detrimental effects of gentrification on existing Chinatown populations (i.e. knowing). But this awareness of gentrification is only partial (i.e., not knowing) because the museum's identification with Chinatown exists within a larger landscape that, offering little in the way of substantive alternative funding and space, touts tourism, culture, and high-end residential development as key routes to economic development with gentrification as a 'natural' by-product (Sze, 524).

Internally, MoCA has been accused of opposing efforts by its employees to organize in a union, a policy that the Tenement Museum also undertook. For museums that celebrate the historic role of labor unions in the area's garment industry in particular, such stances again illustrate a divide between interpretation and practice.

Interestingly, public history work that directly confronts gentrification tends to have a more ephemeral presence, in the form of walking tours and websites. For example, Good Old Lower East Side (GOLES), an affordable housing advocacy group, and Place Matters, a public history organization, teamed up to offer walking tours of the Lower East Side that focused on "slum clearance" in the 1960s, and the failure of the federal government to fulfill its promise to replace the razed buildings with affordable housing. In Atlanta, an artists' collective organized a project around the memories of Buttermilk Bottom, a historic black neighborhood that was razed by the city in order to build the city's Civic Center and the headquarters for Georgia Power. The website (included in the bibliography), shows artists with the group REPOhistory sketching outlines of where homes used to stand in what is now the parking lot of the Civic Center, photos of residents by the streets where they used to live, and, in 1996, the relationship between the Atlanta Olympics and urban renewal. In a more chaotic and decentralized vein, the internet offers an array of autobiographical and ethnographic accounts of the destruction of public housing in Atlanta, with tributes that blend hip hop alongside photography of families and friends who have been displaced (Philip Glass did the same for Pruit Igoe, one could argue).

These sites have filled a vacuum, creating space in a digital realm as space on the ground gets taken away or changed forever. In the public history course I taught at Emory, my students

conducted oral histories with elderly, predominantly black residents of the Edgewood neighborhood in Atlanta, which has increasingly been coveted by younger professionals (of all races), as a convenient and relatively affordable "in-town" neighborhood. The oral histories captured anxieties and anticipation of loss, as well as a rich and powerful urban history marked by segregation, "white flight," and now, ironically, the return of urban professionals wishing to avoid the traffic-snarled suburbs. While my students benefited from the knowledge they gleaned from this opportunity, and I hope that Edgewood residents benefited from the chance to share memories and articulate their concerns, in the end the resulting histories lack an institutional home. A place on the ground, to call their own.

A history museum dedicated to the history of public housing, urban renewal, the flight of industrial capital, gentrification, and so on, rooted in a neighborhood facing such circumstances, would be a wonderful thing. Such an enterprise would be truly radical – and incredibly difficult to fund in today's economic and ideological environment. This is when it always seems like the conversation is starting to go in loops… precisely because there is no model that allows a public history project or institution to grow substantial and significant to a broad mass of people, without playing the funding game with donors (private and government), that have specific designs for what type of cultural institutions support their larger free market goals. Public history critical of these issues seem destined to do interesting and thoughtful works, for niche audiences however.

Additional Resources/Citations

REPOhistory's "Entering Buttermilk Bottom" website:
http://www.repohistory.org/buttermilk_bottom/

Lena Sze, "Chinatown Then and Neoliberal Now: Gentrification Consciousness and the Ethnic-Specific Museum, *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 17:5 (2010): 510-29. – this is part of a special issue on "Race and the Cultural Spaces of Neoliberalism."

Hon-oring the Past: Women's Use of Heritage at Baltimore's HonFest

Mary Rizzo

Street fairs, ethnic festivals and historic reenactments are strategically utilized by urban planners, tourism agencies and businesses to woo gentrifiers and middle-class tourists to neighborhoods contending with the shift to a postindustrial economy. Baltimore, once a site for manufacturing and shipping, is exemplary. To compensate for the loss of industry, the city and many neighborhoods have turned to cultural and heritage tourism—from the development of the Inner Harbor to the institutionalization of various ethnic festivals—in the hopes of encouraging gentrification by drawing upwardly mobile visitors and new residents. Over the past two decades, the formerly white working-class neighborhood of Hampden, located northwest of the downtown, has become ground zero for debates regarding heritage, gentrification and the marketing of Baltimore. The locus of these issues has been the Café Hon restaurant, a faux 1950s diner established by Denise Whiting in 1992, and its annual HonFest, which began in 1994. HonFest, which is promoted as a celebration "in honor of…[the] historic working-women of Baltimore," is attended by women (and some men) who dress as exaggerated versions of a 1950s working-class woman, now known as the Baltimore Hon (see Figure 1).[i] With approximately 50,000 people attending HonFest in recent years, it has become arguably the most popular heritage production in a city rife with them.[ii]

Figure 1 Heidi, Rita and Nichole dressed as Hons

HonFest displays many of the most criticized aspects of gentrification. For example, public streets are blocked to traffic, allowing tourists to wander freely while residents search for parking. Recently the festival was expanded to two days, meaning that access to local churches was difficult due to the crowds. The main lightning rod for criticism, however, is the festival's icon, the Baltimore Hon. Festival promoters argue that the Hon is a uniquely Baltimore icon, specifically native to white working-class Baltimore neighborhoods like Hampden, Highlandtown and Dundalk. This caricatured and vaguely historicized image of a white working-class woman is used to market a welcoming image for Hampden, but has proven instead to be a much more slippery character whose meaning is constructed and used in varying ways.

In festival imagery, the Hon is always depicted as white, although increasingly women of color and children dress as Hons for the festival. The use of the Hon as a symbol of Hampden has allowed business owners and others to market the area as a white, safe and quirky enclave within Baltimore. Histories of Hampden consistently naturalize Hampden's longtime racial homogeneity by arguing that the neighborhood is "isolated" due to geography (it is bordered by a park and Johns Hopkins University) and culture.[iii] Settled by Southern and Appalachian whites, Hampden remained more than 93% white into the 1990s, a stunning number in a city that was only 31% white overall. Even still, gentrification had already begun to change the area's complexion. Between 1990 and 2000, the number of white residents dropped by more than 14% while the percentage of African Americans rose an astonishing 351%, though this still made it only 2.7% of the total. While no other racial or ethnic group experienced such a dramatic increase the numbers of people claiming Asian, Hispanic, American Indian or multiracial identities rose as well. As Baltimore became a majority nonwhite city, Hampden's racial homogeneity (and low housing prices) has made it an anomaly and helped to define it as safer than other places. I asked Heidi, a winner of HonFest's Best Hon competition and native Baltimorean, to tell me about growing up there three decades ago. She said, "it was more social…I don't want to say safe. All your family lived in close proximity. You knew all your neighbors."[iv] Trying not to invoke "safe" in her response, which she understands as racially coded, she expresses a sense of loss for that past community. Increasingly, the Hon is being used as a symbol of Baltimore as a whole, suggesting a wider erasure of the city's current

nonwhite majority and the long history of racist social and economic policies that kept African Americans segregated within certain proscribed areas.[v] The city of Baltimore codified this idea in its 2002 Economic Growth Strategy: "the quality of Baltimore's built environment, including…its tight knit neighborhoods give it a special character that creatively utilized can shape the world's view of Baltimore."[vi]

Known for calling everyone "hon" as a term of endearment, the Hon is a nurturing and welcoming figure who hearkens back to this nostalgized past. To return to my interview with Heidi, for her and many others HonFest offers a chance to recreate the "feeling of being in the city and being around all these people and not being a stranger even in a crowd." As this suggests, there is a keen desire for community connection, but within the safe space of HonFest. Gentrification is in part spurred by this desire, as suburbia is envisioned as privatized and isolated from the to-and-fro of the city, but only when combined with a controlled environment. As one woman commented, at HonFest "the atmosphere is so friendly…when a stranger stops you it's not scary, it's friendly," suggesting that outside of HonFest, interaction with a stranger on a Baltimore street would be a cause for alarm.[vii]

While the festival purports to honor working women, the Hon is depicted visually as a caricature. For many Baltimoreans, this aspect is particularly galling as they see the Hon as a means by which professionals and artsy types mock working-class culture.[viii] At HonFest, a common joke is when someone compliments a woman dressed as a Hon on her outfit and then asks what she had done to get ready. The Hon feigns confusion, saying something like "Get ready? This is how I always look." Everyone laughs, demonstrating the recognition of the joke—obviously a woman dressed like this couldn't really believe that what she was wearing was attractive. As one Best Hon contestant explained, "For yuppies like me, this is kitsch."[ix] Depicted in this way, the history of working-class women's lives in Baltimore is reduced to tasteless styles without context.

For others, the Hon, however constructed an image, has come to be seen as their heritage, albeit a kitschy one. I've argued previously that kitsch in this regard can be seen as part of the cultural history of working-class women in the postwar period who utilized cheap, mass-

produced goods in unique ways to create a class-specific style.[x] For these women, who I call the core Hons, HonFest is an opportunity to publicly pay homage to the history of white working-class women in Baltimore, which is otherwise absent. In this way, they act as incipient public historians who utilize play, including exaggerated dress, language and comportment, to interact with festival attendees and to connect their specific personal and familial memories to Baltimore's history. Integral to these connections, which I've begun to consider "play-publics," is the fact that the core Hons, dressed in their distinctive, often personally meaningful outfits, constantly interact with strangers and each other at the festival. For example, Heidi describes what happened after her mother Rita won the Best Hon competition. "Everybody was coming up to you [Rita] afterwards and saying you remind me of my grandmother…a lot of people would speak to their roots."[xi] The attendees personalized Rita's 'act,' acknowledging its basis in a local class-specific culture, even if it was exaggerated. One attendee explained that seeing women dressed as Hons "makes me think about how women went through so much back then…single women, like my grandmother who had five kids." Interacting with the core Hons gave her "a greater appreciation for the history of Baltimore…and that we're honoring women's history in particular."[xii] With few public spaces available where working-class women's lives can be discussed, the core Hons' ability to prompt strangers to share these stories of class and gender is noteworthy and should raise the question for public historians on how we can make visible the social and cultural world of working-class women. These impromptu groups also often collectively mourn the loss of public spaces, like local department stores and beauty parlors, that were once of central importance to working-class women and have been lost due to gentrification. Ironically, while the core Hons' activity is predicated on the gentrification of Hampden, since HonFest only exists as a revival of a culture that is being replaced, it can also be seen as a critique of gentrification, especially with regard to the events of late 2010.

For a number of years Denise Whiting has owned several trademarks associated with the word "hon." When this became public knowledge this past December it unleashed a firestorm of controversy, as Baltimoreans expressed their displeasure over Whiting's seeming control of a word associated deeply and emotionally with Baltimore's heritage. Protests were held outside Café Hon and a local man has vowed to test the trademark by selling coffee mugs with the word

hon on them. As public historians have argued, the goal of activities like historic preservation—seen as the antidote to the leveling sweep of gentrification—can only be deemed successful when they result in the democratization of historical knowledge and create a commitment to vernacular history in residents.[xiii] Amazingly, the Baltimore Hon has resulted to some degree in exactly that kind of commitment, though it may not be as historically informed as we would like. I'm particularly struck by the depth of emotion being demonstrated. From those who hate HonFest, to the core Hons who spend hours creating costumes for it, to the commenters on *Baltimore Sun* articles about the trademark issue, Hon has become the center of a public discussion of history, heritage, neighborhood change and the role of commerce in it, suggesting the complicated ways in which gentrification affects cities.

What is the role of public historians here? Prior to this current controversy, Dr. Denise Meringolo, University of Maryland Baltimore County, and I wanted to explore how public history could be used to address gentrification in Hampden. With funding from UMBC's social entrepreneurship program, we created "Community-Based History: Hampden's Hon Fest", for master's students in public history. The goal of the class was to create a plan for an exhibit on working-class women's history in Hampden to debut at HonFest, utilizing the festival's popularity to historicize the event and draw on what the core Hons were already doing in their ephemeral encounters. Over the course of the semester, though, the class decided to shift their focus instead to creating historic markers on a trail that winds through a park in Hampden. With the tagline "at home in Hampden," the students tried to address gentrification by focusing on living in the neighborhood, rather than just visiting for HonFest or to shop on the increasingly upscale main thoroughfare. Using historic photos and quotes from the extraordinary Baltimore Neighborhood Heritage Project oral history collection, the markers focus on topics including work in the textile mills that created the neighborhood and the role of community institutions like churches (see attached panel images). However, the lack of a neighborhood historical society has become a stumbling block. Students are planning on presenting the panels to the community at a public meeting with the hopes that they will take ownership of the project. In addition, the class was advised by a city council member that it was cost prohibitive to try to put the markers in public areas, as that would require paying annual fees. Instead, she

suggested finding local businesses willing to have the markers on their buildings, effectively privatizing this public historical practice. It also raises the question of how to deal with the effects of gentrification, which has, at least in Hampden, begun to break down the racial lines that kept this area almost completely white. In practical terms, who can public historians work with to tell this complicated and contentious story?

Bibliography:

Miriam Greenberg. Branding New York: How a City in Crisis was Sold to the World. (NY: Routledge, 2008).

Sharon Zukin. Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989).

Lance Freeman. There Goes the 'Hood: Views of Gentrification from the Ground Up. (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2006).

---

[i] HonFest website. http://www.honfest.net/whatis.html.
[ii] Sessa, S. "Hon-estly hon its just fun." *Baltimore Sun.* 13 June 2008, A1.
[iii] D. Randall Beirne. "Hampden-Woodberry: The Mill Village in an Urban Setting" *Maryland Historical Magazine*, Vol. 77, No. 1, Spring 1982.
[iv] Heidi, 2008. Interview with the author on 20 March 2008, Baltimore.
[v] For example, in 2010, the Maryland Transportation Authority used the image of a Hon for its "Charm Card" campaign. Interestingly, though, while ads that appeared on buses only featured a white woman dressed as a Hon, a tv ad showed the white Hon interacting with a black Hon. For more on Baltimore's housing policies, see W. Edward Orser's *Blockbusting in Baltimore* (University Press of Kentucky, 1997).
[vi] Baltimore City Department of Planning, 2002. Baltimore City economic growth strategy [online]. Available from: http://www.ci.baltimore.md.us/images/EconGrowthStrategy.pdf.
[vii] Debbie, personal communication, 14 June 2009.
[viii] *People Like Us: Social Class in America,* 2001. Film. Directed by Louis Alvarez and Andrew Kolker. USA: Center for American New Media.
[ix] Margie, interview by the author, tape recording, Baltimore, MD, 8 June 2002.
[x] Mary Rizzo, "The Café Hon: Working-Class White Femininity and Commodified Nostalgia in Postindustrial Baltimore," *Dixie Emporium: Tourism, Foodways and Consumer Culture in the American South.* (University of Georgia Press, 2008).
[xi] Heidi, 2008.
[xii] Desiree, personal communication, 14 June 2009.
[xiii] Theodore J. Karamanski, "History, Memory, and Historic Districts in Chicago," *The Public Historian,* v. 32 (4) November 2010.