

## **Lecture 7: If you Can't See It, Can you Preserve It? The Danger of "Integrity"**

Introduction and Announcements: Next week's class will include a tour of the former Charles Street Jail. This historic building is currently under construction so please dress accordingly. Reminder: please send comments and suggestions for your mid-semester review of the course.

Class Outline:

Discuss the concept of "historic integrity."  
Student presentations introducing topic for final paper.

The class began with a Professor's Comment and student discussion of the previous week's presentation. The expansion of the New York University Law School in Greenwich Village and the controversy surrounding the so-called Poe House represent an example of one of "hard cases" of historic preservation. The class agreed that the final result is the product of a detailed, carefully worked out compromise; it did not result in great new architecture, but a kind of background building. It destroyed some artifacts of the past, while trying to save others. The class reviewed some of the conclusions from the previous week: notably, that the limited building height, the provision to protect an historic view, and the attempt to match the earlier building height and character of the street frontage on Thompson and West 3<sup>rd</sup> Streets may be the building's most significant design features.

### **Professor's Comments**

Integrity is a central idea to historic preservation practice. As the Thelen and Rosenzweig study showed, many Americans feel connected to history and they trust museums and historic sites to present it. In particular, many Americans seek out the experience of seeing "the real thing," "authentic" objects from the past. One of the topics we will discuss today is how people in different parts of the world have different ideas about the past. Furthermore, the idea of "integrity" and the preservation of the past in material artifacts has differed historically. In the West, it has only been since the Enlightenment that this view of preservation has been dominant. When we look at other places and other times, we realize that the concept of preservation is very much a contested idea.

### **Discussion**

Students discussed cases from the readings: Stille (2002) on the "culture of the copy" in China, the decision not to grant World Heritage Site status to the Issei Shrine in Japan, Carter (2004) on the mixed architectural heritage of the northern Chinese city of Harbin, Ladd (1998) on preservation issues related to the Berlin Wall, and Brookstein's (2001) description of the Maxwell Street case in Chicago.

Several students commented on Stille's description of the Chinese use of high-quality copies of ancient artifacts for the purposes of museum exhibition. Some students were of the opinion that the Western experts involved in the projects at Xi'an and Luoyang did not seem open to non-Western views. The rapid transitions in China in the past decade, especially the expansion of capitalist economic activity, were cited by several students as a major factor in preservation-related questions in China. The class disagreed on whether these changes would lead to a disappearance of the past and the continued destruction or possible mismanagement of historic sites in China.

Two students questioned the reasons why the Issei Shrine would be denied World Heritage Site status. The class generally agreed that while some factors may be unknown, the case seems to show the extent to which international preservation standards reflect the post-Enlightenment, primarily Western notions of "artifact" and "integrity."

In discussing Harbin, students commented on how the changing political regimes and economic context led to very different treatment of historic architecture. In particular, the influences of tourism, regionalism, and globalization seem to be increasing, while symbolic "nationalist" concerns have become less important.

Many students commented on their own experience seeing the Berlin Wall or its meaning as a political or historic icon. One student stated that one of the remarkable aspects of the wall to her was its continuing power as a symbol and artifact, its ability to evoke emotion in people, even removed from its original context and displayed in new places. Discussion centered around how the wall functioned when it divided East and West Berlin and how it was treated as an object after "the fall."

One student described to the class her recent trip to Dubai, explaining that the city has embraced a multi-cultural, Orientalist symbolism in the design of its new skyscrapers, malls, and resorts.

Federal guidelines describing the "aspects" of integrity were discussed. Students disagreed on whether or not the aspects were useful or not. One student explained that she felt "location" should not be an aspect of integrity because the area around historic buildings may change and what is more significant is the interpretation of the building. She cited an historic building that was moved to a park and the arrangement of historic artifacts in an interpretive setting at the Cloisters in Manhattan. Another student countered that he felt that integrity of location was important because the factors of topography, setting, and spatial relationships influence how buildings are designed and how we perceive them.

Finally, students reviewed the Maxwell Street case and the events described by Brookstein (2001). Students tended to agree that the site should have been designated and preserved, but disagreed on whether the concept of "integrity," the procedures of preservation practice, or the individuals and groups involved (and not involved) were responsible for the destruction. One student commented that the case showed the influence that powerful landowners, politicians, and institutions can have in the process. Students expressed surprise that state government officials at the Office of Historic Preservation reversed themselves on the issue of "integrity."

## **Student Presentations**

Students presented their topics for final papers: a comparison of management practices of town commons, an analysis of historic preservation issues related to subway systems, an exploration of a public art project using recorded sound and its implications for interpretation of urban historic districts, a discussion of the work of photographer Robert Adams and his influence on preservation thinking in the 1970s, an analysis of the group called the Society for Creative Anachronisms, and a discussion of the practice of historic preservation in low income neighborhoods.