

WORKING WITH CULTURAL DIVERSITY: NEW OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR PRESERVATION

Columbia University
Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation
Historic Preservation Program
Spring 2015

Prof. Ned Kaufman
ned@kaufmanconservation.com

Wednesdays 11-1, Avery Hall Room [number??]

The United States is a diverse nation as never before. Not that diversity itself is new: Native people, European immigrants, and enslaved Africans were all part of American society from the very beginning. But today's social complexity is quantitatively and qualitatively different from the American past. Today, one in seven Americans were born in another country, while one out of every ten Mexicans lives in the United States. By 2043, the Census Bureau projects that a majority of Americans will belong to minority groups. That's less than thirty years off: *a date well within the career span of today's graduate students.*

Working with diverse communities is becoming the new normal, posing challenges as well as opportunities for preservationists and planners. What are the heritage needs of diverse groups? How can preservationists (and other professionals) meet them? How can largely white civic and preservation groups diversify themselves? Dealing constructively with diversity clearly matters for the future of preservation: it matters for the future of America too.

The goal of *Working with Cultural Diversity* is to give students the fundamental tools for working with culturally diverse communities, at the level of both project management and policy development. The course begins by establishing a factual basis for discussion: who are we Americans, where do we come from, how did we get here? We then look at the leading strategies western democracies have adopted to incorporate diverse populations, with special attention to the set of policies known as multiculturalism. We turn next to preservation itself, reviewing the history of cultural diversity initiatives, especially efforts to conserve Native, African American, Hispanic, and Asian heritage. Finally, we look forward. Taking what we've learned about preservation's successes and failures, we explore new policy frameworks for the future.

Working with Cultural Diversity is a discussion seminar, organized around weekly reading assignments and conversations in class. We will also meet with at least one ethnically specific heritage group in New York. Each student will be responsible for a short class presentation on a case study drawn from either Native, African American, Hispanic, or Asian heritage preservation. In addition, students will write a final paper. Students will have the option of working individually on a research topic chosen after consultation with the instructor, or of working collaboratively with other students on an aspect of new policy development.

NOTE: the following Outline of Classes is a preliminary version, intended to represent the overall content and direction of each class. Specific readings and assignments will be provided before the beginning of the course.

Outline of Classes

Class 1. History, heritage, and diverse communities

[*What preservation can do for diverse communities*]

A. DIVERSITY IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICA: WHAT IS IT?

We begin by establishing a factual basis for working with diversity in contemporary America, considering two kinds of information, demographic and historical.

Class 1. Diversity: some demographic facts

Who lives in the US today? Fortunately we have the US Census to tell us not only where today's Americans came from but also how the geographical picture has changed (and even, with a good deal of uncertainty, how it might change in the future). This is essential information for preservationists, because we can't work with diversity in the abstract: effective strategies begin by understanding who is actually here. Only then can we begin to ask what their needs are and what their heritage might look like.

Class 2. Diversity: some historical facts

Every group (whether ethnic, cultural, national, racial, religious, or linguistic) has had its own distinctive historical experience in the US (not to mention what they bring with them), and no group's history is precisely like any other's. We can't possibly study them all. But in this class we read about and discuss the experiences of three representative groups, Native, Japanese, and Mexican. We look for features that distinguish each. But we also learn to recognize historical patterns that minority groups often share, making their experiences different from those of the majority.

B. WAYS OF THINKING ABOUT HERITAGE AND DIVERSITY.

Western democracies have been grappling with diversity ever since the 1960s, seeking ways to incorporate distinct racial, ethnic, or cultural groups into existing societies without erasing their cultural heritage. It is not a trivial problem, and preservationists have much to learn from studying the models developed by policy makers and political philosophers in the United States, Canada, and Australia. The dominant and most successful framework for dealing with diversity has been the set of theories and policies collectively known as multiculturalism, and this is where we concentrate our efforts: a study of multiculturalism can help us understand what has worked in preservation and, most importantly, why certain efforts have not worked.

Class 3. Multiculturalism in theory

Multiculturalism isn't just a synonym for diversity. Rather, it's a set of ideas about how people with diverse backgrounds and values can live together: in other words, about how societies can manage diversity. These ideas are highly relevant to preservation. They help us understand the role of cultural *difference* in a diverse society. And they help us grapple with a fundamental policy challenge: how can preservation ensure that everyone is treated fairly when everyone's needs are different?

Class 4. Multiculturalism in practice: preservation in Australia

Australia stands out as a nation where preservationists set out explicitly to craft a multicultural practice. A study of the Burra Charter and other key documents reveals an approach to heritage distinctly different from that of the United States – and one from which American preservationists can learn a great deal.

C. WHAT HAS PRESERVATION ACCOMPLISHED?

It was in the 1980s that the US preservation world woke up to diversity. Much has been accomplished since then, yet few would say that it's been enough. In this unit we take stock of what has been done, what has worked, what hasn't, and what remains to be done. We focus on four key areas – Native, African American, Latino, and Asian heritage – each of which has raised specific issues and prompted specific responses. Students will make brief presentations on case studies. We also look more closely at the situation in the nation's rapidly evolving metropolitan areas, using case studies of selected ethnic communities.

Class 5. Federal diversity policy

Federal preservation policy, though weak in many ways, has a symbolically prominent role with regard to diversity, because it is the only expression of a national point of view: for federal policy to recognize a particular group's heritage signifies acceptance of that group; the failure to recognize signifies rejection, or at least lack of recognition. So we start our review of US preservation's accomplishments by tracking the evolution of federal policy, especially the National Register.

Class 6. Innovations in Native American preservation

Decades of Indian activism have led to substantial reforms in how the federal preservation system treats Native heritage. We focus on the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, the creation of Tribal Historic Preservation Offices, and the National Register's adoption of the concept of Traditional Cultural Places and seek to understand how these innovations have affected not only Indian preservation but the practice of preservation more broadly.

Class 7. Culturally specific (grassroots) heritage initiatives

Preservation isn't all top down. Many communities of color have taken the initiative in launching programs to preserve their own heritage. Students divide into groups to study and report on African American, Latino, and Asian examples.

Class 8. The American Latino Heritage Initiative: the way of the future?

In 2011 the Obama administration launched its American Latino Heritage Initiative, a much-publicized effort to grant federal recognition to Hispanic heritage. We subject the program's motivations, public rhetoric, and accomplishments to a close analysis in order to debate whether it represents a viable model for future diversity initiatives or a dead end.

D. WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? NEW DIRECTIONS FOR DIVERSITY WORK.

Thirty years of diversity work in preservation have brought important gains, yet they have not given us the truly diverse heritage America needs, nor have they given the preservation world the necessary capacity to

meet the needs of an increasingly diverse constituency. What can be done? We consider options for federal, state, municipal and non-profit policy and programs. Students will have the opportunity to work individually or collaboratively to develop proposals for new policy or program initiatives.

Class 9. Underserved communities: a meeting with representatives of the Dominican Studies Institute at CUNY

New York's Dominican community dates back to the 1930s, but immigration increased sharply in the 1960s, after the fall of the Trujillo dictatorship. At about 750,000 Dominicans have surpassed Puerto Ricans as New York's largest Hispanic group. Though they have achieved significant gains in political representation, recognition of New York's Dominican heritage lags. A meeting with representatives of CUNY's Dominican Studies Institute provides an opportunity to learn about the heritage needs of New York's Dominican Americans.

Class 10. Can preservation heal? Discussion with two therapists

Some psychiatrists, family therapists, and youth counsellors believe that recognizing people's heritage and helping them strengthen their own awareness of it can improve the life chances of at-risk youth and promote better relationships among people of diverse backgrounds. Are these appropriate concerns for heritage professions? If so, how could preservationists address them? We raise these questions with Rev. Khadijah Matin, an interfaith minister who works in hospitals, prisons, workplaces, and Nancy Cohan, a family therapist who works with at-risk children of color.

Class 11. Interculturalism and cultural competence: implications for preservation

In recent years *interculturalism* has emerged out of *multiculturalism*. The key difference is the growing emphasis that diversity thinkers place on the relations *between* culturally diverse groups, and especially on the need for society to encourage cultural competence (essentially the ability to work with people of different backgrounds). In many fields workplaces have become quite diverse, so the value of cultural competence is obvious. Yet the practice of preservation has remained stubbornly white. What implications do interculturalism and cultural competence have for us?

Class 12. Presentation of student papers/New directions in diversity

The last three sessions are set aside for presentation of student papers, which may (but need not) address the development of new policies, programs, and projects for diversity in preservation. Students working either singly or in groups will present their findings or proposals to the class and lead a discussion on them.

Class 13. Presentation of student papers/New directions in diversity

(See Class 12.)

Class 14. Presentation of student papers/New directions in diversity

(See Class 13.)