

2019  
ANNE SIEBERT  
*Academic Scholarship*  
SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATION

by **JACKSON LOOP**

In November of 2018 I sat in a San Francisco meeting hall at the National Trust for Historic Preservation's annual conference. A young, African-American research fellow from the University of St. Louis stood before us. He was presenting on an urban renewal project which decimated a vibrant black community in the 1950s. The land was later annexed by his university. Gesturing to a slide showing the large swathe of blank land left after the demolition, he asked us through tears, "How am I, as a black body, supposed to locate my identity in this space of erasure?" In his question, we find the nexus between heritage conservation, displacement, and oppression.

Heritage professionals today have inherited a toolkit crafted in response to such rampant demolition. We can incentivize preservation and help prevent the homogenization of architecture while protecting grand sites associated with our nation's history. But this is not where our fight should end. We rush to save brick and mortar and toil away at laborious designation forms while neighborhoods shift before our eyes. We designate a building and mount a plaque on its facade, while the historic business that imparted its significance fails, priced out by forces supposedly beyond our control. A residence is saved, but its users—those people who coalesce with buildings to create a community's character—are evicted, as wealthier tenants arrive. Rapid neighborhood change cuts residents off from sites that build identity, pulling them away from important social capital and intangible practices—the ingredients that make every community a community.

My research focuses on the intersection between heritage conservation and the advancement of oppressed people. In years past, this has manifested as an interest in Holocaust Studies, which warns people around the globe about the dangers of xenophobia. But after one year of graduate school I realized that this danger is not associated with any one particular state or ideology. Our urban environments' most vulnerable are a transnational body—displaced not only by bulldozers, but bombs, police forces, and the ruthless calculus of globalization. These forces move quickly and harm people as much as they do historic fabric.

Our cities, then, are a battleground of capital and representation. Who deserves space? How do we ensure that disempowered people can claim what they deem theirs? I believe that the field of historic preservation has a social responsibility to empower all people with meaningful sites and narratives. My thesis carries out such work, inspecting three sites of racial strife in Los Angeles associated with the 1992 Uprising, the Zoot Suit Riots, and the Black Panther Party. Even through small-scale contributions like this project, those involved in



public history and preservation can arm disenfranchised people with the knowledge, history, and belonging they need in their fight for justice.

But beyond any one project or particular site, my master's degrees in urban planning and heritage conservation offer me a lens to inspect every eviction and demolished home, every monument, and every at-risk place of community gathering. All arenas in the fight for social justice could benefit from the advice of public historians and preservationists. From preservation planning to curatorial work, to the fight for food justice and the battle against climate change people with my training should play a critical role in shaping stories that create true social change. With this scholarship and this degree—whether working on state-level preservation policy, or locally, protecting marginalized sites through direct action and advocacy—aim to advance our field toward a more holistic approach which protects not only the bonds between bricks, but those between people, their built environments, and their histories.

