2019

The Role of Cultural Preservation within the Resettlement Landscape: A Case Study of the Puerto Rican Vernacular in Philadelphia

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Abstract
This thesis examines the modification of the social and architectural landscape within their new place of residence, as Puerto Rican migrants move from their home state to the receiving state. By investigating the physical adaptation of space, I question what role cultural preservation, if any, serves the migrating communities in these periods of transition, specifically in cities with substantial development and growth pressures. For the purpose of this research, I define cultural preservation as the act of safeguarding and protecting a community-defined and identified interpretation of a collective and shared history and culture as it is represented within the physical and social space - as it is contained in both the neighborhood’s architecture and the memories of its residents. I analyze existing preservation practices whose aim is to safeguard cultural community assets and questioned whether or not these policies and practices potentially hinder or aid communities during periods of migration and integration. Finally, I question whether or not these adapted and integrated spatial forms define a new category of preservation, confronting the need to reconsider its, at times, static terminology.

Keywords
Migration, Cultural heritage, Puerto Rico, Vernacular architecture, Philadelphia

Disciplines
Historic Preservation and Conservation

Comments
Suggested Citation:
THE ROLE OF CULTURAL PRESERVATION WITHIN THE RESETTLEMENT LANDSCAPE: A CASE STUDY OF THE PUERTO RICAN VERNACULAR IN PHILADELPHIA

Elizabeth Volchok

A THESIS

in

Historic Preservation

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN HISTORIC PRESERVATION

2019

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my advisor, Francesca Ammon, for her ongoing feedback and guidance. I am deeply grateful for her expertise, criticism, and patience. I cannot thank you enough.

I am indebted to my readers: to the incredibly wise, thoughtful, and passionate women who I am fortunate enough to know. Your thoughtful feedback, suggestions, and constant support kept me going during an extremely difficult year.

Most importantly, I must send an emphatic thank you to all the people who dedicated time to tell their (oftentimes difficult) stories. I am continuously humbled and inspired by all of the journeys. Thank you for answering my questions and inspiring me to dig deeper, for your passion, and your anger.

I would also like to dedicate this thesis to my family. Your direct opinion, unyielding support, openness, and encouragement helped shape who I am today. Без вас, я бы не смогла сюда дойти.

And finally, to my mentors and advisors. Thank you for showing me the fight is worth fighting for.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Figure 1: Puerto Rican activist takeover of the Statue of Liberty. Carlos Ortiz Papers. October 25, 1977.

Architecture and its variations within urban communities and neighborhoods are symbolic of specific societal behaviors and emblematic of circumstantial periods of time. This thesis will explore how vernacular housing and publicly accessible open space serve an important role in society’s system of nonverbal communication. Figure 1, while not explicitly a residential vernacular structure, reflects symbiotic communication and a relationship between built structural space—its modification and adaptation—and
contemporary socio-political events. Individually, the Statue of Liberty is emblematic of the universal symbol of freedom and is significant for its representation of “liberty.” The statue literally and figuratively welcomes millions of visitors into the city. In 1977, as a form of protest, thirty Puerto Rican nationalists occupied the Statue of Liberty, draped a Puerto Rican flag from its crown, and strung a banner across its pedestal calling for the independence of Puerto Rico.¹ This temporary extension of architectural space by the demonstrators symbolically communicated a political grievance, in this case the imprisonment of four Puerto Rican nationalists fighting for the territory’s freedom. By modifying the existing physical fabric, the socio-politically motivated demonstration redefined the meaning of the existing space.

Figure 2: Puerto Rican and American flag hung inside a Philadelphia house. Author’s image. 2018.

Figure 3: Puerto Rican flag mural in the South Bronx, New York City. Carlos Ortiz Papers. 1980.
While the Puerto Rican flag is independently culturally significant, positioning it atop an existing physical structure constructs a new form of symbolic architectural communication. For example, when hung in the window of a vernacular residential house (see Figure 2) or visually represented on a mural (see Figure 3), the flag’s presence layers a more powerful social and physical meaning onto a relatively banal space, as seen in the gated window and plain brick wall. Here, the flag is a distinct marker of an individualized and independent culture, representing the current political, social, and economic status of the Island and reflecting a community’s nationalist pride.

By culturally adapting physical space, the Puerto Rican community symbolically communicated personal identity and social meaning, of which environmental-behavioral scholar Amos Rapoport argues, promotes social enculturation.²

Cultural identity, however, is never simply or clearly defined. Culture, in and of itself, is muddled with ambiguity and layered with a complicated history that is oftentimes written, and then re-written. However, shared history(ies), language, cultural practices, and traditions bridge communities together and further instate their relationship to one another, creating a collective identity. Defining a shared culture and relationship to place (and to one another) is already seemingly complex. This is further complicated in the case of Puerto Rico. Thanks to multiple waves of diaspora, Puerto Rican migration is transient, representing a pendulant flow, or a circular form of migration. This constant movement not only transfers people from the Island of Puerto Rico, but also shapes the cultural identity of the diaspora communities around the world.

Rico to the mainland United States, but intensifies a complicated circular movement of identities, culture, and traditional practices. Many scholars debate and dissect Puerto Rican migration and its influence on language, the psyche, communal ideology, and cultural practices (such as visual arts and celebratory ceremonies). However, no formal study of the representation of cultural identity in physical (architectural) and social space—within the context of Puerto Rican migration to the mainland—currently exists. The study of the Puerto Rican vernacular in Philadelphia and current social preservation practices not only asserts existing socio-political inequalities but also contributes to a larger conversation that acknowledges the need to safeguard minority and ethnically cultural neighborhoods.

Therefore, as cities (which is the focus of this research, but not distinctly limited to)\(^3\) continue to grow in both population and size, the need to normalize equitable preservation and planning practices becomes ever more apparent.\(^4\) Cities are the nexus of social, economic, and political environments, and their diverse vibrant immigrant communities sustain them. It is imperative to ensure that they are inclusive and affordable to allow communities to continue to thrive and further develop. The mission of the planner, as urban scholar Samuel Stein points out, is to imagine a better world,

\(^3\) For the purpose of this research, I adapted the definition of cities from Ayse Caglar and Nina Glick Schiller, as something that pertains to the “scale as a differential positioning of a city, which reflects both (1) flows of political, cultural and economic capital within regions and state-based and globe-spanning institutions, and (2) the shaping of these flows and intuitional forces by local historians and capacities.” (Ayse Caglar and Nina Glick Schiller, Migrants and City Making: Dispossession, Displacement, & Urban Regeneration. (Duke University Press, 2018), 7).

one that reshapes space while simultaneously capturing and preserving a community’s history and culture, which is reflected in physical space.⁵

*Scope and Methodology*

This thesis examines the modification of the social and architectural landscape within new place of residence as Puerto Rican migrants move from their home state to the receiving state. By investigating the physical adaptation of space, I question what role *cultural preservation*, if any, plays for the migrating communities in these periods of transition, specifically in cities with substantial development and growth pressures. For the purpose of this research, I define cultural preservation as the act of safeguarding and protecting a community—the collective and shared history and culture within a physical and social space—as it is contained in both the neighborhood’s architecture and the memories of its residents. I analyze existing preservation practices whose aim is to safeguard cultural community assets and question whether or not these policies and practices potentially hinder or aid communities during periods of migration and integration. Additionally, I question whether or not these adapted and integrated spatial forms define a new category of preservation, confronting the need to reconsider preservation’s static terminology. Specifically, I outline the need to redefine the profession of Preservation to something more flexible to changing cultural and practical

norms. The overarching research question is straightforward: how has external and internal migration impacted the cultural representation of Puerto Rican vernacular space and how can contemporary preservation methods aid its retention. I grounded my research in the neighborhoods of Northeast Philadelphia, particularly those of Fairhill and West Kensington, in order to analyze their architectural transformations due to the Puerto Rican exoduses post the economic crisis of the early 2000s and Hurricane Maria, as well as its historic diasporas.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this multi-disciplinary literature review is to examine related research and to situate my work within existing and popularly discussed scholarship. This review is not an extensive analysis of existing arguments and disagreements within existing bodies of literature and theory. However, it does highlight the relevant discourse and contemporary issues that are discussed within city planning and preservation, specifically in the case of the Puerto Rican diasporas in Philadelphia. In order to understand this broad question, I analyzed research with theoretical underpinnings in three interconnected disciplines: Immigration and Migration, specifically around Puerto Rican circular migration; Ethno-architecture; and Cultural Heritage and Historic Preservation.
Immigration and Migration: Puerto Rican Circular Migration

Migration scholarship spans a wide range of fields, from the domestic to the transnational, from the rural to the urban. For the purpose of this research, I explore existing urban migration and immigration literature to better discern what motivates a specific group to relocate, as well as how that migrant groups’ perception of their own culture and identity is influenced and shaped by the receiving state’s existing physical and social environment.

While this body of work examines the architecture of the receiving state, it is necessary to consider the broader question of a migrant’s motivation to relocate. Migration, as interpreted by sociologists and economic theorists within the context of contemporary urban policies, is a result of a series of push and pull drivers. People move from one place to another due to either push drivers—conflict, war, extreme hardship, lack of economic opportunities, or climate change—or pull drivers—the possibility of upward economic and social mobility, better quality of life, and socio-economic freedom.6

Yet, the ability of populations to migrate or immigrate has largely been influenced by a state’s existing economic status and current political regulations. While no opinion is divorced from the context in which the migration theory existed, migration

6 Kyaing Kyaing Thet, Pull and Push Factors of Migration: A Case Study in the Urban Area of Monywa Township, Myanmar (Department of Statistics at the Institute of Economics in Monywa, Myanmar).
scholar Hein De recounts that one of the most common drivers of movement is the desire for economic or upward social mobility. However, contemporary scholarship and current events imply that while economic or social upward mobility drive a large percentage of migration, it isn’t the only driver.\(^7\) According to the United Nations Organization for Migration (IOM), the number of international migrants increased 41% from 2000 to 2015.\(^8\) Of these, 90% migrated due to economic, social, political, and environmental factors, and 10% were refugees fleeing violence, persecution, human rights abuse, and/or armed conflict.\(^9\)

Internal migration, however, is one of the primary forms of movement and will continue to change the way our cities, neighborhoods, and communities are shaped and understood. At the time of this writing, the number of people migrating internally within their “own country” exceeds by 300% the number of people who have moved internationally across borders, with an estimated 763 million internal migrants worldwide, including internally displaced persons (IDPs).\(^10\) It is also important to note that while migrants may emigrate and immigrate for the purposes of increased mobility, migration itself is not an independent variable causing urban development, but rather

\(^7\) Emily Wilkinson, Amy Kirbyshire, Leigh Mayhew, Pandora Batra and Andrea Milan, *Climate-Induced Migration and Displacement: Closing the Policy Gap*, 2016; (White, 2012).
\(^8\) *Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2015 Revision*. UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2015.
\(^10\) UN Migration Issue Brief #2: *Addressing drivers of migration, including adverse effects of climate change, natural disasters and human-made crises, through protection and assistance, sustainable development, poverty eradication, conflict prevention and resolution*. International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2017.
an integral part of the changing landscape itself. One is not detached from the other
and, as Haas notes, this is “a reciprocal relationship between the migrant and the
broader development processes.”

Migration between the island of Puerto Rico and the mainland United States
reveals a complicated and multi-layered narrative. While Puerto Ricans have mostly
been able to move between the island and the mainland “freely,” many of the decisions
constraining the island and its people have been made by external governing bodies.
The formal definition of the continuous bilateral movement and extended round-trips
between the Island and the mainland is referred to as a cyclical, or circular, pattern of
migration. This form of migration is defined on the basis of a fluid movement of people
between areas, usually for the purpose of employment, and has created a “porous
border zone” between Puerto Rican and mainland communities. Situated within the
larger context of migration studies and municipal and federal policy, circular migration is
a lesser known theory of migration. “Internal” circular migration is even less so, of which
existing analysis largely focuses on the concepts of “permanent” and “temporary.”
Moreover, Puerto Rico’s unique form of migration constitutes a distinctly personal

11 Hein De Haas, Migration and Development: A Theoretical Perspective. (The Authors International
Migration Review published by Wiley Periodicals, Inc. on behalf of Center for Migration Studies of New
York Inc. 2010).
(The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 33.
14 Newland, K. Circular Migration and Human Development. (Human Development Research Paper (HDRP)
relationship with the mainland, one that is knowledgeable of the mainland’s neighborhoods, geography, political system, and current events.

International migration patterns have traditionally been defined as single, one-way, and permanent.\textsuperscript{15} Scholarship on this topic is primarily focused on the relocation of workers in search of greater social or economic opportunity from poorer to rich countries, as well as the eventual “counter-flow” once, and if, conditions in the home country improve.\textsuperscript{16} However, the repeated, back-and-forth flow of migrants from one place to another, or circular migration, is increasingly normalizing contemporary migration trends, specifically in countries that are located geographically close to one another, such as Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean with the United States.\textsuperscript{17} Additionally, rapidly developing technology, communications, and transit options give greater access to the fluidity of movement, muddling the lines between distinctly different cultural identities.

To provide some context of the scale of migration that has occurred from the Island to the mainland throughout the 20th century, the net migration between 1991 and 1998 from Puerto Rico to the United States is estimated to be 249,692 persons. This is in addition to the 491,361 who migrated in the 1980s.\textsuperscript{18} According to a recent


\textsuperscript{18} Duany, \textit{The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move}, 211-214.
study done by The Economist, there are currently more Puerto Ricans living on the mainland—about 5 million—then there are living on the Island—3.5 million.\textsuperscript{19}

Prominent Caribbean migration anthropologist and scholar Jorge Duany argues that Puerto Rican circular migrants, which frequently cross geopolitical frontiers, also move along the edges of cultural borders, “such as those created by language, citizenship, race, ethnicity, and gender ideology.”\textsuperscript{20} This frequent movement impacts the migrant’s relationship to, and understanding of, their culture and identity and its subsequent physical and social outcomes. The Puerto Rican case, Duany states, “demonstrates the significance of repetitive movements between ‘home’ and ‘abroad’,,” and confirms that these circulation flows are integral in exchanging of not only capital and commodities but information and culture between established social networks in both communities on the Island and on the mainland.\textsuperscript{21}

Considered a “postcolonial colony,” the Puerto Rican nation—a locus of shared territory, language, economy, citizenship, and sovereignty—is subject to constant fluctuation. Puerto Ricans hold strong national identity with little desire for a concise nation-state. A population that is constantly on the move lives in a territory that legally “belongs to but is not part of the United States.”\textsuperscript{22} Coupled with a history of territorial occupation and social discrimination, Puerto Rico projects an intense national patronage while paradoxically feeling neither here nor there. Therefore, the representation of

\textsuperscript{19} Puerto Ricans on the mainland United States. (The Economist, New York. October 5, 2017).
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid, 223.
\textsuperscript{22} Duany, Puerto Rican Nation on the Move, 5.
Puerto Rican culture and identity—specifically in the context of Philadelphia—has greatly affected the ways in which this group of peoples identifies and represents itself in everyday vernacular space.

Ethno-Architecture: Puerto Rican Culture, Identity, and Representation

Despite discriminatory regulation that has led to systemic oppression, urban physical and social space has been used as a platform for ethnic expression.\textsuperscript{23} Whether through public regulations, such as cultural districts and ethnically-specific commercial districts, or through the private modification of residential architecture, culture has contributed to the development of cities.\textsuperscript{24} Although scholars have studied the impact of immigrants on metropolitan areas,\textsuperscript{25} very little has been written on the relationship between migration and vernacular architecture.

The field of ethno-architecture comes closest to examining how immigrant populations interact with, adapt, and construct architecture. Ethno-architecture is the ethnographic study of people and culture through built form.\textsuperscript{26} Existing scholarship

\textsuperscript{23} Arijit Sen, “Food, Place and Memory: Bangladeshi Fish Stores on Devon Avenue, Chicago,” (Food & Foodways 24, 1-2, April 2016), 67 – 88.

\textsuperscript{24} Sarah Lopez, The Remittance Landscape: Spaces of Migration in Rural Mexico and Urban USA, 2015.


\textsuperscript{26} Gerard Toffin, 1994; Paul Memmott And James Davidson, 2008; Lozanovska, 2016. Ethno-architecture is commonly defined as one that “has been created and built by the users, adjusted as required to suit their own lifestyle and changing needs, and supportive of their own social organization and interaction .... all this being done by the people with their own technologies, their own labour and skills, and drawing where appropriate on the customary traditions of their pre-contact (or classical) Indigenous architecture.” Paul
generally finds that space inhabited by ethnic populations modifies the aesthetic
traditions of the host cities and countries in which they are constructed. Additionally,
these newly inhabited spaces contribute to trans-cultural formations of
contemporaneous modernities, transforming the built environment and the populations
within them.\textsuperscript{27} In these cases, space is morphed and aesthetically re-created to
construct a new form of identity, redefining the ways in which cities are experienced
and inhabited. Residential architecture, like many other expressions of material culture,
is a symbolic method of representation “through which social structures and cultural
categories achieve sensory existence.”\textsuperscript{28}

While not explicitly citing architecture as a tool in understanding the migrant
experience, anthropological and sociological literature provide greater insight into the
personal experiences of groups and individuals moving from one place to another.
Specifically, personal accounts of the Puerto Rican diaspora provide a deeply personal
narrative detailing the complicated impact of transnational relocation,\textsuperscript{29} the
introspection of identity,\textsuperscript{30} the effect of consistent marginalization and racialization,\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{27} Mirjana Lozanovska, \textit{Ethno-Architecture and the Politics of Migration}, 2016.
\textsuperscript{31} Oscar Lewis, \textit{La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in Culture of Poverty – San Juan and New York}. Random
and the “Latinization” of urban neighborhoods. For example, in an extensive analysis composed of first-person biographies, American anthropologist Oscar Lewis writes about the social and physical conditions of a multi-generational Puerto Rican slum-family migrating from San Juan to New York City in the 1960s. Lewis’ and similar anthropological and biographical accounts document not only the migration process but the ways in which specific ethnic groups adapt (or don’t) to their new social and physical environments. Following the initial move from Puerto Rico to New York, Lewis notes that many of the lower-income Puerto Ricans who were surveyed maintained little to no contact with North Americans, interacting with only landlords, government officials, and other functionaries. It was also common to form small islands within the city which would perpetuate existing cultural practices, and oftentimes modify physical space.

Moreover, when seen to be economically and socially profitable, ethnically diverse communities have been used, implicitly or explicitly, by governing agencies to competitively market neighborhoods in order to boost a region’s economic vibrancy. Here, “cultural capital” is seen as an important factor in the development of cities, but it also contributes to wide-spread displacement of generally low-income and immigrant communities. Some scholarship claims that culture is an “important variable in a global

33 Oscar Lewis, La Vida: xl.
34 Oscar Lewis, La Vida: xli.
35 Hein De Haas, Migration and Development: A Theoretical Perspective. The Authors International Migration Review published by Wiley Periodicals, Inc. on behalf of Center for Migration Studies of New York Inc. 2010).
power analysis of migration,” however it isn’t always a central topic of concern within different disciplines. As the world continues to become more integrated through globalization, I argue that it needs to be.

There is a body of study on the importance of houses and “homes,” specifically regarding human mobility in contemporary times. Professor of social sciences and cultural geography, Jane M. Jacobs, discusses the importance of making a space one’s own within a mobile world, where a sense of home isn’t geographically given but rather defined by how the users orient themselves in unfamiliar territory. Jacobs argues that, “the things we assemble to make the houses we live in feel homely; the multiple scales that we negotiate to gather to us that which is familiar,” all contribute to our sense of being.

Academic scholar, Pnina Werbner, further argues that diasporas’ “produce and reproduce themselves, socially, culturally, and politically,” and that they do so through strategies that are “embedded in cultural technologies and underpinned aesthetically.” Simply put, the ways in which migrants incorporate culture and identity within residential dwellings is illustrative of the migrants’ need to create a stabilized structure during physically and psychologically difficult transitions.

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The discipline of preserving material and social history consists of a constantly evolving and complicated narrative: how we value our built heritage and what we constitute as “significant” not only depends on the changing social and political environment but can also vary across generations. For example, architectural styles that are rejected by one generation, may be favored by the next; therefore, multi-dimensional methods of defining and interpreting value exist. A report published by The Getty Conservation Institute outlines the methods of identifying, articulating, and establishing cultural significance. Marta de la Torre and Randall Mason state that “value has always been the reason underlying heritage conservation” and is critical in understanding the future of the practice of historic and cultural preservation.

However, what constitutes “valuable” has, up until recently, been largely defined by a distinctly powerful and elite group of people. In a recent journal publication, Rodwell compares our modern understanding of “heritage” to the historical use of the French term, patrimoine. Here, he makes the distinction that modern heritage is defined as “extrinsic culturally attributed values to selected objects and manifestations;” whereas, patrimoine alludes to the “intrinsic value of a personal and collective inheritance that is esteemed – without qualification – for its usefulness, including our

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41 Values, as identified in the Burra Charter, The Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance - are organized in categories of aesthetics, historic, scientific and social values, 2013.
values of association and memory, and is accumulated and passed down from one generation to another without being destroyed in the process.” Rodwell implies that the foundation of the historic preservation profession rests on agency given to an elite group of people to decide what holds the greatest importance and what constitutes “heritage.”

While the first national historic preservation organization was established by grassroots effort, the professionalization of the field has mostly evolved into a top-down, rather than bottom-up approach. Decisions are largely defined by “specialists or professionals” who determine what constitutes cultural significance and what is worthy of “preservation” and safekeeping. Additionally, cultural significance often ascribed to a fixed period of time, where the designated group of specialists determine and enforce their decisions, often at the expense of those directly affected. The formalization and sanitization of a multifaceted field has had critical consequences, oftentimes negating the most important actors in a community planning process: its residents. This class-based system of attributing value to physical space operates through exclusionary heritage preservation-based policies and programs, of which I will broadly outline below.

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43 See: The Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association
44 De la Torre and Mason, 2002; (Rodwell, 2018).
While the Historic Preservation movement in the United States has roots that date back to the 1850s (if not earlier), the professionalization of the field began at the start of the 20th century.\textsuperscript{45} The first historic district in the United States was established locally in Charleston, South Carolina in 1931. Ordinances that designated properties within specified areas as historic—and therefore worthy of preservation—set a precedent that define the field's regulatory agenda for local, state, and federal Historic Preservation offices to this day. In 1933, in response to a perceived need to preserve sites of national significance, the first federal preservation program, The Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), was created to meticulously document the nation’s architectural history.\textsuperscript{46} By 1935, Congress had passed the Historic Sites Act which established an inventory and formal national policy to “preserve for public use historic sites, buildings, and objects of national significance for the inspiration and benefit of the people of the United States.”\textsuperscript{47}

National organizations played a large role defining and regulating the country’s cultural landscapes and built history. The National Trust, a privately funded, nonprofit organization, was founded in 1949 through a congressional charter that allowed the

\textsuperscript{45} One of the first historic preservation efforts was the Washington’s Headquarters State Historic Site in Newburgh, NY, designated in 1850.
organization to acquire and administer historic sites and objects of national significance. 
The formation of a leading national organization set the standard for how the practice of preservation should be administered across the nation. Subsequently, following the demand for a now specialized profession, James Marston Fitch founded the first academically recognized historic preservation and heritage conservation master’s program in 1964 at Columbia University.

While the evolution of heritage and historic preservation has continuously saved numerous sites and structures across the country, its very existence established a precedent for preservation practice that hasn’t always been conducive to the rapidly changing urban world. Through the process of designation and landmarking, both at a local and national level, the field has cemented the significance of specific periods of time onto our built world, while ignoring others. While this process has done the field a world of good, it has sometimes done so against the wishes of property owners or despite strong community opposition, rarely taking into account immigrant experiences and their attachment to space. There are, however, several community-organized and advocacy-led examples of social and physical preservation, such as the work done by BlackSpace in Brownsville, Brooklyn. This thesis gathers examples of such work and applies their preservation strategies to a Philadelphia Puerto Rican context.

CHAPTER 3: PUERTO RICO MIGRATION AND ITS IMPACT

Pre-, 20th Century

Until the late 19th century, the island of Puerto Rico was growing in population, consistently welcoming migrants. Due to open trade treaties (The Royal Decree of Graces, 1815), new immigrants came to the island from Europe and the United States. These open borders established a foundation for the subsequent social and economic networks between Puerto Rico and the mainland United States.\(^{50}\) Due to this, Puerto Rico shares an unprecedented connection to Spanish American and Anglo-American culture and heritage. However, a statement shared by sociologist Clara Rodríguez, “Since 1898, all Puerto Ricans have been born in the U.S.A,”\(^ {51}\) alludes to the impact of the Spanish–American War when Puerto Rico was invaded and became a territory of the United States. Since the passage of the Jones Act, Puerto Ricans have had the ability to openly move from the island to the mainland as United States citizens, therefore establishing strong social and economic networks.\(^ {52}\) Despite the passage of the Jones

\(^{50}\) The Center for Puerto Rican Studies: Puerto Rican Heritage Poster Series. Diasporas in the History of The Puerto Rican People: A Cartography (Part II).


\(^{52}\) The Jones–Shafroth Act (Pub.L. 64–368, 39 Stat. 951, enacted March 2, 1917) — also known as the Jones Act of Puerto Rico, Jones Law of Puerto Rico, or as the Puerto Rican Federal Relations Act of 1917 — was an Act of the United States Congress, signed by President Woodrow Wilson on March 2, 1917. The U.S. maintained control over fiscal and economic matters and exercised authority over mail services, immigration, defense and other basic governmental matters.
Act, Puerto Ricans remain seen as second-class citizens with more rights than aliens, but fewer rights than full U.S. citizens.\textsuperscript{53}

The complex political status of the island has impacted the creation of Puerto Rican communities on the mainland—a distinctive push factor. A country with its own unique culture and identity has been regulated and directed by the Congress of the United States. Decisions about the island’s commonwealth, statehood, or independence status have largely been decided by territorial occupiers, many of whom rarely, if ever, set foot on the island.\textsuperscript{54} If identity can be defined through language, visual representation of cultural symbols, and art, the United States occupation of the island stripped the Puerto Rican people of their cultural identity and heritage. Since 1902, Spanish was banned from public schools and every subject in school was taught in English, regardless of the fact that most Puerto Ricans, including the teachers, didn’t speak the language.\textsuperscript{55} The introduction of the Gag Law (\textit{Ley de La Mordaza}) of 1948—enacted with the intention of suppressing the island’s right of independence—made displaying the Puerto Rican flag, singing a patriotic tune, speaking or writing of independence, or meeting with anyone or holding any assembly in favor of Puerto Rican independence outlawed and severely punished.\textsuperscript{56}


\textsuperscript{54} Nelson, \textit{The War Against All Puerto Ricans}, 60.

\textsuperscript{55} With the passage of the Official Language Act of 1902 – Nelson, \textit{The War Against All Puerto Ricans}, 84.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid, 65.
Figure 4.1: An old warehouse in Fairhill, Northeast Philadelphia, displaying a Puerto Rican flag painted on a mural, a dedication to the community. Image source: IMPACT Maria University of Pennsylvania Fall 2018 Planning Studio.

Figure 4.2: An old warehouse in Fairhill, Northeast Philadelphia, detail. Image source: IMPACT Maria University of Pennsylvania Fall 2018 Planning Studio.
Figure 5.1: Centro Musical on W. Lehigh Avenue in West Kensington, Philadelphia. Image source: IMPACT Maria University of Pennsylvania Fall 2018 Planning Studio.

Figure 5.2: Centro Musical on W. Lehigh Avenue in West Kensington, Philadelphia. Image source: IMPACT Maria University of Pennsylvania Fall 2018 Planning Studio.
The systematic oppression of identity through the prohibition of intangible and tangible symbols spurred a heightened sense of patriotic pride in migrants’ new places of residence on the mainland. In the neighborhoods of West Kensington and Fairhill, Philadelphia, flags are visibly displayed, businesses sell culturally specific goods, and social gathering halls serve both locals and foreigners alike (see Figures 4-5). Sincere cultural affinity for the Island has shaped the ways in which newly arrived Puerto Ricans craft the spaces in which they live, work, and socialize. As Duany writes, these are attempts to “assert Puerto Rico’s distinctive collective identity, within the context of continued political and economic dependence on the United States.”

Puerto Rico’s colonial relations and overseas possession, first with Spain and now with the United States, has exposed the Island to foreign capital, commodities, laws, and customs, unequal to any other Latin American country. Despite this, I argue that Puerto Ricans today demonstrate strong cultural identity, distinguishing themselves from their colonizers. To demonstrate this, I analyzed two Philadelphia neighborhoods that, at the time of this writing, held the largest population of Puerto Ricans living within Philadelphia’s city limits.

The narrative of Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia includes a history of displacement, from the island to the mainland and throughout a number of neighborhoods within the city’s boundaries. Spatially, the history of Puerto Ricans in the city is interconnected

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with the history of urban renewal and gentrification. Philadelphia, along with New York and Chicago, has historically been home to one of the largest populations of Puerto Ricans since the 19th century. By the mid-20th century, Philadelphia’s Puerto Rican population more than doubled, going from under 2,000 in 1950 to 7,300 in 1954. Drastic increases continued well into the 21st century. According to the U.S. Census in 2000, there were 91,527 Puerto Rican’s in Philadelphia, which then jumped to 121,643 in 2010. As aforementioned, migration to and from the island in the last two centuries has been a direct result of a number of economic, social, and political push and pull factors. The most common motivation that has brought Puerto Rican migrants to the mainland has been economically driven. When job opportunities looked better on the mainland and/or when they look worse in Puerto Rico, Puerto Ricans sought opportunities elsewhere. However, when United States immigration regulation prohibited immigrants from entering the country, mainland companies recruited, Puerto Rican laborer who, because of their citizenship, had permission to come and work.

In an essay comparing two ethnic groups and the role of their cultural identity in Philadelphia, urban anthropologist Judith Goode explains that physical space is the site

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66 The Immigration Act of 1924: limited the number of immigrants allowed entry into the United States through a national origin’s quota. The quota provided immigration visas to two percent of the total number of people of each nationality in the United States as of the 1890 national census; V. Vázquez-Hernández, From Pan-Latino Enclaves to Community: Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia, 1910-2000. 2005: 88; Puerto Rican Arrival In New York: Narratives Of The Migration, 1920-1950. 2005: 102
of collective identity unique to the Puerto Rican community. Unlike other migrant
groups, she explains that when Puerto Ricans cluster in space it encourages a strong
linkage to their ethnic community - internally on the mainland but also to the island. In
Philadelphia, “Philaricans” 67 have shared histories dating back three generations and are
also tied to secondary migrants born and raised in neighboring cities of New York and
New Jersey. Goode highlights the unique nature of Puerto Rican migrants, who have
participated in substantial exchanges with the island, facilitating a circular form of
migration that has created existing and active community groups on both the island and
the mainland. 68

The presence of community organizations has had a positive role in aiding
migrants through the migration and integration process and has had an impact on the
surrounding physical and social space. Prominent Latino-serving cultural institutions,
such as La Milagrosa Church; the Hispanic American Fraternal Association; the First
Spanish Evangelical Mission; and the International Institute, took shape in Philadelphia
at the beginning of the 20th century as Puerto Rican and other Hispanic populations
grew. 69 The formation of these mutual aid societies and the construction of a Spanish
language Catholic chapel by local community members served as spaces of social

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67 The most common nickname for members or culture of the Puerto Rican diaspora is “Nuyorican,”
referring to those who settled in or around New York City, one of the original cities that drew Puerto Ricans from the Island to the mainland. The term is also used by Islander Puerto Ricans to differentiate those of Puerto Rican descent from the Puerto-Rico born.
gathering and community growth. By hosting events, these social spaces helped strengthen community ties, provide aid and resources, diminish any cultural tensions, and integrate newly initiated Philadelphia residents into a Spanish-speaking *colonia* – smaller components within the greater migration landscape.\(^\text{70}\)

Physical and social networks established by earlier migrants in Philadelphia created personal connections that still persist today. These networks, serviced by transnational trade and economic systems, created a scattering of Spanish-speaking enclaves in Philadelphia by the beginning of the 20th century. These served – and continue to serve – as sources of both physical and psychological community support. Migrants were able to connect to employment opportunities, especially in the sugar and tobacco trades in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Additionally, recruitment efforts made by Philadelphia based companies, such as the Pennsylvania Railroad, attracted many Spanish-speaking workers to the region.\(^\text{71}\) Due to previously established Spanish-speaking ethnic enclaves in Philadelphia, Puerto Ricans primarily settled in communities with Spaniards, Cubans, and Mexicans. Between the years of 1910 and 1945, the majority of Spanish-speaking residents lived in the community enclaves of Southwark, Spring Garden, and Northern Liberties, which they shared with predominantly “working class” Italian, Polish, Russian, Jewish, and African American communities.\(^\text{72}\) As Puerto Rican migrant populations in the city grew, so did these

\(^{71}\) Ibid, 88.
\(^{72}\) Ibid, 90.
neighborhoods, which eventually became predominantly Puerto Rican. The concentration of inexpensive housing, proximity to industry or factory work, good access to ethnic businesses and shops made these neighborhoods attractive to working class groups.\textsuperscript{73}

\textit{Inter-war Planning and Development: 1920s}

Planning and development in the United States during the interwar years and the second half of the 20th century greatly impacted the shape and character of neighborhoods and communities nationwide. In Philadelphia specifically, a change in housing policies and shifting populations shaped the city into one of the most segregated cities in the north and this affected housing patterns in the post-World War II period.\textsuperscript{75} Puerto Ricans and other Latinx groups became increasingly segregated by race and ethnicity. The formation of ethnically specific neighborhoods greatly influenced the type of businesses and the characteristics of the geography that defined physical space within Philadelphia.

\textsuperscript{73} Sam Bass Warner in \textit{The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of its Growth} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987) argued that the concentration of Puerto Ricans and other Spanish-speaking residents formed a geographic pattern closely resembling the letter “S,” “Beginning at the bottom (Grays Ferry and Southwark), the pattern snakes along northbound to include parks of Society Hill, Chinatown, East Poplar, Northern Liberties, Spring Garden, Strawberry Mansion, and West Kensington. In addition, there was another concentration in West Philadelphia, specifically in Parkside, with a smattering representation in the areas of Tioga and Hunting Park, north of Lehigh Avenue, and in the east in Port Richmond.” \textit{(The Puerto Rican Diaspora - Historical Perspectives}, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005).

\textsuperscript{75} More on what housing policies and shifting population in Philadelphia were (pg 90-91 in \textit{From Pan-Latino Enclaves to a Community}).
Economic status and national discriminatory policy dictated which minority groups settled in which neighborhoods. During the first half of the 20th century, Puerto Ricans were predominantly working class, and workers generally lived close to their jobs. Additionally, racist and discriminatory housing policies ensured that minority groups – particularly, African Americans and Latinos – would live segregated from white and affluent populations in the city. Industry and labor practices dictated physical and social outcomes of communities throughout the city: better paying white-collar and professional jobs were occupied by whites, while African American and immigrant groups worked in largely “un-skilled” industries. Therefore, when Philadelphia, like many other industrial cities across the United States, experienced the decline of industrialization and the flight of many of the core industries and sources of work in the city in the 1920s, those who felt it most were the minority and immigrant groups.

76 Ibid, 90.
Figure 6: La Milagrosa Catholic Church at 1903 Spring Garden St, Philadelphia. It was the first Catholic Church in Philadelphia to offer Mass Services entirely in Spanish. La Maligrosa acquired the Spring Garden location in 1912 with a grant of $1,080. By the 1920s it became a large cultural center, serving the growing Latino neighborhood, especially its prominent Puerto Rican population. The church officially closed its doors in 2013.77 (Left: La Milagrosa in 1915. Image Source: Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Right: La Milagrosa in 2013, before it closed its doors for the last time. Image Source: OCF Realty)

Because of its centrally located community center and place of worship, as well as the presence of factory work and industry nearby, Spring Garden evolved as a prominent Puerto Rican ethnic enclave. The presence of the Baldwin Locomotive Works plant brought many Puerto Ricans to the neighborhood. Additionally, as scholar Victor Vazquez-Hernandez points out, one of the primary reasons Spring Garden attracted so many Puerto Ricans during the period from the 1920s to the 1950s, was because of the

presence of a Catholic Mission, *La Milagrosa*, on Spring Garden and 19th Street\(^78\) (see figure 6). The religious institution’s presence was essential in establishing and facilitating the social network of Puerto Rican migrants. During one interview, when asked what landmarks define her neighborhood and contribute to its character, a Puerto Rican immigrant living in Northern Liberties spoke of the two characteristics of Northern Liberties at the time when she bought her first house. While there were crime and drugs in the neighborhood, the house’s proximity to a religious institution reassured her that it was safe enough for her and her young children.\(^79\)

Amidst popular, yet controversial debate, immigrants have greatly contributed to metropolitan cultural and economic diversity. Their participation in the labor market and presence in the social spheres of cities promoted innovative ideas and brought in new perspectives.\(^81\) Goode synthesizes discourse commonly attributed to the United States, one that defines it as a “mosaic, tapestry, quilt, or salad whose many equal parts together make a better whole.”\(^82\) This narrative, she argues, largely ignores a persistent


\(^{79}\) Author’s interview

\(^{81}\) Historically, immigrants have been responsible for the revitalization of Philadelphia- opening businesses, contributing to the economic growth of the city, participating in the workforce and spreading cultural ideas and practices. As groups climb up the social and economic ladder, newer immigrants are faced with greater obstacles and typically reside in the low-income neighborhoods older immigrant groups once claimed. In the 1940s, ‘50s, and ‘60s, Puerto Ricans searching for greater economic opportunity moved to North Philadelphia and established the barrio, an area with a traditionally large concentration of Puerto Ricans. Slowly Dominicans, Colombians, Mexicans and Guatemalans all of whom were also hoping to achieve the “American Dream” made Philadelphia their home as well. While much is known culturally about each Latino immigrant group in North Philadelphia, little is known about the collective relationship between these individuals. ([https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1000&context=senior_seminar](https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1000&context=senior_seminar))

racial binary in the United States in which “whiteness” is a category that defines a pure and hierarchical social group based on race and exacerbates inequality, exclusion, and oppression.\footnote{Ibid} However, the concentration of ethnic groups in neighborhoods, and the representation of their cultural characteristics, both through tangible and intangible measures, is pivotal for new residents and locals alike. During the first decades of the 20th century, the ethnic enclaves of Spring Garden adapted the same characteristics of the 	extit{colonia}. These enclaves served as central urban nuclei within Philadelphia and provided space for residents to speak in their native tongue, share cultural resources communally, and represent forms of their cultural identity, all essential in defining a sustainable community.\footnote{Institute for Sustainable Communities. 2019: \url{https://sustain.org/about/what-is-a-sustainable-community/}}
The Puerto Rican population continued to grow post World War II with large-scale migration from the Island beginning in the mid-1950s. At this time, Philadelphia had the third largest concentration of Puerto Ricans in the United States, many migrating first to large cities such as New York before finding their way elsewhere. The Puerto Rican population in Philadelphia increased substantially from the 1940s through the 1960s, growing from 854 in 1940 to 7,300 by 1954 (see figure 7). Operation bootstrap – *Operación Manos a la Obra* – was enacted in 1947 as a federal industrialization program that pulled thousands of Puerto Ricans from the island to the mainland, contributing to a large portion of Philadelphia’s population growth at that time. While Puerto Ricans arrived to the mainland with citizenship and suffrage rights (not typical of most immigrant groups coming to the United States), their low levels of education and occupational skills placed them at the bottom of the city’s social hierarchy.

As was the case in many cities nationwide, urban renewal exacerbated the segregation and racism of the 20th century and displaced many. As a minority group in

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88 1968-1985 Urban renewal efforts in North Philadelphia resulted in the displacement of Latinos. The Latino communities in Northern Liberties were pushed north of Girard Avenue into Kensington, where they clustered around 5th Street. Today, the neighborhood around 5th Street and Lehigh Avenue is the most identifiable Latino neighborhood in Philadelphia, although remnants of older Latino settlements in Spring Garden and Southwark remain. Located in the Fairhill neighborhood, el Centro de Oro is the Latino commercial district centered around North 5th Street. The Golden Block’s many shops, restaurants,
Philadelphia, Puerto Ricans were directly affected by these discriminatory practices. Coupled with the lack of resources and low economic status, they were forced to relocate and settle in areas consisting mostly of rental apartments, where housing was overcrowded and deteriorated.\textsuperscript{89} While the percentage of migrants who eventually went on to own their homes rose, it was not until the subsequent displacement during the urban renewal period when Puerto Ricans were “relocated,” or pushed out of their homes in the Spring Garden neighborhood further north and east to the areas that are today Fairhill and West Kensington. Throughout the 20\textsuperscript{th} century and up until today, Puerto Ricans have consistently felt and were defined as the “other,” both on the mainland and for those born outside of the Island but still identified with Puerto Rican culture. Whether this classification was internal or external, or a combination of both, it constantly redefined the perception of the ”Puerto Rican” identity and further mobilized community members to congregate.

Philadelphia was not the only city that experienced wide-spread redevelopment in the name of urban renewal. By the mid 20\textsuperscript{th} century, urban renewal projects in the United States had become prime examples of authoritarian models of power.\textsuperscript{90} African Americans and Latino/a urban dwellers suffered the most – they were too politically and economically weak to save small-scale neighborhoods and local character. For example,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Oscar Lewis, \textit{La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in Culture of Poverty – San Juan and New York.} (Random House, New York. 1966), 188
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
the plan for Lincoln Center in New York was projected to remake the city into a new arts and cultural force that boasted of technical, economic, and cultural power. However, the plan for Lincoln Center required demolishing homes and the livelihoods of thousands of lower income people.

_Displacement: El Barrio, Kensington and Fairhill: 1960s - today_

The second half of the 20th century impacted the growth and development of Puerto Rican communities in Philadelphia twofold. Since the 1950’s, growing tensions erupted into violence in the Spring Garden neighborhood. This spasm of violence brought the Puerto Rican community into the spotlight of social workers and city officials. While this tension mobilized community groups and activists to address the problems that led to the violence, it also contributed to a wider racial and cultural discrimination and misconceptions that spread throughout the city. Simultaneously, larger structural changes occurred throughout Philadelphia and other large metropolitan centers nationwide. Between 1968 and 1985, Puerto Rican and Latino residents of Spring Garden were pushed out of their neighborhoods. Latinos moved east and north towards existing Latino enclaves at 7th and 2nd Streets in northeast Philadelphia and expanded enclaves around the 5th Street corridor.⁹¹

If the initial move to Philadelphia was difficult on the Puerto Rican community, the second internal migration, exacerbated by externalities occurring city-wide, proved equally as ruthless. Industry began to decline and factory work, which had been a source of income and a lure for new migrants, was almost nonexistent. By the 1970s, the physical abandonment of the neighborhoods and city’s economic base now defined the city’s landscape. Community groups mobilized in order to address what the city was unable – or refused – to. These groups worked collectively to improve the general conditions of their neighborhoods. These efforts included new and innovative ways to change the appearance of the neighborhood and instill cultural pride, such as transforming public parks or the vacant lots, many of which still exist today.
Figure 8.1: Corner of Cumberland St. and 2nd St. in West Kensington. A mechanic warehouse selling and occupying space adjacent to its lot. Image Source: Author’s images, 2019.

Figure 8.2: A lively garden affixed in an empty lot adjacent to a resident’s home, also in West Kensington. Image Source: Author’s images, 2019.
The once empty and vacant side lots scattered throughout the community have since been transformed to vibrant gardens or spaces of informal business. [Figure 8] As told by a resident of Northern Liberties, these vacant lots were not only used as public spaces for gardening or community gathering but also served as additional revenue sources. Auto repair shops, fruit and vegetable stalls, local small-scale outdoor eateries, and other creative uses were given to the once vacant lots. For example, as one interviewee explained, a local resident would rent out the space adjacent to his lot to store vintage cars for $150 per month, per vehicle, a significant revenue increase to a moderately low-income household. While technically, the empty and vacant lots were still owned by the city, their transformation and rehabilitation were due to the community members and residents themselves.92 As another interviewee explained, throughout history Puerto Ricans have always “done what they could with what they had,” alluding to larger-scale cultural practices and historical contexts of colonialism on the island itself.93

Today, the neighborhoods around 5th Street and Lehigh Avenue are still predominantly Latinx based. Fairhill and Kensington serve as the primary Latinx commercial district centered around North 5th street. Nicknamed “The Golden Block,” products from not only Puerto Rico but also from Caribbean and South American countries can be bought in many of the shops and restaurants and define the main

92 Author’s interview.
93 Author’s interview.
street of *el barrio*. For the purpose of this thesis, I examined the neighborhoods of Fairhill and West Kensington as case study neighborhoods to examine the modification of culture within the Puerto Rican context.

CHAPTER 4: DEFINING THE PUERTO RICAN VERNACULAR

Anthropologist and scholar, Carol F. Jopling, chronicles the evolution of the Puerto Rican vernacular on the Island through an ethnological analysis. Jopling dissects the spatial order of the Puerto Rican model to develop a typological study of the Puerto Rican built environment, which she states, contrasts sharply with the “differentiated, plainer North American settings.” Unlike the architectural styles of Philadelphia’s Row houses, the geography of Puerto Rico held a prominent role in the social development and architectural history of the island. Up until the mid-20th century, the siting of the houses on the Island and the materials used were largely determined by the terrain and the climate. In addition, colonial occupation greatly influenced the variety of architectural styles and through the introduction of new materials, building methods, and aesthetic preferences.

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As a result, Puerto Rican vernacular architecture has evolved through an integration of a variety of different styles throughout history. Prior to the 16th century, architecture on the island was closely affiliated with the Taino Indians (an Arawak people). During this time the common vernacular construction was in the form of Bohios, which were generally constructed as two-room houses built out of a timber frame, walled with sugar cane or yagua (inner bark of palm), roofed with thatch, and with either a dirt floor or a wooden floor raised on posts (see figure 9).
Today, Bohios made out of yagua, or sugar cane, largely exist as romanticized, folkloric reconstructions. By the early 16th century, the Island was conquered by the Spaniards. This occupation spurred early Spanish utilitarian colonial housing construction in Puerto Rico, which was built out of wood or adobe, and stone adaptations of Spanish vernacular houses and the Taino bohios (see figure 10). The houses were simple, one-story structures built of mamposteria, or masonry, at curb height with limited ornamentation. The style was characterized specifically by its solidity.
and weight – conveyed through the materials used, the thicknesses of the walls, and the horizontal straight lines.

![Puerto Rican Criollo (creole) and Criollo Pueblerino were constructed out of wood with many features reminiscent of Victorian Europe, New Orleans Creole, and Art Nouveau styles: with pierced wood fanlights, balconies with wrought iron railings in arabesque designs, slanting high-pitched roofs, and wood jalousies. Most of the existing examples are now also painted in bright colors, particularly light green and aqua, and have been further ornamented with various decorations patent North American in inspiration. (Mid 19th c.)](image)

**Figure 11:** Ponce Criollo House, Puerto Rico. Authors image, Fall 2018

By the mid-19th century, (particularly post-1898 occupation by the United States), mainland architectural styles greatly influenced the construction of the Puerto Rican vernacular on the island. The Puerto Rican Criollo (creole) and *Criollo Pueblerino* were a combination of wood construction with features closely resembling Victorian Europe, New Orleans Creole, and Art Nouveau styles. Specific features, such as pierced
wood fanlights, balconies with wrought iron railings in arabesque designs, slanting high-pitched roofs, and wood jalousies were prominent throughout the Island. Many of them were painted in bright colors, particularly light green and aqua and were further adorned with North American influenced ornamentation. Examples of this can still be in Ponce, Puerto Rico (see figure 11). Ultimately, by the mid-20th century, United States influence had become commonplace throughout the island. The common Bungaloid vernacular style on the island was influenced by two major styles: Beaux Arts architectural style with arched and linteled openings between columns or pilasters and its facades with advancing and receding planes; and Prairie style defined by its horizontality. They also incorporated elements of traditional North American worker architecture: small single-story bungalows with porch-veranda’s which were simultaneously used as both living and outdoor space. The popularity of drawings and illustrated pattern books made the Bungaloid style particularly wide-spread. It’s popularity was also due to its, construction being well-suited for Puerto Rico’s climate (see figure 12).
Case Study: Fairhill and West Kensington

Fairhill is a neighborhood in Kensington that was first settled in 1718. It is bounded by Lehigh Avenue to the south, Sixth Street to the west, Front Street to the east, and the Amtrak rail lines to the north. Like much of Philadelphia, Fairhill is characterized by classic 19th-century industry and historic working-class residential architecture. It has been home to generations of immigrants who came to Philadelphia in search of upward economic and social mobility. However, in recent decades as industry rapidly declined in Kensington, Fairhill experienced a drastic decrease in jobs.
and population. As a result, poverty and crime increased and many of its buildings and lots sat vacant.

Out of the 24,876 (2013-2017) residents that live in Fairhill, 96% 80% or 19,790 of those are Hispanic race. The majority of those residents are of “working age” with 60% between the ages of 18 and 64 – but there is also a significant percentage (31%) under 18 years old. Additionally, 67% of Fairhill’s population makes less than $25,000 (2013-2017 annual income. This is substantially more than the county of Philadelphia, where only 34%, make less than $25,000. While there are an estimated 9,825 housing units within the boundaries of Fairhill (2013-2017), about 13% of those housing units are estimated vacant. The most recent data suggests that in Fairhill, the number of vacant residential properties is just over 6%, whereas in the city of Philadelphia that number is just over 2%.

Kensington, specifically West Kensington, is relatively smaller in size when compared to Fairhill, where 4,118 (2013-2017) residents reside. Of these, 80.5% or 3,315 of those residents are Hispanic. The majority of these residents are also of “working age,” with 63.4% between the ages of 18 and 64. Similarly, a significant percentage (29.38%) are under the age of 18. Even more drastically, 72.64% of West Kensington’s population makes less than $25,000 (2013-2017 annual income), which is

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96 Fairhill, is bound by census tracts 42101038300, 42101017500, 42101019200, 42101017601, 42101017702, 42101017602, 42101019501, 42101019502, 42101017400 and located within, or touching the following zip codes: 19134, 19140, 19125, 19133.

97 West Kensington is bound by census tracts 42101017500, 42101016100, 42101017601, 42101016300, 42101017702, 42101016400, 42101016200 and is located within, or touching the following zip codes 19134, 19125, 19122, 19133.
significantly higher than Philadelphia County, where only 34%, of residents make less than $25,000. West Kensington has significantly fewer housing units, only 1,536 units according to the U.S. census. While the number of housing units, in comparison to Fairhill is relatively small, the housing vacancy rate is just as high. An estimated 11.72% of residential units are vacant. The most recent data suggests that in West Kensington, the number of vacant residential properties is just over 6.43%, (compared to the city of Philadelphia which is at 2.5%).

Culturally, many immigrant family structures and practices differ to those of a typical American household. Puerto Rican families are on average larger and proximity to family is central. It is very common for generations of Puerto Ricans to live close to one another, if not under the same roof. Additionally, social and communal areas are considered to be one of the most valued spaces within the neighborhood. Community members and neighbors often gather together to celebrate by throwing what one resident of Kensington describes as “loud, boisterous parties that spilled onto the sidewalk and even over to her aunt’s steps and porch.”98

Fairhill and Kensington consist primarily of single-family and multi-family residential dwellings. Single-family houses are predominantly narrow, two story rowhouses, approximately 14-15 feet wide, built to the sidewalk, with a basement, and

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flat fronted brick. On some blocks, houses are set back from the sidewalk behind a small front porch and incorporate bay windows on the second floor.99

![Image of caged porches](image)

*Figure 13: The “caged porches,” or cobertizos of Philadelphia. Theresa Stigale, 2014.*

While relatively unnoticeable, culturally specific modifications can be seen on residential architecture throughout the Kensington and Fairhill neighborhoods of Philadelphia. The effect is understated but alluring. Metal bars wrap around windows and cover porches, commonly referred to as “caged porches” or *cobertizos* (see figure 13). For outsiders, the *cobertizos* may look like efforts to keep others out to ensure a

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secure and safe private space. In reality, the presence of the “cages” on windows and porches is common throughout the island of Puerto Rico and are part of the Puerto Rican vernacular.

Puerto Rican architecture on the Island has, for decades, been characterized by a superficial Spanish colonial form. However, the reality of living in a dense tropical climate is expressed through modifications such as high ceilings, patios that act as ventilation shafts for air, and the use of specific materials – all of which clearly define the Puerto Rican vernacular. Additional factors, such as an almost year-round warm climate, impact the design of security measures, in Puerto Rico, windows and doors are almost always kept ajar for ventilation, creating the need for compatible barriers. The adaptation of window guards and interior courtyards encourage the culture of community while protecting from intruders.\(^{100}\)

The adaptation of the Philadelphia rowhome, common in North Philadelphia, to reflect the Puerto Rican vernacular is reminiscent of Spanish and Moorish influence on the Island where colonnaded walkways surrounded by gardens were used to blur the boundaries between public and private space. Due to the rural and informal nature of Puerto Rico specifically, residential properties utilize the full extent of the allotted lot. Local architect, Ariel Vazquez, references these cultural practices stating that when you “decide to build your house, you put it right in the middle, so you have a big front yard and a big backyard” (see figure 14). This way, the owner can “maximize the views of the city and nature around them, as well as provide a buffer between the home and the
street.” The challenge, however, is incorporating this practice into the Philadelphia rowhome, which commonly sits right at the edge of the property line.

Ultimately, the middle spaces, such as front porches or stoops that are not completely public but not private either, contribute to the Puerto Rican cultural value of gathering outside with family and friends. The desire to hold onto aspects of traditional lifestyles that are native to the island is seen through architecture and built space, such as the cobertizos. This representation of culture, specifically within the context of the residential vernacular landscape, reveals a need for collective being and cultural representation. As seen throughout Kensington, specifically along North Cadwallader Street, the variation in design of the cobertizos visually reflects individuals’ identity. Yet, by referencing the same architectural style, residents collectively display their cultural heritage.

In many cases, those who are in positions of power define the characteristics of neighborhoods. These place-based environments are defined by the layout of the streets, the placement of landmarks, and the representation of distinct architectural styles. Despite the intentions of these governing bodies, and regardless of existing policies and regulations, the communities that occupy these spaces naturally redefine and repurpose their environments. While quantitative analysis can clearly depict the roads, street grids, landmarks, and monuments, it is through qualitative analysis that we

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begin to understand the ways in which specific elements of the community are formed and represented.\textsuperscript{102}

Conversations with residents, professionals, activists, and academics who live in the neighborhoods of West Kensington, Fairhill, and Norris Square provided insight into the importance of the representation of culture. Both tangible (defined by physical elements such as flags, ethnic-produce stores) and intangible (defined by language spoken, ethnic practices and rituals, festivals, social congregations) associations were voiced as significant and fundamental components of the community. Among all interviewees, cultural identity was highly valued and respected, as it invoked a sense of belonging. In some cases, the presence of an ethnic culture was a defining factor in a family’s decision to move from one neighborhood to another – they felt a “sense of community.” Alternatively, residents interviewed who had resided in their neighborhood for multiple generations reflected on that new construction and infill were “ignorant of the existing fabric and don’t acknowledge the surrounding community fabric.”\textsuperscript{103} These newly developed sites are “homogenous in their appearance and volume, completely disregarding the existing conditions and community history.”\textsuperscript{104} Moreover, the visual representation of one’s culture is crucial because it not only gives a sense of belonging, both in private spaces such as homes, but also in the public realm.

\textsuperscript{102} For the purpose of this research, the names of those interviewed have been changed.
\textsuperscript{103} Author’s Interview.
\textsuperscript{104} Author’s Interview.
Cultural representation connects people to a space and the preservation of it is vital for the development of future neighborhoods and communities.

Findings

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the complicated narrative of the migrants’ journey and understanding of place, I conducted a series of conversations with recently relocated and previously settled Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia. Additionally, while not specifically recorded in this body of research, informal conversations with Hurricane Maria climate change refugees framed my initial inquiries and interview questions.\(^{105}\)

Over a period of six months, interviews with five residents of Kensington and Fairhill were conducted in person, over the phone, and through email and the following findings are annotated in summary form. While it should be noted that urban neighborhoods inherently do change, and many people move from one place another willingly, the following interviews specifically reflected the ethno-demographic changes that were a direct result of historic and contemporary gentrification and displacement.

As noted in the previous chapter, following the second wave of migration from the Island to the mainland, many Puerto Rican residents settled in the Philadelphia neighborhoods of Spring Garden and Fairmount. However, newly defined development

\(^{105}\) See appendix for questions asked during the interviewee’s conversations.
pressures in the neighborhoods close to Center City, Philadelphia pushed Puerto Rican residents further north. The following themes are explored within this chapter: the socio-psychological perception of cultural identity and the usage of urban space; the impact of multiple relocation and migrations; and the use of open and public space, such as side lots and park. Due to time constraints, the number of interviewees was limited to five, however, more case study interviews should be conducted in order to collect sufficient data for a more extensive analysis.

Mateo González, a local architect and urban activist in his South Kensington neighborhood (formerly a resident of Northern Liberties), reflected on the cultural practices of his ethno-community where the adaptation of the vernacular is defined by those who inhabit the space. Historically underrepresented communities, generally those with fewer resources, have had to “do what they can with what they have.” Those originally displaced from Fairmount moved to the Northeast neighborhoods of Philadelphia where space was adapted and built upon, a common practice in many South American cultures. Vasquez noted that it is common in Latinx culture, or “back home” to have family units live closer to one another, if not with one another, since homes are seen as family investments and are inherited cross-generationally. Here the adaptation of existing architecture or new additions are a combination of necessity and culture.
Figure 15: Ornately decorated iron grating enclosing the balcón in West Kensington, Philadelphia. Image Source: Theresa Stigale, 2014

Figure 16: Iron grating over a small balcón with an adjacent side lot. Norris Square, Philadelphia. Image Source: Author’s image
González also spoke about modifications to the humble two-story row houses that now sport distinct porches enclosed with iron grids. These fences enclose balcón – notable for their curved iron bars – which are, at times, elaborately decorated. While to some these now covered spaces reflect a need for safety (which in some cases may be true), they are reflections of cultural practices. Balcónes are “private” spaces distinct from the public sidewalk. But as González explains, they are actually spaces that are meant to invite people in, they are spaces where residents can gather, sit, and socialize without worry, and they are a common form throughout the Island of Puerto Rico (see figures 15 – 16). These adapted spaces reflect the community’s cultural identity, which in turn “creates a sense of belonging and develop(s) ownership” says González.

Another example of claiming ownership in spaces that originally sat neglected are the rehabilitated vacant side lots in North Philadelphia. Many of these side lots were, activated by adjacent property owners, but in some cases, they were activated by the community as a whole. These side lots are often reconstructed into gardens, public parks, or other spaces for social interaction. In some cases, the lots are used, albeit illegally, by the adjacent homeowner as a supplemental form of income – a necessity as many residents are low-income and rely on innovative methods to earn extra income.

Carla Rodriguez Calderón similarly acknowledged that the adaptation of vacant lots, specifically by the residents themselves, served as necessary points of spatial cohabitation. Public space, such as pocket parks, recreation centers and commercial corridors, in addition to the front of homes where community members gather to socialize and have conversations, were cited as some of the most important places
within the community or neighborhood because they provide spaces for people to
gather in public. Calderón, originally from Puerto Rico, moved to Northern Liberties and
purchased a home in the late 1990s—a time when the neighborhood was “full of blight, 
drugs, and prostitution.” Calderón said she would have felt unsafe coming home at night 
with two small children if it weren’t for the presence of a Mosque across the street. She
referred to them as the “gatekeepers” of the neighborhood, “necessary religious 
institutions.” The presence of the mosque and the people that came to pray there,
enabled her to have a safe state-of-mind. While Calderón, a realtor and developer for
the Hispanic community in Kensington and its surrounding areas, stated that she “can’t
stop movement or change,” she thinks it’s possible to “mitigate long-term impact.” She
hopes community organizations, like the local CDC’s, will be the mediators between
income development and retaining the existing physical and social fabric—“a careful
balancing act.”

As someone in the local development field in Philadelphia, Calderón held a
unique perspective in her understanding of the changing cultural dynamic in these
neighborhoods. More than once she noted that she had knew about future
development projects that she could capitalize on; however, because of her own roots
and family connection she also felt responsible to care for an underrepresented
demographic. As these development pressures grow, vacant properties—specifically the
vacant lots activated by local residents (in any cases not legally owned)—are now being
sold off, without alerting the community or the property owners that have cared for
those lots for so long. Once cleaned, these vacant spaces were not only repurposed
public space used for gardening or community gatherings, but also as area of business. While almost all were occupied illegally (some with criminally activity), most were simply sources of additional income: from selling tostones as one resident did or renting space to community members to store their vintage cars. For families living paycheck to paycheck, these supplemental forms of income were vital. These alternative sources of income disappeared when the new owners purchased the “empty” lots. The Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority was recently criticized for favoring the sale of side lots to developers in order to personally pocket its profits, and many of the side lot auctions are done without public notice to alert residents who cared for the space for years.

During periods of transition, the cultural adaptation of space was a collective effort of “taking ownership of identity.” Repurposing vernacular architecture and landscapes provided agency and familiarity in difficult circumstances. Cultural preservation is necessary for local residents to cope with externalities beyond their control. While it is difficult to prove the ways in which preservation of culture defrays the displacement of residents, it certainly staves of some of the most prevalent contemporary challenges that Northeast Philadelphia faces today: gentrification and the “whitewashing” or homogenization of historically immigrant communities.


CHAPTER 5: LEARNING FROM LOISAIDA

New York in the 70s and 80s, like many other cities, was crumbling. Its infrastructure sat, abandoned and deteriorating. However, those who were marginalized had no other option but to settle in areas within the city that were in such a state of decay that they were compared to Dresden after World War II.\textsuperscript{108} That is when and how the neighborhood, Loisaida, officially defined by the area between Houston Avenue and Avenue C, became a beacon of resilience and cultural revival.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{loisaida_festival_poster.png}
\caption{Poster advertising the Loisaida festival, occurring yearly in the Lower East Side, 2016. Image Source: The Loisaida Center}
\end{figure}

and 14th streets and between Avenue A and the East River, was created. A handful of Puerto Rican community organizers breathed a new identity and enlivened a neighborhood in Manhattan that had otherwise sat neglected. The Loisaida movement, as historian and activist scholar Liz Ševčenko notes, “constructed a neighborhood-specific discourse of puertorriqueñidad born from its political relationship to urban space,” which did more than just claim the neighborhood and the rights to public services; it “suggested a new physical and discursive place for Puerto Ricans and puertorriqueñidad in the postindustrial city.” The narrative of Loisaida in the late 20th century emphasizes the necessity of cultural heritage and representation in architectural space and defined the claims of a local territory in the Puerto Rican community of New York City. [Figure 17 - 18]

As urban economies nationwide de-industrialized, manufacturing industries, which had originally drawn and heavily employed large numbers of Puerto Rican residents, relocated to areas outside of the city. Additionally, specific strategies motivated by the city’s desire for economic development, as well as profit-gaining motivated private investors, fueled property disinvestment. Without proper government regulation ensuring the viability of tenant rights, landlords seized any necessary maintenance and investment but continued to collect rent. “Accidental” fires were also common by property owners looking to both push residents out and cash in on insurance money. At this time, the practice of redlining by banks and insurance companies further exasperated the circumstances through discriminatory lending practices. The outcome was a landscape of deterioration, where inhabitable conditions
forced residents to leave and the neighborhood’s buildings and lots sat abandoned, attracting looters, and priming the area for crime.

While the Lower East Side wasn’t the only barrio in New York City - El Barrio in East Harlem and the South Bronx were also abandoned by city officials, investors, and its own community members, it did hold a unique geographic position unknown to other Latinx ethnic enclaves, similar to those of contemporary Fairhill and East Kensington in Philadelphia. In the late 20th century, two recently gentrified neighborhoods, Greenwich Village and Soho, were located in close proximity to Loisaida, as well as the new economic hub of the city – Wall Street. This proximity to a changing, and increasingly wealthier constituency became the biggest threat as speculative developers noticed the potential value of land and targeted the Puerto Rican working-class of the Lower East Side. This threat, led by the inevitability of gentrification through the disappearance of affordable housing and the displacement of working-class residents, fueled a new form of urgency to claim urban space and assert a community’s cultural identity throughout its borders.

There were two ways the residents and community members of Loisaida did in order to combat these threats and to preserve and instate their cultural identity as their right to the city. The first was to name the neighborhood themselves as a form of combating gentrification, of which rebranding was a mechanism used “in order to chase out the poor,”111 and to combat it, residents needed to reclaim their heritage by placing

111 Ibid, 296.
themselves on the map as an important space in the city’s history.\textsuperscript{112} By not only naming the neighborhood Loisaida, community members and organizers contributed a specific identity to the neighborhood associated with the Afro-Puerto Ricans who resided there. By defining the identity of a place, the community groups and activists of Loisaida had transformed from a disinvested neighborhood in Manhattan, to a movement that fought for the rights of working-class Puerto Rican residents both within the Island and the mainland. Through the assertion of a name, fighting for adequate living conditions, organizing neighborhood empty lot improvements and cleanups, and mobilizing celebratory events, such as the Puerto Rico Day Parade, to march through their neighborhood’s streets, the residents communicated their seriousness through action, as well as their usage of urban space.\textsuperscript{113}

Additionally, the Loisaida’s community members reconstructed the existing landscape of the Lower East Side in order to instate their cultural presence and express their identity and communal values. Residents hung the Puerto Rican flag, and tenants’ associations displayed banners and signs identifying their names on buildings, or murals were colorfully drawn depicting well known moments in Puerto Rico’s history, all as ways to claim the landscape that was theirs. Additionally, residents altered the physical landscape by rehabilitating empty lots and designing community gardens, some even

\textsuperscript{112} Garcia, an interviewee of Liz Ševčenko’s, said: “In the early 70s we was trying to look for a name to call the neighborhood because the developers was already calling it Alphabet City, the East Village, and they started using names like that in order to make it attractive, to start selling property, to the outsiders, to the gentrifiers. They won’t use names like the Lower East Side. They used names like the East Village, because that makes it more attractive …” (Ibid, 297).

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid, 303.
created casitas or small wooden houses modeled after those of rural Puerto Rico, portraying those common to the Jibaro people.\textsuperscript{114}

\textbf{Figure 19: Lower East Side Community Newspaper, Volume 1 - Number 1 ASPIRA of New York, Inc. Records, 1959-1998.} A community organized and published (bilingual) newspaper called for the organization of residents against wide-spread neighborhood demolition efforts.

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid, 308.
While the Loisaida community did effectively organize, enough for city
government to officially recognize it as an ethnic territory and the movement, in it of
itself, did prevent a complete turnover during the 1980s. So much so that the “many
city-owned buildings that were appropriated and rehabilitated by a Loisaidan tenant
associations formed a barrier that thwarted the complete gentrification of the area.”\textsuperscript{115}

[Figure 19] However, as the New York’s real estate value started to turn by the 1990s,
the mayor and private-developers saw the potential of the recently community-
rehabilitated neighborhood had and sought to reclaim them by targeting the social and
cultural heart of the neighborhood first, its community centers.\textsuperscript{116} While the community
did mobilize in order to fight for its protection, they were no match for what is the
power and control of urban land, the municipal government who actively sought to
reclaim the space by raising property taxes. In 1999, one of the largest and last
remaining community centers was sold off to a private developer.\textsuperscript{117} With that political
power, fueled by growing profit margins in the private land market, the very essence of
the neighborhood (it’s community and its buildings) was erased.\textsuperscript{118}

New York City provides a myriad of unique examples of not only Latino-focused
human and cultural displacement efforts but of other marginalized groups as well. While

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid: 313/ i.e. Mele, “Neighborhood ’Burn Out,’”, 128.
\textsuperscript{116} One target was the Charas/ El Bohio cultural and Community Center, the original organizing bases of
Loisaida. Community organizations are spaces that I would consider the heart of the neighborhood and its
cultural and social space. In this particular case, the organization spent over twenty years restoring an
abandoned school building and turning it into classrooms, theaters, and dance and studio space, and
proving programming for its neighborhood residents. (Ibid, 314.)
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{118} To see more of how Capitalism is continuing to displace millions of people and buildings: “Capital City,”
Samuel Stein, 2019.
New York City is oftentimes considered an outlier, due to its larger population and
greater renter-ship than Philadelphia, it does provide important insight on displacement
practices that widely occur. For example, Harlem’s Frederick Douglass Boulevard and
125th Street rezoning’s has occurred largely by what planner Sylvia Morse cites as
“economic factors that ignored and threatened the neighborhood’s significance as an
African American cultural and economic mecca.”119 In this case, Morse analyzes how
zoning and housing policies increased displacement in a neighborhood that has thrived,
despite resounding neglect by the city and led to the subsequent shift to a mostly white
and upper-income demographic. While this thesis’ research does not delve into zoning
regulation and housing policy that does greatly contribute to neighborhood and
community displacement, it does acknowledge that preservation and planning
methodology are not, and cannot, operate in individual silos but rather work
collaboratively towards rectifying the larger challenge.

CHAPTER 6: WHAT CAN CULTURAL PRESERVATION DO?

Historic preservation, as aforementioned, has historically outlined the
significance of our built cultural heritage. Everyday spaces, or the vernacular, however,
are not commonly perceived as valuable contributors of heritage and are oftentimes
disregarded from the equation of legal protection completely. Sites of significance have

119 Tom Angotti, and Sylvia Morse. Zoned Out!: Race, Displacement, and City Planning in New York City.
(Urban Research, 2017: Harlem: Displacement not integration), 98.
been important resources in describing immigrant experiences throughout neighborhoods in the United States. Oftentimes, however, preservationists neglect integral portions of the immigrant narrative – whereas the neighborhoods in which they live, work, and shop have been widely studied by social and ethno-historians for decades. Additionally, immigrant neighborhoods tend to have little significant “high-style” architecture that is worthy of traditional landmarking processes and has often been turned over as new ethnic groups adapt buildings to suit their needs. Therefore, the vernacular architecture of these ethnic neighborhoods offers significant challenges to the preservation field.

However, there are examples of social preservation measures undertaken by ethnic groups that successfully managed to retain not only the community in the face of redevelopment but its specific immigrant attributes as defined through space. Shortly following WWII, San Francisco was one of the first cities in the country to initiate a redevelopment program shortly following the New Deal era. By the late 1940s and early 1950s, a newly created San Francisco Redevelopment Agency proposed plans for a project in the Western Addition district for an “extensive, twenty-eight-block project,”120 where most of the area would be bulldozed and resold to private developers for housing, commerce, and institutional use. Roughly 9,600 people lived within the project’s boundaries, many of which were monetarily or racially restricted from living...

anywhere else. Significantly, the Western Addition neighborhood held the second-largest nonwhite group, known in prewar years for its “Japanese district.” While the Japanese population had decreased since the war, specifically when more dominant ethnic groups such as the Chinese American and Filipino had increased, it still occupied about 20% of the project site.

In an era of urban renewal and a rigorous urban redevelopment agenda, the meaning and understanding of civic participation was redefined. Precarious ethnic and minority communities were the least likely to benefit from any city and privately-led redevelopment, but the ones who characterized a specific urban identity to the city. In a time when land is at a premium, ethnic groups had to mobilize in order to project their concerns. In the example of San Francisco, the group of Japanese American merchant-planners represented their community through public and participatory action, successfully cooperating with city officials in order to voice the community’s concerns and preserve its social and physical fabric.

While the efforts in San Francisco were made in the mid-20th century, their success story persists to this day. A recently released “Cultural Heritage and Economic Sustainability Strategy” for San Francisco’s Japantown outlines tools and strategies that secures the future of Japantown as “the historical and cultural heart of Japanese and Japanese American Community.” To do this, the city’s historic preservation office, in

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121 Ibid.
122 Ibid.
123 Ibid, 105.
collaboration with local community groups and residents, identified and documented Japantown’s important social heritage resources, including buildings and monuments, businesses, institutions and organizations, events and traditional arts, crafts, and practices. While this plan and its implementation are necessary steps that propel the field of preservation in the right direction, they are limited to economic and regulatory tools majority applicable to only the neighborhood’s commercial district, as opposed to considering the residential and vernacular spaces that exist in conjunction with.

San Francisco’s Cultural Heritage and Economic Sustainability Strategy is only one example of how the field of preservation begun to evolve and expand. Advocates and scholars are challenging the historic notion of preservation’s fixed and exclusive nature, citing the need to be more inclusive, socially aware, and malleable to today’s changing social and political climate. This changing dynamic and the democratization of the field contributes to the larger discourse and shift towards equitable and socially conscious planning practices and bottom-up approaches in community development at large. At this juncture, planning and preservation “professionals” take a step back to better understand what community members consider “valuable” and constructive, oftentimes differing from that of the “specialists.” Grass-root networks of urban planners, policymakers, and preservationists have stepped up to voice their concerns on http://default.sfplanning.org/plans-and-programs/in-your-neighborhood/japantown/ICHESS_FINAL_WEB2.pdf

current issues affecting low-income and minority communities, which had historically not been fully recognized or addressed by their professional fields. For example, BlackSpace - a coalition of those aforementioned, was a result of a number of initial convenings and “unconferences,” formed to address the “gaps between policy, people, and place,” and move away from “perfunctory forms of engagement” in order to recognize, affirm, and amplify Black agency. This is one example of how grassroot, “lowercase” preservationists, planners, and activists, who deeply value space identified by their communities, established a force to address contemporary urban problems. In this specific example, BlackSpace partnered with community members of Brownsville, Brooklyn to highlight the importance of preserving Black culture and space. Through an exploratory community-focused process that garnered local insight, amplified the heritage of one of Brooklyn’s historic Black enclaves. Magnifying awareness and documenting the spaces that the local community considered culturally significant, acknowledging the need to better understand place and the past, present, and future of its community. Activities and discussions such as these bring to light the necessity to re-evaluate contemporary planning and preservation practices at large and consider the need for more impactful systematic changes that are multifaceted in their practices and approaches.

127 Blackspace.org.
Additionally, historic preservation in the United States today is less likely to consider history through a silo but one that is more adaptive and sensitive to the importance of community storytelling and the environmental sustainability of existing structures.\textsuperscript{129} Historic preservation offices are embracing progressive notions of “preserving our communities,” in addition to those who have significant architectural value. The City of San Antonio Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) is leading the praxis of the field by placing significant emphasis on preserving community character and its culture. Where “local,” rather than stylistically significant and high-styled buildings are considered “worthy” of preservation efforts. For example, in 2017 when the San Antonio Housing Authority threatened to demolish part of the Alazan-Apache Courts, a vernacular but historically significant segregation-era public housing development for Mexican-Americans, the San Antonio Office of Historic Preservation collaborated with local community organizations such as Esperanza Peace and Justice Center in order to project the importance of this space, both physically and socially.

The case of the Alazan-Apache Courts, along with many others in the Westside of San Antonio - where 95% of the population is Hispanic, reflects a larger concern over the social extinction of various cultural groups. This concern calls for a need to tell the history of not just the physical fabric but the way that people use and interact within these spaces and the social context in which they were constructed in.\textsuperscript{130} By considering


both the tangible and intangible aspects of a community’s cultural identity and heritage, historic preservation offices such as San Antonio’s, San Francisco’s and internationally, Australia’s, are leading the field in capturing, and advocating for, the social significance of a space, alongside it’s physical.\textsuperscript{131} Considering and consulting the indigenous culture and existing community, in turn, helps inform decisions for the future of equitable development and growth of these neighborhoods.

CONCLUSION

Cultural heritage has the subject of numerous official political and scientific discourses; however, rarely do we see the treatment of an area’s cultural heritage by the communities who identify with that heritage. A community-driven preservation, conservation, and planning agenda is largely absent from both national and international discourse. Yes—cultural, heritage, and identity are difficult topics to address. But we need to establish specific strategies that remember, synthesize, and display heritage. By placing “minority” heritage—specifically that of the vernacular—rather than “high-style” at the forefront of dialogue, we prepare the field of preservation for the expansion of its practices within the spheres of planning, restoring, and building on the memory of distinct groups of people.

\textsuperscript{131} See more: \textit{Tangible Benefits from Intangible Resources: Using Social and Cultural History to Plan Neighborhood Futures}, James Michael Buckley and Donna Graves, 2016; and \textit{The Japantown Cultural Heritage and Economic Sustainability Strategy (JCHESS)}, 2013.
The purpose of this thesis is to recognize the ways in which people-centered and place-based frameworks and approaches exist within city planning and cultural preservation discourse. The findings prove that there are disconnects between place-based and people-centered strategies in city development strategies. Some conversation is happening at the United Nations, The World Bank, and other international organizations that hadn’t previously factored in cultural heritage. However, these conversations only occur post impact, rather than in situ.

A recent book produced through a collaborative effort between the World Bank and UNESCO posits a framework that “mainstreams culture into post-crisis city reconstruction and recovery.” The claim is that by integrating cultural aspects into planning phases—needs assessments, scoping, planning, financing, and implementation—the plan can better support the process of reconstruction and “places of significance to communities.” Moreover, “people-centered strategies are critical to strengthen community ownership and to accelerate the socio-economic recover of cities.” This requires the “safeguarding and promotion of norms, traditions, local knowledge, crafts and cultural industries in reconstruction and recovery processes.” The framework proposes techniques that acknowledge the city as a “cultural construct,” and the necessity of prioritizing culture early in the post-disaster planning process. While these claims are made for the reconstruction of cities post disaster, I argue that they should be applied throughout planning and preservation processes at the outset.

138 Culture in City Reconstruction and Recovery. The World Bank and UNESCO.
For the purpose of this research, I adopted the definition of culture as a “set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, and traditions and beliefs.” The comprehensive definition of culture refers to cultural heritage as both tangible and intangible heritage, where tangible heritage includes buildings and structures, as well as physical open space such as parks and vacant lots.

While architectural questions analyze the stylistic form and the state of the built environment within the migrant’s place of origin or during the process of migration, as I have shown there are few inquiries about the physical adaptation of space within the migrant’s new place of residence. Therefore, there is a need to critically analyze architectural representation as it relates to the cultural preservation of one specific group within the context of the existing urban form.

This case-study analysis of a Puerto Rican community in Northeast Philadelphia alluded to a practice of architectural adaptation as an integration mechanism that would help mitigate the process of migration. In almost every case, whether in written accounts or interviews, migrants emphasize the impact of surrounding space on both their psychological and social environments. However, existing planning, preservation, and housing policies lack the strategies necessary to preserve the physical and social fabrics of these culturally vibrant and distinct neighborhoods. Acknowledging ethnic and

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139 UNHCR, 1982.
minority neighborhood’s significance and their role within the larger urban landscape is a necessary first step. However, adapting and normalizing bottom-up, community organization, and neighborhood planning efforts into the municipal regulatory framework should be the long-term goal.

The examples of Loisaida in New York and the Western Addition neighborhood in San Francisco prove that through organized collective effort, protecting the physical and social community character is possible. However, while both examples were considered successful, they were only so to a certain extent. Wide spread displacement, specifically in minority and ethnic communities – those with the least amount of political and economic power – are still commonplace. Affordability is one of the greatest concerns in many low-income and minority neighborhoods, not only in large cities such as New York or San Francisco, but in Philadelphia as well.¹⁴⁰

Most importantly, neighborhoods and communities must be recognized as organically evolving and constantly changing landscapes. It is necessary for their planning and preservation regulatory frameworks to be malleable to the changing social, political, and economic shifts. The Puerto Rican case is unique only in its historically confused socio-political status. Immigrant communities exist in almost every city in the United States—if not the world. I argue that in a continuously urbanizing world—one where immigration, migration, and relocation will only continue and grow

¹⁴⁰ Most of the residents in Northeast Philadelphia who were surveyed responded that housing was one of the largest concerns within the neighborhood. This was also confirmed through a client-based community and economic development studio done in 2019 in collaboration with the coalition organization, Ceiba, who work with these same communities.
We, as planning and preservation advocates and professionals, have the responsibility to protect and preserve diverse urban life.
APPENDIX

Interview Question Set:

The following set of questions were intended to guide the conversations in order to provide a more natural response. They were not given to the interviewees beforehand and in many cases the residents who were interviewed derailed from the initial prompt, providing greater and richer contexts.

1. Why do you live in this neighborhood? When did you move here? How has it changed?
   a. How do you define the boundaries of your neighborhood?
2. Who do you interact with in your neighborhood?
3. How do you define your culture? (Highlight some of its defining features)
   a. How is it tangibly represented in your community or space?
   b. How is it intangibly represented in your community or space?
   c. Are there any specific examples that you could give?
4. What are some places in your community or neighborhood that are important to you?
   a. Why do you consider them important?
5. Do you think that it is important to visually represent your culture within your community or neighborhood?
6. Do you think that it is important to visually represent your culture within your community or neighborhood?
   a. Why or why not?
7. What is your biggest concern for your community or neighborhood today?

Practitioners/ Preservationists, Architects, Planners:

1. How would you define cultural preservation?
2. What are some best practices when working with culture in growing and developing neighborhoods? (personally, or professional)
   a. Does it hinder your (organization’s) mission and goals?
   b. Does it aid in your (organization’s) mission and goals?
3. Have you seen tensions mitigated between old and new residents?
a. Do you think tension could be mitigated between new and old residents through the representation of ethnic culture?

Practitioners/other:

1. What kind of architecture is most important in your neighborhood, or the neighborhood’s that you’ve worked in?
2. Do you value everyday buildings?

Additional Interview notes:

Additional interviews were conducted alongside the initial five residents of Northeast Philadelphia. They included conversations with architects, Ariel Vasquez; preservation offices: San Antonio Historic Preservation Office, San Francisco Historic Preservation Office, New York City Landmarks; scholars, academics, and preservation specialists: Donna Graves and Barrett Reiter.
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