

The National Trust for Historic Preservation is a private, non-profit advocacy group whose mission is to preserve America's historic treasures and revitalize its communities and downtown areas. This year, their annual conference was held in Austin, Texas--a place where historic preservation is clearly an important aspect of the culture. The event was sponsored by numerous groups including the National Park Service and the U.S. General Services Administration; and attracted students, professors, architects, lawyers, engineers, and planners who all share a common interest of historic preservation. The four days spent at the conference were scheduled with presentations and panel discussions focused on educating peers and colleagues on certain topics concerning preservation in America today. Overall, these discussions were professional and sparked animated conversations among the professionals and students. Though some presentations were rather basic in the knowledge of preservation offered, there were a few which were thought provoking. I left the conference feeling a need to further research the advocacy of minority cultures in the world of preservation.

Since I have taken many classes so far at Mary Washington which pertain to the goals and set backs of preservation, I looked for meetings and presentations which focused on issues I have not yet studied in great depth. For instance, I participated in the discussions which revolved around the efforts to preserve minority cultural resources such as public housing units, burials, and low-income neighborhood revitalization. Many of these discussions sparked controversy and lead to the subject of ethnicity in preservation practice. Race seems to be a topic which can often either interfere with preservation projects, or hinder them. In both the discussion meetings, "Preservation in Low-Income Neighborhoods", and "Preserving African American Burials and Cemeteries," an overarching theme many minority projects in preservation seem to share is the lack of representation and general disinterest from other social groups in the area. One speaker represented a minority group in L.A. and fought to keep low-income housing in a particular neighborhood, and another presenter is currently in charge of the preservation of a historical African American burial ground which was in danger of demolition. These cases regarding the preservation of African American and Hispanic resources described only a small part of the larger problem in the historic preservation field. The scholars and professionals working with minority groups had a passion for their work, and seemed to share the feeling that the lack of interest, funds and representation were main obstacles in dealing with these cultural sites. I found these lectures very informative about the challenges minority groups face when dealing with preservation.

Although I enjoyed these lectures, one thing I disliked about the conference overall was that it seemed to be geared towards professionals thinking of pursuing a career in preservation who have little background knowledge in the field. I felt that some of the general lectures were basic, and only reiterated what I have learned previously in my classes. By the second day I started scanning the synopsis of lectures and aimed to go to talks I had little to no information on already. Another aspect of the conference I found difficult was the scheduled "nosh & network" sections. Since there were so many people involved in the conference, it was also hard to engage

others in conversation. It also was evident that there were definite factions that existed, and, other than my peers from UMW, I did not know anyone and found it hard to strike up conversations randomly. I felt a sense of inferiority since I was only an undergraduate student rather than a graduate student or working professional.

Overall, the conference was a good experience which helped me learn more in depth about larger issues concerning preservation. I was encouraged to ask questions of our speakers, and had a valuable conversation with one woman who works for the National Trust about the public housing dilemma. She offered me her e-mail address and advised me on literature which would help with further research on the topic. Since our department at UMW is quite small, it was nice to see the variety of professional careers and organizations that are in the United States which all deal in some way with the larger field of preservation. I also found that many graduate programs were represented as well and were very happy to offer information about their departments and courses.

In conclusion, I would advise undergraduate students to take advantage of the chance to go to the next annual National Trust Conference in Buffalo, where they can see the various academic institutions and organizations which work in the field.