

Beyond Preservation: Using Public History to Revitalize Inner Cities (Urban Life, Landscape and Policy)

Andrew Hurley



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Across the United States, historic preservation has become a catalyst for urban regeneration. Entrepreneurs, urban pioneers, and veteran city dwellers have refurbished thousands of dilapidated properties and put them to productive use as shops, restaurants, nightclubs, museums, and private residences. As a result, inner-cities, once disparaged as zones of poverty, crime, and decay have been re-branded as historic districts. Although these preservation initiatives, often supported by government tax incentives and rigid architectural controls, deserve credit for bringing people back to the city, raising property values, and generating tourist revenue, they have been less successful in creating stable and harmonious communities.

Beyond Preservation proposes a framework for stabilizing and strengthening inner-city neighborhoods through the public interpretation of historic landscapes. Its central argument is that inner-city communities can best turn preserved landscapes into assets by subjecting them to public interpretation at the grass-roots. Based on an examination of successful projects in St. Louis, Missouri and other U.S. cities, Andrew Hurley demonstrates how rigorous historical analysis can help communities articulate a local identity and plan intelligently on the basis of existing cultural and social assets.

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