

January 2003

Historic Preservation and Urban Cultural Geography in Southern California

Charles Palmer

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/psi_sigma_siren

 Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), [Historic Preservation and Conservation Commons](#), [Social History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Palmer, Charles (2003) "Historic Preservation and Urban Cultural Geography in Southern California," *Psi Sigma Siren*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 1 , Article 1.

Available at: https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/psi_sigma_siren/vol1/iss1/1

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the History at Digital Scholarship@UNLV. It has been accepted for inclusion in Psi Sigma Siren by an authorized editor of Digital Scholarship@UNLV. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@unlv.edu.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION AND URBAN CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Charles Palmer

In 1995, the editors of *Historic Preservation* bestowed their Great American Main Street Awards upon Pasadena, California; Clarksville, Missouri; Dubuque, Iowa; Franklin, Tennessee; and Sheboygan Falls, Wisconsin. The awards recognized the collective achievements of local governments, citizenry, and historic preservationists who “tapped into community pride and energy and built upon--not over--the inherent value of their community’s historic character.”¹ It is no surprise that Pasadena represents California on this list, as the city has eighty-four separate listings on the National Register of Historic Places as of November 2001. This is more, in fact, than some counties--consider the forty-eight listings in Riverside County, or the thirty-one in Ventura. Even relentlessly prosperous Marin County lists only thirty-eight sites.²

What is it that makes Pasadena so different from its neighbors? Pasadena, after all, is often depicted in literature as the prototypical Southern California suburb--dispersed, decentralized, and dependent on the automobile. Becky Nicolaides writes that historians tend to explain Pasadena along with other early suburbs of Los Angeles in terms of sprawl, which they attribute to “the Midwestern background of residents, the streetcar and automobile, and the anti-urban bias of early planners.” She continues:

As Robert Fogelson put it, the native-born whites who migrated to Los Angeles brought with them “a conception of the good community which was embodied in single-family houses, located on large lots, surrounded by landscaped lawns, and isolated from business activities.... Here then was the basis for the extraordinary dispersal of Los Angeles.”³

But is Pasadena really typical of the California urban experience? And if it is not, might this have something to do with making the city a favorite of the preservation community? In fact, it is possible to assert that Pasadena more closely resembles the other, Eastern, cities on the Great American Main Street Award list than it does some of its more immediate neighbors within the state. Certainly, by the late twentieth century, Pasadena was far from sprawling. Surrounded on all sides by other municipalities, with little opportunity for expansion, Pasadena’s growth in the post-war period was quite modest, by California standards. Between 1950 and 1992, the population increased

¹. Jonathan Walters, “The Centers Hold,” *Historic Preservation* 47, July/August 1995, 6-11.

². National Register Information System, accessed 16 October 2001; available at <http://www.nr.nps.gov>; Internet.

³. Becky M. Nicolaides, “‘Where the Working Man Is Welcomed’: Working-Class Suburbs in Los Angeles, 1900-1940,” *Pacific Historical Review* 68, no. 4 (1999), 517.

by twenty-eight thousand residents, from 104,577 to 132,605, and the incorporated land area remained almost unchanged, growing from 21.3 to 23.0 square miles.⁴ Compared with other cities in the area, Pasadena can be characterized as relatively compact and stable. Because of this, together with its history of old money and Midwestern sensibilities, Pasadena has more than a passing resemblance to the eastern cities which dominate the pages of preservation magazines. This study will assert that it is this “Easternness” which makes the city an inherently conducive environment for historic preservation. Compactness and a stable population with a history of homogeneity are more likely to foster the sense of common vision and shared identity required for the success of preservation on a community-wide scale.

If Pasadena, then, is not typical of Southern California communities, what is? One possible candidate is the city of San Bernardino, forty five miles to the east. San Bernardino makes a particularly useful comparison, because in spite of the apparent similarities to Pasadena in terms of age, early history, and population levels, the city has only four sites in the National Register of Historic Places.⁵ And if “urban sprawl” is the hallmark of the Southern California identity, San Bernardino has a significant claim to that process, as author William Whyte coined the term to describe what he observed during a trip to the city in 1958. “Flying from Los Angeles to San Bernardino--an unnerving lesson in man’s infinite capacity to mess up his environment--the traveler can see a legion of bulldozers gnawing into the last remaining tract of green between the two cities, and from San Bernardino another legion of bulldozers gnawing westward.”⁶

Both Pasadena and San Bernardino were carefully planned by groups outside of California as “colonies” of their home states. Pasadena was founded in 1874 by well-to-do investors as the “California Colony of Indiana”⁷ and continued to be identified as a haven for the wealthy. In *Southern California Country: An Island on the Land*, Carey McWilliams notes that the city made a concerted effort in the late 19th century to promote itself as a resort destination for upper-class easterners, many of whom subsequently took up permanent residence. The landmark Raymond Hotel was “Thoroughly Bostonian in atmosphere...” to the point of hiring Massachusetts author Charles Frederick Holder to write promotional pieces for the city. Due to the effects of eastern tourism, and the character of Pasadena’s founders, McWilliams uses the words of author Sarah Comstock to describe the city as one of the *least* western communities in the United States.⁸

San Bernardino began in 1851 as a colony planned by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-

^{4.} United States Bureau of the Census, *County and City Data Book 1956*, (Washington, D.C., 1956), 364; *County and City Data Book 1994*, 674.

^{5.} National Register Information System, accessed 16 October 2001; available at <http://www.nr.nps.gov>; Internet.

^{6.} William H. Whyte, Jr., “Urban Sprawl,” *Fortune*, January 1958, 103+.

^{7.} J. W. Wood, *Pasadena Historical and Personal: A Complete History of the Organization of the Indiana Colony* (Pasadena: by the author, 1917), 54.

^{8.} Carey McWilliams, *Southern California Country: An Island on the Land* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1946), 145-147.

Day Saints. In *San Bernardino: The Rise and Fall of a California Community*,⁹ Edward Leo Lyman demonstrates that although San Bernardino was planned by the Church to be a culturally homogenous community, it soon became a haven for cultural dissidents, even before the church withdrew its official support in 1857. In subsequent years San Bernardino's chief appeal was its location, which made land both plentiful and cheap, compared with communities closer to Los Angeles. These both contributed to its development as a blue-collar railroad and military town. As a result, perhaps, on the average citizens of Pasadena are considerably wealthier and better educated than those of San Bernardino.¹⁰

This statistic can lead to the facile assumption that Pasadena's success in historic preservation is simply a matter of economics. However, if money was the key factor, one would also expect that the whole of Marin County, a byword for California affluence, would have more than the thirty-eight National Register listings mentioned above. In order to clarify the point, the focus of this study is on the period after 1966, when federal and state programs made public funds increasingly available for historic preservation projects at the civic level.

Where Pasadena had experienced most of its growth prior to WWII, attracting residents of like mind to the original settlers, census records show that San Bernardino's main period of growth was post-war. Unlike Pasadena, the city had ample room for outward expansion, a fact quickly exploited by both real estate developers and commuters looking for cheap, freeway-accessible housing. Between 1950 and 1992, the population nearly tripled, from 63,068 to 172,451 as incorporated land area grew from 19.5 to 55.1 square miles, mostly to accommodate tract housing.¹¹

In their study of suburban growth in Orange County, California, Rob Kling, Spencer Olin and Mark Poster point out that the manufactured sameness of such housing was unlikely to promote any sense of attachment among new residents to the established character of a community. The regional strip malls which accompanied these developments similarly tended to draw attention away from historic downtown business districts which required shoppers to venture out on foot for yards at a time.¹²

⁹- Edward Leo Lyman, *San Bernardino: The Rise and Fall of a California Community* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996). This easily the definitive work on San Bernardino's early history, and presents a fascinating account of the Church's attempt to maintain authority in the face of a rapidly diversifying population. On Mormon town planning, see C. Mark Hamilton, *Nineteenth-century Mormon Architecture and City Planning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

¹⁰- In 1990, Pasadena's median family income was \$40,435 as opposed to \$28,843 in San Bernardino. Per capita incomes were \$19,588 and \$10,865, respectively. In the same year 36.3 percent of Pasadena residents aged 25 years or older held at least a bachelor's degree, compared to 12.7 percent of San Bernardino residents in the same demographic group. Source: United States Bureau of the Census, *County and City Data Book 1994*, (Washington, D.C., 1994), 678.

¹¹- United States Bureau of the Census, *County and City Data Book 1956*, (Washington, D.C., 1956), 364; *County and City Data Book 1994*, 674.

¹²- Rob Kling, Spencer Olin and Mark Poster, "The Emergence of Postsuburbia," in *Postsuburban California: The Transformation of Orange County since World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 7-19. On the development of western suburbs see also Carl Abbott, "Multicentered Cities," chapter six in *The Metropolitan Frontier: Cities in the Modern American West* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1993).

The city's promotional literature may have actually been promoting this same sense of detachment from the community, as for decades the city's best feature was depicted as its proximity to other Southern California attractions. A brochure issued by the Chamber of Commerce in 1958 was typical, speaking (optimistically) of "desert playgrounds, tropical date gardens, fragrant citrus groves, deep sea sport fishing...all within a few minutes drive."¹³

In these respects, San Bernardino serves as a useful case study of the effects of such patterns on a community's support for preservation projects. Even as Pasadena's first preservation efforts were listed on the National Register in the early 1970s, residents and city officials in San Bernardino remained largely apathetic to the continued destruction of physical links with the city's history in the name of progress and redevelopment. Before delving any further into the details of these attitudes and their consequences, however, it is instructive to look back and examine the origins of this history that had become, to a large degree, disposable.

San Bernardino came into being in 1850, at the behest of President Brigham Young of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, to serve a specific need. Young desired a self-supporting entrepôt near the coast of California to facilitate Mormon trade with, and migration from, the Gentile world.¹⁴ Because of its proposed location near the corrupting influences of Los Angeles, the settlement was intended to remain small, and its residents were carefully appointed by church authorities. From the outset, however, the new town proved a haven for those members of the church who wished to escape the spartan environment and stern discipline found in Salt Lake City. Following a round of expulsions from the fellowship brought on by challenges to church-selected civic officials, it was perhaps with some relief that President Young called the faithful back to Utah in 1857.¹⁵

Those who remained in San Bernardino as apostates were joined in 1860 by a wave of ever-hopeful gold miners, following a strike in the nearby San Bernardino Mountains. Many of the new arrivals were originally from the Southern States, as were half of the original settlers, a few of whom had been accompanied by slaves in 1850. Together they helped to make the town a center of Confederate sympathy in Southern California.¹⁶ Despite this, San Bernardino attracted a significant number of African-American immigrants in the 1880s, who joined the already established Chinese and Jewish populations.

¹³ San Bernardino Chamber of Commerce Convention and Visitor's Bureau, Promotional brochure, 18 March 1958, in the collection of the California Room, Feldheim Central Library, San Bernardino, California.

¹⁴ Russell R. Rich, *Ensign to the Nations: A History of the Church from 1846 to the Present* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Publications, 1972), 183; Melvin T. Smith, "Mormon Exploration in the Lower Colorado River Area," in *The Mormon Role in the Settlement of the West*, ed. Richard H. Jackson (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1978), 29.

¹⁵ Edward Leo Lyman, *San Bernardino: The Rise and Fall of a California Community* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 186. See also Lynn A. Rosenvall, "Defunct Mormon Settlements: 1830-1890" in *The Mormon Role in the Settlement of the West*, ed. Richard H. Jackson (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1978).

¹⁶ Edwin A. Sherman, "Sherman was There," *California Historical Society Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (1945): 275.

As the new century approached, San Bernardino's favorable location led to the development of citrus cultivation and a Santa Fe Railroad depot to ship the fresh fruit to consumers in the East. Both figured heavily in the development of the local self-image, and form elements of the city's official seal. Promotional campaigns in the early twentieth century emphasized the Mediterranean beauty of the area's citrus groves, and more importantly, the city's role as a transportation hub at the junction of the Santa Fe and Southern Pacific rail lines and the future Route 66 highway.¹⁷

The place of transportation in the civic identity was reinforced in 1942, when local politicians succeeded in bringing an Army Air Force repair facility to the city. As a result, for the next four decades the Air Force and the Santa Fe Railroad formed the basis of San Bernardino's economy. The apparent stability of these two institutions promoted a sense of optimism as the city entered the post-war period. Officials and business owners greeted Southern California's post-war population boom with equal enthusiasm, although the influx of new residents left many wondering how city services would keep up with the demand.¹⁸

A byproduct of the expanding population at San Bernardino's outskirts was, indeed, a decline in the fortunes of the downtown business community, despite expectations that the new residents would automatically equal more dollars in local cash registers. In response, city leaders wholeheartedly embraced the concept of urban redevelopment in the 1950s, encouraged by the availability of federal funds and the grandiose schemes to exploit them presented by architectural firms hired as consultants by the city planning department. The city as a whole appeared to be particularly smitten with the belief that it should be recast as a "Space Age transportation center," the better to play host to, and perhaps make use of, the expanded Air Force base located within city limits. Even the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word were taken by the spirit of the Space Age, promoting the grand opening of a new addition at their St. Bernadine's Hospital against a backdrop of rockets, monorails, and supersonic aircraft.¹⁹ Major redevelopment programs were put into effect in 1956, 1964, and 1975, each more ambitious than the last, and each calling for the demolition of wide swaths of the downtown business district. The combined impact saw all but a handful of prewar structures swept from an area of nearly one square mile in the heart of the city. San Bernardino's motto during the later part of this period, "City on the Move," suggests the way in which redevelopment could be equated with a spirit of dynamism and progress, despite the occasional misgivings of residents as recorded in the local San Bernardino *Sun*

In common with cities throughout the country, San Bernardino's government and business

¹⁷ Charles Palmer, "Looking for the Next Big Thing: San Bernardino, California, 1940s--1980s" (M.A. thesis, Sonoma State University, 2001), 21-22.

¹⁸ Stuart Perry Walsh, Harold V. Pederson, and Margaret Burt, "The Future of Industry in the San Bernardino Valley--A Report Prepared by Industrial Survey Associates for the San Bernardino Valley Industrial Committee" (San Francisco: Industrial Survey Associates, 1951), California Room, Feldheim Central Library, San Bernardino, California, 31-33.

¹⁹ Advertisement, San Bernardino *Sun-Telegram*, 3 July 1960, F-1.

leaders sought the cure for what ailed their city in the form of a quick, one-time, all encompassing solution. They seem to have fallen prey to at least four of the “Ten Myths About Downtown Revitalization” described by Dolores Palma in *Main Street Renewal: A Handbook for Citizens and Public Officials*: “If We Build It, They Will Come. . . . If We Demolish It, They Will Come. . . . If We Complete One Major Project, They Will Come. . . . If We Had More Parking, They Would Come. . . .”²⁰ Whichever myth had primacy, the practical result was that the first blows in the battle for civic revitalization--and many thereafter--were delivered with the wrecking ball.

Throughout the post-war period, calls for saving and rehabilitating older buildings were few and far between. In contemporary newspaper accounts, those actively seeking to preserve specific buildings tended to come across as voices crying in the wilderness. More common were vague expressions of regret that the building had to go, or that it was too bad that somebody couldn't have done something to save it. Progress was the order of the day, and progress was defined to mean “new.” Historic preservation often represented an unwanted roadblock, predicated on the assumption (or myth, according to Dolores Palma) that developers could not be induced to return to the downtown unless they were given a clean canvas on which to work.²¹

As Richard Wagner points out, federal aid programs for community redevelopment favored demolition and new construction, until the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966.²² This provided federal grants for local projects, together with the State Historic Preservation Office system to recognize historical significance and determine eligibility. The act was bolstered by the Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act of the same year, allowing the costs of preservation and planning to be absorbed directly into federally supported urban renewal projects.²³ A number of important laws followed, including the Tax Reform Act of 1976, which provided tax incentives for the rehabilitation of certified historic structures, and tax penalties for their demolition.²⁴ An amendment to the National Historic Preservation Act in 1980 produced the Certified Local Government program, to provide additional grants to communities which established preservation commissions with powers of review and enforcement.²⁵

The codification of historic preservation since 1966 has been accompanied by a professionalization of the community, a trend that some find disturbing. George Percy told the 49th National Preservation Conference in 1996 that what started as local advocacy movements had

²⁰ Dolores P. Palma, “Ten Myths About Downtown Revitalization,” chapter 42 in Roger L. Kemp, ed., *Main Street Renewal: A Handbook for Citizens and Public Officials* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2000), 374-379.

²¹ Ibid., 375.

²² Richard Wagner, “Local Government and Historic Preservation,” *Historic Preservation Forum* 5, no. 2 (1991): 14-25.

²³ William J. Murtagh, *Keeping Time: The History and Theory of Preservation in America* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1997), 210.

²⁴ Ibid., 213.

²⁵ Norman Tyler, *Historic Preservation: An Introduction to its History, Principles, and Practice* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), 56-57.

become “a discipline and a moral imperative (an ethic) which unfortunately is not widely shared by people not directly engaged in preservation.”²⁶ In other words, historic preservation is now to a large extent identified with a monocultural elite. Those outside this homogeneous community must be educated before they can fully appreciate and take part in the goals of preservation. In his overview of the theory and practice of the preservation field, Norman Tyler confirms this when he concludes that it is actually desirable to exclude property owners from the process altogether. “Historic buildings should be recognized as such whether or not the owner agrees. The determination should be made by a qualified panel of experts....”²⁷

Pasadena set up its Cultural Heritage Commission along these lines in 1976, backed up by a city ordinance requiring a property owner to seek official permission to demolish any structure more than fifty years old.²⁸ This was not a spontaneous act, but came as a result of Pasadena’s own experience with the demolish-and-rebuild approach to downtown revitalization. As with communities throughout the state, Californians’ increasing attachment to the automobile threatened the original, pedestrian-oriented business district on West Colorado Boulevard, with its dearth of convenient parking. By the late 1940s, the prime retail addresses were to be found further east on Colorado, beyond Arroyo Parkway, and along Lake Avenue.²⁹

A group of merchants and business owners attempted to reverse this trend in 1956, forming the Pasadena Central Improvement Association. Predictably, the first attempt was one of the most obvious: the Association formed a parking district and after removing several buildings constructed a large lot adjacent to Colorado Boulevard.³⁰ This private effort was followed three years later by the publicly-funded Community Redevelopment Agency. Perhaps because of slower population growth, or greater reservations towards what redevelopment implied, the Agency moved at a slower pace than its counterpart in San Bernardino. The first major study on the old downtown was not commissioned until 1966, and despite findings that the city had only five years to act before serious decline set in, it not until 1970 that leaders approved the creation of a Downtown Redevelopment Area.³¹ They were perhaps spurred on by observations of the sort expressed in a Los Angeles *Times* from 1969: “Pasadena’s Crown City Image Tarnished: White Flight, Urban Blight, School Problems.”³²

²⁶.. George Percy, “Preservation at a Crossroads,” *Historic Preservation Forum* 10, no. 3 (1996): 30-35.

²⁷.. Tyler, *Historic Preservation*, 80.

²⁸.. Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 623.

²⁹.. The Arroyo Group, Planners, Architects, and Associated Disciplines, *A Plan for Old Pasadena: A Design, Plan and Implementation Program for the West Colorado Boulevard Area of Pasadena, California* (Pasadena: The Arroyo Group, 1978), 11.

³⁰.. *Ibid.*, 12.

³¹.. Kerstin C. Koblik, “City Recycling: Old Pasadena-A Case Study” (MA thesis, California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, 1981), 11.

³².. Quoted in City of Pasadena website, accessed 9 November 2001; available at <http://www.ci.pasadena.ca.us>.

In order to have something to do with the Redevelopment Area, a new organization of property owners and business people, under the name Pasadena Now, teamed with the Chamber of Commerce in 1971 to fund a twenty-year “action plan.” The Pasadena Central District Improvement Program called for the immediate rebuilding of 369 acres in the core of the city, exclusive of West Colorado Boulevard. Property owners in this area--now known as Old Pasadena--specifically asked to be left out of the Program, in a move that was perhaps indicative of future trends. In return, the authors of the Program dismissed West Colorado as “rundown” and unsuccessfully promoted in its place a boutique-laden “Old Town,” modeled on San Francisco’s Ghirardelli Square, within the Redevelopment Area.³³

The Old Town idea was never more than a paper project, but by 1975 several major projects were completed or underway, including a Conference Center, the Pasadena Hilton Hotel, several corporate regional headquarters, and the enclosed Plaza Pasadena mall along the south side of Colorado Boulevard.³⁴ Rather than boosting the confidence of local residents, however, redevelopment seems to have promoted unease and a feeling of loss. “Much of the urban core, with its human scale buildings, had been replaced by slick, high-rise structures and a large number of families and businesses had been replaced,” and as a result, “[t]here was a genuine feeling that Old Pasadena exerted a charm that the newer buildings were unable to convey.”³⁵

This “charm” of Old Pasadena was undoubtedly derived from a sense of nostalgia within the community for a past which suddenly seemed threatened with elimination. In *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture*, Michael Kammen explains the link between nostalgia, which tends to increase in response to change or a sense of discontinuity with the past, and historic preservation.³⁶ Because of Pasadena’s history of cultural homogeneity, its residents were perhaps more likely to look back at their city’s past in similar ways, making it easier for them to agree on both the need for preservation and the means to achieve it. What is certain is that from 1975 onwards, Pasadena staged a retreat from the principles of redevelopment it had fully embraced only five years previously. The Pasadena Central Improvement Association, which had initiated the redevelopment process in 1956, commissioned a new study from the firm of Keyser Marston Associates in 1975 specifically aimed at the rehabilitation of existing structures, rather than at their replacement.³⁷

By contrast, San Bernardino seemed to have fewer qualms about redevelopment. Between 1956 and 1975 the city had undertaken two major downtown clearance and rebuilding projects, and was laying the groundwork for a third. The most significant, in terms of major structures lost, was

³³.. Koblik, “City Recycling,” 13-19, 24.

³⁴.. “Heritage: A Short History of Pasadena--Pasadena Faces the Challenge: 1950-1970, accessed 30 November 2001; available at <http://www.ci.pasadena.ca.us>; Internet.

³⁵.. Koblik, “City Recycling,” 26-27.

³⁶.. Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 618.

³⁷.. Koblik, “City Recycling,” 28.

the Central City Project which had begun in earnest in 1967. Central City was San Bernardino's response to a privately funded shopping mall, designed by the firm of Gruen Associates, located beyond the city limits with ready access to freeway traffic. Downtown business owners and city hall were united in their concern, as the loss of sales would also mean the loss of tax revenues needed to keep pace with the demands of continued growth. The solution was a complete reworking of a ninety-three acre zone in the middle of downtown to a plan provided by Gruen Associates centered on a rival shopping mall to be built with public redevelopment funds. Only three existing buildings within the project zone were considered worthy of being retained.³⁸

Opposition to the plan came mainly from an association of business owners who asserted that the practice of redevelopment constituted an attack on their individual rights. In contemporary newspaper accounts, the only appeal to the innate historic value of the buildings slated for demolition came from a local architect, David Hatfield. "Nothing in Gruen's plan," he noted, "allows for retention of old, historic buildings with their natural charm and link with the past."³⁹

The majority of business owners and city leaders were too worried about future profits to concern themselves with such intangibles as charm or ties to the past. San Bernardino's newspaper of record, the *Sun*, threw its weight behind the mass demolition with a photo-feature in 1965 describing the existing downtown as a "drab, dreary" world full of "Relic[s] of Bygone Day[s]" in which age was equated with "blight." An accompanying editorial rhetorically challenged the holdouts, asking "Do they fight for the right to blight?"⁴⁰

By 1968 the city leadership was pleased enough with the progress on the Central City project to commission another study by Gruen Associates. Gruen quickly identified a two-hundred and forty acre zone adjacent to the original project area as sorely overdue for rebuilding. "Downtown San Bernardino is typical of most Central Business districts in that its development pattern is a remnant of the past. The outmoded structures, the dreary environment and the awkward and inconvenient system of parking the customer's cars substantially contribute to business decline."⁴¹

Gruen's plan for rebuilding this zone was only partially implemented, due in large measure to opposition from African-American community groups. Most African-American residents lived on the west side of San Bernardino, where they had been essentially isolated from the rest of the city by freeway construction in the 1950s. The San Bernardino Black Community Coalition, formed in 1970, claimed that the federal funds used for downtown redevelopment had been awarded

³⁸.. Warner Hodgdon et. al., *San Bernardino 1851-1980: A Supplement to the Overall Central City Plan of Development* (San Bernardino: Redevelopment Agency of the City of San Bernardino, 1975), 23-24.

³⁹.. David Hatfield, quoted in Joe Baker, "Construction of Mall Expected to Start Early Next Year," *San Bernardino Sun*, 10 February 1965, B-1.

⁴⁰.. "A Walk Along Third Street," *San Bernardino Sun*, 27 June 1965, A-5, -6, -7; "Blight Eats at Heart of San Bernardino," Editorial, 27 June 1965, A-6; A declaration of "blight" was the key to federal redevelopment funds.

⁴¹.. Gruen Associates, "San Bernardino Central City Planning Area North of Central City Redevelopment Project No. 1," (San Bernardino: Redevelopment Agency of the City of San Bernardino, 1968), 2.

specifically because of the economic conditions on the west side that resulted from this isolation. Because the funds had not been used there, according to Coalition member Harry Davidson, “we feel that the ‘City on the Move’ has been moving away from the Black community.”⁴² A study conducted at the behest of a new city administration in 1973, with backing from the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, confirmed the Coalition’s assertions. While the city concentrated on modernizing its business district, the problem of sub-standard housing in minority neighborhoods became more acute.⁴³

The 1968 Gruen study was not entirely abandoned. Even in a reduced state, it drew the attention of city planners to the redevelopment potential of the land beneath two of the city’s most historically significant structures, the San Bernardino Municipal Auditorium and the California Hotel. The demolition of the latter, in 1985, seems to have been the factor which led to the first serious public debate on historic preservation; a debate which had already been well underway in Pasadena during the previous decade.

Pasadena’s Keyser Marston study of 1975 demonstrated that the preservation and reuse of historic structures was economically viable and even preferable, particularly in light of the possibility of federal assistance. Urged on by both the Cultural Heritage Commission and the non-governmental group Pasadena Heritage, the city government obtained a fifty thousand dollar grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, in order to formulate a specific plan for once-scorned Old Pasadena.⁴⁴ Michael Kammen notes that the term “heritage” is often taken to denote stability and integrity, and in some cases it “seems to be very nearly a euphemism for selective memory” Heritage then represents how any given segment of society wishes to see its past, and what it chooses to remember as significant.⁴⁵ It follows that the larger and more homogeneous this segment is, the more coherent is its vision and the broader its reach. Pasadena’s new plan was not just to be concerned with the preservation of old structures, but also with the formation and promotion of a distinct civic identity.

The Arroyo Group, a Pasadena-based architecture and design firm, was entrusted with the job, and returned its recommendations in January 1978 in *A Plan for Old Pasadena: A Design, Plan and Implementation Program for the West Colorado Boulevard Area of Pasadena, California*. The plan emphatically stated that the “West Colorado Boulevard area of Pasadena is the City’s downtown link with its past,” and the key to making the city once again an attractive destination.⁴⁶ The authors did not confine themselves simply to preservation, and pragmatically identified where

⁴² Harry Davidson, quoted in Richard Kimball, “Black Community Groups Form Coalition to Unify Actions, San Bernardino *Sun*, 22 October 1970, B-4.

⁴³ Gary Van Osdel et. al., “The State of the City of San Bernardino, 1973,” (San Bernardino: Community Planning and Management Program, 1973), 67.

⁴⁴ Koblik, “City Recycling,” 105, 48.

⁴⁵ Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 625.

⁴⁶ Arroyo Group, *Plan for Old Pasadena*, 3.

new construction or other improvements⁴⁷ could compliment the existing structures and further integrate them into the greater downtown. They also identified the basic problems confronting the rehabilitation of historic structures, such as modern building codes and the difficulty of securing financing. The authors presented city leaders with several options to overcome these obstacles, by means of either a locally-declared Urban Conservation Area, or by a Landmark District established in conjunction with the State Office of Historic Preservation. By working within the state and federal preservation system, the city would bring property owners under the umbrella of the 1976 Tax Reform Act, which provided tax incentives for those who rehabilitated eligible historic structures, while penalizing demolition. In addition, California state law allowed cities to modify their building codes to accommodate historic structures, so long as they provided “reasonably equivalent protection of life and limb.”⁴⁸

In contrast to Pasadena’s slow, almost reluctant approach to redevelopment, the principles of historic preservation were adopted in earnest: By 1980, 13 properties were listed on the National Register, including the Civic Center Historic District, the first of seven such districts that would be listed by 2001.⁴⁹ The Old Pasadena Urban Conservation Zoning Overlay District was established in January of the same year, which set up a Design Committee with power of approval over all actions within the district. The following year the city investigated a design plan for the entire downtown, which was particularly focused on “accommodating new development within a framework of graciousness, charm, and not-too-bigness that has been the image and reality of Pasadena”⁵⁰ 1981 also saw the disbanding of the Community Redevelopment Agency, in a further expressions of this preservationist mindset.⁵¹

At the same time in San Bernardino, redevelopment continued with business as usual. This is not to imply that the process was conducted without comment or criticism, although this was very nearly the case through the 1970s and much of the 1980s. An embarrassing incident in 1975 illustrates the apparently low level of concern. San Bernardino’s oldest structure, the Atwood Adobe, one of three houses surviving from the 1850s, was torn down by the city redevelopment agency simply to fulfill the terms of the original Central City project contract. Agency Executive Director Peter Quinn explained to the city planning commission that it was “understood” that the agency would clear all the land in the project area for the benefit of developers, and so proceeded without seeking the approval of the mayor or city council, and without inviting public comment on the matter. Referring to the significance of the adobe, he remarked “I think that would probably

⁴⁷.. These included more parking, as always.

⁴⁸.. Arroyo Group, *Plan for Old Pasadena*, 65.

⁴⁹.. National Register Information System, accessed 16 October 2001; available at <http://www.nr.nps.gov>. ; Internet.

⁵⁰.. Charles Hall Page and Associates, *Preliminary Downtown Pasadena Urban Design Plan* (Pasadena: Charles Hall Page and Associates, 1981), 36.

⁵¹.. City of Pasadena, accessed 9 November 2001; available at <http://www.ci.pasadena.ca.us>. ; Internet.

come under ‘the greater includes the lesser’.⁵² Commissioner Walter Schuiling commented that there had been individuals in the community with an interest in preserving the adobe, but the agency’s methods had left them without any opportunity. Rather than expressing anger at the outcome, however, he could only conclude “I think that was kind of sad.”⁵³

San Bernardino’s commitment to redevelopment continued even as Pasadena formally rejected the concept. In 1981 the California Hotel and the neighboring Municipal Auditorium, which together had once been the focus of San Bernardino’s social life, were being eyed for demolition in the name of progress. Both structures dated from the mid-1920s, another period of rapid population growth and one in which the area’s flourishing citrus industry and as yet smog-free Mediterranean climate brought the city’s promotional efforts to a zenith of self-satisfaction. “Here contentment reigns,” declared a souvenir map from 1929, “for they who dwell with the shadow of her mountains, beneath the sunlight of her skies, can say in truth, there is no fairer spot on earth than the San Bernardino Valley.”⁵⁴ The buildings reflected this exuberance and confidence. The auditorium was built in 1923 in a Jazz-Age interpretation of neoclassical style, while the 1926 hotel was a lavishly detailed expression of Mission Revivalism. Except when both were commandeered by Army in the early days of World War II⁵⁵, they were consistently popular and heavily used until the mid-1960s. The 1968 Gruen Associates report, somewhat surprisingly, recommended that the hotel be reused as senior housing, but insisted that the continued existence of Pioneer Park, where the auditorium stood, was a roadblock to development. “[W]e cannot over emphasize the importance and necessity of ultimately putting Pioneer Park land to a more productive use, if the maximum in revitalization is to be achieved in the northern sector of Central City.”⁵⁶

Because the Gruen plan was never fully implemented, as explained above, the auditorium remained in limited use until 1979, when it was declared unfit for occupancy due to deteriorated plumbing and failure to meet current fire codes.⁵⁷ By this point the city administration again had its collective eye on Pioneer Park, with the intention of building a new Central Library on the site. The Library Board commissioned a study of the building, after it had sat vacant for three years, to assess the potential of the building for either rehabilitation in its original role, or reuse as a library. It is

⁵².. Peter Quinn, quoted in Richard S. Kimball, “Atwood Adobe haunting RDA,” *San Bernardino Sun*, 18 December 1975, B-1+.

⁵³.. Walter C. Schuiling, *Ibid*.

⁵⁴.. “Map of the City of San Bernardino, California,” issued by the San Bernardino Chamber of Commerce (Sun Printing and Publishing House, 1929), single sheet, in the collection of the California Room, Feldheim Central Library, San Bernardino, California.

⁵⁵.. George S. Patton established an emergency West Coast defense headquarters in the hotel on the evening of 7 December 1941, which was later taken over by Joseph Stilwell. The auditorium was used to house support troops. Source: Robert A. Schaefer, “Historic Research of the California Hotel,” Typed/Xeroxed manuscript, undated (1982 or later), California Room, Feldheim Central Library, San Bernardino, California, 5.

⁵⁶.. Gruen Associates, “San Bernardino Central City Planning Area,” 12.

⁵⁷.. Ralph Allen et al., “Pioneer Park Site Analysis--Municipal Auditorium/Downtown Central Library for the City of San Bernardino,” (Santa Ana: Ralph Allen and Partners Architects, 1981), 5.

likely that the result was a foregone conclusion. The report perfunctorily declared “It can be said that the Municipal Auditorium possesses no unique architectural elements of historic significance,”⁵⁸ with the result that the city insisted the building be in full compliance with the Uniform Building Code for new construction as a condition of reuse. This despite the fact that architecture is only one of four possible criteria for federally-recognized historic significance, the others being associations with broad patterns of history, the lives of important individuals, or important historical information.⁵⁹ Because compliance would have required seventy percent of the original structure to be replaced, the Library Board recommended that the mayor and city council approve razing the site, so that a new federally-funded library building could take its place.⁶⁰

The same fate befell the California Hotel in 1985, for essentially the same reasons. The original senior housing plan quickly fell through in 1973 when the developers could not meet the city’s parking requirements.⁶¹ The building remained vacant for several years afterwards, absorbing damage from transients, while legal title passed between a series of speculators and would-be developers. The property was declared a public nuisance in December 1980, but uncertainty over who actually owned the property delayed an official decision on whether to issue a demolition order. Unlike the auditorium, the potential demise of the hotel attracted more than passing commentary. An editorial in the *Sun* suggested that the California Hotel had touched a nerve in the popular consciousness: “There are few structures in the city that are as valuable as the hotel in terms of historic symbolism. If it slips through the fingers of preservationists, there will be little practical hope that the remaining physical reminders of San Bernardino history can be saved from disintegration. It would be a great misfortune if the community proves to be that indifferent to its heritage.”⁶²

Local builder Robert Schaefer mounted a serious bid to acquire and rehabilitate the structure from 1981, and appeared to be on the verge of success when he was informed that the hotel appeared to qualify for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Knox Mellon, the State Historic Preservation Officer wrote “as such, it is eligible for rehabilitation under the State Historic Building Code with the concurrence of the City of San Bernardino.”⁶³ Surprisingly, the city did not concur-- Mayor W. R. Holcomb was intent on applying the 1979 Uniform Building Code, ostensibly in the

⁵⁸.. Ibid., 9.

⁵⁹.. In addition, allowance is made for structures that are significant only within the specific community. This is the case for most of the properties listed on the National Register. In practice, the last criterion, regarding historical information, is usually only applied to archeological sites.

⁶⁰.. Library Board Trustees, signed Larry Harvey, President, to Mayor and Common Council, 24 September 1981, California Room, Feldheim Central Library, San Bernardino, California. The library was named after local rabbi Norman F. Feldheim

⁶¹.. No author, “Hotel conversion plans stall,” *San Bernardino Sun*, 11 December 1973, B-1.

⁶².. Quoted in Schaefer, “California Hotel,” 7.

⁶³.. Knox Mellon, SHPO, Office of Historic Preservation, Department of Parks and Recreation, to Robert Schaefer, File number J-06894, 20 May 1982, California Room, Feldheim Central Library, San Bernardino, California.

name of earthquake safety. This was despite Schaefer's assertions that the hotel could be economically brought into compliance with the 1970 UBC used for the construction of San Bernardino's new City Hall. According to Holcomb, reduced building standards "grew out of a tremendous lobbying effort by owners of older residential buildings" in Los Angeles. "Fortunately," he added, "we don't have that situation here in San Bernardino."⁶⁴

Holcomb's attitude is somewhat surprising, considering that reduced standards for historic properties were specifically allowed by state law, as demonstrated in the 1978 *Plan for Old Pasadena*. However, to those familiar with the local politics of San Bernardino, the attitude is not entirely surprising. Redevelopment projects tended to be identified with the administrations under which they were developed, due to the city's strong mayor-weak council form of government. Mayors took great pride in their ability to bring federal dollars to the city, particularly for urban renewal. There is extensive anecdotal evidence to suggest that when the sweeping powers of the mayor's office were put in the hands of a strong willed individual such as W. R. Holcomb, or his immediate predecessor Al C. Ballard, it resulted in certain "Augustan" impulses.⁶⁵ Redevelopment, in other words, was a means by which ambitious mayors sought to create a legacy: a San Bernardino figuratively transformed from a city of brick to a city of marble.

While Schaefer was still trying to raise financing for his California Hotel proposal, title holders Pan American Bank of Los Angeles decided to cut their losses and applied for a demolition permit on 4 January 1985. In the absence of any historic preservation ordinance, San Bernardino's City Attorney concluded "Any owner has the right to demolish his own property."⁶⁶ By the end of March, Pan American had done so. This raises a valid point regarding local versus out-of-town ownership of historic properties. It is not unreasonable to suggest that a locally-owned property would be more likely to be preserved, through appeals to nostalgia and community identity, than one in which the owner has no connection to the community, tax incentives and protection ordinances notwithstanding. At the very least, local preservation measures might induce the out-of-town owner to "unload" their property to the first available buyer, rather than contend with the added complexities of compliance. In any event, Pan American failed to realize an improvement on their investment by demolishing the California Hotel. After sitting vacant for more than a decade, the site has recently been made into an extra parking lot for the senior housing project built next door.

San Bernardino's first National Register property listing was achieved in the same month that the California Hotel's demolition permit was issued.⁶⁷ As this was not reported until May 1985,

⁶⁴.. Craig Staats, "Architect: Must ignore standards to save S. B. hotel," *San Bernardino Sun*, 2 February 1982, B-1+.

⁶⁵.. Al Ballard held office from 1965 to 1971. Holcomb served eighteen years in two separate administrations: 1971-1985 and 1989-1993.

⁶⁶.. Mark Lundahl, "Demolition permit issued for old hotel," *Sun*, 30 January 1985, A-1+.

⁶⁷.. The first National Register listing of any kind associated with San Bernardino was the 1976 Crowder Canyon Archeological District, located in the mountains several miles northeast of the city.

it is probable that the city officials had no say in, or even knowledge of, the designation. The 1931 Main Post Office was one of twenty-eight selected directly by the State Historic Preservation Officer to be listed under the multiple listing theme of “The U. S. Post Office in California 1900-1941.”⁶⁸ At this point, Pasadena was in the midst of a preservation boom. Between January 1980 and May 1985, the city added twenty-six individual properties and four historic districts to the National Register, including fourteen listings in July 1983, to initiate the theme of “Bungalow Courts of Pasadena.”⁶⁹ The use of multiple listings indicates the degree of sophistication which Pasadena was bringing to its historic preservation progress. It allowed preservationists to use the basic groundwork of historical context and significance for a number of related properties, rather than having to duplicate efforts by starting from scratch with each new project. In addition, multiple listings accommodated unconventional properties, such as the Bekins Storage Company roof sign listed in 1997 under the theme of “Early Automobile-Related Properties in Pasadena.”⁷⁰ A multiple listing established in 1998, “Residential Architecture of Pasadena: Influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement,” extended the concept out of the downtown to include private houses--which had been listed singly to that point--and put another six properties on the listing by 2001.⁷¹

San Bernardino may never achieve anything like Pasadena’s success in historic preservation--if for no other reason than a self-inflicted shortage of significant properties--but following the affair of the California Hotel attitudes did begin to change. It is possible that the loss of the hotel, coupled with economic decline and an increase in crime severe enough to cost W. R. Holcomb his office in 1985, provoked the same sort of nostalgia which proved crucial in Pasadena in the 1970s. Shortly after Holcomb was voted back into city hall in 1989 the city took its first official steps towards instituting a historic preservation program. The Urgency Historic Structure Demolition Ordinance (MC-694)-- named without any apparent sense of irony--was added to the city Municipal Code in December because, as stated in the official findings “Several buildings of historical value have already been demolished, including the Municipal Auditorium, Antlers Hotel, Carnegie Library and Atwood Adobe and many others which were an irreplaceable part of our heritage”.⁷² The ordinance put into place a Historic Preservation Task Force, charged primarily with reviewing applications for demolition permits while a more comprehensive program could be developed.

In contrast with the rapid progress in Pasadena following the creation of the Cultural Heritage Commission in 1976, preservation in San Bernardino retreated to the back burner until the late 1990s. In 1998 a new mayor, Judith Valles, made it a personal priority to see the city’s 1916 Santa Fe Railroad station listed on the National Register. A special supplement to the San

⁶⁸.. Jan Roddick, “Downtown post office dedicated as historic landmark,” *San Bernardino Sun*, 14 May 1985, B-2.

⁶⁹.. National Register Information System, accessed 16 October 2001; available at <http://www.nr.nps.gov>; Internet.

⁷⁰.. Ibid.

⁷¹.. National Register Information System, accessed 16 October 2001; available at <http://www.nr.nps.gov>; Internet.

⁷².. San Bernardino Municipal Code (1998), Chapter 15.37 Historic Building Demolition Ordinance, Section .010

Bernardino *Sun* described the station as “a source of pride and fond memories for thousands,” including Valles who had often gone to the station to meet her parents after their visits to Mexico. She made an aggressive push for state and federal renovation money, declaring “It’s a part of our history and that’s why it’s really important to re-establish and remodel the depot.” George Wilson of the San Bernardino Railroad Historical Society, which had joined Valles’ campaign, added “It’s such a natural. It’s our heritage.”⁷³ Valles was particularly concerned with the National Register listing, which was achieved on 2 February 2001, because of the reduced earthquake standards it would permit during the course of rehabilitation.

Old habits die hard, and Valles was by no means the champion of historic preservation throughout the city. She is also the chief advocate of a plan to demolish some of the city’s oldest residential areas to make way for a series of artificial lakes and streams, under the title Vision 2020. Still in the talking stage in December 2001, this would be the most extensive redevelopment project yet, if put into effect, and a radical recasting of San Bernardino’s created image.

Historic Preservation on any large scale is a community-wide exercise, which requires a broad level of agreement among those involved. There must be agreement on what to preserve, and on what measures the community is willing to undertake in order to accomplish this goal. The examples of Pasadena and San Bernardino demonstrate that the potential for such agreement is more likely to be found in cities which resemble those of the Eastern or Midwestern United States, in which residents of broadly similar backgrounds live in close proximity to visible reminders of the community’s past. The rapid population growth of a heterogeneous population, and the physical sprawl which are characteristic of many California cities, works against the maintenance of strong community identity and a shared vision of local history. Residents who live on the edges of cities such as San Bernardino, seeing only structures built within the last ten years or so, would tend to be less interested in the preservation of unfamiliar old buildings, particularly if asked to vote a special assessment on themselves to pay for it.

San Bernardino’s experience with redevelopment suggests the impact which ethnicity might also have on preservation. Attendees at the Forty-fourth National Preservation Conference in the Spring of 1990 adopted a series of eight principles as their “Call to Action for Community Conservation.”⁷⁴ The last principle called upon local leaders to “Recognize the cultural diversity of communities and empower a diverse constituency to acknowledge, identify, and preserve America’s cultural and physical resources.”⁷⁵ However, if this diversity is manifested in sharp divisions within the community, there is an increased possibility that preservationism could be equated with

⁷³ Lynn Anderson, “Santa Fe Depot: History moves into the Future,” *San Bernardino Sun*, 13 September 1998, AA1-AA4.

⁷⁴ Commonly known as the Charleston Principles, after the conference’s host city of Charleston, South Carolina

⁷⁵ Norman Tyler, *Historic Preservation: An Introduction to its History, Principles, and Practice* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), 55-56.

paternalism and gentrification. This equation was the primary factor in the opposition by African-American residents in Cincinnati's formerly German Over-the-Rhine neighborhood to a plan which would have designated their homes a historic district, and there is no reason to believe that such attitudes are unique to Ohio.⁷⁶ Recall the implications of George Percy's assertion that historic preservation had become a discipline separated from the population at large: local residents must be educated, presumably by outsiders, before they can appreciate and accept the full meaning of preservation. Within ethnic minority groups in a community, there is the possibility that historic preservation would not be fully supported unless it grew out of the group's own interests and definitions of heritage. And even if this is the case, there is the possibility that extensive historic preservation will actually discourage further expressions of diversity, rather than encouraging it as promoted in the Charleston Principles, by enshrining the role of specific periods, processes, or individuals as the basis of community identity. Coupled with preservation's proven tendency to raise property values in and around a project area to the detriment of lower-income residents, this could eventually lead to a community with little appeal for those who do not fit within the social and economic image

Author Richard Rodriguez, in a speech to the Forty-ninth National Preservation Conference, brought up a point that is far too easily overlooked when considering the "charm" of historic structures. He suggested that his listeners understand the past as a record of people's dreams of the future.⁷⁷ Old buildings were once expressions of modernity and progress. The examples of Pasadena and San Bernardino illustrate that in rapidly growing communities, the elimination of old structures in favor of new construction can be seen as simply the continuation of this progress. It may be that historic preservation is something that a community can only indulge in, on more than a building-by-building basis, once it has achieved something of a settled middle-age and growth is no longer the order of the day.

This, in turn, raises a number of questions. Does a commitment to historic preservation on the scale seen in Pasadena imply that "progress" is no longer a valid goal for the community? If this is so, are Pasadena's residents slowly turning their city into an open-air museum, or a real-world version of Disneyland's Main Street--a pleasant, unchanging backdrop for a self-absorbed café society? What is the future of a city that increasingly exists to market its past? And conversely, what is the future of a city such as San Bernardino which has eliminated most of the physical connections to its past? One answer may be the creation of a completely new "heritage." San Bernardino's Convention and Visitor's Bureau has capitalized on the city's mention in Bobby Troup's 1946 hit song "Get Your Kicks on Route 66" with the Route 66 Rendezvous, a car-oriented

⁷⁶.. Zane L. Miller and Bruce Tucker, *Changing Plans for America's Inner Cities: Cincinnati's Over-the-Rhine and Twentieth Century Urbanism* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1998), 158.

⁷⁷.. Richard Rodriguez, "A Community of Dreams," *Historic Preservation Forum* 10, no. 2 (1996): 9-18.

“major celebration for nostalgia buffs nationwide.”⁷⁸ In partnership with corporate sponsors such as

⁷⁸.. San Bernardino Convention and Visitor’s Bureau, Route 66 Rendezvous website, accessed 19 December 2001; available at <http://www.route-66.org>; Internet.

Chevrolet, Firestone Tires and Chevron, local leaders are casting a new, consumer-oriented image for the city as the capital of America's postwar automotive culture. The centerpiece of this nostalgia is the "Cruisin' Hall of Fame," located at San Bernardino's modernistic city hall, a building which once symbolized the ideals of redevelopment and "progress." Whether this new strategy will be any more successful at revitalizing the city than those which went before it, however, is still anyone's guess.
