

LATIN AMERICANS AND HERITAGE VALUES IN ALLENTOWN'S 7TH STREET CORRIDOR

Jeremy C. Wells

Anne Hirsch

Barbara Macholz Grimaldi

Karen Beck Pooley

Erika M. Sutherland

There is a lack of research addressing how Latin American cultural groups perceive and value historic environments, which may lead to poor planning decisions in these neighborhoods. This study focuses on how Latin American business and property owners in the historic 7th Street Corridor of Allentown, Pennsylvania, perceive and value their older (pre-World War II) built environment and how decisions are made regarding the environment based on these values. The results indicated that participants clearly valued older buildings for their intrinsic "historic" quality but did not reject modernity, emphasizing the need to accommodate current uses, especially in the building interiors. Participants expressed a preference for buildings with more design complexity and for restoring buildings rather than preserving them in situ. They also shared a variety of positive and negative responses regarding the appropriateness of design modifications representing certain Latin American cultures in the corridor, such as certain colors or the flags of countries. The results of this study may help to influence planning and historic-preservation practice in older Latin American communities by using a values-based approach for interventions in preservation planning.

INTRODUCTION

Research on how ethnic communities perceive and value their built environments has typically focused on policy issues from a macro level, while neglecting instances of a cultural group's interaction with and perceptions of specific neighborhood environments (Chaudhury and Mahmood, 2008). Moreover, there is a lack of basic understanding about the interaction between space and Latin American culture — a claim supported by Arreola (2004:2) in his assertion that “the questions explored and investigations performed by . . . social scientists and humanists rarely concern geographical aspects, regional diversity, or adaptations to place among [Latin American] populations.” Due to this knowledge gap, city planning often fails to adequately address issues of cultural diversity because the environmental values and behaviors of the cultural groups that are affected are not understood to a significant degree, much less given priority in planning decisions (Goonewardena, *et al.*, 2004). In the past few decades, there has been an increased interest in the role of ethnic minorities in “deliver[ing] a more inclusive past” that recognizes and celebrates the diversity of heritage (Gard'ner, 2004:88), but understanding such a past remains elusive at best due to the lack of research and attention in this area (Kaufman, 2009) and the difficulty that traditional historic-preservation practice has in understanding and accommodating pluralistic values from different perspectives, as Muñiz and Hartig (2010) illustrated.

To help provide empirical evidence to address these gaps affecting planning and preservation practice, this study looks at Latin American business and property owners in the 7th Street Corridor of Allentown, Pennsylvania; the ways in which these individuals perceive and value the older (pre-World War II) built environment of the 7th Street Corridor; and how decisions are made regarding the environment based on these values. Particular emphasis is placed on how these business and property owners determine the balance between preserving (or restoring) the original historic character of a building and changing the fabric of the building to represent certain aspects of Latin American cultures.

RESEARCH ON CULTURE AND PLACE

A significant amount of research has been conducted on the intersection of housing design and culture (for example, AlAnzi, *et al.*, 2009; Kellett, 1999; Low and Chambers, 1989; Ozaki, 2002; Ross, 1987). Interiors of homes have also received attention, especially with regard to how immigrants create an environment that ameliorates feelings of alienation from their home culture. These studies are typically qualitative in nature, seeking meanings that attach people to the interiors of their homes. For example, Amor (2008) studied how Arab-American Muslim immigrants in Chicago, Illinois, and Dearborn, Michigan, decorated the interiors of their homes with items that had Arabic symbolism in order to recreate their traditional way of life to avoid feeling alienated in their new community, while Hadjiyanni (2007) looked at how Somali women brought their cultural traditions into the home through behavior and interior decorations in an effort to feel less out of place.

More specifically applicable to this paper are studies that address cultural differences in the valuation and perception of landscapes. There is evidence that cultural differences, perhaps stemming from childhood experiences, impact the perception and valuation of landscapes (Zube and Pitt, 1981). Cultural influences affect how space is defined, perceived, and used, and studies have looked at spaces from plazas in San José, Costa Rica (Low, 1996), to Balinese townscapes (Samadhi, 2005) and heritage landscapes in Hong Kong (Teather and Chow, 2003). Values attributed to landscapes also vary depending on the particular culture. For instance, a study by Alumäe, *et al.* (2003) found that residents in various locations in Estonia thought that “natural” landscapes were “beautiful,” and landscapes with heritage buildings were “valuable”; the residents also often deferred judgment on the values attributed to these places to individuals in positions of authority. In India and the Middle East, aspects of time, space, and nature as applied to landscapes are

fundamentally different from accepted Western concepts (Jain and Clancy, 2008; Orbasli, 2007), while in East Asia, notions of an “authentic” heritage landscape are based on semiotics bound in cultural values rather than the building fabric (Chung, 2005). More often than not, the places described as valuable by heritage experts (from an artistic or historical perspective) do not actually represent the values of locals, as Gard’ner (2004) found in his study of the Bangladeshi community in East London, England. Lastly, indigenous cultures also value and perceive time and space differently from Western cultures, such as in Australia (Andrews and Bugey, 2008), Oceania (Ko, 2008), and the United States (Basso, 1996), where spiritual and symbolic elements with sociocultural meanings take precedence over the physical fabric of places.

Considering that the Latin American population is now the largest ethnic minority in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), there are surprisingly few empirical examples of how Latin Americans perceive and value landscapes — especially urban landscapes — from an emic, rather than etic, perspective. Objective descriptions of urban landscapes with Latin American cultural influences include Benedict and Kent’s (2004) account of the Puerto Rican-influenced landscape of Cleveland, Ohio, where semifixed, rather than fixed, feature elements represent Puerto Rican culture. Examples of such elements included commercial signage in Spanish, religious shrines in yards, buildings painted in bright colors, perimeter fencing, and Puerto Rican flags. Overall, many of the elements described in Benedict and Kent’s study were similar to elements that might be found in Mexican American urban landscapes but with subtle variations; for example, the religious shrines of Puerto Ricans typically display the Virgin of Miracles (*La Milagrosa*), while Mexican American shrines more commonly display the Virgin of Guadalupe (*ibid.*). James Rojas’s (2003) study of the Mexican American neighborhoods of East Los Angeles discussed similar elements as applied to a less dense landscape, with more emphasis on graphic elements, such as signage and murals, and people’s activities than Benedict and Kent (2004).

THE STUDY AREA

The study area for this research was located in the 7th Street Corridor of Allentown, Pennsylvania. The three-quarter-mile-long corridor, bounded to the north by Washington Street and to the south by Linden Street, is considered Allentown’s second commercial downtown center (the first is on Hamilton Street) and has long had a Latin American influence. While the city was founded in 1762, the majority of the study area consisted of buildings from the latter half of the 19th and early 20th centuries that represent a largely German and Anglo cultural heritage (Hall, *et al.*, 1982). The corridor is not listed on any local, state, or national historic registries, but the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (the state historic-preservation office) has indicated that the 7th Street Corridor is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.¹

Allentown was originally settled by German, French, and Swiss immigrants in the 18th and early 19th centuries, and this ethnic makeup remained prevalent until the turn of the 20th century, when Italians, Syrians, Slavs, and Eastern European Jews began to arrive (Adams, 2000:3-4). While a small number of Mexican workers arrived in the Lehigh Valley in the 1920s, it was not until after World War II that a significant number of Latin Americans, arriving directly from Puerto Rico, moved to Allentown to work in factories and on farms. In the 1960s, the first immigrants from other Latin American countries, such as the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru, began to arrive, diversifying the mix of Latin American cultural backgrounds in the area (Adams, 2000:24). In the 1970s, the flow of Puerto Ricans into Allentown continued, but a growing number moved directly from New York City, rather than Puerto Rico, due to perceptions that the cost of living in Allentown was cheaper and the city was safer, as well as decreased pressure to leave Puerto Rico for better economic conditions (Reisinger, *et al.*, 2006). According to the 2010 U.S. Census, about 60% of the Hispanic population of Allentown is Puerto Rican; the remainder is composed predominately of Mexican and Dominican populations (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

TABLE 1. Demographics of the 7th Street Corridor versus the city of Allentown, Pennsylvania (Data sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010, 2014).²

Characteristic	7th Street Corridor	City of Allentown
Total population	4,404	118,793
% Hispanic	65%	46%
% who lived in a different house one year ago	23%	23%
% of adults with less than a high-school degree	39%	32%
Unemployment rate	23%	7%
Median household income	\$27,621	\$36,578
Poverty rate	50%	26%
Homeownership rate	34%	47%

Within the study area, 65% of the population is Hispanic, compared with 46% for the city as a whole (*ibid.*).² Table 1 compares the demographic data for the study area and the entire city. Nearly two-thirds of the population in the study area is Hispanic (*ibid.*).

METHOD

This study was designed as a qualitative case study (see Yin, 2003) and employed semi-structured interviews and photo-elicitation techniques (see Harper, 2003). The unit of analysis was Latin American business and property owners in the 7th Street Corridor of Allentown between Linden Street and Washington Street.

In qualitative research, there is an emphasis on understanding how things work in their own particular settings, so smaller sample sizes are useful. To increase the trustworthiness of the data collected from the selected methods, it is necessary to find people in the specific setting being studied. Generalizability, therefore, is not the goal. The overall concept of generalizability (or what Maxwell [2005] referred to as “external generalizability” — that is, the ability to make similar conclusions outside of the group being studied) and its attendant requirement of large samples is antithetical to many of the goals and potential contributions of qualitative research. Instead, qualitative research emphasizes interpretation and understanding (Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Huberman and Miles, 2002). Repeatability is also not the goal of qualitative research; rather, it should “produce a coherent and illuminating description of and perspective on a situation that is based on and consistent with detailed study of that situation” (Huberman and Miles, 2002:174).

One of the most common sampling methods in qualitative research is purposive or theoretical sampling, in which a sample is intentionally chosen for its ability to “yield the most relevant and plentiful data” (Yin, 2016:93) and selected “based on the validity of findings rather than representativeness of populations” (Finch and Mason, 1990:28). Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011:55) defined a purposive sample as consisting of respondents “chosen to participate in a study based on their particular characteristics as determined by the specific goals of the research project.” In another sense, a purposive sample overrepresents certain meanings in a population while eliminating others, which results in what quantitative researchers call “selection bias”; however, this bias is actually desirable because it intentionally represents the theoretical perspective of the study. As Mason (2002:124) elaborated, “In its more general form, theoretical sampling means selecting groups or categories to study on the basis of their relevance to your research questions, your theoretical position . . . , and most importantly the argument or explanation that you are developing.” There is a perception, therefore, that qualitative research is unreliable because of its reliance on non-statistical sampling methods and lack of control for selection bias. However, in purposive sampling, this bias is actually a strength, as “[t]he logic and power of [purposive] sampling lie in selecting *information-rich cases* for study in depth. . . . Studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding” (Patton, 2002:230; emphasis in original). Using this logic, a

TABLE 2. Participant demographics.

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Years worked in 7th Street Corridor	Years lived in 7th Street Corridor	Interview language
Jorge	Male	50	Dominican	0	4.5	English
Juan	Male	32	Mexican	< 1	0	Spanish
Anna	Female	51	Puerto Rican	*	6	English
Isabel	Female	44	Puerto Rican	*	0	English
Nadia	Female	46	Dominican	2	0	Spanish
Pilar	Female	51	Puerto Rican	15	24	English
Pedro	Male	52	Puerto Rican	1	0	English
Nuria	Female	39	Dominican	2	0	Spanish
Alejandro	Male	48	Dominican	16	0	English
Jose	Male	35	Not given	2	0	English
Elena	Female	51	Dominican	4	0	Spanish
Amalia	Female	46	Ecuadorian	8	5	Spanish

Note. * Participant was not working in the 7th Street Corridor at the time of the interview but had in the recent past; no specific number was given.

probability sample in which all known selection bias is eliminated would result in “information-poor” cases, which would provide insufficient data to answer the research questions adequately.

Because the goal of this study was to understand how Latin American business and property owners in the historic 7th Street Corridor perceive and value their older built environment, the purposive sample only included participants from this geographic area in order to generate rich data for analysis. The 7th Street Allentown Main Street downtown revitalization program recommended specific individuals for this study; a subset of these individuals was then purposefully selected by the lead author to meet all of the following four requirements to achieve the theoretical aims of the study: participants had to (1) work or live in the study area currently or within the recent past (as described by the participant); (2) be business or property owners in the study area; (3) own or operate a business in a building constructed before World War II; and (4) self-identify as Latino, Latin American, or Hispanic. Table 2 lists the basic demographics of the 12 participants selected for the study. The authors expected that the values and perceptions shared by the participants would reveal reasons why they chose to live or work in these older buildings. No attempt was made to gather data from non-Latin American residents or business owners, as it was not expected that such individuals would be able to reveal useful data within the theoretical frame of the study.

Participants were contacted by telephone and in person to schedule an interview, which took place in a public area or the participant’s place of business. Interviews were conducted in 2007 in Spanish or English, and the audio was recorded for later transcription. Interviews conducted in Spanish were translated into English before coding. The interviews consisted of 12 questions aimed at understanding the ways in which Latin Americans perceive and value the older built environment and how these values influence changes made to the built environment. All participants, who were assigned pseudonyms for the study, were given information on informed consent and allowed to either not participate in the study or withdraw at any time without repercussions; all participants agreed to fully participate. In accordance with Yin (2003) and Miles and Huberman (1994), a process of pattern matching was applied to the transcribed data, and the data were then coded using Text Analysis Markup System (TAMS) Analyzer software (www.tamsys.sourceforge.net).

Table 3 lists the questions and prompts used in the semi-structured interviews. Photographs of complete street scenes with the buildings in context with their environment were used to (1) elicit responses related to buildings with high and low historic integrity, (2) elicit responses regarding ethnic changes made to buildings, and (3) allow participants to identify buildings they believed

TABLE 3. Questions and prompts used in the semi-structured interviews (provided in Spanish for some interviewees).

#	Theme	Question	Instructions to interviewer	Prompts (only if needed)
1	Preferred buildings on 7th Street	What are your favorite buildings on 7th Street? Why do you like these buildings?	Show photographs of entire street scenes with buildings numbered. Record the building numbers that participant identifies.	i. Tell me about the buildings you think look nice or are visually pleasing. ii. Are there particular buildings whose design makes you want to visit them? iii. Are there particular buildings that have fond memories for you?
2	Disliked buildings on 7th Street	Which buildings do you dislike on 7th Street? Why do you dislike these buildings?	Show photographs of entire street scenes with buildings numbered. Record the building numbers that participant identifies.	i. Tell me about the buildings you think look bad or ugly. ii. Are there particular buildings whose design makes you want to not visit them? iii. Are there particular buildings that have bad memories for you?
3	General valuation of the historic built environment	What kinds of things do you like or dislike about buildings that were built between 1850 and 1950?	n/a	i. How would you feel if an old building that you liked was going to be torn down? ii. Are there features or characteristics of old buildings that you prefer over new buildings? iii. Do you prefer the way old buildings look?
4	Building with high historic integrity	What kinds of things do you like or dislike about this building?	Show photograph of building with high historic integrity to participant.	i. Is it aesthetically pleasing or displeasing? How? ii. Do you think the building is designed well or poorly? iii. Do you think the building is well or poorly suited for a business?
5	Building with low historic integrity	What kinds of things do you like or dislike about this building?	Show photograph of building with low historic integrity to participant.	i. Is it aesthetically pleasing or displeasing? How? ii. Do you think the building is designed well or poorly? iii. Do you think the building is well or poorly suited for a business?
6	Building with ethnic modifications	What kinds of things do you like or dislike about this building?	Show photograph of building with ethnic changes to participant.	i. Is it aesthetically pleasing or displeasing? How? ii. Do you think the building is designed well or poorly? iii. Do you think the building is well or poorly suited for a business?
7	Cultural expression and preservation — existing characterization	Which buildings, if any, on 7th Street express Latin American heritage?	Show photographs of entire street scenes with buildings numbered. Record the building numbers that participant identifies.	i. Are there certain kinds of designs, colors, or cultural practices that you think help define 7th Street as a unique place?

TABLE 3 continued. Questions and prompts used in the semi-structured interviews (provided in Spanish for some interviewees).

#	Theme	Question	Instructions to interviewer	Prompts (only if needed)
8	Cultural expression and preservation — future changes	How do you think the buildings on 7th Street could change to reflect the various Latin American cultures and ethnic groups that live and work in the area?	n/a	i. Are there certain kinds of designs, colors, or cultural practices that you think should be used to change the buildings on 7th Street? Examples: painting a building a different color or using building designs from areas outside the continental U.S.
9	Cultural expression and preservation — relative importance	Which is more important for a building on 7th Street: should it look like an old, pre-1950s building or be changed to reflect more recent Latin American culture? Why is this important?	n/a	i. Do you think it is more important for a building to look like it did when it was constructed? ii. Do you think it is more important that the building be changed to reflect various Latin American cultures?
10	Existing changes to owned or rented building	What kinds of changes, construction, or renovation have you done to the building you own or rent on 7th Street?	n/a	n/a
11	Desired changes to owned or rented building	If you were given an unlimited amount of money, how would you improve or change the building you own or rent on 7th Street?	n/a	i. What kinds of visual, design, or maintenance problems does your building currently have? How would you like to address these problems? ii. Do you think it would be better to demolish your building and build a new one in its place?
12	Expression of preservation ethic	What parts of the building that you own or rent are worth preserving or saving?	n/a	i. Tell me about the old or original parts of your building that you think are worth saving.

represented specific ethnic changes from complete streetscapes of the study area. In order to understand participants' valuations of a building that historic preservationists would consider to have a high degree of historic integrity (*i.e.*, historic authenticity), the authors used one photograph from the 7th Street Corridor to represent a building with a high degree of historic integrity. The National Park Service's (1997) guide for evaluating the historic integrity of a property provided the objective criteria for authenticity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association that were used to assist in selecting the building. A small focus group consisting of historic-preservation professionals selected and approved the photo. The focus group also selected a photograph from the study area to represent an older building with a low degree of historic integrity, which met as few of the seven elements of integrity as possible. A focus group consisting of members of the 7th Street Allentown Main Street program selected the building they thought represented ethnic changes.

RESULTS

Participants shared a variety of responses regarding their general valuations of the older buildings and places on the 7th Street Corridor, but all were either positive or neutral in character. Juan's response was representative of the positive responses interviewers received; he found 7th Street pleasing because of its "old-fashioned buildings" and elaborated that he liked 7th Street specifically because it had old buildings. Amalia acknowledged that she appreciated the older buildings but thought that "modern" buildings also made a valuable contribution to the street. Some participants, such as Jorge, answered the question from a third-person perspective, relating that "I wouldn't say that the historic architecture is the thing that is most important to the people, but I will say that if you come and see for yourself, you'll see that the city really is beautiful."

When asked about the types of monuments and buildings they preferred, all participants mentioned that "historic" buildings were valuable, but certain types of buildings were repeatedly singled out in the interviews. Churches, "mansions," and monuments that reminded participants of their home country were types that emerged from the data. Although there are newer (post-World War II) churches on 7th Street, only the church buildings constructed before 1920, such as St. Luke's Church (Figure 1), were mentioned by participants. Similarly, the "mansions" mentioned by participants were also pre-World War II buildings and, as with the churches, were large, high-style buildings with a great deal of ornamentation (Figure 2). Participants offered some clues as to why the churches and mansions were valued, and the use of stone as a building material seemed important. In Allentown, as in much of the northeastern U.S., brownstone (a brownish/reddish-colored sandstone) was a typical building material in the latter part of the 19th century. Participants described in detail why this stone was particularly important. Pedro emotionally described how he liked the "beautiful stone structure, like the stones found on the church, and like that dark brown block-like material used in the mansion down the street from my restaurant — oh my God, it's gorgeous." Nuria and Isabel made similar comments in connection with the use of building stone; Nuria added that she preferred the type of stone used in older buildings to what is used in contemporary construction.

In addition to stone, participants detailed other reasons why they liked older buildings, emphasizing their design, ornamentation, age, history, and craftsmanship, in contrast to the "boring," "simple," "bland," or "plain" quality of contemporary construction. Windows and doors received the most attention, along with roofs, especially "big open [paired] doors," as Pedro emphasized. Roofs became more valuable as their ornamentation and complexity increased. Participants, mentioning that these were "historic" buildings, described them using words such as "beautiful," "gorgeous," and "pretty," or as Pilar related, "This is art." Pilar thought that what really added to the aesthetic appeal of an older building was the presence of "original beautiful fixtures," such as lights, railings, faucets, and sinks "that you don't see anymore." This latter theme related to the



FIGURE 1. St. Luke's Church.



FIGURE 2. Representative "mansion"
on 7th Street.

idea that older buildings have better craftsmanship and quality, along with a kind of permanence and rarity. Pilar described the buildings as "sturdy," "stable," and "not pre-fabricated. ... You'll never, ever, ever find this type of material and workmanship again."

While the purely physical or aesthetic features of older buildings dominated the interviews, there was an additional layer of meaning related to the history and life of buildings. For instance, Anna thought "historical architecture" had a kind of magic to it because these buildings have experienced the passage of time that "brings life to certain places." As Anna was describing her feelings about architecture, she began to mentally dissect a building that had been a restaurant, looking for physical clues about the past that could tell her the building's history. She clearly enjoyed this process, which added additional meaning and depth to what might be described as an ordinary building; in other words, the experience of dissecting the building provided additional value. In a sense, Anna was using the building as a kind of mental time machine, much as Amalia did when she described how a monument to the Civil War, located at the intersection of 7th and Hamilton Streets, took her back to her home country of Ecuador, where a similar monument stands. For participants, the older buildings of the 7th Street Corridor had the ability to bring back memories of hypothetical historical events that did not necessarily have a factual basis but still proved powerful in connecting participants with place.

Not all of the opinions shared by participants about older buildings were positive, however. A number of participants did not like certain aspects of historic buildings and were often frustrated by these issues. Overwhelmingly, these issues related to the use value of the buildings, including the difficulty of adapting them to be handicap accessible. Isabel lamented that "there is very little that you can do to modernize" older buildings, reflecting the innate tension between preserving historic buildings and adapting them

for contemporary use. Interestingly, although the 7th Street Corridor does not have any design controls germane to historic preservation (the area is not in a local historic district, nor are any of its buildings listed on a local historic register), some participants believed incorrectly that "there are a lot of laws in terms of architecture, making it difficult to change the buildings." This situation could be related to the fact that the 7th Street Corridor is sandwiched between two local historic districts (the Old Allentown and Fairgrounds districts), which do have design controls.



FIGURE 3. Building with a high degree of historic integrity.

When presented with the photograph of the building with a high degree of historic integrity (Figure 3), participants not only found the building “historic” but also thought it had a great degree of aesthetic appeal. Anna, for instance, expressed that “out of all the buildings on 7th Street, this is like the really nicest one,” while Juan thought that the building “was designed beautifully.” Participants had a variety of reactions to the colors used to paint the building; Jorge found that the “colors are too old fashioned,” and Elena did not like them because they were too dark, while Juan was pleased with what he saw, finding the colors “simple and not too bright.” A number of individual building elements from the building, particularly the doors, windows, and roof, elicited positive responses from participants. Similar to their thoughts on why historic buildings are valued in general, participants found the double door and details around the windows particularly appealing, as well as the articulation of the roof form.

The photograph of the building with a low degree of historic integrity (Figure 4) elicited strongly negative responses from all of the participants. Jorge related a particularly poignant comment on the building: “The historic structure has died. This is ugly.” Elena thought the building was “horrible,” while Pedro was more moderated in his comments, indicating that the building was



FIGURE 4. Building with a low degree of historic integrity.



FIGURE 5. Building with ethnic changes representing Latin American culture.

simply “boring.” The lack of ornamentation and upkeep was particularly disturbing to participants, eliciting comments about the building being “bland” and “plain,” while other participants felt sorry for the building, noting that “no one cares for it” and that it needed “tender loving care.” Juan thought the building looked too much like a simple box and that there was nothing interesting about it. Two elements in particular were the source of many of the negative comments: the aluminum siding, which obscured some of the building’s original features, and windows with detailing that was too simple. A few participants were actually quite intrigued by what might be behind the aluminum siding; Jorge in particular thought that “there are beautiful things behind that material.” Finally, Jose took a pragmatic approach to what he saw, noting that “sometimes people [make buildings look bad] because they want to conserve heat. Putting the siding up helps insulate the building.”

Participants desired changes to the 7th Street Corridor that were consistent with retaining and, in some cases, rectifying the historic integrity of older buildings, with an emphasis on the restoration of facades to “bring back the beauty of the building” through the removal of later changes. The preservation of the building interiors was not deemed as important or necessary. In the eyes of participants, a particularly undesirable

treatment for an older building was to cover its facade with siding or stucco; almost as bad was to remove its original doors and windows. None of the participants thought it was particularly important to restore a building’s original colors. There was also a recognition that, in some cases, buildings or parts of buildings may be too far gone to save. Participants thought that demolition was acceptable in these situations, but overall, the demolition of older buildings should be avoided if at all possible. The caveat to this treatment, however, offered by Isabel, is that “you can’t tear down a building and put up a modern structure. There are just too many buildings, they’re just all too old, you know, for it to blend.” Isabel’s idea, shared by a few other participants, was that new construction does not look authentically old and therefore calls too much attention to itself in the streetscape; the goal should be for buildings to blend into the overall environment.

An important goal of this study was to determine to what extent participants perceived and valued ethnic changes to buildings that represented some aspect of Latin American culture. Figure 5 represents a building in the 7th Street Corridor with such ethnic changes. All of the participants agreed that the building was properly represented in this fashion, indicating that it was painted in the colors of the Mexican flag (red, white, and green), but none particularly liked the changes that they saw from an aesthetic standpoint, other than the canopy over the main door, which “makes the whole facade of the building,” as Alejandro explained. Other than colors, the design elements that participants disliked did not represent ethnic modifications. Rather, their responses related to modern updating, such as stuccoing over the brick to create a “south of the border” look and adding a new door and windows on the ground floor that did not blend in with the historical elements of the building. There was wide disagreement with regard to the colors of the building. Jorge, for instance, thought it was “unnecessary” to paint a building in the colors of a country’s flag, saying that “I am

Dominican, but I don't want to paint my building with the colors of the Dominican flag." Elena did not like the colors because "they aren't the colors of my culture." The opposite reaction was held by Isabel, who appreciated that the color of the building "really signifies what it is. It's Mexican, it has Mexican colors."

Participants were each given an opportunity to identify other buildings in the 7th Street Corridor that they thought represented ethnic changes consistent with Latin American culture. When presented with photos of complete streetscapes, participants selected buildings that had signs in Spanish (Figure 6); colors of the flags of countries or pastel colors; and in one case, a Puerto Rican flag. Pilar singled out one building in particular for representing ethnic changes related to uses that are typical in Latin American countries (Figure 7); upon seeing the building, she excitedly said,

Yes, yes, this [building] is very very typical in Latin American countries. You have the check-cashing places, you ... place long-distance calls in those stores. You also have all the writing in Spanish, money orders, beepers — the whole nine yards — that's very typical of Latin American countries.

Some participants, however, did not think any of the buildings in the 7th Street Corridor represented ethnic influences consistent with various kinds of Latin American heritage. For instance, in response to this question, Nadia responded,

What do you mean, Latin American? My country is different, and the architecture there is much different than the architecture here. The architecture here is not ours, it is from here. Furthermore, in my country, everything is different, and I haven't traveled to other Latin American countries, so I'm not sure what other Latin American architecture looks like.

Participants' perceptions of ethnic changes to buildings were also related to the degree to which they thought such changes should be made or encouraged. Participants expressed disparate views on this subject, with half agreeing that such changes should be made, and the other half thinking ethnic changes were entirely unnecessary or even unwarranted. Isabel, who was in the former camp, explained that "a multicultural expression, whether it be that of the Chinese restaurant or the Mexican restaurant, let it be a multicultural expression, and I think that would be fantastic." While Pedro thought it was important that the 7th Street Corridor reflect Latin American heritage, he speculated that it could be done in a way that ensured the changes would not be considered threatening to the dominant Anglo culture: "We can bring part of our culture to the United States, without at the same time trying to change the United States." Some participants questioned the



FIGURE 6. Building with a Spanish sign.



FIGURE 7. Building with strong Latin American cultural associations.

necessity of ethnic changes at all, typically emphasizing that it was more important to “respect” and “bring back the beauty of the building itself,” as Pilar explained. While none of the participants denigrated the desire to express cultural heritage, some participants, such as Jorge, offered that “the people can express their cultures in other ways; for example, they can have a block party.”

Considering the aforementioned values related to how participants thought older or historic buildings should be treated in the 7th Street Corridor, the study looked at how economic factors might impact these desirable treatments. Would a theoretically unlimited amount of funds result in compromises to the preservation ethic that emerged from participants, such as the replacement of older buildings with new buildings that are better adapted to contemporary uses? When this question was posed to participants, the consistent response was that, in all reasonable cases, they would continue to want to preserve or restore the exteriors of buildings in the 7th Street Corridor, with a greater emphasis given to restoring missing features on facades. Many suggested they would likely replace the original windows of older buildings with more energy-efficient models that visually matched the originals, although not all of the participants agreed with this approach. In addition, participants said they would add more signage, including awnings, to advertise businesses. Participants indicated that they would be less likely to preserve the interiors of buildings; there was a strong desire among

participants to modernize interiors to accommodate more uses, and handicap accessibility was frequently mentioned. Isabel summed up the overall direction that participants would pursue if finances were not a concern:

I think [the building should be brought] back to its original form. ... There could be some modern elements added to it, like the windows, things like that, but it doesn't really take away that much because ... the windows [will] have more display room. There are minor things that can be done, but I really do believe that it should stay as is, unless a building is completely gone, and they need to tear it down, then that's something different. But right now, these are well-structured buildings, and they're going to be around for a long time.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Based on the data that have been presented, several themes emerge related to the general valuation of 7th Street's built environment, desirable interventions based on these values, and the acceptability of ethnic changes to the built environment. The responses shared in this study may make participants appear to be antiquarians, rejecting contemporary design practice. The fact that participants were purposefully selected from a Main Street program — a program founded on the practice of historic preservation — would indicate that these individuals were likely to have a preservation ethic that would be borne out in the interviews, so these results are not necessarily

surprising. It is important to emphasize, however, that while participants *valued* older buildings, they did not reject modernity; rather, the emphasis was on accommodating current uses in existing buildings. In this sense, it would actually be more appropriate to refer to them as sustainability advocates based on their emphasis on reuse and adaptation. Moreover, even though the results discussed here are not necessarily generalizable, they may help to dispel anecdotal claims that Latin Americans do not value or appreciate built heritage, even if this heritage originated from entirely disparate cultural traditions.

The stated preferences of participants with regard to design complexity — in roof forms, windows, and doors, for example — were consistent with recent empirical psychological evidence from correlational and experimental studies showing that human beings appreciate such complexity. Stamps (2000) indicated that the more “turns” (*i.e.*, polygonal forms) an object has, the more acceptable and aesthetically pleasing it is. He found that an increase in ornamental details in buildings, such as the use of shingles to create patterns and cornice, door, and window trim, corresponded to an equal increase in aesthetic preference, especially if the details were on the building’s facade. In his study, people preferred gabled roofs to flat ones and generally preferred more complex roof designs. In Stamps’s experiments, design simplification resulted in a significant decrease in the perceived aesthetic qualities of the building. Similarly, in a series of perception ratings based on photographs of historic, historicized, and contemporary design conducted by Levi (2005), study participants consistently preferred the authentically historic and “fake” historicized designs in that order. Specifically, he found that “historic-looking buildings were not viewed as ‘architectural fakes’ but, rather, were viewed as attractive complements to the existing historic buildings” (*ibid.*:156), in much the same way that participants in this study desired that new design blend in with the old through the use of historical design precedents.

Unlike current historic-preservation doctrine, which emphasizes preservation (retaining as many layers of history on a building as possible, without giving preference to one over another) over restoration (taking a building back to its “original” state or a certain point in the past), participants clearly preferred restoration as the intervention of choice. Given the nature of the built environment in the 7th Street Corridor, this reaction is likely due to the fact that many buildings were covered with inexpensive stucco and aluminum or vinyl siding, reducing their visual complexity and impairing their ability to be read as historic. The modernization of interiors was an important activity, especially with regard to providing handicap access, and would be likely to increase if building and business owners obtained increased funding for such changes. Greater funding was also associated with an increased desire to restore the facades of buildings but did not drive participants toward the demolition of existing buildings.

Finally, the results provide an interesting picture of the perception and valuation of ethnic changes that represent elements of Latin American culture to buildings in the 7th Street Corridor. Participants expressed a variety of opinions on the matter, with some wanting the colors of buildings to represent the colors of country flags or an increase in Spanish signage to increase business, while other participants expressed a desire to blend in with the dominant Anglo culture and thought such interventions were not important. Interestingly, participants did not discuss ethnic changes in context with funding issues, leading to the conclusion that the availability of funding would not necessarily drive or reduce such changes.

Studies, such as this one, that address the way ethnic minorities value the built environment are needed to help drive the decision-making process in urban planning and especially historic preservation. The findings of this study provide evidence of how ethnic minorities value historic built environments, and although these values largely align with accepted preservation practice, there are some differences, such as an emphasis on historicized design and restoration over preservation. Reconciling these traditional ideas of authenticity, which rely exclusively on the physical fabric, with sociocultural and personal values, such as those explicated in this study, presents a significant challenge to accepted preservation doctrine (Mason, 2003; Smith, 2006; Wells, 2007,

2010a, 2010b). A first step toward meeting this challenge is to understand the subjective values that people have for historic places, especially from a multicultural perspective. Approaching the preservation of the built environment from a values-centered (Mason, 2006) frame offers planners a way to make better informed decisions that benefit more people. Main Street and similar economic revitalization programs may find such information to be particularly valuable in their community outreach efforts. While largely unexplored, the intersection of space, culture, and heritage offers tremendous potential in utilizing the older built environment to benefit all people. While the results of this study are not necessarily generalizable due to its qualitative nature, the insights gathered may be transferable to similar situations and therefore help inform city-planning and historic-preservation practice and policy, a topic for future research. Moreover, studying the perspectives of non-Latino groups for comparison would also be useful.

NOTES

1. Information supplied to the lead author by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.
2. Because there is no census area that exactly matches the geography of the 7th Street Corridor, the authors have approximated this geography area with data from Census Tract 8, Block Group 4; Census Tract 10, Block Group 2; Census Tract 16, Block Group 3; and Census Tract 16, Block Group 4.

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Additional information may be obtained by writing directly to Dr. Wells at School of Architecture, Art, and Historic Preservation, Roger Williams University, One Old Ferry Road, Bristol, RI 02809, USA; email: jwells@rwu.edu.

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AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

Jeremy C. Wells is an assistant professor at Roger Williams University, where he teaches in the historic preservation program. Wells's research focuses on the intersections between critical heritage studies, social science research methods, and practice that affects the conservation of the historic environment. He runs Heritage Studies.org and is the founder of the Historic Environment Knowledge Network at the Environmental Design Research Association.

Anne Hirsch, MPH, is the environmental epidemiologist for the North Carolina Division of Public Health.

Barbara Macholz Grimaldi is Director of Development and Communications for the Public Interest Law Center, a nonprofit law firm in Philadelphia that works to ensure people living in poverty have access to fundamental resources such as education and healthcare. She is a 2008 Phi Beta Kappa, magna cum laude graduate of Muhlenberg College with a BA in English and Spanish.

Karen Beck Pooley is a senior associate at czb LLC and a professor of practice at Lehigh University. She was previously Executive Director of the Allentown Redevelopment Authority and a deputy director with New York City's Department of Housing Preservation and Development. She has a PhD in city planning from the University of Pennsylvania. Both her research and professional work focus on neighborhood revitalization strategies and the evolution of federal, state, and local housing policy.

Erika M. Sutherland is an associate professor of Spanish at Muhlenberg College and Director of the Grupo de Apoyo e Integración Hispanoamericano in Allentown. She has developed service-learning courses that connect her interpreting and translation students with the area's diverse communities of Hispanic immigrants and has directed numerous independent projects helping students explore new ways of integrating Spanish with their other areas of academic and professional interest.

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