



Karolin Frank, Patricia Petersen, eds. *Historic Preservation in the USA*. Berlin and New York: Springer, 2002. XXIV + 265 pp. \$79.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-540-41735-4.



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The premise of this book is that since the 1960s, public attention has been drawn increasingly towards the thematic link between historic preservation and urban planning. The author apparently began this work as a German doctoral dissertation, with the underlying intention of comparing German and American approaches to planning, economic, and social issues in the fields of historic preservation and city planning. The book's methodology is an examination of four selected historic districts within the central business districts of Philadelphia, Boston, Charleston and Savannah.[1]

The author's theoretical basis for the book is somewhat overambitious. The clearest example of this is the use of the four selected historic districts—in Philadelphia, Boston, Charleston and Savannah—as proxies for historic preservation activity elsewhere in the country. To place this sample in context, it is important to note that there are 8,898 historic districts, representing great socio-economic diversity, in the United States.

This over-reaching agenda would not be so apparent if the book's title were other than Historic Preservation in the USA. The four cities included in the book are among the oldest and best preserved in the United States. All four have long had established economies, social structures and political orientations in which the preservation of cultural resources is perceived as a worthwhile

activity, and as an expression of patriotism. Thus, historic districts in these four cities are likely to be among the best-advantaged in the nation, in terms of financial and political resources, as well as in offering a population density that assures continuing interest in their long-term economic and residential viability. Those interested in preserving historic districts in newer or less affluent cities have had fewer resources; and the preservation of the inner-city neighborhoods of African-Americans and other minority groups—or in rural areas anywhere in the country—have had far fewer financial and political resources available to them. Historic districts in less affluent cities, or in rural areas, or which serve as homes and business districts for minority groups, are not included in this book.

Aside from the mis-titling, the book suffers from an evident lack of first-hand experience with the practice of historic preservation in the United States. According to the Appendix, the author conducted a total of thirty expert interviews in the four municipalities. While the twenty-one-page bibliography illustrates an exhaustive—and impressive—review of the scholarly literature, this book-based approach does not substitute for personal, or professional expertise in a field that has major locally based variables (For example, each of the fifty states has its own state historic preservation law and associ-

ated regulations; these are complemented by the enabling federal legislation). This lack of daily familiarity is apparent in the numerous oversimplifications and misreadings of cause and effect, such as "It may be observed that American's growing awareness of and emphasis on heritage is above all a consequence of the Civil Rights Act of 1964/65".[2]

In sum, the book's primary value lies in serving as an introduction to a complex and multi-faceted subject, especially for those unfamiliar with the American systems for historic preservation and urban planning.

Footnotes:

[1]. Defined by the author as "Geographically defined urban or rural areas in which a significant concentration of historic buildings or architectural styles exist. The his-

toric district receives special protection through the local historic zoning ordinance." (p. 235).

[2]. In fact, some of the catalytic events of the American Civil Rights movement occurred ten years before the passage of the Civil Rights Act; these collective events in the African-American experience led to an increased awareness of and emphasis on ethnic, personal and political heritage for many Americans.

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