PastForward Online 2022 Conference Proceedings: New Title?
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National Trust Update from the President

PAUL EDMONDSON

Good afternoon, everyone. I’m Paul Edmondson, president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and it’s my pleasure to welcome you to the 2022 PastForward Conference. PastForward is the National Trust’s most important annual gathering of leaders, decisionmakers, and practitioners in this field—a chance for us to join in conversations about creative options for preservation, to explore effective solutions to the challenges we all face, and to share our experiences of how preservation can catalyze communities.

As Dr. Gabrielle Tayac, historian at the Smithsonian Institution and a member of the Piscataway Nation reminds us, “You are always part of a larger story—you are rarely, if ever, going into a place where no one has ever been.” I am speaking to you from Washington, D.C., which was built on the unceded lands of the Nacotchtank and Piscataway people. We respectfully acknowledge that we are on their traditional territory, and we recognize and honor the cultural traditions of those Native American communities—past, present, and future.

Our conference today continues a long history of convenings by the National Trust, beginning with a gathering in April 1947, setting in motion a tradition that lives on today as our Annual Meeting and Conference.

That spring, some 75 years ago, representatives from dozens of leading historic, cultural, and preservation organizations met in the still-new National Gallery of Art. David Finley, soon to be the National Trust’s founding chair, was the director of the National Gallery and served as host.

Participants discussed their shared challenges and concerns about the state of historic preservation in the United States. But more importantly, they contemplated a bold vision for the future, in which preserving historic places would be a shared priority and a shared effort across the country. A national effort, and a national movement.
Central to this goal was the creation of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, chartered by Congress two years later. Expanding the ways in which we preserve places would fall to the leaders who came after, and to all of you here today. We are always pushing forward to resolve threats and explore opportunities, to save more places, to learn more from one another, and to build a better future together.

If we were in person today, at this point in my remarks I might ask you to look around the room to recognize some of your fellow participants. Since we are virtual, I’d like to use the power of this digital platform to introduce you to just a few of the many participants in this year’s conference.

First of all, I would like to share some numbers with you, and also to acknowledge some of the many organizations that are joining us today. We have more than 780 organizations represented, including state agencies and preservation organizations, historical societies and historic sites, museums, foundations, universities, federal agencies, architects, consulting firms, and Tribal groups. Welcome all.

We have a number of longtime attendees, and I thank you for your loyalty. Of about 2,000 participants, almost 6 percent present have been attending for more than a decade. We’re also pleased to welcome many first-time attendees—32 percent of you are new to PastForward, which is a wonderful sign for the future. Welcome.

Participants from 14 countries are also joining us. And from the westernmost point in the United States—and the furthest destination from Washington, D.C. —we celebrate our delegation of friends from Guam. We apologize for the fact that it is the middle of the night for you. In any case, welcome!

To ensure that we continue to invest in the future of preservation, the National Trust developed a Diversity Scholarship program 30 years ago. This program elevates preservationists from groups that have been historically under-represented in our movement. Please welcome our 300 Diversity Scholars, who take their place among more than 2,500 scholars that we have hosted over the last 30 years.
There are many past alumni from the Diversity Scholars program who are leading in the preservation world. I want to point out just two of them: Mtamanika Youngblood and LeJuano Varnell, who are joining us from Atlanta. Mtamanika is chair emeritus and LeJuano the executive director of Sweet Auburn Works, helping to revitalize one of Atlanta’s most important historic districts. I also know Mtamanika well from her service on our board of trustees. Thank you both for joining us, and thanks to all the Diversity Scholar alumni who are advancing our work across the country.

Please also join me in thanking all the speakers and session participants you’ll meet over the next three days. They are here sharing their knowledge so we can grow together. To all our speakers: We are grateful to you for sharing your talents, your skills, and your experience with all of us.

Before we begin the deep learning and exchanges of the conference, I want to talk briefly about some of the work carried out by the National Trust since we were last together. We watched closely as the pandemic continued to change the landscape of our everyday routines and impact those who are the most vulnerable. We have also watched the deepening social and political divisions in our country, and we firmly believe that our work can create a unifying place for all to feel welcome and included.

At the National Trust, we currently organize our efforts around five major categories of work: advocating for places; stewarding historic sites; grantmaking for greatest impact; addressing inequities; and engaging a new generation of preservationists.

First, in collaboration with so many of you across the country, we advocate for saving places. This ranges from complex legal cases that can take many years to resolve, to the expansive campaigns of our annual 11 Most Endangered Historic Places list.
Each year, the 11 Most Endangered Historic Places list plays a critical role in raising awareness about threatened historic sites—and often it is the impetus for protecting those places. With more than 300 sites spotlighted over the years, fewer than 5 percent have been lost.

For example, Rassawek, located in Virginia at the confluence of the James and Rivanna rivers, is the historic capital of the Monacan Nation. In 2020, we placed Rassawek on the National Trust’s list of 11 Most Endangered Historic Places, when the James River Water Authority proposed to install a water intake and pumping station on the site. Our listing boosted efforts by the Monacan Indian Nation and our preservation colleagues in Virginia, and ultimately, the James River Water Authority voted this past March to choose an alternative site, protecting the sanctity of this important place.

And, just last week, we and our partners in Arizona celebrated another win that had been the subject of an 11 Most listing this year. Camp Naco is a former military camp along the U.S.-Mexico border that once housed units of the all-Black cavalry known as the “Buffalo Soldiers.” After years of deterioration, Camp Naco will receive a $4.6 million grant from the state of Arizona for critical stabilization and rehabilitation. This has been a major effort over the last several months involving local and congressional officials, preservation partners in Arizona, and the Arizona State Historic Preservation Office. Congratulations all!
One of the 11 Most Endangered Historic Places this year that is still at risk is the Minidoka National Historic Site in Jerome, Idaho, where the U.S. government held 13,000 Japanese Americans who were forcibly relocated during World War II from western states. Minidoka still needs our help, this time because it is threatened by a massive wind farm project. I hope you’ll join the National Trust, the Friends of Minidoka, and other partners in urging the Bureau of Land Management to protect this important place.

Since the National Trust’s beginning, stewarding historic sites has been central to our work. And of course, this work isn’t just about preserving historic buildings, landscapes, and collections, but also about using them to engage the public in creative ways that help us address issues important in our world today.

At Lyndhurst, in Tarrytown, New York, we recently presented “Women’s Work,” a groundbreaking exhibit marking the connections between women artists—from the domestic handicraft traditions of the 18th and 19th centuries to contemporary art. At Lyndhurst, visitors to “Women’s Work” encountered more than 125 objects and art pieces produced by an inclusive group of women artists, from Dolley Madison to Yoko Ono.

At Belle Grove, in Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley, artist-in-residence Jerome Bias brought his skill in furniture-making to this site of enslavement to expand its interpretation. As he built a China press, Bias shared his own story and the stories of African American cabinetmakers in the 19th century. He also held open-hearth cooking demonstrations, including a special meal for the descendants of people who were enslaved at Belle Grove.

At Filoli, a National Trust Historic Site in Woodside, California, a new site-wide exhibition explored Filoli’s evolution from a watershed...
valley dotted with creek-side Ohlone villages, to a reservoir supplying water to the post-Gold Rush population of San Francisco. Throughout the house and garden, this exhibit connects California’s water history with the challenges of today, and the need to take action to ensure a sustainable future.

These are just a few examples of how stewarding our National Trust Historic Sites means telling their stories in ways that connect with the world we live in today.

Over the past year, the National Trust has also expanded its grantmaking to advance preservation work at historic places across the United States. With the broadest range of preservation grant-making programs in the country, the National Trust provides funding and technical expertise to organizations and institutions that are positioned to create meaningful impacts in their communities.

For example, in partnership with the National Endowment for the Humanities, we created the Telling the Full History Preservation Fund, made possible through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. This grant program is helping organizations interpret and preserve historic places representing our full shared history. With $2.5 million in grants awarded to 80 organizations across 39 states, these projects demonstrate how preservation is a powerful tool for advancing justice and equity.

In 2021, in response to pandemic-related challenges being experienced by smaller historic restaurants in cities across America, the National Trust developed an exciting initiative with our longtime corporate partner—American Express—to benefit these important community assets. In the last two years, we have awarded $2 million to 50 small historic restaurants,
helping to ensure that these historic community anchors will endure.

In all of our work, we know that evolving the profession and the focus of historic preservation to rectify past inequities within the preservation movement is also critical to our shared future. Doing so calls for a proactive approach, and we’ve created a number of special funds, initiatives, and programs that address the areas of greatest need through the application of resources, attention, and technical expertise.

Of course, one of the most impactful ways that we are doing this is through the incredible work of the National Trust’s African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund, which is celebrating its fifth anniversary this year. Through the Action Fund, we are helping to preserve and lift up places that have been overlooked in American history—places that represent centuries of African American activism, achievement, and resilience. To date, more than $80 million has been raised in support of hundreds of preservation projects nationally.

For example, for the second year in a row, funding from the Mellon Foundation has allowed us to award more than half a million dollars in grants to Historically Black Colleges and Universities to support preservation planning on their historic campuses. Also this year, with the support of the Lilly Endowment, we began our Preserving Black Churches program, which offers a national strategy to support those institutions, which are profoundly important in American history and in our communities and our country today. A key component of this new program is grant funding, and we received more than 1,200 applications in the inaugural grant round for this program. We look forward to announcing these awards on Martin Luther King Jr. Day this coming January.

Building on ongoing work to identify current threats to America’s Chinatowns, we recently launched a new effort to help document these important cultural resources and to articulate why these cultural and business districts must be saved. Our initial findings show that historic Chinatowns take many forms, from the bustling density of major urban centers, to smaller Chinese communities in rural landscapes—many of which are represented by single
streets or just a few buildings. We look forward to sharing more about this growing effort as we make progress.

Finally, we recognize that we must constantly attract, engage, and expand a new generation of preservationists.

We are doing this through programs such as our HOPE Crew, our youth enrichment and workforce development program, providing opportunities for young people, volunteers, and veterans to develop skills in preservation trades. HOPE stands for “Hands-On Preservation Experience,” and our HOPE Crew projects provide needed help in the form of preservation-in-action. Recent projects include engaging young people in restoring masonry at a hospital first established for people enslaved on St. Croix; another project has been documenting Black heritage sites in Washington, D.C.; and another has focused on restoring cabinetry at the Modernist House of Tomorrow in Indiana.

Thanks to a generous gift from a longtime donor and his family, we are expanding K-12 civics education programs at our National Trust Historic Sites. As we begin to build out the Marder-Vaughn
Center for Historic Sites Interpretation & Education, we are conducting new research on the histories of our sites and developing new partnerships through teacher-in-residence programs. This initiative came from the vision of the late Stan Marder that historic sites provide an ideal environment for young people to examine and engage with our shared civic values.

While these are only a few examples of our work, you can see that we continue to make strides in saving places, supporting communities, and connecting people to our past and our future through historic places. And that vision of a national movement reflected in that organizing meeting at the National Gallery some 75 years ago is still our guiding principal, and has never been more relevant than it is today.

On behalf of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, I am pleased to welcome you to PastForward, and I am deeply honored to have all of you as colleagues in this important work. FJ

PAUL EDMONDSON is president and CEO of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.
Hello, PastForward 2022 attendees. I’m Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava. I’m wearing pink in honor of Breast Cancer Awareness Month. I’m honored to be here with Paul Edmondson, CEO and our host at the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Advocates and architects, city planners and historic site directors, students and elected officials, and commissioners and Main Street directors—everyone here has a role in preservation.

This is especially true in Miami-Dade. As we continue to grow at a record pace, we must reimagine how to preserve and enjoy our historic places for future generations. We face some unique challenges here and therefore a unique opportunity to be on the forefront of solutions. Our community, and with that our historic places, have been the first in the country to experience the effects of climate change—more severe storms, heavy rains, and extreme heat, to name a few.

As one of my first actions in office, I appointed our county’s Chief Heat Officer and Chief Bay Officer, the first positions of their kind in the world, and an acknowledgement of how important these issues are for our residents and our structures. Countless structures in Miami-Dade speak to our rich and vibrant history as a cultural center and converging point for people from around the world. It’s essential to preserve historic places amid climate change so they can bear extreme heat or weather events, and better yet, help alleviate the problem.

In 2019, the county’s Office of Historic Preservation conducted a historic site vulnerability assessment for designated historic sites. This assessment evaluated the risk level of our county-designated...
sites to factors like flooding and sea level rise. It enabled us to understand which sites are most at risk and could benefit from elevated attention. The assessment informed policy coordination with other county departments regarding resilience and preservation, recommended a pilot project around preservation and resilience at the Deering Estate, and suggested pursuing grant projects related to the intersection of preservation and resilience.

We also are conducting a Historic Heritage Survey of our historic and cultural places. This multi-year surveying effort is enabling the county to track and prioritize at-risk historic and cultural sites, from properties at risk of gentrification and development pressure, to climate change and sea level rise. We are focusing on historically excluded communities. Anticipated to be completed next spring, this community engagement process will engage citizens in sharing information about the spaces and places most important to them.

An outcome of these assessments has been that our Office of Historic Preservation has coordinated with partners in the community to achieve a common goal of preserving our future. The Deering Estate, a lovely historic park in our county, obtained a

*Birds eye view of the Deering Estate Stone House, Richmond Cottage and Boat Basin*  
PHOTO COURTESY MIAMI-DADE COUNTY
grant from the Florida Division of Historical Resources to conduct a sea level rise study, which will be completed in collaboration with the county by June 2023.

The next step was to take assessment into action. In February 2022, the Board of County Commissioners adopted an updated historic preservation design guideline document for the county called “Resilient Rehab: A Guide for Historic Buildings in Miami-Dade County.” This document is the first update to the guidelines since the 1980s, and it has a focus on preservation through a resilience lens, understanding that we must balance preservation with the realities facing historic properties, like flooding, sea level rise, and increased storm events. With a first set of guidelines in place, there is plenty of room for innovation and revitalization.

The county is on its second year of providing $1 million to Dade Heritage Trust, a local nonprofit focused on historic preservation. They execute our vision to purchase, rehabilitate, and historically designate historic structures and preserve affordable housing.

Historic preservation goes beyond the colonial frontier days of America as we know it. In Miami-Dade, we are here on the land of the Miccosukee people and doing our best to respect and honor that history. Our county has a longstanding archeological ordinance and program, which ensures the preservation of indigenous sites in the county. Centering equity in everything my administration does is key, especially throughout our preservation programs. We’re just getting started with these indigenous history and historic designation reports; making information more accessible through a website update; ensuring our materials are available in English, Spanish, and Creole; and identifying and implementing broader community outreach opportunities.
My own Miami-Dade County staff is participating in two sessions today where you can learn more about our efforts through, number one, a panel on diversity and inclusion in Florida preservation, highlighting efforts around the state. And second, a session on historic preservation standards and how they can be more flexible and adaptively utilized to support equity efforts and expand the preservation narrative. The collaboration happening throughout this conference is sure to inspire decades of new work. I thank each of you for your dedication and commitment to the preservation of history throughout your communities. Thank you for the honor to join PastForward 2022, and I wish you all a fantastic conference. FJ

DANIELLA LEVINE CAVA is the mayor of Miami-Dade County.
Envisioning a Better Future: An Interview with American Institute of Architects CEO Lakisha Woods

William Bates: Hello, everyone. I’m Bill Bates, and I’m a member of the board of trustees of the National Trust and also the 2019 president of the American Institute of Architects. I’m here today to talk to our guest, Lakisha Woods, executive vice president and CEO of the American Institute of Architects. Over the past several years, Lakisha has held several significant leadership roles in the design and construction industry. She most recently served as the president and CEO of the National Institute of Building Sciences, which convenes experts in the building industry, design, government, and regulation to identify and develop solutions to critical issues impacting the built environment, including climate action and natural disasters and inequity. Likewise, Lakisha is currently the Board chair of the American Society of Association Executives and served as the vice chair of the U.S. Green Building Council. I ask you to join me in welcoming Lakisha Woods, our guest today.

Lakisha Ann Woods: Thanks, Bill. Well, hello, everyone. I am delighted to spend some time with you during the PastForward National Preservation Conference. Conferences like these are so important because they create stronger bonds of partnership, lines of communication, and opportunities to explore shared commitments to progress. In my view, the work of the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the priorities of the American Institute of Architects are already quite aligned. For starters, AIA is focused on ensuring that architecture strengthens our communities, just like the National Trust. And as Bill just noted, a sustainable future requires that conservation and preservation are among the top choices made by architects and the design community. To that end, AIA is committed to providing the tools and the resources that architects and the broader design community need to preserve and
conserve spaces and places that improve the quality of life of the community and further our understanding of our shared history. Thank you again for the opportunity to join you today.

**William Bates:** Yeah, and that’s a great segue into my first question. As you know, the 2022 agenda for our PastForward conference is about leading change together, and the conference’s theme is about moving from vision to action, and that’s important. We have developed a vision that we think is preferable for our country and for preservation, and so I’d like to talk a little bit about the importance of partnerships to help solve big problems. That ideal of moving from vision to action together, would you mind talking about that a little bit?

**Lakisha Ann Woods:** Absolutely. One of the best aspects of my role is the opportunity to speak to other members of the architecture, engineering, and construction sector that I often refer to as AEC. Even though we all play different roles, what unites us is a common vision of a built world that empowers and inspires. Events like this are important reminders that solving big problems means working together to turn vision into action. The pandemic, the worsening climate crisis, and the urgent need to address inequities have made clear that partnerships are more important than ever. Successfully addressing the challenges we face requires a comprehensive and coordinated effort. I am proud of the work AIA has done and eager to build on our success by, among other things, deepening AIA’s partnerships, because convening and bringing people together are so important for us to really solve those big problems.

**William Bates:** That’s great, and while we’re on this thought of big problems and solving them, as I know from my time at AIA, its strategic plan has two top priorities, and they're focused on using the power of design to address issues like climate emergency and creating a more equitable society. Given that, I was wondering if you could talk a little bit more about AIA’s role in addressing these and how it dovetails with the importance of preservation.

**Lakisha Ann Woods:** Well, Bill, as you know, part of the reason I was so excited for the opportunity to come work with AIA is
because of the phenomenal strategic plan that has been developed. Focusing on climate and equity and how those two intertwine is so important not just for us, but for everybody in the built environment and everything that impacts it. I think it is something that we are going to continue to work on with others in partnership as we discussed. But that strategic plan is something that we must really use as our mainstay and our course. Everything that we are doing at the organization ties back to that, and that’s one of the things that I’ve been working on early on in my job here, is making sure that the work that we do is really focused and connected back to the strategic plan.

I’d say the best answer for this question is really paraphrasing the mission of the National Trust, and that is preserving our historic places and spaces builds stronger communities by telling the full story of our history to reflect the contribution, experience, and voice of everyone, which speaks directly to the equity pillar of the strategic plan. And also, preservation is almost always a more sustainable option, which of course directly aligns with the strategic plan’s sustainability pillar. Equity and sustainability are all that we’re focused on, and clearly, that’s why it’s such a great partnership with the National Trust.

William Bates: My next question revolves around the thinking of the great transition, the ongoing generational change that we see, and the impact that it has on methods and stories that we in
the AEC space can do to turn vision into action. What do you think about the work of the AEC sector and where that might take us in collaboration?

**Lakisha Ann Woods:** I have spent my whole career representing associations in this space, and the great transition and recognizing the need for generational change, it is long overdue. For those people who don’t know, I started my career at the National Ready Mixed Concrete Association, and from there, I went to work for the Associated General Contractors of America and then to the National Association of Home Builders, then, of course, the opportunity to lead as CEO of the National Institute of Building Sciences before I came here to AIA. I love construction. I love everything that impacts the built environment, and the people that we target to help us is so important.

I’ve long spoke about the importance of increasing the diversity in this space and specifically about how we need to increase the number of women and diverse individuals who are targeted to be a part of our industry. The trades numbers are still so significantly low. I used to give a speech about getting women into this space, and shared that it was the slowest nontraditional career growth of any other nontraditional job. There are examples like how phrasing is changed, from a policeman to a police officer, or from a fireman to a firefighter, that demonstrates culture changes that have to happen in order to increase that diversity in our space.

The construction industry over 30 years went from 3.2 percent female to 3.6 percent female, and the other sectors went from 3 percent or 9 percent to 20 or 30 percent. There are cultural changes that must happen in order for us to truly bring the changes that are needed in diversity within this industry. And of course, new minds bring fresh ideas and perspectives. In the AEC space, as in all sectors, this is very true, and it’s undergoing this significant generational shift because now we have no choice. All of our people are retiring out of our space, and we’re forced to make changes.

But the good news is for the first time, there are four generations that are active in the workplace. Accomplishing any goal requires harnessing all points of view and experiences. That means all of us
in the AEC sector must work together to ensure that voices, perspectives, and stories of everyone everywhere are reflected in all of our projects. It also means incorporating a diverse set of perspectives into the design process early.

I’m reminded of a quote from award-winning architect Zaha Hadid: “A brilliant design will always benefit from the input of others.” Hadid shared that quote a few years before she passed away, but it signifies the power of collaboration and how our work can have a lasting impact that can inspire future generations. As you can see, I’m very focused on equity and diversifying our space, and I think it is the key stepping stone to impacting all of the positive change that is available and coming for us as we move forward as a profession.

William Bates: It’s a great answer, and I agree with you about expanding the inclusive work that we see in these sectors. It makes me wonder how we can collectively impact our communities to inspire and enhance the quality of life in America and to focus on sustainability, equity, and health to make the world a better place. What are your thoughts around that?

Lakisha Ann Woods: Thanks for that question, Bill. First, I think we have to get out and let people know what we do. Become more involved in local politics or discussions about the built world in your community. There are no better ambassadors for the power of the built world and design to shape the lives and change minds and to inspire than each one of you. As we expand that understanding through words and deeds, we need to make sure that we’re doing everything we can to let people know about the work that we do and why it’s important and how it impacts the community.

Here in Washington, we are already working as a team to advance policies that harness our collective potential to drive positive and lasting change. We’re working with allies in Congress to secure appropriation requests that strengthen preservation as an effective vehicle for greater equity in our communities, and that’s just to name a few ways that AIA and the National Trust are working together. We know that we need to advance our common vision of a built world, and we will work together so that we make sure it honors everyone.
William Bates: Our work in Washington is really necessary to making sure that there’s an awareness of the importance of the built environment and historic preservation, and we really appreciate the efforts that AIA is putting forth in that regard. Regarding my last question, I was wondering how are environmental issues and social justice issues linked together, and how can a commitment to sustainability and equity help solve the greatest social issues of this generation?

Lakisha Ann Woods: Since its founding in 1865, AIA members have been committed to safeguarding the public’s health, safety, and welfare to improve the nation’s quality of life through the power of design. And like the members of the National Trust, AIA members continue to identify and preserve an even more comprehensive catalog of our shared architectural heritage, especially sites crucial to telling the full story of this nation. AIA believes that neither the protection of the historic built environment nor the decarbonization of the building sector are mutually exclusive, but instead are essential together to increase the sustainability and resilience of our communities while honoring the history of everyone. Social justice is something that we will continue to work on as a profession. The things that we do can positively impact our community, but it is an ongoing factor that we must continue to work on. We must adapt our culture within our firms, within our organizations, and adjust ourselves as humans. That’s really what’s going to change and impact our social equity within our industry.

William Bates: I really appreciate your time and insights today. They’re so relevant to both organizations, and you’ve given us a lot to think about. I look forward to seeing how AIA and the National Trust work together in the future to tell the full American story and build stronger communities through the power of design and place and history in the years ahead. Do you have any concluding thoughts, Lakisha?

Lakisha Ann Woods: I’m just so happy to have had the opportunity to connect with you, Bill. It’s always great to see you and have a chance to touch base and talk. I am honored that the National Trust invited me to participate in this event. Thank you,
and thanks to the National Trust for their leadership for the past 70 years in protecting, preserving, and conserving America’s historic places and spaces so that they continue to inspire and teach us. Although I’m still only eight months on the job, every day I’m learning so much more, and I’m thrilled that people have shared their thoughts, their visions, and their ideas where they would like to see AIA move, and the direction, so that we can continue to positively impact society and our profession as a whole. I am here to listen and learn and continue to work to positively impact this organization. I’m thrilled to be here and look forward to our continued partnership with the National Trust.

William Bates: Thank you again, Lakisha, and thanks to everyone who’s contributing to this conference. I look forward to continuing to work together to make a brighter future for our country. Thank you, everyone, and have a good conference. FJ

LAKISHA WOODS is executive vice president and CEO of the American Institute of Architects. WILLIAM BATES is a member of the board of trustees of the National Trust and also the 2019 president of the American Institute of Architects.
Latinos in Heritage Conservation: Re-imagining the Historic Preservation Movement

SEHILA MOTA CASPER

Many thanks to the National Trust for Historic Preservation for this invitation. It is a pleasure and huge honor to be with you on this day. My interest in life has always been around history, places, storytelling, and whose story is being told. I’m going to share with you a piece of my own history and research that has deeply influenced my preservation approach. I’m also going to share the incredible work ahead for our new nonprofit, Latinos in Heritage Conservation (LHC), and the work that we are doing to elevate community voices and offset systemic inequities as we push for equity and inclusion and a practice that values Latinx heritage.

In 2013, I was attending Savannah College of Art and Design, studying to get my Master of Fine Arts in Historic Preservation.

Texas Historical Commission’s Christianson-Leberman Building, also known as the “pink building.”

PHOTO COURTESY TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
I was so excited to have been awarded the coveted Texas Historical Commission’s Diversity Internship that summer. Not only would I be working with the National Trust and the State Historic Preservation Office, but I would also be in Austin and working on the very first Hispanic tourism guidebook. On my first day, I walked up to the historic pink building, and I was greeted by my boss, April Garner. Along with my colleague Joel Zapata, we reviewed the project and our work ahead of us. We’d be doing site identification and travel writing, so I reached out to the 18 Latinx content experts who were advising us on the handbook.

After hearing that I was extremely fascinated by the Borderlands and women, one of them pointed me to Laredo, a small town in south Texas. Early on, I became obsessed with the social movements coming out of Laredo. I learned about an extraordinary individual named Leonor Villegas de Magnon, also known as “La Rebelde.” She was born in 1876 and became a Spanish newspaper journalist and a feminist. She was a political activist who also worked as a teacher. Her work and fearlessness took over my research. I told my husband about how in March 1913, she heard gunfire and battle. The Mexican Revolution had made its way on the other side of the border in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico. Knowing that there’d be much bloodshed, she took to action and organized to help the revolutionary cause and Carranza’s army.

She and a handful of other women crossed the Rio Grande and ran straight into gunfire to sneak wounded men back to safety in Laredo, Texas. Leonor’s home had always been a social sanctuary for Mexican expats and political organizing, and now she converted it to a makeshift wartime hospital to nurse and heal the wounded. This all-volunteer brigade was called La Cruz Blanca, or the White Cross. After the war, Leonor received five medals from the Mexican government for her valor and role in supporting the revolutionary effort. I was going to pursue this site so that I could add it to the guidebook, but then I learned that her home, La Cruz Blanca, which was located on Flores Avenue, no longer existed. How is it possible that this house owned by this significant figure would not be considered important enough to save?
This dead-end of not finding extant buildings kept coming up for me. As a kid growing up in Grapevine, Texas, I was fascinated with the history of my hometown and its people. As many of you know, Grapevine is a thriving Main Street community, and Main Street was the backyard and the playground of my childhood. Our historic buildings, their mystery, stories, always piqued my interest. My parents had moved here in 1971 from Sabinas, Coahuila, Mexico, to make North Texas their new home. My father is a huge sports fanatic and started the first Latinx soccer league soon after moving here. As a kid, I attended Sunday soccer games and loved riding my bike up and down Main Street. I was a budding historian and never missed the opportunity to duck into the public library and to learn more about historical figures and my Mexican and Indigenous roots.

I was in the third grade when I first set foot in the Grapevine Historical Museum. Beyond excited, we walk to Heritage Park to the yellow wooden building. The docent welcomes us, and I enter the dimly lit room. I see exhibits. I see the first doctor, our first mayor, and agricultural exhibits on cotton, which built my hometown. I see confederate veterans and train conductors. What I notice is that it’s mostly white men and white people, and it’s the telling of the pioneer and settler story of Grapevine. I didn’t see Tejas, I didn’t see Mexican history. I didn’t see Indigenous history, and I didn’t see myself. I was frustrated and confused, and I felt like an outsider within my own hometown.

Flashback to my summer in Austin, which began with me chasing the story of Leonor, and it continued with me chasing after several
other important figures whose lives were not deemed worthy enough of preserving. This roadblock and realization ended up shaping my Master of Fine Arts thesis work. I wanted to examine why and how is it that this practice shapes and affects the local community and our U.S. history—and more importantly, how do we change this?

I assessed the national landscape of Latinx preservation and examined how our field has traditionally disregarded the Latinx narrative and experience. My thesis work concluded with proposals for a new and inclusive methodology with a framework that values and actively preserves Latinx heritage. The following summer, in 2014, I received the Mildred Colodny Diversity Scholarship and interned with the National Trust to help find threatened and endangered Latinx heritage sites throughout the country. I was connected with other like-minded individuals who were also asking these questions. This included Latinos in Heritage Conservation (LHC) co-founders and early co-chairs like Desiree Aranda, Laura Dominguez, Dr. Sarah Zenaida Gould. Along with a dozen other practitioners, we began deliberating how we, as a collective, could take action.

We’re a group of professionals and advocates working in historic preservation and allied fields such as academia, conservation, museums, the arts, and planning. We started to create this synergy, and we met for the first time at the National Trust PastForward Conference in Savannah, Georgia, in 2014. For this first gathering, we had 30 other individuals for a lively one-hour session. It was exhilarating to discuss the need to support the Latinx preservation movement within our own field. We held mini breakouts and brainstormed, and by the end of 60 minutes, we knew that we needed a national network. That evening, a dozen of us had a very well-deserved celebration. Eddie Torrez, architect and National Trust Advisor from Chicago, proposed this ambitious idea that we host our own national conference in just six months in Tucson, Arizona.

So, we got to work. In May 2015, our emerging group, Latinos in Heritage Conservation, held our very first convening in partnership with Tucson Historic Preservation Foundation. The support was more than we anticipated, and we ended up having to change venues a few times. Over a period of two days, we met and walked Tucson to learn more about Latinx preservation strategies. We had
a shared interest in preserving historic Latinx sites and sustaining the living cultural heritage of Latinx communities. We also wanted to promote Latinx leadership and participation within the profession. Overall, our goals were to define a governance structure for LHC and consider roles, responsibilities, programs, and advocacy. We also solidified our mission and vision, which would affirm our work moving forward. With nearly 100 Latinx elders, practitioners, advisers, leaders, and scholars, the room resonated with a feeling of community, and for all of us, we felt like we finally found our gente.

In 2018, we had our third national convening in Providence, Rhode Island, marking our first conference in New England. We partnered with Rhode Island Latino Arts and the State Historic Preservation Office and held a gathering of over 200 individuals. There, we elevated the histories and preservation work of individuals from Columbia, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, and Puerto Rico. As we reflected on the 50-year anniversary of the National Historic Preservation Act, we examined how national trends and urgent issues in heritage conservation within Latinx communities and underrepresented work was affecting our own worlds and our communities locally. We asked who is this Act serving, and who is it not? We celebrated how new and recent arrivals were preserving their own heritage.

During the Corazon de Providence tour, we explored La Broa’ Street, or Broad Street, and we heard about Josefina Rosario, known Doña Fefa, a Dominican who migrated to Providence and opened her first Fefa’s Market in 1959. This was Rhode Island’s first Latinx bodega in the state. Doña Fefa and her husband’s store served Latinx foods and sold Spanish newspapers from Doña Fefa’s motherland. The bodega and Doña Fefa acted as a community hub.
This was where they welcomed and advised new immigrants by helping with housing, registering them to vote, and sharing the ins and outs of getting settled in Rhode Island.

This past April, we held LHC’s fourth national conference, which we’re now calling Congreso, in Denver, Colorado. With over 230 people, we met in the beautiful History Colorado museum with our partner Historic Denver. We highlighted Latinx heritage work in the Intermountain region, and its diverse geography, cultures, ecological zones, histories, and traditions. It was also a milestone moment as we celebrated our new chapter. For the past eight years, we’ve been a passionate, all-volunteer group, and we recently became a nonprofit. In Denver, LHC announced that, with support from the Mellon Foundation, we’d be hiring our organization’s inaugural staff with me as the new executive director. Collectively, we reflected on democratizing historic preservation and shared innovative strategies to preserve Latinx heritage in rural and urban communities and in our public lands. We ended the conference with walking tours of Denver’s historic Westside, and there we learned about the history and evolution of the land from Indigenous to the Chicano/Chicana movement, and viewed La Alma Lincoln Park Historic Cultural District and Chicano/Chicana murals, which still tell the story today.

Latinos in Heritage Conservation is the leading national nonprofit organization that works for the preservation of Latinx places, stories, and cultural heritage in the United States. We are preserving historic Latinx sites, sustaining the living cultural heritage of Latinx communities, and promoting Latinx leadership and participation within communities and the profession. We envision a just world that values Latinx heritage, people, and places. Rooted in social justice, LHC strives to transform the preservation movement at a national scale through creative projects and intergenerational collaboration that will amplify Latinx voices and perspectives, and here’s how we’re going about it.
The Abuelas Project is a digital humanities, multi-year project that will identify, collect, and share stories about places that matter most to Latinx communities in the United States and Puerto Rico. It will be something accessible at all levels to the community and something that even my mother can use. Recognizing that our own sites have historically been excluded from historic designations and that we have abuelas, or grandmothers or strong matriarchs, in our families, this project pays homage to those leaders who have shared our family histories across dinner tables and at family gatherings to help keep our history alive. Our final product will be a story-driven, map-based online platform that functions as a grassroots historical registry for significant Latinx places.

Our Latinx Preservation Toolkit will be the first of its kind. It will be a free community resource revolving around a print and digital handbook and short bilingual videos that will weigh the advantages of historic preservation and help to demystify the formal processes and languages that we use. It will highlight Latinx heritage conservation success stories, and it’ll share best practices for place-based advocacy. For example, this toolkit could be an aid for community leaders in El Paso and help guide them in protecting their sacred cultural barrios from arena footprints, overeager developers, eminent domain, or from the wrecking ball. Our goal is to produce an accessible educational resource in both English and Spanish that will help Latinx communities and organizations in urban and rural areas to help advocate for the protection of Latinx historic sites and other tangible and intangible resources.

We’re so excited to share that in 2024, Congreso will be in Miami, though it’s not lost on us that the state of Florida and Puerto Rico have sustained devastating losses from multiple hurricanes over the past few months. This, of course, includes tragic loss of life, infrastructure, housing, but also irreplaceable heritage. It makes our mission even more profound as we focus and study regional methodologies and share impressive work that’s rooted in community. We’ll discuss strategies against commercial gentrification, environmental health, resilience, and disaster relief, such as sea level rise for historic communities and zonas, like in Little Havana, Calle Ocho, Miami-Dade, and the broader Southeast,
as well as Puerto Rico. This biennial conference of Latinx community
leaders, advocates, allies, and historic preservation professionals
is the only national event dedicated to the Latinx preservation
movement.

Now I want you to imagine the heritage and pioneer museum
in Midwest town America, but today it’s just called a museum.
There’s a Dominican girl with her lunchbox and perfect chongos,
ready to go to her school trip. She walks into the museum. Instead
of seeing the town’s first white doctor, mayor, war heroes, or
settlers, she sees her own heritage being represented. She sees
Doña Fefa’s bodega, the Guatemalan restaurant located on Calle
Ocho, Chicanx murals, and my father’s soccer league. She sees her
own heritage, and she knows that she belongs.

Latinx stories have been excluded from the narrative and
mainstream preservation practices. That’s why we invite you to
support Latinos in Heritage Conservation. Join our movement and
help push for transformative change. Start with your local community.
Ask them to lead you by sharing the places that matter most to
them - some may be known, and some may be unknown. Let those
stories and sites be the ones that you help to preserve. Everyone in
this room knows that the histories we uplift help us understand
ourselves as human beings and influence who we are within our
spaces. I’m asking you to integrate Latinx heritage into your daily
practice and commit to decolonizing this work. Tell the stories of
Latinx individuals, and celebrate our contributions to this country
by preserving our history. Thank you for listening today. FJ

SEHLA MOTA CASPER is executive director of Latinos in Heritage Conservation
The Ball and Chain: The Heart(beat) and Soul of Little Havana

Chris Rupp: Hi, I'm Chris Rupp, executive director of Dade Heritage Trust, and in our continuing efforts to bring conference participants a flavor of Miami, I want to introduce you to Bill Fuller, the owner of the world-famous Ball & Chain in Little Havana. Bill, can you tell our participants about your investment in Little Havana?

Bill Fuller: Chris, great to welcome you here to the Ball & Chain. Little Havana, for me, was a passion project, mainly because my mother is of Cuban heritage, and it was a way of merging both my interest in real estate with my passion for the heritage. And at the same time [I fell] in love with the historic building stock, the authenticity of the neighborhood that existed, and its people. It was the idea of working on these buildings, and working with the people and creatives, entrepreneurs, restaurateurs, in reassembling and developing a renaissance around this wonderful street which we have called Calle Ocho. I think it’s going pretty well, so far.

Chris Rupp: Bill, Little Havana is the second-most visited place in Miami after South Beach. What has been the effect of your investment and vision for the neighborhood?
Bill Fuller: When we first started investing in Little Havana, in 2004, based on what we know from the Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau, the visitors to the street were about 250,000 a year. Now, we realize about 4 million a year, which represents about a quarter of the visitors who come to Miami Dade. So it’s been an exponential growth, but it’s been a responsible growth. It’s been one where it hasn’t required any new, large, disruptive buildings to take place in the neighborhood. We’ve been very sensitive to the original building stock. We’ve been very considerate of heritage businesses that have existed and families that have run those businesses for years. We really tried to keep as much of the national tenancy out of what we call the Cultural Historic District. They’re great, but when people come here, they’re looking for something really unique and authentic.

Chris Rupp: As a developer, why do you invest in historic properties and see preservation as a positive?

Bill Fuller: For us, it’s really in the hard drive and DNA of our company. My partner, Martin Pinilla, and I, we are aligned on so many levels, but an important bedrock of the company is that we really respect the history of Miami, of South Florida, and of everything that has happened in our past. It’s so important to keep retelling stories, important to keep sharing with future generations to come. All of these properties—the historic properties and the legacy businesses—are so important to keep around and to protect and cherish. It’s part of the message. It’s part of what drives us. It drives our passion.

Exploring and understanding the history is a fun part of the expedition, but then also we’re bringing it back to life where new generations can remember what it was like to be in South Florida. We’re in a really unique space right now because of the development, the high-rise and mid-rise entrenchment that we have coming into our community. The reality is that we have very scarce land in South Florida, and our historic building stock is going to be under pressure forever. And so we really need to look back at our earliest building stock—from the 1920s, 1930s, in some cases, even 1910—that we have here in the neighborhood. And really, look to protect as many of those structures as we can, because they do age, almost like a fine wine.
As I look back on the history of our renaissance, let’s say over the last 15 years, there are very specific businesses that I can point to that I think are real game changers. One of the first was Azucar Ice Cream, where Suzy Batlle developed a one-of-a-kind Cuban-based ice cream. And then came the Ball & Chain, which was absolutely a catalyst. It showed fellow food and beverage operators in South Florida that we could drive very high-volume numbers out of an establishment like this. Calle Ocho and Little Havana were always overlooked. It was overlooked as a neighborhood that was an immigrant neighborhood, a neighborhood that really was not at the top of the hospitality game. And all of that has radically changed over the last few years. Many of my fellow food and beverage operators, top of class, are now in the neighborhood. They have great concepts and continue to drive the entertainment and the traffic to the neighborhood. I think that’s going to continue to grow in the near future.

Chris Rupp: What will drive the continued success of Little Havana?

Bill Fuller: The success of Little Havana is predicated on preserving the people that live here. It’s really, really important. They’re not just talking words. It’s really important that we find a way to embrace all of the different economic classes that have been part of the foundation of this neighborhood. It is what is the authentic part of Little Havana. It is what drives me and keeps us all grounded. That we are part of a real community, not a fabrication. And it’s important that we protect the people, because without the people, everything that we have protected then becomes, in a sense, superficial. So that is really the heartbeat. When we discuss El Corazon de Miami, we’re talking about the epicenter. Little Havana is the geographic epicenter of all of our great neighborhoods: The Grove, the Gables, the beach, North Miami. But really, the corazón, the heartbeat, is the people. It’s that force that really drives all the creativity and ambition that we see in the neighborhood.

Chris Rupp: Bill, tell us about the history of the Ball & Chain.

Bill Fuller: The Ball & Chain originally opened in 1935 and had 22 years of great history as being really important to the music
scene in South Florida. It hosted some of the best acts in the country at the time, including Count Basie, Billie Holiday, Chet Baker, and Lena Horne, until it closed actually in 1957. In 2013, we brought it back as best as we could with the storytelling, as if it had never closed. Today we have 90 hours of music produced live every week, and it’s become the musical heartbeat of the neighborhood.

Chris Rupp: Bill, you served as a board member for Dade Heritage Trust. What does the organization mean to you?

Bill Fuller: I’m proud to be a member of Dade Heritage Trust for several years and watch the growth of the organization. Now in its 50th year, it’s really an incredible institution. In South Florida and in Miami Dade, we’re very grateful to have the organization and all the great leadership behind it. Everybody is deeply passionate about it, and its message has really taken root. It has a great foundation to move forward into the future generations. Thank you. FJ

Chris Rupp is executive director of Dade Heritage Trust. Bill Fuller is the owner of the Ball and Chain in Little Havana.
A Conversation About Supporting Chinatowns and Cultural Preservation

Di Gao: Hi. I’m Di Gao, senior director of research and development at the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Welcome to the keynote plenary conversation on saving Chinatowns. Over the past year, I’ve been leading efforts at the National Trust to find ways that we can support historic Chinatowns through preservation, as Chinatowns across the country continue to find themselves in a fight for their survival. Chinatowns have been bastions of community resilience for over 170 years, but today, many of them find themselves facing a multitude of existential threats. In the wake of these challenges, we are exploring what activism and preservation looks like in Chinatowns today.

I am honored to be joined by award-winning cookbook author, culinary historian, and fierce activist for Chinatowns across the country, Grace Young. Among her many accolades, Grace is a three-time James Beard Foundation Award winner and a six-time International Association of Culinary Professionals’ award winner, including the 2021 Lifetime Achievement Award. She has authored numerous cookbooks and devoted much of her career to preserving the traditional iron wok, an endangered culinary tool that’s traditionally used in Chinese cooking. Her family has donated cookware to the Smithsonian Institution as significant artifacts for Chinese American culinary history. Grace has been named the Poet Laureate of the Wok by food historian Betty Fussell, and recently was dubbed the “Accidental Voice for Chinatown” by Grub Street for her advocacy for Chinatowns and Asian American and Pacific Islander small businesses across the country. This year, Grace received the Humanitarian of the Year Award from the James Beard Foundation and received the Julia Child Award at the Smithsonian. She’s partnered with many nonprofits to raise money and elevate the profile of Chinatown’s legacy businesses, and her activism has been widely chronicled. Grace, thank you for fighting for Chinatown, and thank you so much for being with us today.
Grace Young: It’s my pleasure. It’s a great honor to be here with you.

Di Gao: This year’s theme for our National Preservation Conference is “from vision to action.” Like many of us, I think you saw that Chinatowns were struggling and were in need, and you took action. Could you share your personal journey about what caused you to act?

Grace Young: Absolutely. I’m a Chinese cookbook author, so generally I’m in Chinatown two or three times a week to shop and to eat. In January of 2020, I was stunned to see that Chinatown suddenly emptied out because of xenophobia and misinformation. In New York City and across the country, Chinatowns were shunned. It was so painful to see that so many restaurants and shops lost 40, 60, and even 80 percent of their business.

On March 15th, 2020, I went to Chinatown with videographer Dan Ahn to interview restaurant and shop owners. It was my idea that if New Yorkers could hear the personal stories of all the hardships that they had gone through in January and February and the start of March, that we could rally support and bring business into Chinatown. The director of Poster House museum, Julia Knight, had contacted me, saying that she wanted to help Chinatown. When I told her this idea, she said, “If you do these videos, we will post them on the Poster House website.” So that’s how we ended up in Chinatown on Sunday, March 15th. Unbeknownst to us, that evening after we did the interviews, Mayor de Blasio would put New York City in lockdown. As we went into Chinatown to do these interviews, we were not prepared for what we discovered, that 70 percent of Chinatown restaurant owners had decided to close the following day because business was so bad.

One of the interviews we did was at Hop Kee, one of the oldest restaurants in Chinatown. The owner told us that he had no choice but to close the following day. Generally, when you go into Hop Kee, there’s a line out the door. That day when we arrived at Hop Kee, there was only one table that was occupied. Peter Lee, the owner/manager, brought us into the kitchen, and I’ve been in many, many Chinese restaurant kitchens in my life. They’re always the noisiest place in the world. That kitchen was silent because
there were no orders. I will always remember the looks on the faces of the dishwashers, the cooks, the waiters. Nobody knew what was about to happen, but I think all of us knew that we were in trouble. The faces of all those workers still haunts me today. Many of the employees at Hop Kee had been with Peter for 10, 20, even 30 years. I think doing these interviews on Sunday, March 15th, right before Chinatown shut down on one of Chinatown’s darkest days, profoundly affected me, and it inspired all the work that I ended up doing in the last two and a half years. I realized that so many of those workers had no voice, and that they had no way of getting their story out to the public.

After we did these videos, called “Coronavirus Chinatown Stories,” Mayor de Blasio put us into lockdown. Then in the latter part of March, April, and May, I made many walks into Chinatown with my husband. It was stunning because Chinatown looked like a Hollywood movie set of Chinatown. It was completely empty. Normally there’s bumper to bumper traffic going down Mott Street. There were no cars, no pedestrians. At that point, New York City was the epicenter of the pandemic. We had 700 to 800 deaths a day. For the first time in my life, I saw the real possibility of losing Chinatown. It was just chilling and devastating to see Chinatown emptied out like that.

By the time we reopened in June, there were legacy businesses that did not reopen. There was a little life in Chinatown, but nowhere near what Chinatown normally feels like. In 2019, New York City had 66.5 million tourists, and historic Chinatowns in San Francisco, New York, and Boston are dependent on tourism. In 2020, I would
venture to guess that there were no tourists whatsoever. Not only did we lose the tourists, but in Manhattan and lower Manhattan we lost workers. In San Francisco and Boston, Chinatowns are adjacent to the financial district. All of those workers suddenly disappeared. Chinatowns were really struggling to survive. Locals were afraid to come out for fear of catching COVID. I realized that even though I had never been an activist, I had to do everything in my power.

I reached out to every contact that I knew and drew on every skill that I had. Because I’m a cookbook author, I had some contacts with the media, and so I reached out to the local NPR station to do an interview to raise consciousness and raise public awareness that Chinatown needed our support. I wrote articles for different magazines like Food and Wine. Media reached out to me, like BBC and Today.com. I ended up raising money with a local grassroots organization called Welcome to Chinatown. I raised over $40,000 to save legacy businesses in Chinatown. Those restaurants fed people in the community that were dealing with food insecurity, who were on low income or seniors. I raised money to provide personal security alarms for seniors and workers in Chinatown. I started an Instagram campaign with the James Beard Foundation in 2020 to save Chinese restaurants. In 2021, it shifted to supporting AAPI—Asian American and Pacific Islander—mom
and pop businesses across the country. I just tried to do everything in my power to try and lift Chinatown up.

Di Gao: It sounds like you really drew on every connection and every tool you had access to and really leveraged your position. I want to back up a little bit for this audience and ask you what you love about Chinatown and what makes it so unique, and why it’s important to America that Chinatowns are saved.

Grace Young: Well, Chinatown is a vibrant living community, where every restaurant and store is one of a kind. Often, I feel when I go to Chinatown, it transports me to another world. There are moments I feel like I also take a little trip back in time. When I think about Chinatown, I think about some of my favorite places. I love to eat in Manhattan’s Chinatown at Hop Lee, which reminds me of the kinds of restaurants my father used to take me to. I would describe it as Cantonese soul food. When you go there in the daytime, I love to see that all the Chinatown postal workers have a table of their own. It’s all about community, and I call it sort of the “Cheers of Chinatown.” It’s a very special feeling being there.

In San Francisco’s Chinatown, I’m very, very fond of the Wok Shop. Tane Chan opened the store over 50 years ago, and when you go into this store, it’s mind blowing. It’s packed to the gills. It’s a very tiny shop, but with all of these treasures. They carry the old-fashioned traditional cast-iron Cantonese-style wok. Tane Chan is in her 80s now, and during the pandemic, never missed a day of work. She went into that shop every single day. She reduced hours, but she is a national treasure.
Here in Manhattan’s Chinatown, we just had the Mid-Autumn Festival. There’s a little Malaysian bakery called Kuih Cafe, and I posted on Instagram that they sold moon cakes for one day, and they are works of art. They are so gorgeous and even more delicious to eat. So there are all these little specialty things that you can find in Chinatown and only in Chinatown.

I love the people of Chinatown and their work ethic. Whether you’re in a restaurant or a store, most people work seven days a week, 10, 12, or 14 hours a day. During the pandemic, they showed even more grit and determination and dignity showing up when there was no business, or during times when there was the threat of anti-Asian hate crimes. Chinatown is a place to celebrate history and tradition and culture and fabulous food. I love that Chinatown is the story of America. For me, it represents one of the things that makes this country great. It’s about diversity and inclusiveness.

**Di Gao:** Wow, thank you so much for that vivid picture of what’s at stake and all that Chinatowns across the country have to offer. When we talk about saving Chinatowns, I think that can mean a lot of different things to different people. There’s a philosophical question in the preservation field, as well, about what it means to preserve something. When you talk about saving Chinatowns, what aspects of Chinatown do you talk about preserving or saving?

**Grace Young:** Well, I am always focused on the businesses. I know that there are so many different areas of Chinatown that are in need of help, but I feel as though if you don’t save the businesses, that just opens the door to gentrification and redevelopment. Right now in Chinatown in the last months, there’s a new pizza shop,
there’s coffee shops, bubble tea, ice cream, Korean fried chicken. I wish them all well, but to me, they are not Chinatown. If more of that happens as Chinatown becomes gentrified, we will lose Chinatown.

I think one of the things that is so important about Chinatown are the mom and pop businesses. In Manhattan’s Chinatown, 98 percent of the businesses are mom and pop. In San Francisco’s Chinatown, there are 1,000 family-owned businesses. I don’t know the stats for all the other Chinatowns in America, but they’re all mom and pop. I think that there was a time when mom and pop businesses were the backbone of America, and it’s what made this country so special. When you go to Chinatown, everything is done the old-fashioned way. It’s about people-to-people connections. It’s about sometimes cash-only businesses.

During the pandemic, all of us heard that online business has skyrocketed, and Amazon is making more money than they ever made. I understand that during the pandemic we needed to do online business because it was safer, and it was more convenient. But you have to consider the idea of scrolling, clicking, and then the next day the box arrives, versus going to Chinatown and supporting a little mom and pop business. I have never shopped at Fresh Direct or ordered groceries at Whole Foods and had it delivered to me. I love the experience of going to Chinatown and going to one store to buy my fish and another store to buy my produce.

One of the stores where I love to buy my produce is 88 Natural on Mulberry Street. It’s run by a husband and wife who get there early in the morning to set up and work all day. Roughly around 3 or 4 in the afternoon, their daughters arrive from school. Sometimes if you peek into a back room, you can see them doing their homework, or they’re eating a snack. When things get busy, they pop out and they help their mom and dad at the cash register, or they’re prepping vegetables. At the end of a long day, they all go home together, and you want them to succeed. I want to support that business rather than Amazon to make sure that they make it.

Every single one of those stores and businesses in Chinatown have a story that is similar to that. I think when we are supporting
mom and pop, our lives are richer. The experience of going to buy your groceries or eating in a restaurant, where the waiter knows what you want even before you open your mouth because you’ve come in so many times and they know what you like, is what makes our lives a fuller experience. I think that it’s really important right now to have this consciousness that when we’re saving Chinatowns, we’re actually saving small town USA the way America used to be.

**Di Gao:** You really highlight an important point. It’s not just the businesses. These businesses are family institutions, they’re cultural anchors, and they serve such important roles for the community. Are there other issues—you started talking about gentrification, displacement, continued fallout from the pandemic—that you want to elevate and let people know about that Chinatowns are still struggling with at this point in time?

**Grace Young:** Everyone suffered during the pandemic, but Chinatown suffered more. As I mentioned, at the start of the pandemic in January and February, business went down 40, 60, even 80 percent. For historic Chinatowns like San Francisco, New York, and Boston that are dependent on tourism, there were no tourists in 2020. So many of the Chinatown businesses have dealt with mounting debt. There are certainly landlords who were lenient and negotiated a lower rent, but I’ve heard enough stories about the landlords who were tough, who were hounding their tenants for the rent, even when we were in lockdown when they knew that their tenants were not taking in any income at all. The variety of hardships that Chinatowns have endured include not only the mounting debt, but also anti-Asian hate crimes. That’s had a huge impact on Chinatowns.

Right now in New York, San Francisco, and all across the country, Chinatowns used to be open late into the night. In the old days in Manhattan’s Chinatown, there were restaurants that were open until 4 a.m. Pre-pandemic, many restaurants were open until at least 1 a.m. Nowadays, many of the restaurants are closed at 7 or 8 o’clock in the evening, because there’s simply no business. That is because locals are afraid to come out at night. During the daytime and this past summer when the weather was warm, when
you’re in New York’s Chinatown, it actually feels a little pre-pandemic. There’s a vitality to it. But in the old days after work, lots of Chinese Americans and Asian Americans would swing by Chinatown on their way home from work and pick up groceries or have a meal. Nowadays because of safety issues, they go directly home. There are the smaller markets in Manhattan’s Chinatown that are closing at 4:30 or 5 o’clock. There are a few restaurants that are open until 10 o’clock, but I think 10 o’clock is now the cutoff point. Most restaurants are closed by 8 o’clock. In the spring of this year, in New York City, there was a small study that was done, and it revealed that 75 percent of Asian seniors are afraid to leave their homes. This really impacts the business in Chinatown. Without people feeling comfortable and safe, it limits how much restaurants are going to make, and they cannot survive if there is not dinner business. So it’s really critical that everyone else come into Chinatown.

Everyone, all businesses in America right now, are dealing with supply chain issues and inflation, but in Chinatown, the impact of inflation is even more dramatic. One restaurant owner told me pre-pandemic, the cost of cooking oil was $26, and now it’s more than doubled. It’s $59. The price of all foods has also gone up. But on top of that, the energy bills have gone up by a 100 percent. So pre-pandemic, they were paying $4,000 to $5,000 and now paying nearly $10,000.

When you think about Chinatown, most people expect inexpensive meals. There is a restaurant in Chinatown that pre-pandemic was selling lunch at $5.95. When you think about how they could make money for a lunch for $5.95, when you take into account the cost of their food, labor, rent, electricity, gas, water, garbage, insurance, what could the profit be? The Chinatown business model has always been reliant on selling volume. They set a very, very low price, but they’re hoping they are going to sell 200 or 300 lunches, and that’s the way they squeak by. When you have these rising prices because of inflation or energy costs are going up, it’s so hard for these businesses. The restaurant that had the $5.95 lunch now has a $7.50 lunch, and the owner says he’s not making money. He also gives away complimentary rice and a bowl of soup. And he
does it just to keep the doors open, hoping that the clients also come back for dinner. But the customer mindset is they want that inexpensive meal. There are a lot of challenges for Chinatown right now. I’m really worried because when it’s really cold in New York, you don’t even want to cross the street to get some orange juice. So that means that there’s also going to be a greater decline in business for Chinatowns all across the country.

Di Gao: It sounds like Chinatown is no stranger to crisis, but this is so much more sustained and long term to be suffering this lower level of foot traffic and lower level of business that’s really pushing things to the brink.

Grace Young: There’s actually one other issue that’s very important. Right now in New York City, they are talking about congestion pricing. Cars coming into New York will be charged a surcharge to enter the city, and they haven’t determined what that price is going to be. Many businesses in Chinatown are very worried about this because it means that Chinese Americans, Asian Americans, or Americans, in general, who want to come into the city to visit Chinatown might not do it if it is going to be $23. They might not come into Chinatown just to have their kids get a haircut and to have a lunch of dim sum because everyone has to tighten their belts right now. There are multiple challenges facing Chinatown even though the pandemic is over.

Di Gao: When we talk about preservation, I think a lot of people think that it only focuses on the buildings. So I think this conversation is really interesting around the lifeblood and cultural assets of Chinatowns being the legacy businesses. I came across some words that you used in an article to describe your journey, as you realized you have always been a preservationist and your life’s work has come into sharp focus. I want to hear in your words, what does being a preservationist mean to you?

Grace Young: My work as a Chinese cookbook author has always been about preserving recipes that are at risk of being lost. I’ve always been fascinated with getting recipes from the older cooks, because I think there is so much wisdom in the old ways, and I’ve been so focused on the traditions of wok cooking. But as
the pandemic unfolded, I shifted my focus to saving Chinatowns. At first it did not sink in, but I realized that I was of course trying to save one of the great centers for Chinese cuisine and culture. But in fact, I am also preserving a piece of the American story.

Chinese food has such a long history in America, which dates back to the mid-1800s. There is this wonderful author, Jennifer 8. Lee, who wrote a book called “The Fortune Cookie Chronicles. In the book, she talks about the fact that we think of apple pie as being the quintessential American food, but when was the last time you had apple pie, and when was the last time you had Chinese food? And for most people, they eat Chinese food more often than they have apple pie. If you Google “what is the most popular ethnic food in America,” it’s Chinese food that comes up. I think most people don’t even think of it this way, but Chinese cuisine in America is an important part of the American culinary landscape. I’ve always thought about how I’m preserving the traditions of Chinese culture, but now I realize that I’m preserving a piece of American history when I fight to save Chinatowns and mom and pop businesses. There’s a vast array of different Asian cuisines that you will find in Chinatown, and all of them are part of the American story.

Di Gao: That is so beautifully said. Thank you for that. You had brought up a common understanding of preservation that you yourself held before we started talking, which is that people often think that preservation focuses on the distant past or the “long dead past,” and it’s not really relevant to people today. I wonder what could show communities like Chinatown that preservation is a tool for good?

Grace Young: Well, I think that without preservation, there will be the loss of Chinatown as a way of life. All those stores that I feel are so unique and special—from the herb shops to where you can find artisanal tofu in Chinatown bakeries—there’s so much richness in Chinatown. Here in Manhattan’s Chinatown, you only have to look at Little Italy to understand what the ramifications are if we don’t save Chinatown. Right now, Little Italy is just a tourist destination, it’s like Disneyland. The restaurants are geared toward tourists. There are only two remaining markets. It used to be a vital community, and it’s all been stripped away.
One of the things that came up during the pandemic was in April of 2020, I read a CNN report that 59 percent of independently-owned Chinese restaurants in America had ceased their credit card and debit card transactions, implying that they had permanently closed. In the same news piece, it said that P.F. Chang’s, which is the largest chain of Chinese restaurants in this country, had received PPP loans and their sales had doubled. At that time, I thought to myself, “Oh my God, are we going to lose all the little mom and pop restaurants that have so much character and make Chinese food so interesting in this country and be left with the equivalent of the Olive Garden of Chinese food?” Now, as I see Chinatown struggling, there is a P.F. Chang’s that opened in the financial district in 2020. There’s another one opening up about a mile or so from Chinatown, and I think there’s another one about 2 miles away. So if we do not take action and actively preserve and support Chinatown, I fear that we will be left with just big chain Chinese food restaurants.

**Di Gao:** Yes, it seems like so many Chinatowns are battling for their soul right now with commercial development. They are also facing issues around razor-thin margins and inequities and access to incentives and other sources of public support because of issues like language barriers and lack of translation. Thank you for sharing with us some of those challenges. I want to end on a question about how people can act to save Chinatowns. If people walked away from the session today with one to-do item, what would you say people can do to support their local Chinatowns and help their survival?

**Grace Young:** I think it’s really important to make an active effort to support your local Chinatown frequently. And not just to eat in the restaurants, but to shop in the markets and the stores. When I go to Chinatown, I ask my friends or my neighbors if there’s anything I can pick up for them—some takeout, some produce. Do you want the mangoes, the baby bok choy, some fresh ginger? I’m happy to do that, because every little bit counts. It is important to actively do less online shopping and to go into Chinatown and experience how wonderful it is to shop from these little mom and
pops. You can find everything in Chinatown. It’s not just Asian ingredients. You can find milk, yogurt, you can buy paper towels, there’s tons of pharmacies, you can get your drug prescription filled in Chinatown. In New York’s Chinatown, there are a ton of eyeglasses stores. Chinatown is infinite in what it has to offer.

I urge people to support their local Chinatown. If you don’t have a local Chinatown, support your local AAPI mom and pop businesses, because they’ve all been suffering during the pandemic. Or remind your friends and relatives who live in cities that do have Chinatowns that they need to show up.

**Di Gao:** That is fantastic. And an absolute last question. What’s next for you, Grace? Are there any exciting campaigns or projects in the pipeline that you would like to share?

**Grace Young:** I’m partnering with the James Beard Foundation on a national social media campaign called #SupportChinatowns that we are launching on November 15th of this year. We are reaching out to famous chefs and celebrities to share their Chinatown story. So many of us have a special love for Chinatown and tips for things that we love to eat or do in Chinatown. We want to gather up those stories and memories as a tribute to Chinatown and to raise public awareness that we can’t take Chinatown for granted. The idea is to have this outpouring of love and support for Chinatown and that it’s a way to recognize that Chinatowns are an important part of American life. I hope all of you will do a post about why you love Chinatown and use the hashtag #SupportChinatowns.

**Di Gao:** Thank you so much, Grace. I’m really excited about this continued partnership to protect Chinatowns for future generations. I will end on one of my favorite quotes from Grace, even though I can’t possibly say it any better than she has said during this session: “Chinatowns and the businesses within them are links to our past, and when we lose our past, we lose a part of ourselves.” That’s why this work is so important. Thank you all again, and please enjoy the rest of the conference. FJ

GRACE YOUNG is an award-winning cookbook author, culinary historian, and fierce activist for Chinatowns across the country. DI GAO is the senior director of research and development at the National Trust for Historic Preservation.
Robert Stanton: Greetings and a warm welcome to “A Presidential Conversation; Preserving the Legacy of our Historically Black Colleges and Universities.” This session is brought to you by the African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund at the National Trust for Historic Preservation. We are honored, we are privileged to have three distinguished university college presidents with us for this session. We have Dr. Cynthia Warrick from Stillman College in Tuscaloosa, Alabama; Dr. Logan Hampton from Lane College in Jackson, Tennessee; and Dr. David Wilson, president of Morgan State University in Baltimore.

Before we get underway, let me again, on behalf of the presidents, express our deep gratitude to Brent Leggs and Tiffany Tolbert at the National Trust for Historic Preservation for extending to us this warm and very generous opportunity to share with you our thoughts, our perspectives, our visions, our hopes, our dreams about the future of preserving the legacy of our—of our—Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). So, let’s get started.

I am honored and humbled to serve as your moderator, and I’m a graduate of a historically Black university, Huston-Tillotson University in Austin, Texas. If I were sitting in a hall of Congress, I would use the expression to ask my fellow presidents to maybe yield the balance of their time so I could speak all afternoon about Huston-Tillotson University. But that would not be appropriate. As we know, our HBCUs own and steward a diverse and impressive collection of historic sites, historic landscapes, buildings, and archives. The management and conservation of these heritage resources are invaluable to the understanding of HBCUs’ legacy. It is also critically important to attract students, faculty, and administrators who seek a unique cultural and educational experience. In essence, historic preservation, whether on a formal or informal
basis, can help distinguish HBCUs from other academic institutions. It really is an advantage, a competitive advantage. So let me ask our distinguished presidents a couple of questions at the outset.

What is your perspective on historic preservation? How has your school integrated historic preservation into your broader academic mission and campus planning activities? Let me start with Dr. Hampton at Lane College.

Logan Hampton: Well, thank you, and thank you for this forum and an opportunity to tell the story of Lane College and historic preservation. Certainly, it’s just been a part of the fabric of our institution. We began in 1882 as the first institution of learning for what was, at that point, the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church. The church itself was founded in 1870. And just fresh out of slavery, just on the other side of reconstruction, our founders thought that next to soul salvation, educating ministers and educating teachers that would then educate the populous was their highest priority. I’m always interested by that notion. Their thought was to get about equipping those newly free former forced laborers to participate in society, to contribute to society, and to pursue education. That process began at the founding of our institution as soon as the persons were set free. That’s a transforming thought and a liberating thought and something that we ought to celebrate.

Throughout our history, that has continued. We are providing education and opportunity to those persons who might not have access to education, helping students to fully establish the power of their potential.

Today, our conversation is an interesting conversation in that we talk about historic preservation. A part of our work in historic preservation is that I sit in this space that you’re looking at now, which is one of the original spaces that was built on our campus. In fact, one of our local historians reminds me that when Bishop Lane raised $240 to buy a property, he bought 4 acres right here on the former Hayes Forced Labor Camp. This space where the current administration building sits is in about the same place where the “big house” was set. As my students might say, “I feel some type of way about that.” I’m not sure how I feel about that,
but this space and this place was a former forced labor camp. And it is now a seat of education and has been now for 140 years.

Preserving that history, I think every day when I wake up that I stand on the shoulders of those 41 former forced laborers who founded our church, and, J.K. Daniels himself, who in 1878 made the motion to establish a school of learning in Tennessee. And Bishop Lane, who then took on the great work of raising the money and founding this school. Every day I’m reminded as I wake on this holy hill and begin my work that I do, that I, in fact, stand on their shoulders. Historic preservation is more than just a notion for us of holding, preserving a facility. It is who we are, and it is a legacy that we live and that we continue even today.

**Robert Stanton:** Dr. Cynthia Warrick, please tell us about Stillman College in Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

**Cynthia Warrick:** Well, thank you Mr. Stanton, and thank you colleagues for sharing these stories. The history of Lane College is very interesting and somewhat similar to Stillman College. Stillman was founded in 1876 by the pastor of First Presbyterian Church here in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. He was the white pastor at a time when the constitution of Alabama changed to make it illegal to educate African Americans in public schools. That ushered in Jim Crow, and he went to the general assembly of the Presbyterian Church and asked to start a school to educate Black ministers. He started the school in his house at first, and his house is still standing. It’s owned by the National Alumni Association and is on the National Register of Historic Places and is also an Alabama Historic Landmark.

After a few years, he bought the old Cochran Plantation, which is where we sit today, on 105 acres, which housed 71 slaves in its time during slavery. The columns on the plantation house were saved and placed on our current Sheppard Library. The columns and the capitals were imported Italian marble and wrought iron capitals. A piece of the history of that plantation house where they used to hold classes remains on our campus on the library.

The campus is on the Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage and we are a National Register listed historic district.
There are three buildings contributing to the district, the oldest building being Winsborough Hall, which was built by the Presbyterian women in 1922. Then there’s Snedecor Hall. The Presbyterian women built it, as well, because there was no Negro hospital in Tuscaloosa. The Presbyterian women decided first to build a girls school and a dormitory because there weren’t any women at Stillman, and then they said, “Well, there’s no healthcare in the community, so we’re going to build a hospital and a nursing program.” The third building is the Sheppard Library, where the capitals and columns stand.

Historic preservation is very important to Stillman. It tells the history of Stillman. It tells the history of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and African Americans in this community. Most have a connection to Stillman. It’s the anchor in the west end of town, which is the historic African American community. It is the largest contiguous landowner in the community. One of the things that we’re doing with the support of the National Trust and the National Park Service is raising funds to restore Winsborough Hall, which is in significant disrepair. We are also renovating, Sheppard Library. It is being converted to a civil rights museum and digital learning center to tell the story because there’s no place that is telling the story of civil rights at Stillman and Tuscaloosa.

I think when people think about Alabama and civil rights, they think about Birmingham and Selma, but Tuscaloosa had marches,
and they had a Bloody Tuesday that occurred prior to the Selma march. They had sit-ins, bus boycotts. All of the things that were taking place in Montgomery and Birmingham and Selma took place in Tuscaloosa, but no one knows that history. We feel that Stillman will be able to share that history with the community and the nation. Many Stillman students participated in the marches and the national Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the sit-ins and certainly were injured and arrested during Bloody Tuesday.

This history is a history of America, it’s a history that needs to be preserved, and these buildings connect us to that history. Restoring them on our campuses is very important.

Robert Stanton: Excellent, excellent Dr. Warrick. Dr. Wilson at Morgan State University in Baltimore, please share with us the history of Morgan State and some of your current developments there.

David Wilson: First of all, let me express my appreciation to the National Trust for Historic Preservation for having me and President Warrick and President Hampton to talk about our incredible institutions and their legacies. I think this is an enormously important conversation, and I cannot think of a better place to have it and a better umbrella in which this conversation will take place. We at Morgan, like you heard from President Hampton at Lane and President Warrick at Stillman, have been around for a while. It came into existence in 1867; we are now in our 155th year. Morgan’s founding is not too dissimilar from that of many of the other 100-plus HBCUs. We were established by five visionary African American ministers, of which one of them was newly freed from a southern Maryland plantation. His “master,” if you will, gave him his freedom. But there was a law in place at the time called the Fugitive Slave Act, and it said that if individuals were caught on the southern side of the Mason-Dixon Line, even if they were free, they could be returned to their “masters” or go to jail. One of these individuals who actually was credited with implementing this fire within the ministry for the founding of Morgan was the late Rev. Samuel L. Green. He left that plantation and was caught by fugitive bounty hunters, and they sentenced him to 10 years in a
Baltimore city penitentiary, of which he served five. He could read, he could write. His crime was that he was in possession of Uncle Tom’s Cabin, the Harriet Beecher Stowe book. His desire was to establish an institution to enable Blacks who would be coming out of slavery to cultivate their minds. It became even more urgent for him while he was in the penitentiary. When he was released out of the penitentiary, he then led the movement to establish the Seminary Biblical Institute, which is now, of course, Morgan State University. Rev. Samuel Green is depicted in the movie Harriet and was the minister of the church that actually was responsible for helping Harriet Tubman on numerous treks back to Maryland to free slaves.

The history of Morgan is one that is rooted in activism. We cannot run away from that. That activism started with Rev. Samuel Green, and it persists at the university. It persists in terms of our curriculum. It persists in terms of our structures. What I like to say about our institutions, about HBCUs, is that they really are tangible edifices of the hopes and the aspirations of the slaves. We here at Morgan, like our other HBCU sisters and brothers, we understand what that means. It’s not just about the structures, it’s how do you also align curriculum in a way that’s going to tell the historical story. That’s what we do here. We excavate the history. We make no apology about the fact that when you walk our campus, you cannot divorce that historic walk from a walk to freedom and the fight for everyone to be a part of the American ideals embedded in the Constitution.

We have moved from that founding in 1867, where we had nine students and two professors, to today, where we have close to 9,000 students coming from 44 states and over 70 countries. We’re offering 150 academic degree programs, and about 75 percent of our students are African American. We stand as a very proud institution in the American higher education landscape. Institutions like Morgan and Stillman and Lane and others, they must be enhanced, they must be preserved, because if that does not happen, we would almost consciously be removing such an important part of our history from our landscape. As Maya Angelou said, “History cannot be unlived.” We are not about unliving the history, but we are about being the true storytellers of it.
Robert Stanton: All of us can appreciate our colleges and universities as they continue to grow, continue to expand to meet the needs of our educational objectives, and certainly encourage our students to seek a wide variety of professional occupations. Recognizing that our universities, our campuses are growing, what measures are you taking to assure that modern construction to meet current and future needs is compatible with preserving the integrity of buildings that were constructed shortly after the Civil War? Many of these buildings were constructed by students themselves. How do you maintain that historic integrity of our legacy with modern-day needs?

David Wilson: Well, we are fortunate at Morgan to have presented to the state of Maryland over the last 12 years a case for state investment in the capital aspect of our campus. We are in the middle of a $1 billion capital enhancement of the campus. If you come to the campus, you’ll see that in the last seven or eight years, we have built some pretty impressive academic facilities. They’re still going up as I speak, but one thing that is extraordinarily clear to us is that we understand those legacy buildings and the stories that those legacy buildings are telling. The new buildings must have some kinship with those stories, in terms of the structures and in terms of what happens within their walls.

*Legacy buildings at Morgan State University.*

PHOTO BY PAUL BURK
We’ve been on our current site for 105 years. We were built on a quarry in the northeast corner of Baltimore County before it was annexed into the city. Many of those early legacy buildings, the stone actually came from that quarry. When you come to Morgan and you look at those legacy buildings, you will not see a redbrick building as a part of our historic legacy here. With the newer buildings, there are still no redbrick buildings. That’s just baked into our master plan. The board of regents expects us to execute it. The faculty is expecting that. The students are expecting that, and certainly our alumni who had those experiences in those legacy buildings. With all of the contemporary facilities that we are seeing, they make sure that they are not standing out like a sore thumb.

To conclude, we are doing two things. Number one, we are carefully orchestrating a master plan to renovate some of our legacy buildings, saving the exteriors but bringing them to a higher degree of functionality. Number two, we are making sure that we are true to the historic presence of those buildings on this campus that must always occupy a prominent place on the Morgan campus.

Robert Stanton: Dr. Warrick, you mentioned earlier about how some of the richness of the buildings on your campus have been recognized nationally and that they’re listed on the National Register of Historic Places. I would like for you to comment a little bit about your vision, your development plans to increase facilities on your campus, but also to do it in such a way that it does not interfere with the integrity of your historic structures. And lastly, it would be my hope that all of our HBCUs will ultimately seek the kind of recognition that you have there at Stillman College in terms of being listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Cynthia Warrick: We have a master planning team similar to what President Wilson was sharing, and our master plan team works with the historic architects. Most of our historic campus in the district is in the quad at the very front of the campus. It takes up a big bulk, and the quad has very old magnolia trees that share this space with these historic structures.

As you know, historic preservation is very expensive and it takes a long time to do, because once you start working on one
piece, you find out that something else is wrong. That’s where we are with Sheppard Library and the columns. We got some funding from the state of Alabama to work on the facade and the roof and the awnings. We started to take the paint off of the columns, which came from the original plantation house. They have lead-based paint on them. As we were removing the paint, we found out there are a lot of cracks and other kinds of fissures on the columns. Now we’ve had to have our architect come in and make recommendations on what we need to do to protect the integrity of the columns before we can put the capitals back on the top of them. It’s a slow process, and certainly is a very expensive process. As much as possible, we go back to the original type of materials that were used or preserve existing historic materials on the building. We don’t take the windows out and put in new windows. We find aesthetic ways to deal with the Americans with Disabilities Act, as we have to be mindful of the people who come to the building. We find innovative ways to access the space by persons with disabilities. Our master plan team works closely with architects and planners in order to ensure the historic integrity is retained, but also that new buildings complement the existing campus architecture.

Like Dr. Wilson mentioned, we have a lot of red brick in different periods of time, buildings from the ‘20s then the ‘40s and the ‘50s and the ‘60s, and now the 21st-century architecture is different. We try to complement the existing historic campus so when you come on the campus you know it’s all Stillman, it doesn’t look like someplace from a different century.

Robert Stanton: Dr. Hampton, you spoke earlier about your plans and vision in terms of continuing to expand the physical assets of your campus. Can you elaborate a little bit on that?

Logan Hampton: Going back to your original question of “how do you go about this,” the first word or words that popped into my head were “very carefully.” The first thought that came to my mind was when we were needing to replace the windows in Cleaves Hall, which was historically the female residence hall. At the time that it was built in 1921, it coincided with the building of the steam plant. It was one of those
moments in history where you could live at Lane College, live in a residence hall, and you had steam heat. I am fond of saying that we were uptown, it was the place to live on campus in 1921. But when we got ready to change those windows, it was just more than a notion. It took us the better part of a year to plan it and then to find a contractor who had nerve enough to execute it. Afterward, when you look at the current Cleaves Hall, the building looks the same. We did not impact the historic accuracy of it.

This work is unique and exciting work. I have the benefit of serving in Bray Hall. To students of a generation, they consider this building the Administration Building. They don’t know it as Bray Hall. It was renovated in the early 2000s. For those students of a generation who will come during homecoming and meet me in my office, they will tell me that this office was their math class. I am honored to serve in their math class.

I say all that to say, it is very painstakingly careful work that we do to maintain our facilities, in the same way that my colleagues have master plans. At Lane College, we were blessed to be able to receive a grant to plan the restoration of J.K. Daniels Hall. That is a hall that has just been an absolute workhorse of a building for our
institution. It is the hall that we are currently looking to restore. It was originally established as the Industries and Trades Building, and in that building it had shoe making, auto mechanics, tailoring, agriculture. As I think about the history, we cycle back around to thinking about how, as a liberal arts institution, do we prepare students to work in industries that are highly technical.

In response to that, we have established our Career Pathways Initiative, which allows students who are pursuing liberal arts, baccalaureate degrees an opportunity to develop stackable technical credentials that in some cases would prepare them to compete for entry-level jobs in manufacturing or the technology or the digital space. Those skills would allow them to get in the door so that then they could use their higher-order skills that we teach them in their liberal arts education—the scholar skills, scholar habits, the thinking, the theoretical kind of skills.

It is interesting to me that we have cycled all the way back around to the original purpose for that building. It has served for us as the Industries and Trades Building, but shortly after it was established, a floor of it was being used as a library. Later it was renovated in the early 1950s and the entire building was used as
a library. Now today it is used as a building where we have a number of services. Our security is in there, and it serves as an office building and provides some services to our campus community. As we think about it in the future and as a part of our master plan, we are reconceiving how we might use that building and are beginning to move back to its original use, in a modern-day sense, as an Industries and Trades Building where students are able to do one-stop shopping and earn stackable credentials.

Robert Stanton: It is so inspiring just to reflect on the richness of our legacy as manifested by our Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Those that are privately endowed and those that are state supported. It’s just a fascinating history. Interestingly enough, part of one campus is administered directly by the National Park Service, and that is the Tuskegee Institute National Historic Site, which encompasses The Oaks, the home of president Booker T. Washington, built by the students. and the library and laboratory used by Dr. George Washington Carver, again built by the students. When Congress passed legislation authorizing the Tuskegee Institute’s historic site as a unit of the park system, that elevated the richness of our HBCUs in the halls of Congress and reminded us that we should, as a nation, have a perpetual responsibility of preserving this rich chapter in our collective history.

I want to share with the listening audience that I want to commend each of you and your respective campuses for being a recipient of the HBCU grant under the Cultural Heritage Stewardship Initiative administered by Brent Leggs and Tiffany Tolbert. Congratulations on that. We are certainly indebted to the National Trust for Historic Preservation. We’re indebted to the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the National Park Service, and many other organizations that have contributed. But we must continue to build up on the past and the present in going forward.

Let me ask sort of a general question. As presidents and leaders of three of our leading universities and colleges, and knowing that you contribute to the social, cultural, and economic health of your individual states and individual communities, what are your ideas and needs for growing historic preservation impacts
on your campuses? In other words, if you could leave this with one big idea, a suggestion to support your efforts, what would be that one big idea, what would be that vision? What would be that dream? And let me just pigeonhole the thought, too, that in 2026, we will celebrate, we will observe, we will commemorate the good, bad, and indifference of the 250th anniversary of the founding of this nation. I am very privileged to serve as an advisory member of a council established by the organization responsible for planning jointly with the states, their political subdivision, and others, how we may commemorate in 2026 the 250th anniversary. I would like to be able to put it on the table how we as a nation can stand and salute and recommit ourselves to preserving the richness of our Historically Black Colleges and Universities. I would invite you to give me your vision and your dream and your hope that I can carry to the leaders at the national level as to where we can individually and collectively recommit ourselves to preserving the legacy of our HBCUs.

**Cynthia Warrick:** Well, thank you so much. I appreciate all of the insight and experience that you’ve shared through all of your time in historic preservation and certainly as an HBCU alum. I was thinking about what you said about the preservation and practice, and that’s what we think about learning by doing. The National Trust in their HBCU grant program did provide funds to hire an existing student to work on the planning of these projects. I think that was a great step forward in terms of getting more knowledge about historic preservation out there to these students, and we just need to do more of that. But the other area that I think could gain some attention would be through environmental justice. When we think about environmental justice, and you think about like what Logan Hampton said about where our institutions are located in those communities that have no investment from anywhere, that, to me, is an environmental justice issue. It’s an environmental justice issue when we allow these historic properties to go unrepaired and unrestored. I think we need to have the historic preservation of HBCUs become part of the environmental justice conversation, part of the federal government’s environmental
justice working group, really, so we can have multiple agencies contributing to support these campuses, these national treasures, these landmarks that contribute not only to the National Park Service’s mission but also [to the departments of] education, energy, environmental protection, health and human services, Department of Defense. All of these agencies have a role to play in improving the environmental justice issues at HBCUs and certainly having historic preservation as part of that dialogue and action.

Logan Hampton: I was pleased that you began that with Dr. Warrick. She has been really my mentor in kind of thinking big about how to engage agencies, governments, et cetera, in helping us to solve our problems. I do want to just lift up this notion that this is our nation, all of us. It belongs to all of us. These institutions, these Historically Black Colleges and Universities are all of ours. They are all of our institutions, and because they exist, some would argue, we have a Black middle class. Because they exist, our nation has been sustained. Because they exist, we are an exceptional nation, and as a result, these institutions deserve our investments.

I do want acknowledge—and thank you Dr. Warrick for again reminding me—that our students have been very much engaged in this process and in this conversation about historic preservation. It’s been a part of our history seminars. I had two students, Tarik McKinzie and Shea Thompson, who are graduates who worked on our project with J.K. Daniels Hall and have lifted up J.K. Daniels as a founder of our institution. Chase Cameron, who is a senior this year, is on the planning team for the future plans of J.K. Daniels, working with our architectural group. I was meeting with a group of scholars about another matter just last week, and the historic St. Paul CME Church where many Lane students of a generation attended chapel is now a building owned by the college. It is not on the historic register. I had two students, Keith and Tiffany, who asked the question, “How do we get a building on the historic register? And how can we help?” Those students are very much interested. Our students are very much interested in this work, and the means and ways in which the government and others can provide resources and opportunities for those students to engage fully would be helpful to us at this level.
David Wilson: Let me echo what both of my colleagues have said. I think the ideas are quite original and compelling. I would just offer perhaps a few things to think about. Number one, there is no accredited preservation program at an HBCU, and this particular industry is largely white and largely male and it is grossly under-represented. And I’m not being self-serving. I’m the president, but we believe that Morgan is the only HBCU with this kind of broad academic mission in preservation, which includes training for students in architecture and landscape architecture and planning and construction management and engineering and history and museum studies. We are seeking here to become a national leader in training Black preservation professionals, leveraging this broad academic mission of ours through the efforts of Professor Dale Green in our School of Architecture and Planning, who, by the way, is a descendant of one of our founders, Rev. Samuel Green. We are moving forward to hopefully formally establish the first historic preservation program at an HBCU in the country, that’s number one.

Number two, in terms of another kind of idea to grapple with, I really began to understand historic preservation as an undergraduate student at Tuskegee. The Oaks and the Hollis Burke Frissell Library and the laboratory of George Washington Carver. I was just overwhelmed by the history. Even as an undergraduate, we would go and visit other HBCUs, and I tried to connect that history that I was living every single day with what I was being exposed to on some of the other HBCU campuses. And wow, I could have emerged from those experiences being the most educated undergraduate student in America about African American history without having taken 20 academic credits, just from those experiences. I would say, is it worth serious cogitation for us to think about something that we may call a national HBCU historic trail, where the goal of public-private partnership may be to raise, I’ll just throw it out there, $50 billion. And then connect the story of, if you will, the maturation of America seen through the eyes of the HBCUs, and map that trail out so individuals can begin to travel this country in a very organized way, and be exposed to these stories, if you will, from Cheyney University outside of Philadelphia,
perhaps all the way over to Langston University in Oklahoma. You put together that trail very carefully. I think there’s an opportunity here for a serious public-private partnership that could have a large funding goal. When that is invested on each of the individual campuses, it would go a long way toward helping us to seriously protect these legacies. At the same time, it would create this powerful narrative that we could begin to expose a large swath of America to that they may not get in the history books of their local K-12 schools. We have a country that is bereft of a significant portion of its history. I think we need to get out in front of that and preserve these stories and elevate them to a higher level of consciousness on the part of our nation.

Robert Stanton: Let me thank you on behalf of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, individually and collectively, for your insights, your wisdom, your leadership, your accomplishments, and your unwavering commitment to stay on the journey. This has been so, so uplifting. I’m privileged to serve as a member of the Advisory Council for the African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund under the leadership of Brent Leggs. A fellow member is the Honorable Jim Clyburn, and over the course of my National Park Service career, we worked very closely with him. As you know, he’s a graduate of South Carolina State, and he’s been one of the strongest supporters of the appropriations for HBCUs that is administered by the National Park Service. Over the past 20 or 30 years, something like roughly under $90 million has been awarded to HBCUs, and I think in this year’s appropriation it’s $10 million. As long as Congressman Clyburn is there, I think that he’ll continue to influence his colleagues.

This has just been absolutely outstanding. Dr. Wilson, I have recorded your suggestion for a national historic trail of HBCUs, and I was privileged as the director to administer the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom. This could be something similar. So with your permission, I’m going to take that forth as something that should be considered by my colleagues in the National Park Service, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the National Trust.
This conversation could go on for days, and I hope that we’ll continue to stay connected. President Wilson, you referenced Harriet Tubman. Her spirit burns deeply within each of us. Her legacy is not only commemorated at the place of her birth on the plantation in eastern Maryland, but she’s also commemorated at a similar historic site in her last place of residence in New York. I salute you, I encourage you. In the words of Harriet Tubman, simply this: “Keep going, keep going. When things are difficult, keep going.” We cannot do less if we are to honor our ancestors and encourage this in future generations. I am so proud and so privileged to have been a part of this family. Thank you very much. FJ

ROBERT STANTON is the former director of the National Park Service. DR. LOGAN HAMPTON is president of Lane College. DR. CYNTHIA WARRICK is president of Stillman College. DR. DAVID WILSON is president of Morgan State University.