

# ForumJournal

VOL. 32, NO. 4

## Intangible Heritage



National Trust *for* Historic Preservation

**Preservation  
Leadership Forum**

# Historic Preservation Without Place

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When the general public thinks about historic preservation, they envision house museums, historic neighborhoods, and battlefields. But we know that many important histories cannot be attached to place, because the buildings were demolished, landscapes paved over, communities redeveloped, leaving little evidence of the tangible places that once existed. Often, these erased places relate to the histories of marginalized communities—minorities, people of color, immigrants, the working poor. These histories we now recognize are equally foundational to who we are as a nation as the histories of political leaders, captains of industry, and war heroes. To preserve the history of marginalized communities, it is often necessary to focus on intangible heritage—elements of culture such as community traditions, dialect, music, art, craft, and cuisine. In the following pages, you will find wide ranging explorations of this theme.

While most of the articles in this issue focus on specific communities and the efforts to preserve intangible heritage, others take a broader view of the topic. We explore the work to preserve intangible heritage in African American, Latinx, Vietnamese American, immigrant, and coal mining communities throughout America in places as disparate as San Diego; Pennsylvania Coal Country; Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Arlington, Virginia. But first we position intangible heritage within the context of historic preservation. In the preservation of places, for example, there is a legal framework guiding the protection of historic sites. With intangible heritage, such legal protections are also starting to take shape. Another article evaluates validity of intangible heritage, asking “If heritage is itself intangible, how can there be an intangible version of it?” I’ll leave that for you to decide.