Saving America’s Treasures

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Los Angeles, California
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Cliff Palace at Mesa Verde, Calif. (Photo courtesy of HABS/HAER)
The Tenement Museum, N.Y. (Photo courtesy of the Tenement Museum)
Fort Monroe, Hampton Roads, Va. (Photo courtesy of the Department of the Army)
Preservationists Look to the Future

The 2000 National Preservation Conference presented a perfect opportunity to explore trends affecting historic preservation in coming years. To this end, the National Trust

• Chose Los Angeles as the host city, providing a diverse, future-oriented venue.
• Selected the theme Saving America’s Treasures in the 21st Century, playing on the name of this important national program and projecting it into the future.
• Joined with the J. Paul Getty Trust to host a small symposium in September 1999 to explore future trends and their impact on preservation issues and to help plan the Los Angeles conference.

Partnered with leading national and California organizations and agencies, as well as hundreds of Los Angeles preservationists, to enrich our exploration.

At the Getty symposium national, state, and local preservation leaders undertook actual scenario planning, in which small groups representing major points of view chart the future according to their respective interests. This process provided filters for us to recognize key trends in the myriad of events unfolding each day. While we decided not to undertake scenario planning at the actual conference, the symposium led to selection of our two keynote speakers, special sessions focused on the future, a range of interactive sessions, and a new international dimension.

Our two keynote speakers explored two polar viewpoints in looking at the future. Stewart Brand, internationally known futurist, addressed a world of ever-accelerating change driven by technological advances. Yet his message was that, amidst such change, the role of preservationists is to take the long view, to be “keepers of the fabric of civilization.” Lorraine Johnson-Coleman, a superb storyteller, spoke to our hearts and souls in reminding us that, ultimately, people, their relationships,
and their heritage are what matter, regardless of how quickly technology changes our lives.

Other speakers addressed the future from diverse, important perspectives and priorities. Central to these was the report on building the preservation movement by National Trust President Richard Moe. The next issue of the Forum Journal will continue this dialog with articles based on presentations about the impact of the digital revolution by business/urban writer Joel Kotkin, and the consequences of population changes by demographer Chris Ertel.

All of us involved in planning and organizing the conference hope that you find these presentations both stimulating in your thoughts about the future and valuable in your current work.

Peter H. Brink is senior vice president of Programs at the National Trust for Historic Preservation.
At the recent National Preservation Conference in Los Angeles, I was delighted to present the National Trust President's Award to members of the 710 Opposition Coalition, a Los Angeles group that has been working for years to prevent the construction of the last segment of the 710 Freeway in that city. First proposed in the 1950s, this freeway would devastate stable neighborhoods, seriously impact six National Register historic districts, destroy nearly 1,000 homes, and displace 3,500 people in the communities of Pasadena and South Pasadena and the El Sereno neighborhood of Los Angeles.

The National Trust has had long and extensive involvement in this issue. The threatened communities were on our “11 Most Endangered” list for an unprecedented five years, from 1989 to 1993. We’ve been party to ongoing litigation, and our staff—particularly in our law department and the Western Office—has worked hard to keep this issue in the public eye and to urge the adoption of alternatives to this enormously destructive and unnecessary project.

I’m proud of what the Trust has done—but our role has been modest compared to the amazing effort put forth by the members of the 710 Opposition Coalition, who have been working to stop this highway for more than 35 years. Their work has paid off, and is continuing to do so. Last year they won a landmark federal court decision enjoining construction of the freeway, and this year the city of Pasadena, which had supported the highway for 33 years, reversed its position and resolved to oppose its construction.

The fight isn’t won yet, but I’m confident that it will be.

What the 710 Opposition Coalition has been doing is what historic preservation is all about: saving places we care about. It’s happening all over America—and the more I travel, and the more I hear about what’s happening in community after community, the more I’m convinced that we may well be on the edge of a new golden age of preservation.

This is a time of unprecedented opportunity—and the promise of unprecedented success. We have a robust economy, a new generation of enlightened civic leaders, a reduction in the crime that has plagued older communities and neighborhoods, a growing number of developers and planners who recognize the value of preservation as a revitalization tool. Even the very nature of our movement has changed; instead of spending most of our time trying to keep bad things from happening, we’re now working mostly to make good things happen.

With preservation facing a range of opportunities as great as we’ve ever known, I believe the National Trust is better prepared than it has ever been to take advantage of those opportunities and to provide the kind of leadership that our vigorous and growing
movement needs and deserves.

In 1995, this organization began an extraordinary transition. From 1968 through 1998, the Trust received an annual federal appropriation. In 1995, we received $7 million in federal funding, which was 21 percent of our total budget and more than half of our unrestricted budget.

In 1994, an attempt was made to eliminate our funding in the House. It was defeated, but the fight served as a signal for the year ahead. In the 1996 budget battle, our appropriation of $7 million was cut in half. It was apparent that the Trust’s funding was at significant risk.

At this point we stepped back and asked ourselves whether the battle was worth it. We decided it was not. We needed financial certainty and we wanted to be independent.

Through negotiation with congressional leaders, it was agreed that our appropriation would remain at $3.5 million through 1998 and then go to zero in 1999.

Having bought some time, we immediately reduced the need for unrestricted funding by more than $2 million and increased revenue goals by more than $1 million.

More important, we launched a year-long strategic planning process by the board and staff—a process that focused our mission and led to the adoption of a five-year financial plan. Key components of the plan committed us to:

- develop new revenue sources;
- build endowment;
- hold down costs;
- create a $5 million Independence Fund, which is providing valuable bridge funding for our operations through 2002, giving us the time to rebuild our financial base in a new way; and
- launch a comprehensive capital campaign, the first in Trust history.

Virtually every part of the Trust has responded to a new way of operating. We are more entrepreneurial, more strategic, more aggressive, and more creative in seizing funding opportunities for our preservation programs and in pursuing our vision. The results are a real credit to the hard work and vision of our board and our staff.

How far have we come? In 1995, our total operating revenue was $34 million, and that included a $7 million appropriation. This year, our revenue budget is roughly $41 million, and it includes no federal appropriation. This means that we have increased our operating revenues by

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more than 20 percent in just six years, without federal support.

How did this happen? Our development office raised almost twice as much in 1999 as in 1995. Last year was a record year for private contributions: $22 million. Foundation giving has increased more than 500 percent. We added $17 million in new endowment funds, more than in the previous 15 years. We have doubled our endowment in 5 years to $102 million. The earnings from our unrestricted endowment and operating cash doubled from 1995 to 1999.

Perhaps more important than these impressive statistics is the fact that we’ve achieved financial independence while maintaining programmatic momentum.

For example:


Our Associate Sites program is designed to build mutually beneficial partnerships with historic sites all over the country. The first component of this program is a very exciting initiative involving Historic Artists’ Homes and Studios, including places as diverse as the Grace Hudson Museum in California, the Grant Wood Studio in Iowa, and our own Chesterwood in Massachusetts.

We’re also developing strategies for building relationships that will help save historic sites outside of our own collection—places as diverse as the Soldiers’ Home in Washington, D.C., and the Lewis and Clark campsite known as Travelers’ Rest in Montana.

Our Main Street program continues to demonstrate that it’s the most effective downtown revitalization effort of its kind in America. In 1995, we had 1,200 participating communities. Today the number has grown to more than 1,500. New investment in physical improvements in these communities has grown from almost $6 billion in 1995 to almost $13 billion today.

Building on the success of Main Street, our Community Partners program is showing that historic preservation is an effective tool for bringing new vitality and livability to historic residential neighborhoods. Launched at about the same time that we lost our federal appropriation, this program has now worked in dozens of communities.

The asset base of our loan funds has grown from $4.7 million in 1994 to $11.5 million in 2000. Through a new partnership with Bank of America, we’ve just received $25 million to invest in tax-credit rehab projects in 21 states.

Our Statewides Initiative is having great success in building a national network of strong, independent, effective preservation organizations at the statewide level. At the beginning of 1995 there were 17 statewide organizations with fulltime staff. Now there are 38. We’ve given out more than $1.1 million in challenge grants to statewide organizations. In the near future we’ll be launching a similar effort to build capacity among preservation organizations at the local level—while continuing to strengthen the visibility and viability of statewide organizations.

Our Law and Public Policy staff continues to do a great job of securing new legislation and policies that support preservation and, when necessary, going to court to ensure that existing laws are enforced. Since 1995, our Legal Department has participated in an average of 18 major cases per year, plus hundreds of cases in which we
have made comments, participated in Advisory Council reviews, or assisted in mediation.

Lobbying successes since 1995 include the reauthorization of ISTEA, the landmark transportation law that has provided millions of dollars for preservation projects; and a presidential Executive Order, now translated into law, requiring that federal facilities be located in downtown historic districts whenever possible. We’re continuing to work for passage of the Historic Homeowners Tax Credit.

Finally, Save America’s Treasures, our partnership with the White House Millennium Council, has become exactly what we hoped it would be: the most ambitious nationwide preservation endeavor in our history. Almost 700 Official Projects have been designated in all 50 states—a step that encourages local preservation efforts and helps attract funding to support those efforts. The program has generated more than $110 million from public and private sources, ranging from individual gifts of a few dollars to large federal appropriations. In fact, Congress has made another $35 million available for the program in 2001.

The National Trust today is a stronger organization than it was five years ago when we started this transition. We are truly private and financially independent. We have a more expansive vision, and we are increasingly donor-responsive and market-sensitive. I believe we are more flexible, more willing and better able to make good business decisions and take calculated and wise risks. We are better positioned to build greater public support for the National Trust and preservation. In short, we are a new National Trust, better able to face the future with a new outlook, new confidence, a new level of effectiveness.

Last year in Washington, we celebrated the achievements of the National Trust’s first 50 years. Today, as we look ahead to the challenges of preservation in the 21st century, I’d like to remind you of what I said a year ago about the most important jobs we have to do in the years to come:

• First, we must broaden our programs and membership to reflect more accurately the diversity of America.

• We must do all we can to build a stronger, more cohesive preservation movement.

• We must intensify our efforts to manage sprawl and promote policies and practices that foster smart growth and sustainable development.

• Finally, we must work harder to inculcate preservation as an ethic—a value—that is understood and embraced by all Americans.

Meeting these challenges won’t be easy, but I’m confident we can do it. In my eight years at the Trust, I’ve come to believe that this institution has many strengths, but it has two great strengths in particular: first, its ability to broaden its vision, to evolve with the times, and to develop new ways to address emerging issues; and, second and most important, the dedication, loyalty, and effectiveness of our members. And I want to close by thanking you, our members, for all you’ve done to bring us to this point—and for your continued help in building a National Trust and a preservation movement that can truly make a difference in America.

Richard Moe is the president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.
On Wednesday, November 1, the National Park Service held an event to mark the 200th anniversary of John and Abigail Adams’ moving into the White House as its first residents. I was privileged to attend the event with President Clinton and historian David McCullough. Dr. McCullough said something that I think goes to the core of what all of us committed to historic preservation recognize. He said: “I don’t care how experienced one gets working with historic documents—there is still something that sends a charge right up your spine.”

Our trade is preserving the real historic place, in real time, for this and future generations to see and experience—to get a “charge,” if you will.

That experience and thousand others like it—different in scale or purpose—are the true value of historic preservation. They transform past into present, and present into future—giving context to ideas and anchorage to experience.

Mindful that history is the foundation of the future, I recently asked key National Park Service staff to develop a new and firm direction for all our efforts in the first years of the 21st century. The result is our recently created Cultural Resources Challenge.

The Cultural Resources Challenge is a five-year strategic and budget plan to improve the state of our nation’s significant prehistoric and historic places both inside and outside the national parks. It won’t succeed without your help. You will hear more about it in the coming weeks and months.

That heart of the Challenge is particularly well exemplified in one of our most significant current programs—the effort to identify and understand the places of the Underground Railroad—its safe houses and secure routes, its moments of tragedy and elation. The Underground Railroad Network to Freedom is a Congressionally authorized program in the National Park Service. President Clinton approved the

The Underground Railroad existed because of a great national shame—slavery. But that it existed is a great national accomplishment—it is hope, it is freedom.

The physical remains of the Underground Railroad help us to understand the trials and challenges our ancestors faced, the sacrifices they made, and the determination they showed. These places make real those struggles and triumphs. Without them, those experiences are easily forgotten. But with them, there is no more potent place to learn.

In a real sense, the preservation of our historic places is more than the protection of buildings, artifacts, structures, and landscapes. Preservation demonstrates the values of diversity and community that honor and link us with the heritage of our predecessors and furthermore represents our individual and collective legacy to our successors.

One of our greatest accomplishments as a nation, it seems to me, is that we have come to recognize that our legacy is about learning and teaching—helping our youth find a better life and a better place because we have been here.

That makes it very necessary that we preserve the sites of tragedy and difficult periods in our history as well as those of accomplishment. As our great contemporary historian and chairman of the National Park System Advisory Board, Dr. John Hope Franklin, explains it, we now know that “the places that commemorate sad history are not places in which we are to wallow in remorse, but, instead, places in which we may be moved to a new resolve to be better citizens.”

And that is the key message in the Challenge: Using historic place to build an ethic to educate our citizens (especially our children) about both the difficult and glorious moments in our history. For without that, all that we have done and celebrate here this week will ultimately lose meaning.

The Tapestry of American Culture

The historic and prehistoric places preserved in your National Park System tell the story of our human history, our struggles and achievements—as a people and as a nation.

It is a story often told with images of sewing: a patchwork quilt in which...
each piece has a special story
but the full effect is only
achieved when the pieces are
sewn together. Or, in another
version, a tapestry of inter-
woven strands of every hue
and color, forming patterns of
great beauty or significance.

I like this image of
America—the real America.
The real America is a vast
American Indian civilization
that constructed complex cliff
dwellings and developed the
culture that built cities and
villages, and whose people
fought bravely to protect their
homelands, culture, and liberties.

It is the historic homes of
educators, artists, and civil
rights, political, conservation,
and corporate leaders. It is the
lands of the poor, struggling to
build lives for themselves on a
Nebraska homestead claim.
And at national monuments
and memorials where we say
thank you to those who gave,
in the words of President
Lincoln, “their full measure of
devotion” in service to their
country. It is places where we
honor and preserve the rich
cultural resources and tradit-
stions of American Indians
and the native people of
Hawaii, Alaska, and Ameri-
can Samoa.

There are battle sites
from the Revolutionary and
Civil Wars—including the
key surrender fields of both
great conflicts.

We can climb steep lad-
ders into the communities of
ancient societies at Mesa
Verde.

We can stand at Minute
Man National Historical
Park, close our eyes, and hear
the shot that was figuratively
heard round the world, ignit-
ing the spark of independence
for our great nation.

We can visit Manzanar, a
Japanese-American intern-
tment camp in the California
desert, and contemplate the
fragility of constitutional
rights when the societal fabric
is stressed.

We can absorb at Little
Big Horn Battlefield the reso-
nance of 19th-century cultural
conflict and its relevance to
contemporary society.

We can be humbled and
appreciative of the courage
and accomplishment of the World War II Tuskegee Airmen who overcame great odds in a segregated military force amid racial discrimination.

We can marvel at the genius and innovations of Thomas Edison.

We can celebrate the rich texture of Hispanic cultures and the historic achievement of international diplomacy that created Chamizal National Memorial.

We can revisit the accomplishments of the Buffalo soldiers of the U.S. Cavalry, who served in and built facilities at Fort Davis in West Texas, Sequoia National Park, the Presidio of San Francisco, and other early national parks.

We can view the gold rush town of Klondike and reflect on the toughness of the human spirit in the face of challenging endeavors.

We can learn how the commanding voice of Frederick Douglass eloquently spoke out against the inherent inequality between our Declaration of Independence and the human bondage of four million Americans.

Each of these places and people is a piece of the grand mosaic of American history and culture. The success of these Americans and the importance of these places and events combine to create a story of our rich collective heritage.

And we learn lessons of the American story best at the places where the events actually happened. It is the real thing, in the real time, and in the real place. That is what makes our mission, yours and mine, so important and so passionate.

These examples represent the sweep of history embraced in your national parks and throughout every historic site across this great nation.

**Education: A Primary Mission**

David McCullough’s “charge up the spine” rightfully belongs to everyone who shares our American legacy. But it won’t be felt by all who should feel it unless we honor the wisdom of Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune that “Knowledge is the prime need of the hour.”

If we fail in any aspect of our Cultural Resources Challenge, we do not fail properties, sites, and historic districts, we fail people. We fail our heirs and future generations. And with them lies the future of our nation and our very soul as a people.

We must recognize edu-
cation as a prime mission of historic preservation in this new century. We must take into account new technologies and ways of learning unheard of a generation ago. We must bear in mind that our youth will have access to more information than ever before and in ways not yet imagined. In an age of growing cultural diversity, we must ask ourselves whether the ways in which we preserve our past and tell its stories are meaningful to all of our people.

America’s history and the places where it occurred are our “civic glue.” Our loss of historic literacy calls into question the very purpose for which we are all brought here this week. The stakes are high indeed!

The National Trust will once again be called upon to be an invaluable ally for a national agenda that we believe will strengthen all of us. We remain indebted for that continued friendship and support.

Now, on this very special occasion, we reaffirm our long, honored partnership as we strive to build better preservation programs with more impact on the lives of our citizens—all citizens.

We dared to create the Cultural Resources Challenge because we agree with Dr. Benjamin Mays, a great educator and president of Morehouse College, that: “The tragedy of life does not lie in not reaching your goals. The tragedy lies in having no goals to reach. Not failure, but low aim is a sin.”

We don’t ever intend to aim low. Nor do we intend to aim alone. We are partners!

Let us continue to aim high in the preservation of our rich heritage for the benefit of this and future generations.

Robert G. Stanton is the director of the National Park Service. These remarks followed his acceptance of the Louise duPont Crowninshield Award on behalf of the National Park Service.
The Place of Preservation in a World of Change

Stewart Brand

As preservationists explore our role in the 21st century, it only makes sense to look to a futurist. Stewart Brand is both an internationally respected futurist and a striking innovator, having created The Whole Earth Catalogue and having written How Buildings Learn.

In his keynote presentation, Stewart provides us a framework for understanding “paces of change” in the world. He hails preservationists as “keepers of the fabric of civilization” and calls on us to take the long view.

The particular value of Stewart’s thoughts is to assist us in looking at change and the future in the long term. Technology, globalization, commerce, governance, and nature all present major opportunities, threats, and paradoxes for preservationists in the years, decades, and, as Stewart stresses, centuries ahead. The trick is to be able to look beyond fast-changing fads to understand the big things on which we best focus—indeed, to be keepers of the fabric in the long term. In this regard, I recommend both Stewart’s recent book, The Clock of the Long Now, and Thomas L. Friedman’s book, The Lexus and the Olive Tree.

PETER BRINK
Senior Vice President, Programs

Right now, we’re talking about historic preservation in the 21st century. But what about historic preservation in the next 100 centuries? Why not think about that?

Historic preservation is about continuity amid, and often standing against, discontinuity. I’m going discuss ways to look at the future in terms of the pace of change—or I might, say the paces of change.

My first diagram shows a cross-section of civilization, indicating how the pace of change is different for each component of civilization. The fastest pace of change occurs in fashion, then on down to commerce, infrastructure, governance, culture, and finally nature, which has the slowest pace of change.

To give you an example of how that might relate to a building, let’s look at the earthquake in Golcuk, Turkey, in August 1999. The earthquake was a very infrequent but very powerful convulsion of nature that leveled the city. The pace of commerce had affected the pace of governance such that the building codes had been bypassed in
most of the buildings, and so most toppled down in the earthquake. But the building that didn’t go down was the one built to a cultural pace, rather than the pace of commerce—one of the old mosques. Indeed the mosques all over that part of Turkey have fared very well in earthquakes. Mosques know about earthquakes.

I first learned about pace layering from ecology and then from an architect named Frank Duffy in England, who suggested to me that different parts of a building change at different paces.

The second diagram shows that. It points out that the interior of a building, the space plan and so on, can move around fairly quickly. Services change quite rapidly; they obsolesce and so on. Windows, which are part of the services, are also likely to change a lot. The skin of the building is more stable, but it can change too. The building itself is the structure. And that’s what’s expected to last for however long the building is supposed to last. Even more permanent than that is the site; the property line, city lines, and other aspects of site are likely to stay constant.

When you are involved in preserving a building, you’ll find yourself dealing with these different rates of change for each part of that building.

Pace layering goes on in most things. We can compare the slow end of the first diagram to the fast end. Slow remembers, and fast learns. Slow disposes, but fast proposes and integrates. When shocks come to the system, the fast parts react first, then the slow parts integrate those shocks into the system as a whole. Fast is discontinuous; the slow parts manage continuity. You expect innovation, and occasionally the very successful innovation called revolution, to come from the fast parts. But the very potent control of constraint and constancy comes from the slow parts.

This is a generic way to think about robust dynamic systems. They have these qualities of being layered, and
that builds balance into the system.

Now let’s use the first diagram to think about preservation. Preservation lives in the slow parts of this diagram. It really celebrates the slow stuff and it utilizes the slow stuff to be of value to the rest of the civilization. In a sense, preservation expresses culture, via governance to a large degree, to moderate the degradations of fast-moving, fast-destroying commerce and fashion.

**Future Trends and their Impact on Preservation**

Let’s consider how the other elements of this diagram will affect preservation in the future, starting with the fast stuff.

“Fashion” is often the enemy of preservation. It’s the enemy of longevity. It’s even often the enemy of adaptivity.

“Commerce” includes the real estate issues you deal with all the time. Real estate practices force buildings and places to change much more rapidly than maybe they should.

Commerce has led to greater prosperity in America and elsewhere, especially recently. That means a number of things. It means that there is a great deal more money available for preservation and for nonprofits.

But there is another side to prosperity. Charleston, S.C., is a beautifully preserved city today because the city was poor for 50 years after the Civil War, so nothing new was built for a long time. When you have prosperity, you have a higher turnover in buildings, within buildings, and within cities.

Another trend arising from commerce is globalization. Globalization makes possible the idea of world heritage sites and international cultural tourism—fundamental concerns of preservation.

But with the global economy, there is also the spreading “McDonaldization” of places throughout world. As a result, there will be new appreciation for those things that are regional and unique. In a sense, the more globalization moves forward, the more
the local and unique will be valued.

As for “infrastructure,” we’re seeing the growth of wireless and broadband communications—new kinds of tele-presence that I think will affect your sites.

What about “governance”? Money and regulations come and go from government, both locally and nationally. Fifty years ago, when the National Trust was first starting up, the Housing Act that had just been passed in 1949, was funding urban redevelopment—which involved leveling whole parts of cities and building them afresh. Things like that can happen quickly. But generally governance is your friend against the pace of commerce and fashion.

As for “culture,” that’s your business. That’s what you do.

There are some things to consider concerning “nature.” Global warming may be on the way, and that’s going to affect your buildings. They may face fiercer storms, different temperatures, and different precipitation patterns than they were originally built to handle. Also, the environmental movement will continue to be more and more active—and so a stronger potential ally for preservation.

**Technology: A Driving Force for Change**

There’s one important element that’s not included in the diagram—technology. A lot is happening, and that makes people uncertain about the future. They just know that the world is going to be radically different five years from now.

Computers are bringing us virtual reality—a little slower than people expected, but nevertheless it’s coming. “Virtual reality” involves using computer-generated graphics and other technology to create an immersive, multi-sensory experience. That’s a potential new tool for you.

It’s also paradoxical that when there’s more and more “virtual” reality, then “real” reality will grow in value. After all, the quantity of real buildings of value is limited; they can’t be readily reproduced by electronic means.

Biotechnology is leading to life extension—and that will greatly affect what you do. With people living longer, and expecting to be strong and healthy longer, you’ll probably have a larger market for nostalgia. People will be looking for continuity in their lives in the midst of a rapidly changing world.

With advances in molecular engineering, you may get
new building materials that are infinitely malleable. What does that mean for your buildings? You could put in new parts of your building that look just like the older parts, only made of material that is much more durable, or even alive and responsive. Or you could reconstitute a material, molecule by molecule, to create a perfect—and I do mean perfect—fake. What does that do to the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards?

I think that technology will be the major driving force for the pace of change—the major source of discontinuities. In the face of that, that makes the things that have structural continuity, such as the buildings we care about, even more important. It reminds me of what happened in Europe in the Second World War. After the major cities were bombed, cities such as Warsaw meticulously rebuilt themselves so that they could maintain continuity in the face of that horrible discontinuity of the war. We may be looking at future discontinuities—and responses—like that.

Taking the Long View

I’ll close by describing a group that I’m working with to look at some of these discontinuity issues. It’s called The Long Now Foundation. The “short now” means, for example, last week, this week, and next week. The “long now” began 10,000 years ago, at the start of civilization’s story. It’s basically all one story, and we’re somewhere in the middle of it.

We’re trying to build a 10,000-year clock, a 10,000-year library, and a 10,000-year institution to take care of them. We hope to build the clock inside the high cliffs of Mount Washington in eastern Nevada, and we’re getting perspective from the vegetation on top of that mountain. There are bristle cone pine trees, 20 and 30 feet high, that are up to 5,000 years old and still alive. They are magnificent trees. Spending an hour under a bristle cone—forgetting about the present, thinking about the past, thinking about the future—refreshes at a profound level.

I think visitors to your buildings also have the experience of being able to step outside the present and all of its demands and engage the depth of time and history.

Thinking about institutions in terms of longevity brings up issues that may be useful to some of you in your organizations. Right now, we’re talking about historic preservation in the 21st century. But what about historic preservation in the next 100 centuries? Why not think about that?

When I visited Salisbury Cathedral while taping the BBC television series called How Buildings Learn, I met the person who was in charge of taking care of the building. His title was “Keeper of the Fabric.” I love that—“Keeper of the Fabric.”

This conference is a gathering of keepers of the fabric, of keepers of the “long now.” Society expects and needs you to think comfortably about your projects and buildings in fifty- and hundred- and even thousand-year terms. And they expect you to teach them to think comfortably in fifty- and hundred- and thousand-year terms—because you are the keepers of the fabric of civilization.

Futurist Stewart Brand, the creator of The Whole Earth Catalog and author of How Buildings Learn, is the co-chair of the Long Now Foundation, a futurist research organization.
Finding Compatible New Uses for the Army’s Historic Structures

When I spoke at the 1999 National Preservation Conference, we were just beginning to work with the National Trust in a cooperative effort to tackle some of our challenges in managing the Army’s historic buildings. With almost 12,000 individual historic buildings, 12 national historic landmark districts, and more than 70,000 other properties that must be evaluated for the National Register, the Army has a daunting management task. In addition to dealing with the vast scale, scope, and diversity of our portfolio, this work is complicated by strained budgets that focus, naturally, on military operations and training but fund only two-thirds of our minimum infrastructure requirements. We also have almost ten million square feet of unneeded space—space that consumes precious operations and maintenance dollars if we do not dispose of it or reuse it.

At the start of our partnership with the National Trust, we defined three basic choices for the Army’s historic properties: use them, find another user for them, or dispose of them.

We know how to use the buildings we need and how to dispose of the ones we don’t. What we do not readily know how to do, but are now pursuing with the assistance of the National Main Street Center, is how to find other compatible users.

I’d like to share some of our initiatives with you, outline an action plan, and offer my personal observations on the future of historic properties in the Army.

Our greatest challenge is managing those large historic structures that are vacated when Army users relocate to new facilities. So an innovate strategy at Fort Sam Houston, Tex., is notable.

Fort Sam’s Brooke Army Medical Center, built in the 1930s, was replaced by a new hospital in the 1990s, leaving this prominent Art Deco complex vacant, with no essential Army use and no Army funds to adapt it for...
another use. The leaders of Fort Sam, both on post and in the local community, saw the robust local real estate market as a solution to the Army’s problem. They selected a private developer and are now preparing a business and leasing plan to rehabilitate and reuse these distinguished buildings. As a result, we hope that the historic buildings will be preserved, the Army’s costs will be eliminated, and a unique arrangement will allow Fort Sam to receive various services in lieu of lease payments from the developer, which will free up funds for other key projects.

The Army’s Residential Communities Initiative, or RCI, our largest public-private partnership program, also has major implications for historic properties. We have 85,000 Army family houses throughout the U.S. Nearly 80 percent of these are in poor condition. In fact, we have a $6 billion backlog of needed repair and maintenance work that would take decades to clear under traditional procedures.

RCI transforms our approach to this immense problem. We lease our housing land to developers and convey the houses. Then we prepare a long-term community development and management plan jointly with the developer for the entire housing community on each post.

Two of our four pilot sites—Fort Lewis, Wash., and Fort Meade, Md.—have about 450 historic houses. And we’re encouraging our development partners, who include some of the best in the industry, to use the historic preservation tax credits for their renovations.

We hope to expand RCI beyond the four pilot projects to 16 other locations which include more than 2,000 additional historic houses.

The Fort Sam and RCI models are important first steps. But we must go further to streamline the Army-wide process for reuse. Our initia-
tive with the National Trust and the National Main Street Center focuses on how to identify and implement partnerships with other users outside the Army.

The National Trust has assembled a team to advise on five pilot projects in Virginia, Georgia, Illinois, Texas, and Hawaii. We are approaching this much as the National Main Street Center organizes the revitalization of a downtown business district.

The needs of our posts and the local community are analyzed to come up with compatible users and potential financing sources—including not only federal funds but also private funds from community organizations and businesses. These are then reviewed in relation to the building’s suitability for reuse and what must be done to make reuse possible.

At these five pilot sites, we’re exploring a wide range of possibilities including the reuse of five former family houses as office space for defense contractors, shared use of a post theater by a local theater performance group, and use of donations to rehabilitate a locally well-known building.

New Approaches to Funding Building Costs

The second part of our effort with the National Trust is even more fundamental. We’re assessing how to recapitalize our historic buildings’ inventory—that is, how to unlock some of the latent value in the Army’s historic real estate.

I believe this is the most critical issue the Army faces in historic properties. If we solve it, the Army will be able to sustain its exceptional record of historic property stewardship.

Some of our most significant buildings may be monetized through partnerships for adaptive use, tax credits, and commercial financing, as I’ve mentioned. But for the long term we must find a way to completely restructure, not just tinker with, the entire military historic property asset base. And we must do this on a comprehensive Army-wide basis, not a piecemeal building-by-building approach.

The most far-reaching concept identified so far by the team is to establish an Army Historic Property Trust Fund for long-term rehabilitation and maintenance costs. In addition, an Army Historic Property Maintenance and Repair Account could be earmarked specifically for historic properties, much as we have done for military housing. And third, Army Historic Property Bonds could be issued to fund renovation and maintenance costs.
The National Main Street Center of the Trust has been a superb help in crystallizing such concepts and the potential they hold. Congress has welcomed this initiative. There is much more to do before these ideas can be formally proposed within the Army and the Defense Department, as well as to the Office of Management and Budget and the Congress; nevertheless, we’re making progress toward a formal fiscal foundation for Army historic properties.

Recognizing the Need for Compromise

The third part of our strategy is to forge stronger partnerships with state historic preservation officers and preservation interest groups, as well as the National Trust.

We need their help and your help to solve a vexing problem. While we have many jewels in our historic property crown, we also have thousands of junk buildings, dating from the 1940s and through the Cold War.

During this era, the Army mobilized a vast building effort and erected many buildings designed to last five to ten years. Here we are 50-plus years later, facing a huge burden. Most of these buildings have no redeeming architectural or historical value. They’re costly to maintain. They are neither attractive nor efficient living or work places. And many violate basic health and safety standards.

We certainly could keep a few representative examples, but we need broad consensus on policies and procedures that would enable us to demolish these junk buildings quickly, efficiently, and cost effectively. Then we can afford to keep and even polish the many jewels that are important to the Army and to the nation.

It’s not economically feasible or practical to preserve all Army properties simply because they are old. We must set Army preservation priorities. We also need to find a workable compromise between true restoration and practical renovation of our buildings, allowing substitute materials and methods for thousands of utilitarian historic structures.

In the approach I have outlined here today, the Army is making use of all our resources. We must capitalize on our historic assets; conserve the money, materials, and energy already invested in them; and leverage past investments for future functions.

In an institution that reveres the past and honors leadership and teamwork, our buildings serve to impart a sense of community and order. They help to perpetuate our institutional legacy, telling the Army’s and the nation’s story, one Army post at a time.

Partnerships are the key to the success of the Army’s preservation programs—from the already established ones with the National Trust and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation to future ones with the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers and the private sector.

Public-private partnerships will continue to be a major focus of the Army’s approach to historic properties, because partners with common goals and open minds can achieve uncommon results. We—your Army, America’s Army—need you, America’s preservation community, as partners.

Mahlon Apgar, IV is the Assistant Secretary of the Army (Installations and Environment).
There was a time when the work of preservationists was considered a quaint pursuit and a luxury not in keeping with sound public policy. That type of attitude no longer exists within this state government or this parks system. This administration takes seriously the methodology and guiding principles of preservation. Even more, we in state government understand that revitalization begins when we calculate the cost of long-term strategic decisions and wage the battle for appropriate funding in every arena where the interests of the public are at stake.

In the year 2000 we wrote Proposition 12 here in California. In spite of the fact that it was the largest single park bond ever requested in America, the voters enthusiastically endorsed its passage. It will provide $2.1 billion to not only renovate the long-ignored facilities at our 266 state park units but also to encourage the development of parks within our crowded cities. Taken together, it will help preserve the largest natural and cultural heritage holdings of any state agency in the nation.

In California, we have set aside almost $160 million for a long-term maintenance program. We are spending $10 million during this budget year to specifically defend the importance of our disappearing history. Another $10 million has been dedicated to historic preservation.

Clearly, in this era of prosperity, when the demographics of California are being so dramatically altered, we intend to place our objectives at the forefront. In spite of the numbing fact that the population in California has doubled since 1960 and the policy-makers have to plan for an infrastructure capable of handling 50 million residents by the year 2020, we will promote the preservation, adaptive use, and rehabilitation of historic and cultural resources as vital elements of a truly Californian community.

A Preservation Action List

It is imperative that governmental entities develop and adopt preservation ordinances, preservation plans, and programs. The key lesson we must impart is that corporate
America can still succeed and be a nonexploitive party in the way we structure development. Future prosperity does not have to come at the expense of everything we value and hold close to our hearts. We do not have to live in a nation where the heroism at Gettysburg is cheapened by having that hallowed ground play the happy tune of a theme park. Just as we value the friendly invite of a Bob’s Big Boy, we also treasure those places of solitude and reflection.

We can also promote private sector reinvestment through tax credits and other incentive programs.

We can identify and support opportunities for historic preservation projects that encourage job development, stabilize established neighborhoods and business districts, and encourage economic growth and investment in local communities.

We can learn to better communicate our priorities and agenda. If we don’t learn to tell our story, no one else will.

We can promote the development of partnerships with key players and organizations affecting public opinion and the planning process.

We can draft easements protecting historic resources.

And we must be uncompromising when implementing the three-pronged approach of reasonable legislation, legal recourse, and media discussion.

**Bringing Greater Attention to Historic Sites**

In California we have put together a world-class team to explain the economic and social values of rehabilitating Angel Island and the Malibu Pier. The local economy receives a powerful boost when a historic theater such as the Los Angeles Theater where we gather today is restored to her initial glory and becomes an attraction to the millions of people who want to understand the California ideal.

Just a little more than a month ago we celebrated “admissions day” at the state capitol and more than

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*Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park preserves the only California town to be founded, financed and governed by African Americans. A yearly rededication service reaffirms the vision of these pioneers. Photo courtesy of California State Parks*
120,000 people walked the grounds where our first generation of legislators wrote the laws of our land. Four thousand people celebrated the African American experience in California during a weekend at Allensworth. And the gate of our southern border now provides us common artifacts that detail our rich relationship with Mexico. Such reminders highlight, even for the most cynical among us, that our embracing of cultural diversity makes us the economic jewel of the Pacific Rim.

In California we are not willing to merely defend the status quo. To that end, we have cut fees to our state parks in half, reducing them to levels that encourage families to visit. And our museums are either free or easily accessible. We are building a grassroots campaign promoting the importance of our sites by making them an integral part of the way we live.

All of us recognize that this time of prosperity will not last forever. And either an uncaring governor or an unforgiving economy will force tough decisions.

The sites that we seek to protect can no longer afford to have a silent constituency. We need to have strong coalitions in place that make it clear to legislators, to elected officials at every level, that there will be consequences when they cut funding and endanger the preservation of our cultural and natural heritage.

**Integrating Historic Places into Our Lives**

Recently, I was asked what it means to save America’s treasures in the 21st century. To me and to those of you in this room, it is not a waste of time to fight for our historic sites.

As Americans, we learn about courage when we think of events at Antietam and Chancellorsville.

We learn about adventure when we travel to Southeast Light on Block Island to watch for the warnings and understand what it meant at the end of the 19th century when sailors saw that beacon through the fog.

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*The Old Town San Diego State Historic Park recreates life in the Mexican and early American periods of 1821 to 1872. Five original adobes are part of the complex, which includes shops, restaurants and a museum.*

*Photo courtesy of California State Parks*
We learn about community at the Franklin Post Office in Franklin, Tenn.

We learn patriotism has a terrible price by visiting the Congressional Cemetery. And in spite of the sacrifices of those who died for liberty, we walk among the vandalized stones and recognize that sometimes we forget to take care of that which is most important to all of us.

All of these places have received the attention and inspired the passion of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. All over America there are thousands of projects that have importance and hold value and provide meaning to us as people.

Our modern world can connect the child in South Central Los Angeles to the halls of Congress, but no computer can match the wonder and importance of touching the columns at a state capitol or sitting on the ground where American blood was shed for sacred causes.

In closing, let me leave you with a message from California Governor Gray Davis: “This administration does not intend to rekindle the energy of this state or boast about our place in this extraordinary country without saving for our children those venues that tell our story. If we are defeated by deterioration or the voraciousness of development, we will have lost forever those sites where our new generation can discover the better part of their nature.”

Recently I visited Filoli, a beautifully restored Georgian revival mansion designed by California architect Willis Polk. Filoli is loosely translated to mean “fight, love, live.” That philosophy serves all of us who believe that progress without preservation is existence without soul.

Rusty Areias is the director of California State Parks.

Los Encinos State Historic Park, in Encino, Calif., protects the site that was, until the late 19th century, the population center of the southern San Fernando Valley. Major buildings in the park have been closed since the 1994 Northridge earthquake. Restoration and repair is currently underway. Photo courtesy of California State Parks.
While thinking about the future often focuses on the fast-moving and pervasive changes powered by technological breakthroughs and globalization, Lorraine Johnson-Coleman speaks to more timeless dimensions of the heart and soul.

Lorraine is one of the world’s great storytellers. In her keynote address, she used African-inspired Praise Poems, tales of her poor black grandparents in North Carolina, and a richness of humor and warmth to speak to the hearts of all present. She enables all of us to respect and enjoy each other as human beings, transcending race, geography, and material circumstances.

As Lorraine delights us, she is also reminding us that, while technology and globalization are changing the way we do business, govern, and live, human qualities like love, friendship, self-respect, humor, and suffering remain at the center of our lives. And these qualities know no racial, economic, or geographic boundaries.

Lorraine’s recent book, Just Plain Folks, and her commentaries on National Public Radio are further sources of enrichment. Lorraine also led a session on heritage tourism at the conference and is a leader in that field.

Perhaps the cover of Just Plain Folks best describes Lorraine’s work:

JUST PLAIN FOLKS
Original Tales
of Living, Loving, Longing, and Learning,
As Told by a Perfectly Ordinary,
Quite Commonly Sensible,
and Absolutely Awe-Inspiring
Colored Woman

LORRAINE JOHNSON-COLEMAN

PETER BRINK
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, PROGRAMS
The Africans say you have to introduce yourself to the world or people won’t necessarily tell your story the way that you want it told.

Well, African Americans have a story. And if we aren’t the ones going out and introducing who we are to the world, then who says the folks who do are going to get it right?

So I became a storyteller, because the one thing I knew well was black folks. I can talk about them. I decided that I’m going to tell the story of my people, the glory of it all.

But I’m not going to talk about the 12. You all know the 12 black people we talk about during Black History Month, don’t you? They’re in the library, the supermarket, and on public television. And if you buy into that philosophy, then you believe that there are only 12 black people that ever did anything. Now, some people are saying, “Who are the 12?” The answer? Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks—you know—George Washington Carver, etc.

And I say, “These 12 are amazing people, but they don’t begin to tell the whole story of the ingenuity of an entire people.” And that’s the story I wanted to tell.

When I grew up we talked about black history, slavery, and it ended in 1865. Then the Civil Rights movement started in 1955. Well, where were the black people between 1865 and 1955? My teacher in New York City said, “I don’t know. It’s not in the book. Don’t ask me that.”

So I decided I was going to find out. I lived in New York City but went home to Farmville, N.C., every year. That’s where I found the answer to my question. Those people were people like my granddaddy, sharecroppers with a fourth-grade education who had sense enough to survive the most difficult of times; people like my grandmother, who had learned the “art of making do.” That means you don’t have everything you need, but you’ve got everything you’re going to get.

Grandmama didn’t have recipes. It couldn’t be guaranteed that she’d have all the stuff in the recipe. You just had to cook what you had. We learned the tradition of stewing because you could take leftovers—okra from Tuesday, corn from Wednesday, neck bones from Friday, and three pieces of chicken and put it in a pot, simmer it down, put it over rice, make a pan of cornbread, take the rotten bananas and make banana pudding, and you could feed everybody in this room for $15.

This is the history and culture we ought to be talking about. It is a source of pride, not embarrassment, that my grandfather was a sharecropper and my grandmother was a field hand.

I looked around and I started noticing the language was beautiful. My grandmother didn’t say, “Sit down;” she said, “Come warm a chair bottom.” She didn’t have Dr. Spock, but she had sense enough to tell me that I was somebody: “Every tub got to sit on its own bottom.” Then they’d add that “Um-hum” to let you know they were through. “Um-hum.”

No, my grandmother didn’t read Dr. Spock but she knew how to raise 12 children to become awesome human beings, and most days she didn’t know what tomorrow would bring. I think that is incredible. I’ve got two degrees and I still don’t know half of what she knew, and I very much understand that.

And so that’s where my work as a preservationist came in. Now you’re looking around. You’ve got an appreciation for your people, your history, your culture, so you start to do more research. And then you realize that these folks are disappearing from the landscape, and the
tourism industry isn’t recognizing these people and places.

My granddaddy’s shack has as much significance as any huge white plantation house in North Carolina. It symbolizes the same kind of life and dignity. So I decided to get involved in tourism and preservation, because somebody has to not only advocate for these folks but go tell the folks that they’ve got a story.

There is an educational process that needs to happen. Somebody had to go in to rural black communities and explain what heritage tourism is, what preservation is. How do you do this? Who do you contact? Can I be your liaison? Somebody had to tell them that the chicken coop had significance and the outhouse that still stands has a story. And although people lied to you for years and told you your life didn’t mean anything—and folks walked by you every day and never noticed you because you weren’t one of the 12—I’m here to tell you are somebody and we’re going to tell that story.

So that’s what my work is about. It is traveling around to these different communities and doing town hall meetings and talking about tourism and helping the people there to redefine cultural resources. It is not a museum. It is your grandmama’s apron. It’s the way you sing in church every Sunday. It’s the preacher. It’s the old outhouse. It’s the chicken coop. It’s the old family Bible. It’s the traditions. It’s the superstitions. It’s the memories. It’s the way we cook. It’s all of that—cultural resources, not just a museum.

You don’t have to build a thing so people can come. All you’ve got to do is do what you do and be who you are.

So that’s what I do. And I love coming into a community and have them start off saying, “We ain’t nobody,” and leave there with them saying, “Well, where are these folks? They need to come see us, ’cause we got a whole lot to share.”

And so for me it is about redefining preservation. It is about redefining tourism. And it is about knocking down some walls.

I’ll close by telling you a little about my grandfather. I remember asking him one time, “Granddaddy, in this small town there were some mean white folks here, and some of them are still alive; how do you walk around here every day and not hate somebody?” And he said, “I’ve got
a tough enough job being a man. I don’t reckon I could do the Lord’s job, too. You just remember there are some things you can do, and then there are just some things you’ve got to let him do.”

He sat under a tree and talked to it every day. He said, “If you’ve got something inside you’ve got to set free, don’t tell it to nobody because folk got big loose lips and you’ll hear it down the road. But you tell it to a tree, child, and the Lord will come down, pick it up, take it to the heavens, and deal with it.”

I miss that old man. He was the greatest man I have ever known.

Life lessons learned during the most difficult of times—does it get any better than that? I don’t think so.

So every time you see a colored man out in the field and you think, “No tourism possibilities there,” you just remember, “Oh, yes, there is.” And if you ain’t got sense enough to see it, then you must need another job.

And so I’ll close with a little piece of a poem that closes out Just Plain Folks, dedicated to him.

Lorraine Johnson-Coleman is a bestselling author, recurring commentator on NPR’s “Morning Edition,” and a nationally recognized expert on southern culture. Her first book, Just Plain Folks, was a featured selection of the Book of the Month Club, and her audio book performance of her stories won a Publisher’s Weekly “Listen Up” award. Her heritage and cultural arts initiative, called “Journeys Home,” has been recognized as a national model for rural tourism development. She lives in Savannah, Ga., and can be reached at ljctale@aol.com

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I reckon that it’s good, so good to be faithful.
It’s plain comfortin’ to know that you got you this one
who don’t mind at all, not the least little bit,
of catching you when you fall, or steadyin’ you when you stumble
or remindin’ us always that we ain’t nothin’ but human
so we’d best to be humble.
And then, then when them times come down oh so hard
And them days come to call that sho’nough get too tough
I still got me somebody
who loves me—yes, loves me
No matter what!

I reckon it’s sweet, so sweet to just know
that all I can see ain’t all that there be.
And these lousy old folks round here that I see,
sure gonna get ’em, all they got due ’em,
and thankfully, it ain’t up to me to study up how,
how to give it straight to ’em.
I’d like to update you on what we are doing at GSA to maintain our federal government’s public buildings legacy, and let you know how you can help us now and in the years ahead.

Our 7,000 employees are proud stewards of the 450 historic buildings that now make up 25 percent of our 200-million-square-foot inventory of office space. Twenty-five percent of the federally owned office space in this nation is in buildings that are either listed in or are eligible for listing in the National Register.

At GSA preservation can’t be a sideline. It is at the very core of our business.

We recently completed a cross-country road show, partnering with the National Trust and leading preservation practitioners from all over the country, to help our asset managers in GSA and our leasing specialists get our federal agency tenants excited about locating in historic buildings and older central business areas.

GSA has changed from that time 30 years ago when a band of citizens in Washington, D.C., had to rally at the foot of the old Post Office to keep GSA from demolishing it. Now we put our federally owned historic buildings first. It is good business for us and it is the best form of “green” architecture—reusing the assets we’ve already got—something we are also committed to.

Our capital investment criteria and our agency housing strategies have been changed to give priority to historic buildings—especially prominent community landmarks such as San Francisco’s splendid U.S. Court of Appeals Building, one of the few buildings in the city to survive the 1906 earthquake. These are valuable federal assets and enviable places to work.

We are finding new uses for historic buildings that can no longer serve their original purpose, to keep them occupied and viable. One such trend is that vacated postal work areas can now provide convenient space for our growing federal courts.

At the 9th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals at 7th and Mission in San Francisco, the former postal work area now serves as a library and one of the best infills I’ve seen in a historic building. At the Jacob Weinberger Courthouse in San Diego, the old postal workspace now serves the U.S. Bankruptcy Court.

We are also partnering with nonprofit organizations and preservation-minded companies to keep important but under-utilized historic buildings open to the public and in the federal inventory.

In Galveston, Tex., we are leasing the oldest U.S. Custom House west of the Mississippi to the Galveston Historical Foundation for use as a research facility and public meeting place. In Washington, D.C., we are leveraging federal funds with private
investment dollars to turn Robert Mills’ 1840s General Post Office building into a hotel and restaurant.

We are also partnering with communities to keep important local landmarks viable. When we don’t have a historic federal building to offer, we encourage our customers to lease space in historic buildings owned by the private sector or other agencies.

After obtaining a 30-year lease on the Tacoma, Wash., train station—a Beaux Art landmark—we restored the building; provided a stately setting for our clients, the U.S. Courts; and reopened the station’s grand rotunda as a pedestrian-friendly glass museum. This has sparked a whole burst of development along that street in Tacoma.

We are supplying federal tenants for major privately owned landmarks such as Chicago’s Rookery and for Main Street staples such as the old Chamber Building in Billings, Mont.; the F.W. Grand in Butte, Mont.; and the Carpenter Hotel in Sioux Falls, S.D.

The old Chambers Building in Billings will house the Military Entrance Processing Station, where people go to get their physical exams and be mustered into the military service. It took a bit of discussion with the military to convince them that they could perform physical exams in a historic building just as well as anywhere else.

Setting Priorities

So how do we manage to keep this going in an era of leaner government when there is a shrinking pool of federal dollars? We are setting priorities. We are reserving showcase restorations for architectural jewels such as the San Francisco Court of Appeals Building which I mentioned. But for other places we have to be a bit more creative. And for this we’re going to need your help, support, and in some cases some indulgence.

In some cases we found
we can re-use existing components and infrastructure without having to rip things out. We recently saved thousands of dollars by cleaning rather than replacing the HVAC ducts at the U.S. Courthouse on 312 North Spring Street in Los Angeles—a late 1930s Art Deco masterpiece.

We are also applying codes and standards flexibly to keep rehabilitation affordable. Like others, we are adopting smart codes for existing buildings and revising our facilities design standards so that we don’t have to take things out of historic buildings and we can use creative solutions to meet fire safety and other life safety requirements.

We are encouraging our customers to define their needs more flexibly, too. Federal judges at our San Juan, P.R., courthouse gladly agreed to share courtrooms so they could stay in their historic courthouse instead of building a new one.

We’re using innovative technology to cut the cost of keeping historic buildings safe and functional, particularly on the West Coast. Seismic retrofits can cost a fortune and make it very difficult to make the numbers work for preservation, but we think that new seismic retrofit technology being used to preserve cathedrals in Europe could cut in half our cost for making buildings such as the Moss Courthouse in Salt Lake City safe for federal employees and the visiting public.

This also means letting some public buildings go to others who could provide better preservation and better public access than we can. We’ve conveyed the 1914 San Francisco’s U.S. Court of Appeals was one of the few buildings in the city to survive the 1906 earthquake. Photo courtesy of GSA
Everett Federal Building in Everett, Wash., to the Henry Cogswell College with covenants that will preserve it. The Brennam Federal Building in Brennam, Tex., is now an educational facility celebrating the history of that region. And the city of Chickasha, Okla., is restoring our federal courthouse for continued public use.

We are also broadening our focus to consider buildings of the more recent past. We are striving to maintain good design so that federal buildings don’t have to be “restored” later.

Partnering with Preservationists

This brings up an interesting issue. We recently planned to make some improvements to our 1960s Byron Rogers Courthouse in Denver. We were surprised when local preservationists opposed our plans to create a livelier plaza because some of the proposed changes to the entryway and the plaza were, quite honestly, out of keeping with the original architectural intent. Preservationists suggested that this was one of the more important buildings of that period in the city of Denver. So we partnered with them, along with a team of architectural consultants, to produce a new concept that will enliven the plaza while preserving the original features of the 1960s building.

In December 2000 we hosted a forum of architects, scholars, and preservationists at Yale University to help guide us in caring for our significant modern landmarks and in dealing with what we consider to be our “aesthetically challenged” buildings of the recent past.

We are partnering with the National Trust and the American Architectural Foundation to start thinking our way through this problem.

Our design excellence, urban development, and art in architecture programs are setting higher standards for construction of new buildings and for additions to old ones. Our design excellence program is producing courthouses and border stations around the country that are acclaimed by architectural critics. We hope we are creating the new landmarks for this century—landmarks that the National Trust and citizens 50 years from now will be fighting to preserve.

I hope that you will make a special effort to talk to the GSA people in your region. Please go meet with those folks. They are eager to have you as partners. They are eager to have you hold meetings in our historic buildings, to use the plazas for events.

If we do that, I think that you will find that there will be a strong, secure alliance between preservationists and the GSA from now until those buildings we are constructing today become landmarks that we can officially put in the National Register and protect, too.

Robert A. Peck is the commissioner, Public Buildings Service, U.S. General Services Administration.
Preservation is something I’m becoming extremely comfortable with, and I’ve come to think of it as a sort of journey. For instance when I go to New York, I plan very carefully and get all my things packed, and I have an itinerary. I take a plane trip, and then I’m on my way to the hotel.

But there’s this one little link in the middle, and that’s the cab ride. At some moment I’ve got to get into a cab and entrust my life to a guy who’s been in the city of New York for about three months, barely speaks my language, and really doesn’t know where he’s going.

And I realize that is a metaphor for development; that I am, in effect, a cabby in the preservation movement.

It’s amazing how true it is. The path to preservation is full of the same kind of horrors that cabbies go through, particularly those who don’t know exactly where they’re going. It’s full of wrong turns and potholes and bad traffic. It’s full of every conceivable obstacle you can run into. And you have to pray every time you enter one of those cabs that you’ve got the smart cabby, the guy who can find his way around, who can find the shortcuts, and who can get you there.

The process of working on historic properties in downtown Los Angeles truly has been full of potholes. We always knew it would be. I can tell you this is the hardest thing I’ve ever done, times ten. It is incredibly rewarding, but unfortunately anything that is going to be rewarding, is also going to be very difficult.

That was certainly the case with the St. Vibiana’s Cathedral. As I became involved, St. Vibiana’s was truly on the ropes. It was physically being torn down on the day that the Los Angeles Conservancy stopped its demolition. We ended up jumping off the cliff on this one and taking it on without a real business plan. But we did know that it would be a crime for it to be torn down and that there had to be a way to save it.

You know, as developers, bankers, and preservationists, we sometimes get caught up
in a situation before there is any plan. Some of these projects are true leaps of faith.

You have to believe enough in these buildings to recognize that while you may not be the right person to do it, while you may not have the business community supporting you the way you'd like, and while you may not have all the pieces in place, sometimes you've got to jump off that cliff. Sometimes you've got to get out there, throw a couple of bucks at something, and pray that after you land the project, then you'll use your good common sense, your entrepreneurial spirit, and your creativity to make something good happen.

In the case of St. Vibiana's, that happened. St. Vibiana's will truly, when we're done, be the best project I've ever done. The California State University, Los Angeles, will be holding performances there, adjacent to it there will be a small hotel, a branch of the Los Angeles public library, and 200 units of mixed-income housing.

So the loss of St. Vibiana's could have been one of the great bad days in Los Angeles's history, not unlike how the loss of Penn Station was one of the great bad days in New York's history. But that day has not only been delayed, but it's been delayed indefinitely.

I'm constantly surprised by the people who don't understand how vital preservation is to the ultimate economic health of the city. And yet this city has passed up on the opportunity to save notable buildings a number of times.

In order to change that, you have to convince a group of people—people who really don't get it—that preservation is about more than good intentions. You must convince them that preservation is part of the economic engine that drives cities, because inner cities are all about architecture. I'm always amazed that people manage to pass that fact by somehow.

You have to put together an extraordinarily complex group of people to make preservation happen. We need to partner with other people continually to begin to get out a message that this isn't only doable, but it's vital.

The Los Angeles Conservancy has been an incredible partner in this work. I think it began to change its mode of operation when it finally had a developer that it could count on to work with it. So instead of just trying to stop the demolition of buildings, which is clearly vital, what the Conservancy did was find methods to encourage developers who were of a mind to do this sort of work, and to figure out ways to help them directly.

I already know who the enemies are—the people you have to get through to make this all happen, the people who don't care about historic preservation. Unfortunately, most of them are developers, and that doesn't make it very easy.

But it's the people in the middle, “the undecideds,” who are really going to drive this engine. In most situations, for instance, I'm going to make a case for saving a building, One day it will be no big deal to say, “Oh, my goodness. We've saved something.” That shouldn't be the big surprise. It should be a big surprise when we haven't saved something.
someone’s going to make a case for tearing down a building, and it’s going to be someone in the middle who doesn’t have an opinion that we’re going to have to rely on.

And in order to succeed, through our partnerships with the Conservancy and the National Trust, we’re going to have to put together convincing arguments to show people not only that preservation is right, but that it’s economically feasible and that it’s in their best interest. I think it is pretty clear that preservation is right, but just because it’s right doesn’t mean it’s going to happen.

We’re going to keep doing preservation projects because we love what we do, and we’re totally committed to it.

But when I go to a bank, when I go to another developer looking to do a joint venture, when I’m looking for funding, I’m talking to the most cynical human beings on the planet earth. If I don’t show on the bottom line of the document I bring them that this project will make money, make money all day long, and make money better than anything else you could do in that spot, they’re not going to pay attention to me.

So what I must do is prove to them that this is about money ultimately. And while that may be distasteful to you and me, the reality is that we have to win them over. So we’ve got to show them that the economics of the project really works.

Those are the realities that confront us every single day. And they’re incredibly difficult to deal with. I think we’re the right people to do it. But we need more of our kind. We can’t just be concerned with the individuals who care about preservation. We’ve got to be concerned about the people who couldn’t care less.

Working together with local and state preservation groups and dedicated individuals, as well as utilizing the federal government’s tax credit programs, are what will make preservation happen on a regular basis.

And when it does, then one day it will be no big deal to say, “Oh, my goodness. We’ve saved something.” That shouldn’t be the big surprise. It should be a big surprise when we haven’t saved something.

Tom Gilmore is manager of the Tom Gilmore and Associates, LLC. Along with his partners Jerri Perrone and Charles Loveman, his company has rehabilitated numerous buildings in downtown Los Angeles.
We’re fortunate to live in an extraordinary time in our nation’s history. We are in the midst of a remarkable economic boom. It is not an understatement to say that California is the most economically vibrant state in the richest nation on earth. Our financial strength is reflected by a wide array of indicators including record low unemployment, record rises in personal income, and dramatic increases in both federal and state revenues.

As California’s chief investment officer, it is my obligation not only to be mindful of our state’s fiscal condition today, but also to look ahead and take actions that will strengthen our future economy. And as we look forward into the next two decades—notwithstanding the flush times we now enjoy—it is clear that Americans are going to face enormous challenges.

Of all the challenges before us, two in particular threaten our sustained economic progress. The first challenge is to find a way to meet the tremendous demands of projected growth while preserving those unique environmental qualities that have been so much a part of our economic strength.

Managing Growth

During the next two decades, California will add 12 million new residents, more than 5 million new jobs, and 4 million new households. Two million children will be added to the state’s public school system. This growth will exceed that seen during the boom years of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s combined.

The growth patterns now underway in California, combined with the explosive growth we are facing, threaten the state’s environmental quality and livability, and ultimately will damage its economy if we do not act quickly.

Examples of the costs of current development patterns abound. Last year, California drivers wasted more than...
800,000 hours per day sitting idle on congested highways. Traffic congestion not only costs billions of dollars in lost economic productivity, it is a primary cause of the state’s poor air quality. California is now home to eight of the nation’s 15 worst air quality basins. And poor air quality, as a result of unwise growth patterns, is not unique to California, despite all the jokes that have been made about how Los Angeles residents don’t like to breathe air they can’t see.

Another negative impact of current growth patterns is the lack of affordable housing. California has 13 of the nation’s 25 least affordable housing markets. Since 1995, for every 3.2 jobs created statewide, permits have been issued for only one new housing unit. The resulting housing shortage has reached an acute stage, now threatening continued business expansion.

But regardless of where we live, we need not be victims of growth. If we embrace policies that support more sustainable development at the urban fringe and renewed growth and investment within our cities, we can improve the quality of our air and water, enhance the livability of our communities, preserve our beaches, mountains, and farm land, and strengthen our economic health. How we direct public and private investments is a critical element of such policies.

Bridging the Economic Gap

The second overarching challenge—and one that is even more daunting—is to find ways to grow that promote equality of opportunity. Future economic strength will be elusive if there are “two Californias” or “two Americas”—with much of our state and nation experiencing a buoyant economy while other regions and communities suffer from economic decline and devastation. Current growth patterns too often have widened the gulf between communities and have exacerbated the disparity of economic opportunity among residents.

The problem is particularly acute in California, which has the greatest gap between rich and poor of all but four states—a gap that widened during the last decade. More than one in five California children today live in poverty.

In January 2000, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities completed a study which showed that, in the
1990s, the poorest 20 percent in California saw their real incomes drop by 10 percent—to just over $12,000 per year—while the incomes of the wealthiest 5 percent rose by 18 percent.

In California, an economic mosaic of the state would display the vibrant colors of prosperous neighborhoods and thriving commercial and industrial areas. But in every region the mosaic would be dotted with the duller hues of struggling businesses, brownfields, and families in poverty. And an economic mosaic of any state would, to varying degrees, most likely display a similar pattern.

Dr. Cornel West, a Harvard professor, recently wrote in *The Future of American Progressivism* that: “We now see a world of advanced sectors and regions connected to one another and weakly linked to the backward sectors and regions of their own societies.”

Sadly, that is all too true of California and America today. In the Los Angeles area, the effective buying income per capita in outlying Simi Valley is more than twice that in Compton, which lies in the urban core of the Los Angeles Basin. A 1998 study by the Urban Habitat Program showed wide economic disparities between the inner cities and older suburbs of the Bay Area and the thriving new communities on the fringe. And clearly, the story of the Silicon Valley—the crucible of the new global economy—is not the story of the San Joaquin Valley, where last year unemployment was 5 percent higher than in West Virginia, the state with the nation’s worst unemployment.

This growing division has direct economic consequences that threaten our society’s future. Educational failure will damage the quality of our workforce. Poverty will increase the fiscal burden on federal, state, and local governments. And crime, borne out of hopelessness, will breed fear and inhibit economic progress in countless communities.

But beyond the direct economic impacts, inequality of opportunity has other dire consequences. For more than 30 years, the issue of economic inequality and its inevitable consequences have been absent from the center of debate in America’s civic, political, and financial circles. Now is the time, when our economy is strong, to engage in a new discussion of how to expand opportunity for the communities struggling in our midst.
Americans are very much aware that our current growth patterns are not sustainable. A recent survey found that, by large majorities, California residents ranked both the widening economic gap and diminution in the quality of life among their top concerns. To secure our future, we need to focus on these twin challenges: how can we grow in a way that preserves the environment? And how can we reduce the economic inequality that persists throughout the country? These two challenges are so interrelated that it will be impossible to achieve the former without addressing the latter.

You may be thinking, at this point, just what is the connection between sprawl and the growing inequality of places and people? What is the connection between traffic gridlock in the fast-growing suburbs and disinvestment in many of our inner cities and older, inner-ring suburbs?

### How Unmanaged Growth Leads to Economic Inequality

Here is one example of the connection: Poor neighborhoods with scarce jobs, low levels of public services, and poorly performing schools push out many families who have the resources to move. They flee to already fast-growing areas, which then have to absorb more people and more cars and provide more infrastructure and more services. You know the results in the suburbs—traffic congestion, poor air quality, overcrowded schools, skyrocketing housing prices, and too much distance between the location of jobs and the workers to fill them.

In the areas left behind, the downward economic spiral is accelerated. The tax base erodes further, public services deteriorate, the quality of schools diminishes, and hope fades.

And as the economies of our struggling communities are hollowed out, the impacts—from crime to physical decay—are rarely confined to just those neighborhoods. Instead,
they spread outward into communities throughout the region. No community stands in isolation—and six-foot walls cannot break the bonds of common destiny.

Initiatives for Change

The question that should concern all of us is this: What can we do to bridge the gap between explosive growth in some places and economic struggle and little hope in others—to bridge this gap that threatens to tear our social fabric, degrade the environment, and dim the economic prospects for all of us?

To meet these twin challenges, we must first expand opportunity for the communities struggling in our midst. We must make them places of choice and possibility for people and businesses.

Last year, we released a report called Smart Investments, which outlined policies to direct California’s infrastructure and community development funding in ways that support sustainable growth—a key element of which is reinvesting in the somewhat tattered fabric of California’s existing communities and neighborhoods.

Since its publication, the treasurer’s office has moved forward to implement its policies—redirecting more than $7 billion in public funds over the next three years in pursuit of the “smart investment” goals of community reinvestment and sustainable growth. The following are just a few examples of what we’ve done.

As state treasurer, I chair the committee that annually awards $450 million in federal and state tax credits for the construction and rehabilitation of affordable rental housing. Last year, we adopted new criteria to govern the awards. We now give priority to projects in struggling neighborhoods in which housing is part of a comprehensive revitalization effort. We also reward projects that meet a set of sustainable development goals—for example, projects within walking distance of transit, schools, parks, and shopping.

As a board member of California’s Infrastructure and Economic Development Bank, I persuaded the board to adopt new rules to govern the $1.4 billion in low-cost loans that the bank will make for local infrastructure projects. These funds will now be targeted to economically distressed communities to support projects that are environmentally sensible.

And I successfully pushed for adoption of the Extra Credit Teacher Home Purchase Program—a new $150 million initiative that will provide tax credits to help teachers who are willing to teach in low performing schools to purchase a home. The program aims to bolster schools in poor neighborhoods.

However, our Smart Investments report also recognized that public works and community development programs are only one tool in a wide array of public policy initiatives that must be seriously pursued if we are to close the gap between the “two Californias” and thereby achieve our goal of sustainable growth.

Purposeful Investing

We must also mobilize the resources of the public sector if we are to overcome the challenges facing struggling communities. As Bruce Katz and Katherine Allen noted in the Brookings Review, “People in these neighborhoods often face a triple whammy: poor schools, weak job information networks, and scarce jobs.”

Those are among the reasons why the public realm must truly commit itself to a set of investments—in education, job skills training, and social
services—which create the environment of economic hope.

But even a broad public sector effort will not be enough. We cannot succeed without engaging the powerful potential of the capital markets. After all, in our free enterprise system, it is the engine of investment capital, coupled with entrepreneurship, which ultimately creates jobs and wealth.

The state of California—principally through its $300 billion-plus pension and investment portfolios—is woven into the fabric of the global capital markets. This investment power comes with the responsibility to manage capital wisely. It also allows us to set a leadership example in a new movement of capital to pry open the doors of economic opportunity for the communities left out of the boom of the last decade.

In the past decade billions of dollars of American capital have flowed to risky and highly volatile developing countries across the globe, while at the same time our own underdeveloped communities struggle to attract desperately needed capital to fuel their resurgence.

California’s own pension funds—the California Public Employees’ Retirement System, commonly called CalPERS, and the California State Teachers’ Retirement System, CalSTRS—have more than $5 billion invested in the so-called overseas emerging markets. While the commitment of that capital is playing a role in lifting up some of the poorest nations on this earth, investment returns have been mixed at best, strikingly poor at worst. CalPERS’ three-year annualized returns ending December 31, 1999, were minus 28.7 percent in Indonesia; minus 24.4 percent in Malaysia; and minus 25.1 percent in the Philippines.

I mention that, not to embarrass our pension funds, but simply to make the point that I know we can do better investing here at home. For all their challenges, you don’t need a CIA report to underwrite the San Joaquin Valley or South Los Angeles.

It is in this context that, in May 2000, we launched a new initiative—The Double Bottom Line: Investing in California’s Emerging Markets—which outlines a new set of state investment policies and programs to link the jet stream of the capital markets with public purpose. This initiative calls on the public sector—from public pension plans to state and local gov-
ernments—to invest in ways that meet “the double bottom line.” By that I mean investing to achieve good returns while simultaneously broadening economic opportunity.

The Double Bottom Line sets forth specific initiatives that direct more than $8 billion in investment capital—through state programs and the state’s pension and investment funds—to create economic growth and development in California’s communities. These initiatives are just a beginning—beachheads in what must be a wider war on economic inequality.

In California, we’re already hard at work putting in place investments that meet the “double bottom line.”

• The Treasurer’s Office has purchased $400 million in home mortgages made under the Community Reinvestment Act to low- and moderate-income families and communities, providing new capital to lenders to make even more loans.
• We have increased state deposits in California lending institutions by $1.8 billion, making available well-priced capital for home and business lending.
• CalPERS and CalSTRS, in the last year, have committed more than $1 billion in new capital investment for urban, infill development—from mixed use to office to commercial to housing—targeted to California communities.
• And CalPERS just approved the California Initiative—a $500 million venture fund to grow businesses in underserved neighborhoods.

These investments are not only the right thing to do, they are the smart thing to do. They create more opportunities for people and businesses, and by doing so, they strengthen existing communities.

And there is a positive result that is very important: Investments that build the economies of struggling com-

The Orange County High School of the Arts received $20 million in low-cost financing from the California Infrastructure and Economic Development Bank for its new campus. The school’s move to historic downtown Santa Ana will enhance ongoing preservation and revitalization efforts to sustain the rich culture and heritage of one of Southern California’s oldest cities.
munities allow people to choose not to sprawl!

More Ways to Utilize Investments

But we need to do more than simply establish new investment vehicles in capital-starved communities.

Therefore, as part of our Double Bottom Line initiative, we propose that public pension funds broaden their pool of investment managers. We need to call on the networks and skills of the growing pool of talented ethnic and minority managers who have roots in and knowledge of underserved markets.

We also urge our state government to take a more active role in creating new private capital investment in California's emerging markets through improved targeting of its economic and community development financing programs.

And, we recognize that the absence of high quality information about domestic emerging markets has been a key deterrent to the flow of capital. So, we propose that the state provide $5 million for a pilot program to fund market research which can lead to capital investment in at-risk communities.

We know that some will argue that our investment initiatives are too risky. But even as I speak here today, old myths are being swept away by the facts and experience of successful reinvestment—from retailers profitably re-entering inner-city markets to lenders finding new opportunities in traditionally underserved communities. Indeed, a new and growing body of economic data make a powerful case that communities historically overlooked by institutional capital sources are now prime candidates for reinvestment. Let me give you a few examples:

• A 1999 HUD study showed that the retail purchasing power of America’s inner-city markets exceeds by nearly $9 billion annually the retail sales in those markets. In Watts alone, the gap is nearly half a billion dollars a year—showing that retail investment is needed and can be successful.

• Ethnic and minority markets—often centered in traditionally underserved communities—are growing dramatically. The Hispanic consumer market has gone from $208 billion in 1990 to an estimated $383 billion in 1999. And in the new economy, more than 54 percent of workforce growth will come from minority communities.
• And finally, the federal Community Reinvestment Act of 1977 (the CRA) enacted at a time when banks were sending money to Latin America but ignoring American neighborhoods—is proving that historically underserved communities have great untapped potential. In 1998, Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan stated that the CRA “has helped financial institutions discover new markets that may have been underserved before.” He also noted that there is “no evidence that banks’ safety and soundness have been compromised by [low and moderate income] lending.”

The Need for New Partnerships
The stage has been set for a new era of investment that can bring renewed hope to the communities that have not shared in the bounty of these times. But despite what we are doing in the public sector, and despite the hopeful signs that we are seeing around the country, we can’t achieve our goals of community renewal and sustainable growth without a strong working partnership with the private sector.

Our nation’s private sector investment leaders have demonstrated, time and again, their extraordinary ability to create wealth and economic success. The talents that have produced the strongest economy in the world must be enlisted in helping to assure our own continued economic success in the 21st century.

As we embark upon a new investment dynamic, we must call upon the private sector—insurance companies, investment banks, foundations, venture capitalists, high wealth individuals, to name a few—to join us in this crusade.

The full engagement of the public and private sectors in pursuing the policies of the Smart Investments report and the Double Bottom Line initiative holds out great possibilities. The risks of not pursuing new paths of investment policy will be an uncertain economic future, accompanied by economic and social divisions unlikely to produce good results.

The returns of investing prudently to close the separation between an overflow of development in some areas and a dearth of investment in others will be communities with less congestion, less wasteful decay, more open space, and more opportunity.

The investment policies we have put in place in California are but one step down the long road toward achieving the twin goals of sustainable development and broadened economic opportunity. The road ahead—to educate and engage our public and private sector partners and to fully deploy our financial and public policy resources—will be a test of our resolve. To fully realize our vision of a brighter future, it will require hundreds and thousands and tens of thousands across this great land to join together in common cause and collective action.

I believe we are on the verge of a great era in California and this nation—if we approach it wisely. I am hopeful that—by staying environmentally strong and throwing open the doors of opportunity—California can serve as a model of economic and social success for the nation.

California State Treasurer Philip Angelides has targeted state dollars to declining communities to support more sustainable patterns of growth.
Do you agree with historian Daniel Boorstein, who said: “Planning for the future without a sense of the past is like trying to plant cut flowers.” And do you agree with Arthur Bestor, who said: “Deprive me of my historical consciousness, and in the most literal sense, I do not know who I am.”

It is not surprising if you agree with these statements. After all, you are preservationists. But perhaps you will be surprised to learn that so do the majority of Americans. In 1998, reviewing the results of the first national survey of Americans’ relationship to history, historians Roy Rosenzweig and David Theland concluded, “Americans feel at home with the past; day to day, hour to hour, the past is present in their lives. Encountering the past, examining it, living and reliving it, they root themselves…and…their families in the world. …Americans,” the study found, “want to make a difference, to take responsibility for themselves and others. And so, they assemble their experiences into patterns that allow them to make sense of the past, set priorities, project what might happen next and try to shape the future. …[U]sing these narratives…they chart the course of their lives.”

In other words, Americans regard the past as a usable tool. So do I. I didn’t always.

But starting in the 1970s, I had a series of experiences that altered my thinking. One occurred when I was organizing a National Women’s Agenda, a political platform designed to answer the age-old question: What do women want? Things had gone well. Leaders of a wide spectrum of women’s organizations had actively participated in the formation of the Agenda’s platform. But suddenly it was stuck. Casting about for a solution, I telephoned Professor Gerda Lerner, founder of the modern women’s history movement. Introducing myself, I explained my dilemma and asked if I could have a historical consultation. Silence…and finally, Dr. Lerner said,
“No one has ever asked me, a historian, to help develop strategy for the present.”

But a few days later, Lerner treated me to a personal lecture on the history of women’s organizing efforts. Learning that every successful national effort organized by women had been organized from the grassroots up, and knowing I had been organizing from the top down, I restructured the campaign. In 1975, on the steps of the U.S. Capital, women from more than 100 national organizations announced the formation of a “National Women’s Agenda.”

History had supplied a strategy. Many times since, history has afforded me comfort, inspiration, perspective, and role models. I have come to view history as a powerful tool for the living.

Just as the public yearns for history, so does it yearn for truth. In Lying, philosopher Sissela Bok said, “[T]rust in some degree of veracity functions as a foundation of relations among human beings; when this trust shatters or wears away, institutions collapse.”

But we aren’t doing that. In Lies My Teacher Told Me, James Loewen documents a web of misinformation, omissions, and lies in some of the nation’s most popular and widely used history textbooks. No wonder then, as the Rozenwieg/Thelan survey found, Americans have rejected history as it is taught in high school as “dull” and “irrelevant.” They said this “standard issue history” with its “patriotic story of the American nation” was “insulting to their sense of themselves as critical thinkers.”

But believing history essential to its well-being, the public is nevertheless determined to get it. Spurning school as an unreliable source, Americans turn elsewhere. More than one-third of the survey respondents had investigated the history of their family in the previous year, and two-fifths had worked on a hobby or collection related to the past.

And in large numbers, they turn to historic sites and museums, which they regard as “the most trustworthy sources of historical information.” More than half the survey respondents had visited a museum or historic site during the previous year. “They trusted history museums,” reported Rosensweig and Thelan, “as
much as they trusted their grandmothers.”

The American public trusts historic sites; but the terrible truth is that the history supplied in far too many historic sites is sorely lacking. Crisscrossing the country, visiting historic sites big and small, James Loewen, author of *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, was forced to conclude, “Guides almost always avoid negative or controversial facts, and most monuments, markers, and historic sites omit any blemishes that might taint the heroes they commemorate, making them larger and less interesting than life. …America has ended up with a landscape of denial.”

According to the Rosenzweig/Thelan survey, Americans want history that actively assists them in making connections between the past and the present, a history that “can be used to answer pressing current-day questions.” It is this very goal the Tenement Museum has set for itself.

The Tenement Museum: Presenting Untold History

In founding the Tenement Museum, I hoped to build on the fact that most Americans are descendants of people who came—willingly or not—from somewhere else. Americans share family histories containing the experience of dislocation, relocation, and reinvention. I was determined to introduce long-rooted Americans to their ancestors at the point of their first arrival, when they knew not the language, accent, or customs of their adopted land and before they were financially secure. I hoped that through this confrontation with revered ancestors, Americans could be moved to participate in a national conversation concerning similarly situated contemporary people. I further hoped that Americans might realize that new immigrants have more in common than not with the forebears they so admire. For those newly arrived, I hoped to offer the comfort that comes from the knowledge that as immigrants, they are part of a vital American tradition.

Most visitors take a guided tour of the Museum’s 19th century, five-story tenement building at 97 Orchard Street. Twenty-five feet wide by 68 feet deep, the building, erected by a German-born tailor in 1863, was without indoor plumbing, ventilation, or light. Before its condemnation as a residence in 1935, an estimated
7,000 immigrants from more than 20 nations occupied its 320-square-foot apartments. Although more citizens trace the beginning of their families’ American experience to the urban rather than the rural environment, and most descend from working class immigrants, 97 Orchard Street is the first homestead of urban working class and poor immigrant people to be preserved and interpreted in the United States. It should not be the last. Every city needs to tell this aspect of its history.

Inside, visitors “meet” families who actually lived in the building. They meet, for instance, Natalie Gumpertz, a German Jewish woman who, deserted by her husband in the midst of the 1873 Depression, turned to dressmaking to support her four young children. Natalie Gumpertz is the first single mother presented in a National Historic Site. In the Baldizzi apartment, visitors find a Catholic family that immigrated illegally from Sicily only to be caught in the Great Depression. Thrown out of work, the parents (by then legal immigrants) had to depend on Home Relief. The family was evicted in 1935 when the landlord threw out all the tenants rather than comply with the newest building codes. The Baldizzis are the first illegal immigrants and the first welfare recipients ever presented in an American historic site.

Other apartments present families whose stories raise issues surrounding the nature of childhood, sweatshops, public health, death, childbirth, and, of course, immigration.

Challenges of Interpretation

Many museum professionals have asked, “How do you get away with it?”—meaning, how has the Tenement Museum managed to take on so-called “sensitive” subjects without bringing down the wrath of God upon its head? There is, in our field, a miserable tendency to assume that, unlike ourselves, the public does not appreciate complex history and cannot bear the truth. In fact, the public is clamoring for both.

There have been some skirmishes surrounding interpretation at the Tenement Museum. Some people, including scholars, were distressed when the Museum refused to corroborate their understanding of a tenement as a filthy, inhospitable slum. But memoirs of former residents as well
as laboratory analysis of the tenement’s historic fabric made clear that while keeping persons and apartments clean was a battle, it was one which tenement dwellers refused to concede. “My mother,” explained Josephine Baldizzi, who brought us her mother’s scouring powder, “was fastidious. She loved to shine her pots; they called her ‘shine-em-up-Sadie.’” Furthermore, lovely decorative touches—including layers of patterned wallpaper, faux paint finishes, and even a gold leafed chair rail—attest to aesthetic sensibilities.

Some people were distressed by our reluctance to cast our tenement’s landlords as villains. But our research revealed that the landlords were themselves immigrants. Our first landlord, Lucas Glockner, a German-born tailor, lived with several generations of his family in the building. When the death of her husband in 1918 left Fannie Rogarshevsky, who spoke no English, high and dry, it was her landlord who saved the day by hiring her as the building’s janitor and furnishing her with a rent-free apartment.

We have stood our ground against those who insisted that we tell a story irrespective of the evidence at hand. We stood on the facts, and we could not be moved.

Sometimes, however, we have gotten the facts wrong. A prime example involves an inventory written in pencil on a door jamb in one of the tenement apartments. The inventory lists 100 shirts, 43 pants, 100 shirts, etc. Upon seeing the inventory, a garment union representative surmised, “No one tailor could produce that volume; this must have been a sweatshop.” After a full year of sharing this assumption with visitors, we were thrown off balance when a child pointed to an entry at the bottom of the list: “It says 22 shoes. Do tailors make shoes?” We had assumed wrong. Today, we tell visitors the story of how we got it wrong.

For reasons I have never understood, many historic sites are reluctant to share their “mistakes” with the public. Yet, if there is anything the public needs and deserves to know, it is that history is a continual process of discovery and correction.

By insisting on calling and interpreting the facts as we see them, historic sites avoid becoming part of the problem of the erosion of trust, so damaging to the maintenance of a civil society. “Those,” said Sissela Bok, “who learn they have been lied to in an important matter...are resentful, disappointed, and suspicious. They see that they were manipulated, that the deceit made them unable to make choices for themselves according to the most adequate information available.”

In 1964, 78 percent of the respondents to a Gallup poll said they could “trust [the government in] Washington to do what is right all or most of the time.” By 1994, the figure had plummeted to 19 percent. It is unconscionable for historic sites, perhaps the last of our public institutions to enjoy some modicum of confidence, to contribute to the decline in the people’s trust.

But still more is at stake. “Conscience,” says French Archbishop Olivier de Berranger, “is formed by memory; and no society can live in peace with itself on the basis of a false or repressed past any more than an individual can.” As keepers of the public memory, historic sites are pivotal in the formation of conscience. We cannot afford to play fast and loose with the facts.

A Continuing Story
Nor can we ignore the present and our sites’ relationship to it. Learning that immi-
grants in our neighborhood were waiting three years for seats in free English classes, the Tenement Museum decided to offer its own. For the last four years, immigrants have learned English at the Museum by reading from the diaries, letters, and memoirs of earlier immigrants. “I not only learned English,” said a graduate, “I learned I was not alone.” The graduation requirement—that students must conduct a tour of our tenement … in English—will soon result in a cadre of guides who bring not only their own immigrant stories to the task, but who can also deliver the tour to people who speak Cantonese, Mandarin, Spanish, Creole, and more.

During a segment of the English classes, students learned that 19th-century immigrants were often met at Ellis Island by charity workers who provided employment or housing advice. “No one was there for us at Kennedy Airport!” exclaimed a participant. With that, the idea for the first Immigrant Guide to New York City was conceived. Right before our eyes, the history of immigration had empowered new immigrants with an expanded sense of possibility. “Let it,” said the students, “contain stories of immigrants past that have inspired us; and let it include our stories, for we are the present; and let it supply answers to commonly asked questions.” And so, by the year’s end, the guide will be published in several languages and distributed free of charge to thousands of new arrivals.

Opening New Dialogues

The success of a Museum-sponsored dialogue on immigration, involving immigrants and migrants from many backgrounds, led staff to wonder whether a diverse community could be united through the process of preserving and interpreting a historic site. At that moment, we were approached by the largely African-American congregation of St. Augustine’s Episcopal Church who asked the Museum to assist in preserving and interpreting the 175-year-old Slave Gallery, the only one known to exist in a New York City church. Last February more than 100 community groups joined to launch the Slave Gallery Project. Latino and Chinese leaders embraced the slave gallery as a symbol of their own struggles. The Episcopal Bishop sent an emissary with a formal apology for the Church’s involvement in
slavery. The healing had begun.

Distressed by comments from children suggesting they could measure one another’s worth by tallying up the cost of their outfits, and equally disturbed by teachers’ oblivion to the poverty experienced by some of the children in their charge, the Museum staff teamed up with private and public schools, and with Lyndhurst, a National Trust site, to develop the nation’s first curriculum to address class.

Many children visiting the Museum live today in conditions similar to those portrayed at 97 Orchard Street. How could history help? In 1901 and 1910, proud of its new housing legislation, New York City sent uniformed Tenement Housing Inspectors across the city to note and report code violations. This year, working with the city housing department, we will deputize the children as Tenement Housing Inspectors. Trained at the Museum to recognize violations, and using checklists supplied to housing inspectors in 1901 and 1910, children will rate the conditions in their own homes and send reports of violations to the appropriate agencies. We are using history to teach citizenship and advocacy skills.

Promoting Humanitarian Values

In December 1999, the Tenement Museum organized a conference of the directors of the Workhouse (England), the Gulag Museum (Russia), the Slave House (Senegal), District Six Museum (South Africa), the Project To Remember (Argentina), the Liberation War Museum (Bangladesh), Terezin (Czech Republic), and the National Park Service (sites included the Women’s Rights Historic District, Manzanar, and the Underground Railroad). At the end of the week, the group had formed the International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience and issued this statement: “We hold in common the
belief that it is the obligation of historic sites to assist the public in drawing connections between the history of our sites and its contemporary implications. We view stimulating dialogue on pressing social issues and promoting humanitarian and democratic values as a primary function.”

A project now underway will link these sites to international human rights organizations working on related issues.

Members of the coalition are using history in unique ways. The Workhouse is planning a presentation of a contemporary “bed sit” or shelter beside its 19th-century re-creation. The Gulag Museum works with Memorial, Russia’s leading human rights group, to host conferences on human rights violations and to document past abuses. The District Six Museum served as the site for South Africa’s Land Reclamation Court and sponsors a children’s shelter.

A new role for historic sites is emerging. We are working toward the day when historic sites offer not only deep and nuanced presentations of history, but also respond to the public’s demand for assistance in drawing connections between that history and its contemporary implications. We are conceiving of historic sites as places of engagement in which visitors motivated to participate in finding solutions to enduring social, economic, and political issues will be helped to do so. We hope to make explicit that which has heretofore been implicit: Our sites are important not because of the stories they tell (though of course we are devoted to those stories) but rather because implicit in the stories are lessons so powerful that if fully understood they could improve our lives. Such is the power of history.

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