

Social Preservationists and the Quest for Authentic Community

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In contemporary urban and rural America there is a social process separate and distinct from gentrification: social preservation. Social preservation is the culturally motivated choice of certain people, who tend to be highly educated and residentially mobile, to live in the central city or small town in order to live in authentic social space, embodied by the sustained presence of old-timers. Social preservationists view old-timers as indispensable to preserving a pristine “social wilderness” and as arbiters of authentic community. For this reason, they engage in efforts to limit the displacement of those original residents they deem to be truly authentic. Ethnographic data from two Chicago neighborhoods and two small Massachusetts towns describes and analyzes the ethic and practice of social preservation.

INTRODUCTION

There is an ethic and set of practices, unnamed and little noticed, that shape both urban and rural communities. I call this ethic and set of practices *social preservation*: the culturally motivated choice of certain people, who tend to be highly educated and residentially mobile, to live in the central city or small town in order to live in authentic social space, embodied by the sustained presence of “original” residents.¹ Like environmentalists who seek to preserve the natural environment, social preservationists work to preserve the space they have entered. Social preservationists combine the ideology of social preservation—a set of values that demand the presence of old-timers—with practice: they engage in efforts to prevent the displacement of old-timers in their area, despite acknowledging the disruption caused by their own in-migration.² This concern for the sustained presence of old-timers is rooted in a combination of altruistic concern for those threatened by displacement and taste for an “authentic” version of community predicated on the struggle of marginalized old-timers.

Sociologists have failed to differentiate social preservation from gentrification, perhaps because both involve participants with similar demographic attributes who move to areas populated by those less educated and affluent. Furthermore, adherence to the ideology of social preservation is fluid—some who practice social preservation become gentrifiers (and vice versa)—and, ironically, the methods of social preservation and their practitioners may serve as (unintentional) conduits for neighborhood reinvestment. Nonetheless,

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there is an important distinction between the ideologies of gentrification and social preservation: while gentrification is an investment in the social, economic, and cultural *future* of space, social preservation is an investment of economic, political, and cultural resources in the past and present social attributes of a place. Gentrifiers seek to tame the “frontier,” while social preservationists work to preserve the wilderness, including its inhabitants, despite their own ability to invest in and benefit from “improvements” or revitalization.

Many people may agree with or express the ideology of social preservation even though they do not relocate to live beside old-timers or fail to put the ideology to practical use. There may be gentrifiers and real estate agents who have a taste for cultural difference, diversity, or “the cultural practices of the categorical ‘other’” (Mele, 2000, p. 4). However, there is an important difference between the symbolic consumption of diversity that other authors have noted and social preservation.³ Social preservationists enact their appreciation and consumption of difference through practices intended to preserve that difference. Such practices are particularly salient given social preservationists’ self-reflexive pose: an awareness of their impact on their surroundings, a sophisticated understanding of political economy, and a concern that *symbolic* preservation could cause the *social* displacement of old-timers.

This article, based on a study of four communities where social preservation takes place, two small Massachusetts towns and two Chicago neighborhoods, describes and analyzes the ethic and practice of social preservation.⁴ I begin with a review of my research methods, followed by an examination of the literature on gentrification and a discussion of the similarities and differences between gentrification and social preservation.

METHODS

This project began as a comparative study of gentrifying, or gentrified, urban and rural communities. A pilot study of Leyden, Massachusetts,⁵ a rural village, indicated subtle but striking discontinuities between the disposition of rural “gentrifiers” and the literature’s description of their urban counterparts.⁶ To discern between urban and rural gentrification, I selected four research sites, two urban neighborhoods and two small towns, because of demographic changes in them over the past decade that indicated gentrification, such as significant population change, rising property values, and the formation or dissolution of identity groups. I sought communities that were similar in the aforementioned ways, but that remained geographically and demographically distinct from one another.⁷ My early findings demonstrated that the attitudes and behavior of newcomers I identified in my pilot study were not limited to changing rural communities; the patterns I had first noted in Leyden were present in all four sites. I came to call this unexpected orientation “social preservation,” an ethic and set of practices that seemed quite different from those of gentrifiers. That is, I came to see that social preservationists are not merely a variant of gentrifiers but an entirely different “species.”

The sites do not constitute a random sample, but they do provide valuable sets of variations and comparisons (in terms of population characteristics, political economy, and geographical location). The sites are equally divided between the small town and the urban neighborhood. The sites are as follows.

- Leyden, Massachusetts, a town of approximately 700 residents near the Massachusetts/Vermont border. Over the course of the last half-century, the town changed from a remote dairy farming community to a bedroom village, from which most residents commute to work. Newcomers include organic farmers, artists, and writers, but most are professionals who commute to work in neighboring towns.
- Provincetown, Massachusetts, an isolated beach community on the easternmost tip of Cape Cod. Traditionally a Portuguese fishing village, over the past century Provincetown has become a renowned home and vacation destination for artists and writers, as well as gays and lesbians. The population varies throughout the year from approximately 3,400 (in the winter) to 50,000 (on busy summer day).
- Chicago's Andersonville neighborhood was a stopping point for Swedish immigrants in the 19th and early 20th centuries. In recent decades it has become a popular neighborhood for women, especially lesbians, and is an increasingly trendy place of residence for young and middle-age professionals—both single and coupled heterosexuals and gay men.
- For much of the 20th century, Chicago's Argyle neighborhood, only a few blocks from Andersonville, was home to a large population of Jews and working-class natives of Appalachia. Since the Vietnam War era, many Asian immigrants have established residence in Argyle. Korean, Vietnamese, Chinese, Cambodian, and Laotian establishments dominate the neighborhood's main commercial street. In recent years, young, white professionals have moved to Argyle.⁸

Through a snowball sample, beginning with community leaders and activists, I interviewed 82 individuals: 29 residents of Provincetown, Massachusetts, 20 residents of Leyden, Massachusetts, 17 residents of Chicago's Argyle neighborhood, and 16 of the Andersonville neighborhood. In each site, roughly one-half the informants are newcomers, and the other half old-timers. Newcomers included both social preservationists and gentrifiers, with the snowball method leading to a greater number of the former category than the latter. The interviews varied in duration from one-half hour to three hours, with most lasting at least one hour. I observed church services, block club meetings, political assemblies, safety meetings, plenary sessions, as well as the daily life of residents on the street, in parks, stores, and other public places. I collected ethnographic data in the Chicago neighborhoods over the course of one and one-half years, in Provincetown for two months with several repeat visits for community events, and in Leyden for a period of six months.⁹ In addition, I observed 14 community festivals.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GENTRIFICATION AND SOCIAL PRESERVATION

For the past 25 years, sociologists, urban planners, and policymakers have paid much attention to gentrification, the movement of young, affluent professionals into the central city in search of affordable housing in close proximity to employment opportunities. In the last century, gentrification began as baby-boomers sought affordable homes during a housing crunch induced by the sheer size of the generation (Long, 1980, p. 66).¹⁰ At the same time, changes in the national economy after World War II offered both companies and individual professionals greater flexibility in their locations, opening the inner city and small town to industry and an expanding service sector (Spain, 1993, pp. 157–158).

Urban “boosters” with an interest in the economic revitalization of the central city, such as businesses, the media, politicians, universities, and cultural institutions, encouraged the return of white professionals to urban areas (Logan and Molotch, 1987, pp. 74, 66–84).

Gentrification often results in neighborhood revitalization, indicated by rising housing costs and infrastructure transformations geared towards gentrifiers. Improvements facilitate the physical displacement of lower- and working-class residents. This displacement is sometimes accidental, while in other instances it is the opposite, as in the case of a Vermont restaurateur who paid the homeless to leave town (Smith, 1996, p. 27).

In addition to physical displacement, old-timers often face social displacement, “the replacement of one group by another, in some relatively bounded geographical area, in terms of prestige and power” (Chernoff, 1980, p. 204), embodied by the replacement of cultural, social, and economic institutions of the poor and working class by those of the gentrifiers, who tend to be racially, educationally, economically, and occupationally distinct from the original inhabitants of the neighborhoods to which they move (Spain, 1980, p. 28). Typically, real estate agents and gentrifiers seek to strip urban space from its “historical association with the poor immigrants” (Smith, 1996, p. 8) who once lived in the central city. Or, in Elijah Anderson’s words, “the emerging neighborhood is valued largely to the extent that it is shown to be separate from low-income black communities” (Anderson, 1990, p. 26). Although in some cases gentrifiers preserve aesthetic vestiges of the neighborhood’s past, these practices are distinct from social preservationists’ as they do not aim to preserve residents.

Urban scholars agree that “economic factors alone [can] not fully account for or explain” (Long and DeAre, 1980, p. 2) the impetus for gentrification. In the 1970s and 1980s, baby-boomers’ *cultural* attributes facilitated gentrification, particularly their predilection for late marriage and childbearing (Lipton, 1977, p. 146). These lifestyle choices contributed to the differentiation of baby-boomers’ housing needs from the previous generation (Long, 1980), as well as from less affluent members of the same generation. At the forefront of such cultural attributes was an ideology that supported gentrification, the “frontier and salvation” mentality. This mentality glamorized personal sacrifice and “sweat equity” as methods for “settling” the untamed central city. Economic boosters and the popular press credited gentrifiers with “infus[ing] moribund communities with new health and an appreciation for cultural activities” (Spain, 1993, p. 158), and with spurring an “urban ‘renaissance’” (Zukin, 1987, p. 130).

I have found little evidence that the demographic or cultural attributes of social preservationists are notably distinct from those of the typical gentrifier. Both tend to be highly educated with the cultural, social, or economic capital that lends itself to residential mobility. In fact, social preservationists and gentrifiers sometimes share neighborhoods or towns. For instance, an Andersonville gentrifier explained why she moved to the neighborhood: “I liked the amount of space I could get for the money . . . and the fact that I could still get downtown very quickly several different ways. . . . You know, I wanted to be near the lake.”

Yet, the two groups remain *ideologically distinct*. They diverge in the impetus for their relocation to the central city or small town, as well as in their vision of the future of such space. For instance, the ideology of gentrification often underlines historic and landscape preservation as the cornerstone of revitalization (Zukin, 1987, p. 133), while social preservationists, on the other hand, are more interested in preserving the presence and practices of old-timers. According to a social preservationist who resides near the

University of Illinois Chicago campus, historic preservation encourages rising property values and the displacement of original residents and therefore is antithetical to *real* preservation.

These 7 old buildings . . . they’re only saving the shell of the buildings. They’re going to completely gut the inside. . . . The real big tragedy here is that while I think saving buildings are important, that people are more important than buildings and to have a huge building saved where the people who lived here are all gone is to me not real preservation. What to me real preservation is about—and a lot of even preservationists don’t understand this—is preservation of a place, which is the building fabric but it’s also the people too, and the culture. And the food, and the signage and the music and the interaction. That’s a place, that’s culture, and this was a great place and it should’ve been saved. (*Eight Forty Eight*, February 28, 2002)

There are moments, however, when the ideologies of gentrification and social preservation seem to confer. For instance, social preservationists and gentrifiers share distaste for homogeneous suburbs. Nonetheless, important distinctions remain. For instance, gentrifiers avoid “child-centered” community and seek social diversity (Zukin, 1987, p. 131), while social preservationists seek communities defined by the *presence* of children and the homogeneity of original residents (i.e., residents who are alike, while distinct from social preservationists). The ideology of gentrification emphasizes a reduction in crime and increased social control. Gentrifiers approach original residents “warily until familiarity with neighborhood routine ensures politeness. . . . [They] often expect crime to be as prevalent as ‘background noise’” (Zukin, 1987, p. 133) and regard this as another threat that they, the “urban cowboys,” must contend with (Smith, 1996, p. 13). Social preservationists *embrace* the “background noise” of their neighborhood: crime, an informant said, is necessary to prevent the neighborhood from becoming “too nice.” Social preservationists, who tend to be well versed in the language of gentrification (in fact, most are equipped with a sophisticated sociological vocabulary),¹¹ seek to make acquaintances and friends of original residents.

Figure 1 illustrates the key areas of distinction between social preservationists and gentrifiers.

Type of newcomer	Origins	Vision	Attitude toward newcomers	Attitude toward old-timers
Social preservationist	Lifestyle choice and affordable housing for middle class	Wilderness to be preserved and enjoyed; recognition of old-timers’ culture	Dilutes the authenticity of space; displaces old-timers	Colorful; “authentic”; desirable
Gentrifier	Lifestyle choice and affordable housing for middle class	Frontier to be tamed and later marketed; embodiments of high culture	Welcome fellow “pioneers”; increased safety; rising property values	Threatened by; critical of. If preservation occurs it is historic or symbolic

FIG. 1. Key distinctions between the social preservationist and the gentrifier.

The popular media have recognized the ironic presence of an anti-gentrification ideology among those who appear to be gentrifiers. An April Fool’s Day issue of a San Francisco newspaper “read ‘Old Yuppies Decry New Yuppies’ and ‘Pot Calls Kettle Black’” (Solnit and Schwartzberg, 2000, p. 122). The satirical newspaper *The Onion* published a facetious

article titled, “Resident of Three Years Decries Neighborhood’s Recent Gentrification.” The article reads:

A three-year resident of Chicago’s Wicker Park neighborhood, lashed out Monday against encroaching gentrification. “See that big Barnes & Noble on the corner? You better believe it wasn’t there back in ‘98,” said Smales, 34, a finance manager with Accenture. “This whole place is turning into Yuppiesville. You can’t throw a rock without hitting a couple in matching Ralph Lauren baseball caps walking a black lab.” Smales then took his golden lab for a walk. (*Onion*, 2001)

While fictional, such satire notes a social trend—young professionals’ wariness of gentrification, which has become a powerful symbol (Smith, 1996, p. 34).

Similarly, a few sociologists have observed urban professionals who actively resist upscale development or who seek relationships with the racial or economic “other.” Neil Smith suggests that by the 1980s the anti-gentrification movement induced the Board of Real Estate of New York to print an ad defending the process (Smith, 1996, p. 32). Elijah Anderson describes a movement of white liberals into a neighborhood to establish a racially and economically egalitarian community. “Indeed,” Anderson writes, “many found inspiration, if not affirmation, in their relationships with blacks of the Village and the nearby ghetto” (Anderson, 1990, pp. 8, 17). Richard Florida, in his book *The Rise of the Creative Class*, writes: “The creative class is drawn to more organic and indigenous street-level culture,”—specifically a ‘cultural community’ that is often ‘reviving-downscale’ (Florida, 2002, pp. 182–183). Like Florida, Richard Lloyd notes an aesthetic appreciation for “urban grit” among neobochemians, artist gentrifiers of Chicago’s Wicker Park, who express an appreciation for the neighborhood’s “street level diversity, in which even gang activity and homelessness are valued as markers of urban authenticity” (Lloyd, 2002, p. 520). The presence of danger frames the city as distinct from the suburbs, and authenticates urban experience (Lloyd, 2002, p. 528). Still, neobochemians’ appreciation for “diversity” is largely aesthetic, and their distaste for newcomers of their own class or culture is more about the disruption of *their* culture than the disruption of old-timers’ authentic community (Lloyd, 2002, p. 529). This makes neobochemianism a variant of gentrification, but not a departure therefrom.

In the following sections, I address social preservationists’ ideological claims about the social authenticity of the places in which they live, which they formulate by distinguishing between authentic and inauthentic communities. Social preservationists select the arbiters of authentic community by distinguishing old-timers from other residents. They also contrast their community with “inauthentic” communities, most often the suburb and affluent urban neighborhood. Finally, they distinguish the present state of their neighborhood or town from an imagined, gentrified version of that space. As the empirical evidence demonstrates, for social preservationists, authentic people constitute authentic place, and therefore valuable space.

To uphold these claims of authenticity, social preservationists work to prevent the neighborhood from *becoming* inauthentic by resisting gentrification through political and social *practices*. The practices of social preservation include the symbolic use of festivals, political protest, and participation in political institutions, as well as a set of private practices rooted in their appreciation for the old-timers with whom they live. Before these practices begin, however, social preservationists engage in the construction of the old-timers they later work to preserve.

AUTHENTICITY CLAIMS

The desire to live among those original residents they associate with authentic community is the predominant criterion for social preservationists' residential choice. For social preservationists, community cannot be taken for granted—it arises out of conditions distinct from those that characterize traditional middle-class venues such as the suburb or affluent urban neighborhood. The social preservationist associates community with individuals bound together by shared religion, ethnicity, race, class, and—most importantly—way of life.¹² Specifically, they equate the economic and social struggle of marginalized groups with strong social ties.¹³ This notion of community is not unique to social preservation. Common myths of community “emphasize . . . a distinctive ‘way of life’ that links people in a collective endeavor with other like-minded individuals” (Greenhouse et al., 1994, p. 173).¹⁴ What is noteworthy about social preservationists is their relocation in search of community, and their belief that authentic community belongs to a particular group of people—of which they are not a part. For social preservationists the distinction between newcomers and old-timers is the basis for community authenticity. However, they do not deem all original residents (those there before they arrived) to be “old-timers.” Rather, they use a complicated and sometimes contradictory set of criteria to define the old-timer, which I discuss below.

REAL PEOPLE: OLD-TIMERS VERSUS OTHERS

Each year, on a Saturday in March, residents of Provincetown gather at their town hall, a white clapboard building at the center of the village, for the “Year Rounders’ Festival.” The day is complete with informational booths, dinner, a variety show, and a Navy Band. During the variety show in 2002, a middle-aged and amply sized female impersonator, Isadora with More and Moreah, took to the stage. The audience was notably different from Isadora’s summer tourist audiences. Children ran between chairs, while grandparents bounced babies on their laps. Neighbors, wearing workshirts and jeans, sat beside each other.

Isadora, wearing a blonde wig and a flowing pink gown, prefaced her performance by saying: “This is my seventeenth year in Provincetown.” The audience met her announcement with much applause. “Some of us,” Isadora said, “come across the bridge [onto Cape Cod] and never leave.” The crowd remained quiet. “So . . . seventeen years,” Isadora spoke carefully, “am I a townie yet?” The auditorium resounded with silence. Finally, a few residents replied, “Yes,” but a collective, “No,” countered their affirmation. “I’m not?” Isadora asked, her tone unsurprised. “Well then, how long do I have to be here to be a townie?” This time the audience agreed, a chorus of “Forever!” rang throughout the hall. “Well you better get used to it,” Isadora said before breaking into song, “because I’m going to be.”

In all four sites, social preservationists measure the authenticity of their space by the presence of “townies” or “old-timers,” whose authenticity is measured against the presence of inauthentic newcomers (Isadora and others of the kind) or original residents outside of the old-timer category.¹⁵ Old-timers’ identity is predicated on (1) length of residence, (2) family ties and legacy, (3) economic strata, (4) membership in a geographically rooted social network and the purity of that network, and (5) a configuration of racial, ethnic, and cultural characteristics. As Figure 2 indicates, the importance of the above features varies across the research sites.

	Leyden	Andersonville	Argyle	Provincetown
Old-timers' attributes emphasized by social preservationists	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Length of residence 2. Family ties 3. Membership in geographically rooted network 4. Economic strata, specifically struggling dairy farmers 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ethnicity 2. Length of residence 3. Family ties 4. Membership in geographically rooted network 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Race 2. Economic strata; ownership of a small business catering to Asian clientele 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ethnicity 2. Economic strata 3. Religion 4. Family ties 5. Membership in geographically rooted network 6. Length of residence

FIG. 2. Old timers' attributes emphasized by social preservationists by research site.

As is true of many people, particularly those who live in changing communities, social preservationists admire those who have long resided in the locale. Especially in the rural sites, the modal characteristic of old-timers is the *length* of their relationship to place of residence. As a baby born to royal parents is as much a part of the monarchy as her elders, old-timers' status is rooted in relationships to space and particular families that predate the individual old-timer. Therefore, old-timer status largely depends on family ties and legacy. A Leyden preservationist identified old-timers as "families who have been here for generations." Old-timers have blood ties to their place of residence. These ties are inscribed on the landscape: old-timers' family names mark cemetery gravestones, storefronts, and street signs. A Provincetown social preservationist described old-timers as having "40,000 uncles and brothers and kids."¹⁶

Social preservationists borrow from existing status markers in their appreciation for old-timers. According to rules that old-timers use as much as social preservationists, old-timer status is a birthright seldom transcended by marriage. A woman born and raised in Andersonville teased that her husband is a "newcomer" because he was not born there. In fact, her husband has lived in the neighborhood for 30 years. In an unemotional manner, a Provincetown newcomer said: "I have a lot of friends from all walks of life down here, and I'm very comfortable, but would I ever feel like a townie even though I was married to a townie? No, never. *It's a line you don't cross.*" In this way, social preservationists are not solely responsible for the construction of the old-timer category; they abide by, and often highlight, existing distinctions.

In three of the research sites, social preservationists explicitly identify old-timers by their racial or ethnic identity. In Provincetown, old-timer is synonymous with Portuguese, while in Andersonville it is synonymous with Swedish, and in Argyle with Asian. Although Leyden social preservationists do not mention the race of old-timers, whiteness remains central to their classification schema. At a ceremony on the first anniversary of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack, an Andersonville minister acknowledged the neighborhood's diversity: "When one walks along [Andersonville's main thoroughfare] you see Pakistanis, Iranians, Koreans, Chinese, and Japanese." Chuckling, he paid homage to the group in whose museum the ceremony took place: "Of course we have our Swedes. We can never forget them!" In fact, the neighborhood does not forget them—when business leaders sought support for a new streetscape on the neighborhood's thoroughfare, residents urged a Swedish theme: "Keep Swedish delis, traditions alive."¹⁷ Indeed, the streetscape has a distinctly Swedish theme: Swedish bells decorate sidewalk cement, and the street banners are the colors of the Swedish flag. Similarly, when the Argyle community planned their own streetscape, many newcomers asked the organizers to emphasize the neighborhood's Asian population: "Please consider capitalizing on the ethnicity of the street. I believe

the feel of the renovation should be of the charm of the neighborhood . . . should be in keeping with the Asian flavor of the neighborhood as it already exists.” Thus, social preservationists attach the racial or ethnic identity of old-timers to neighborhood or town identity.

Yet, social preservationists sometimes conflate ethnicity and race with occupation. For example, in Provincetown, involvement with the fishing industry identifies a person as Portuguese, but, as one social preservationist discovered, this is not a fail proof method.

I always thought [this guy] was this old Portuguese fisherman, because he has really brown and leathery skin and he’s always lived in P-town . . . but he’s not. He’s black. I mean, he’s African- American . . . Somebody said, “He doesn’t want anyone to know he’s black.” And I’m like, “He’s not black, he’s *Portuguese*.” And then [the man we were discussing] looked at me like I fell off the turnip truck. I’m like, “Wait, you’re black?” He’s like, everybody’s like, “Look at him! Look at him! How can you not know?” And I’m like, “I just thought he was brown from the sun. I just thought he was old and weathered.” And they were like “What?!” Because it’s just your assumptions. You don’t assume that any African-American person lives in Provincetown or is a *true townie*, because *everybody here is Portuguese*.

In other instances, social preservationists primarily associate old-timers with particular businesses or trades. In Leyden, old-timer is synonymous with “dairy farmer” despite the fact that there are few operating farms in town. In Provincetown, as the population of fishermen diminishes, newcomers identify old-timers by other trades: “The people who do the excavating and the people who are the septic people . . . *you know, the septic people*, it’s been in their family for a million years.” In the Chicago neighborhoods, newcomers recognize old-timers by their relationship to family-owned ethnic businesses. A newcomer described Argyle old-timers as “struggling new citizens in America, and [they] have their own little ethnic businesses.” The discourse that links old-timers to certain businesses or trades is a way of talking about class. When asked what she meant by the term “local,” a Provincetown preservationist said: “You don’t see them on Commercial Street; they don’t eat at all those fancy restaurants . . . They’re living in these side streets not a brand new condo . . . A lot of those people spent a lot of time in unemployment.” This concern for working-class old-timers is distinct from the typical response of the middle class to those who struggle economically. In fact, social preservationists glamorize old-timers’ financial struggle. One reminisced about the “visible poverty” of Provincetown a few decades ago, while another complained that the town is “too nice” and no longer “tacky.”

Social preservationists also identify old-timers as members of a geographically rooted social network. A Leyden social preservationist said, old-timers are rich in “friendship[s] that extend back in time.” Social preservationists either correlate old-timers with multi-generational residence in their current locale, or with a group displaced from their native land (e.g., Asians on Argyle Street). This stands in contrast to newcomers’ geographically dispersed social networks, which some preservationists term “commuter friendships.” The “purity” or authenticity of old-timers’ networks are preserved through the preclusion of newcomers from them. In the words of a highly educated Leyden social preservationist, deftly using sociological terms to describe old-timers: “They’ve got an old boy network and an old girl network, and this same sense of a network doesn’t exist for newcomers who’ve moved to town.” Deciphering the complex web of old-timers’ relationships requires historical, genealogical, and geographic knowledge. The interweaving of individuals and

families across time and space distinguishes “real” community members from newcomers. I asked an old-timer the name of another old-timer who stopped to chat during our interview. The man, I discovered, had to be identified through his relationship to other old-timers, beginning with his wife.

Who’s Anna? She’s of the Steward family, the [famous] sailing ship. Joseph Steward was her dad. He was the first one to do whale watching in pretty much the world. Started the whale watching industry right here in Provincetown. Joseph Steward. Andrew Brown owned the [newspaper]. Andrew’s ex-wife is Joan Smith who’s the chairman of the board of Selectmen. Anna Steward’s his present wife who’s on the board of selectmen, who was the president of my high school class. *Those are real Provincetown people.*

Similarly, in Andersonville, newcomers and old-timers alike spoke of old-timers in relationship to one another: “Have you interviewed Sven’s brother?” Thus, membership in the “old-timer” category is predicated on insider knowledge, as well as relationship to other old-timers.

As obscure as membership rules appear from afar, for residents they are easily understood. One social preservationist recalled her favorite line from a book about Provincetown: “You’ll never be a native if you’re not.” The sentiment resonated with the preservationist’s personal observations.

I meet these old lesbians that [a]re like in their 60s . . . They’ve lived [here] for years, and years and years and years, but there’s always this thing about who’s a townie, who’s a native, who lives here and who doesn’t . . . [They’ve] lived here for 20 years, they’re still not a native.

The line that separates “real” people from newcomers varies within and between the research sites. However, in each locale, old-timer status is not merely a birthright, but also requires a certain “character.” For social preservationists, an Ivy League educated Portuguese resident of Provincetown is less “real” than her high school educated counterpart. Similarly, a Vietnamese-American lifelong resident of Argyle Street is more “real” than his African-American counterpart, despite the fact that there are a greater number of African Americans than Asians in the neighborhood (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). These rules serve social preservationists because they validate the authenticity of old-timers, and hence the authenticity of their place of residence. In each locale, the social preservationist celebrates the racial, ethnic, religious, or cultural *character* of the old-timer; to do this they maintain a composite sketch of what a “real” old-timer is.

The natural landscape so beloved to Leyden newcomers, open fields and carefully maintained woodlots, is as marked by human hands as Chicago’s urban landscape. To preserve Leyden and Provincetown in a natural state, which many newcomers work to do, necessitates constructing what that “natural state” *is*—it is difficult to imagine Leyden newcomers rallying to transform their land to the thick forest that greeted the town’s European settlers, or Provincetown to the uninhabitable conditions that encouraged the Pilgrims’ move to Plymouth.

The preservation of the social wilderness necessitates the construction of a stage of social development that is no more or less authentic than the preservation of natural landscape. Andersonville’s social preservationists devote more attention to the neighborhood’s Swedish elements than to its substantial population of Middle-Eastern restaurants

and residents, despite the fact that in 2000 Swedes composed less than 4 percent of the neighborhood population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Social preservationists relinquish Argyle's resplendent past as home to one of the first motion picture studios, to a contemporary focus on its Asian population. Similarly, in Leyden they neglect a concentration on white settlers, or even the Native Americans who came before them, for a focus on a moment in the town's history when dairy farms dominated the landscape. Provincetown social preservationists do not highlight the long legacy of WASP whaling captains or the fine houses that compose the historical register. Using preformed notions of authentic community, social preservationists construct the arbiters of that community. In turn, social preservationists rely on old-timers to sketch a picture of authentic community.

REAL PLACES: SOCIALLY PRESERVED LOCALES VERSUS INAUTHENTIC "OTHER" SPACE

In interviews, social preservationists distinguish the authenticity of their town or neighborhood by contrasting it with other places they have lived; the stronger the distinction between the two, the more authentic they consider their current place of residence to be. "Other" places, social preservationists suggest, are characterized by the *absence* of old-timers, and by the *presence* of affluent residents, aesthetic homogeneity, and retail chains. In fact, most social preservationists are equipped with "origin stories": elaborate and rehearsed narratives of how they came to live in a place of authentic community. Origin stories contrast the spiritual, political, or aesthetic qualities of social preservationists' place of residence with the spiritually vacuous, capitalist-driven, aesthetically homogeneous place from which they moved. Social preservationists adopt the language of mid- and late-19th-century scholars who worried that with increasing urbanism, "the primary relationships of place and kin give way to rational, individualistic encounters typified by market transactions" (Hunter, 1975, p. 538). The "authentic" community possesses children, extended families, economic diversity, social interaction, ethnic groups, civic involvement, old-timers, their accompanying traditions, and social networks.

Social preservationists measure authentic community by the familiarity or friendship between neighbors. When asked how they evaluate the intimacy of a community, social preservationists repeatedly refer to informal exchanges between neighbors, such as sharing holiday dishes or the simple act of greeting people on the street. A 23-year-old Chicago social preservationist explained why she moved from downtown: "[It's] not *neighborhoody* enough there." Social preservationists seek *Geimenschaft*: community defined by "binding, primary interactional relationships based on sentiment," which they associate with certain groups living in certain places (Christenson, 1984, p. 160).

The presence of children and their families is important to social preservationists. At a Chicago protest demanding low-income housing, a middle-class speaker said: "We know that gentrification is horrible. It destroys families and communities." Another speaker, a 30-something white homeowner, spoke of his choice to live in a neighborhood adjacent to Argyle: "We wanted to live in a community where families can afford to live . . . We don't want to lose them." Provincetown social preservationists mourn the fact that in a recent year the town recorded only one birth. In this way, social preservationists often conflate families with those vulnerable to displacement; their demands for low-income housing are synonymous with a desire for community populated by children and their parents. A middle-aged Andersonville social preservationist is nostalgic for his childhood neighborhood, dominated by extended families.

It is hard as you get older—it is hard the constant transformation and lack of stability . . . It doesn't give you anything to hold on to. This is not an intergenerational community. When I grew up peoples' grandparents were there and parents. When Mrs. _____ yelled at me, I knew it was so and so's cousin. Grandpa was still speaking Hungarian every other word and my other Grandfather, Swedish . . . All that's gone. There's a total break in continuity.

This nostalgia has transformed into a desire to reside alongside people bound together by *Geimenschaft* qualities, such as sentiment, intimacy, and blood.

Social preservationists also compare authentic community to the current state of their place of residence—by rallying for turning the clock back to a more “authentic” period in the neighborhood or town, or by preventing further change. Social preservationists express a basic distaste for affluent newcomers, whose presence, like a bulldozer in the natural wilderness, threatens the social wilderness. A Provincetown social preservationist, who is a prominent business owner and civic leader, recounted her memory of the town before newcomers inundated it, positing the past as the site of true community.

The difference between then and now is that people went out of their way to help you. If you were new in town—like I couldn't find a place to live. [A woman], she got me my first place to live. She went and found it for me. I didn't have to do anything. People, in general, were more friendly, I think. *More community oriented.* (emphasis added)

Social preservationists argue that “improvements” displace original residents, especially children. A Provincetown preservationist who works in nonprofit management complained: “Now every house in town has a construction truck in front of it.” She expressed sorrow that “[t]he fishing community is really gone,” and with it the impetus for her relocation.

The social preservationist, whose quest for residence in a socially preserved locale is rooted in the search for authentic community (embodied by the imagined “sameness” of old-timers), *avoids* the formation of community based on the *sameness of newcomers*. An Argyle resident wrote in opposition of proposed improvements to the neighborhood's main commercial strip: “The biggest reason that I like living in this area is the ethnic diversity and the range of incomes and social classes” (Argyle Survey, 2001). Another wrote: “Try to keep Vietnam town a secret. Keep tourists and suburbanites away” (Argyle Survey, 2001). Social preservationists value places that *lack* certain elements associated with wealth. For instance, a Chicago preservationist described the changes she has seen in Andersonville: “It's jogging strollers and Starbucks now, and it makes me sick.” A middle-class, lesbian newcomer to Provincetown juxtaposed herself with more wealthy newcomers: “I sort of have a hatred for . . . the capitalist urge that happens here, or . . . the rich people that move in . . . people who have a million dollars who [think] this is a great gay place to party, and I'm just going to build a huge condo here so I can come here over the summer and party.” She expressed concern that wealthy people cannot appreciate the true value of the town as an ethnic enclave and fishing village.

Social preservationists borrow from a discourse about the decline of American community explored by Robert Putnam in *Bowling Alone*. Putnam writes of “the things that have vanished almost unnoticed—neighborhood parties and get-togethers with friends, the unreflective kindness of strangers, the shared pursuit of the public good rather than

a solitary quest for private goods” (Putnam, 2000, p. 403). More than anything else, social preservationists search for a community defined by the above qualities. They emphasize neighborhood parties, interactions with strangers, community festivals, and working-class families. In so doing they juxtapose their community against the “socially isolated” suburb or affluent urban neighborhood.

The distaste for modern community forms is not a new phenomenon, nor is it unique to social preservationists. In 1887 Toënnies suggested that with increasing industrialization and urbanization community would be defined by *Gesellschaft*, “an interactional system characterized by self-interest, competition, and negotiated accommodation” (Christenson, 1984, p. 160). In 1975, among newcomers to a Rochester neighborhood Albert Hunter noted “a very conscious rejection of suburbia, or rather a conscious rejection of the somewhat stereotyped ‘image’ of suburbia by residents in the area, and a correspondingly positive assertion of the values of ‘urban living’” (Hunter, 1975, p. 546). For Hunter’s Rochester informants, as well as for mine in Chicago and Massachusetts, the choice to live in a particular locale is a mode of self-definition: “Community ideology provides a convincing rendering of varied social, moral, and other qualities of communities and their inhabitants, diverse qualities that can be appropriated for self-characterization” (Hummon, 1990, p. 143).

Social preservationists actively construct themselves as distinct from gentrifiers, especially when the lines between the two ideologies blur: At a Chicago protest for affordable housing, a white middle-class man received great cheers when he said: “Our gentrifying friends with their diversity . . . like Lincoln Park Zoo where you can see a polar bear or a penguin. *They* want a neighborhood with 3 African American families, a few gays, a few Spanish speaking people. *Ours* is a community that is as it is today with many people of different backgrounds.” Social preservationists derive their identity as much from who they are *not*, or where they do not live, as from who they *are* or where they *do* live. When social preservationists’ conflicting values become self-apparent—to live in the central city while simultaneously preserving it, or to maintain the presence of old-timers while simultaneously improving town infrastructure and thereby increasing taxes—they emphasize the hypocrisy of gentrifiers or affluent suburbanites, and engage in practices to prevent gentrification or suburbanization.

PRACTICES OF SOCIAL PRESERVATION

For social preservationists, the value of the neighborhood or village is contingent on the continued presence, or representation, of the old-timer. Therefore, they engage in work to preserve the social wilderness by preventing the displacement of old-timers. Social preservationists engage in three primary types of practices: (1) symbolic, as in the use of festivals and streetscapes that celebrate old-timers, (2) political, from protests against upscale development to political abstinence in the name of preservation, and (3) private, such as the decision to stay in the neighborhood rather than sell for profit, and to associate with old-timers.

THE SYMBOLIC USES OF FESTIVALS

Social preservationists explicitly link neighborhood identity with old-timers, either by organizing neighborhood festivals or by actively supporting them.¹⁸ Other organizers

may do so in the interest of economic gain, but most social preservationists seek to affirm the relationship between old-timers and their place of residence. In the four sites, their efforts have succeeded in two ways. First, they affirm their perception of the authenticity of the neighborhood or town. Second, they sustain or encourage public association of the space with old-timers. This second accomplishment has the potential to win public support for efforts to preserve the “character” of the neighborhood, as in popular appreciation for Andersonville’s recent Swedish streetscape project, as well as to attract the commerce that may sustain old-timers’ institutions, such as Provincetown’s Portuguese Bakery, and Argyle’s restaurants.¹⁹

Social preservationists represent community with images of the old-timer. Andersonville’s summer festival, the Midsommarfest, replicates a traditional Swedish rite, complete with May Poles and costumed dancers. Neighborhood newcomers primarily orchestrate the festival (most of whom are *not* Swedish). Some Swedish old-timers protest that the festival misrepresents their culture and misappropriates the Swedish Midsommar tradition. Regardless of its accuracy, the festival contributes to an identity as a “Swedish neighborhood,” as do notices of street construction from “Sven,” a fictional neighborhood correspondent depicted with a Viking helmet, and the annual Sankta Lucia procession composed of young women bearing candles, singing in Swedish.²⁰

Similarly, the annual Provincetown Portuguese Festival and Blessing of the Fleet reinforces Provincetown’s identity as a Portuguese fishing village. The festival is popular with social preservationists and tourists. However, in interviews many descendants of Portuguese fishermen said that their sorrow over the drastically diminished fishing fleet prevents their attendance at the blessing. On the day of the 2002 Blessing, after Catholic Mass, a boy asked his grandmother why they did not join the procession that wound its way to the harbor, bearing a statue of St. Peter. The grandmother, a woman in her 60s, replied: “I don’t know anyone at the boats anymore. It’s not like it used to be.” Later, at the Blessing, three men talked with the Harbor Master. One said, “Most of the boats didn’t get decorated this year.” The men nodded in agreement, and another said: “Nah, it’s not like it used to be.”

In recent years, an “Olde Home Days” festival emerged in Leyden,²¹ while in Argyle the annual Chinese New Year celebration, sponsored by the Asian American Small Business Association, is attended by at least as many well-educated whites as Asian residents of the neighborhood. In 2002 and 2003, dozens of white couples stood with baby strollers watching drummers and dancers. Young white men gathered with cameras in hand as smoke wafted from firecrackers. In all four sites, social preservationists orchestrate or participate in public ceremonies that characterize the community by the ethnic, racial, or cultural identity of old-timers.

Such festivals have concrete implications for popular understanding of neighborhood character and authenticity. On the eastern edge of Andersonville, on the day of the 2002 Midsommar Festival, a young son asked his father: “Daddy, what is Clark Street?” His father, without a moment’s hesitation, replied: “Clark Street is where the Swedes live.” Six months later, in a popular Andersonville Swedish restaurant, an eight-year-old girl asked her aunt about the neighborhood. “This is where the Swedish people live,” the brown-haired, 20-something aunt told her niece. The girl asked a question I could not hear, to which her aunt answered: “Yes, there are Persians here, too. This is a Swedish and a Persian neighborhood. Isn’t it nice?” She went on to tell her niece and the adults at the table about her own Chicago neighborhood, “Ukrainian Village.” “Sometimes,” she

said, smiling, “they come up to me and speak Ukrainian. They can’t believe it when I tell them I’m not from the Ukraine!” These comments demonstrate the effective wedding of neighborhood identity to a particular social group. The latter comment also represents another common theme—evidence of the social preservation ethic—i.e., pride about living in, and blending with, a community composed of an ethnic minority—even among those who may not practice social preservation.

When old-timers *are* displaced, social preservationists rely on symbolic representation as a supplement to (though not a replacement of) the presence of remaining old-timers. A Vermont newcomer admitted: “I have certain poetic fantasies about old, deceased sugar makers who once tapped these same trees” (Goldberg, 1991, p. 80). In Provincetown, gay and straight establishments commemorated the death of an eccentric Portuguese old-timer, culminating in the auctioning of a statue in his honor. As Provincetown’s fishermen dwindle, emblems of their labor gain aesthetic significance. A worn, wooden oar decorates the wall of a tourist cottage, while on the opposite side of the state, Leyden newcomers use rusted farm equipment as garden statuary. The space where old-timers may have gathered becomes significant: the Leyden Town Common (installed by newcomers), a Leyden blacksmith shop, Provincetown’s Portuguese Bakery, a Swedish hardware store turned immigration museum, and a conglomeration of Asian groceries and restaurants. Thus, old-timers’ institutions give the community meaning, particularly when “revitalization” threatens the continued presence of old-timers themselves.

POLITICAL ACTION AND ORGANIZING

The wedding of authenticity with social diversity encourages social preservationists to rally for affordable housing and against other development: in Chicago against luxury condominiums and in the Massachusetts sites against development that threatens the town’s quaint character. If “improvements” endanger old-timers, the social preservationist opposes them. Specifically, the social preservationist engages in municipal or neighborhood efforts to prevent gentrification. Forums for such work include the zoning board, conservation commission, planning board, streetscape committees, the boards of historical museums, and various political organizations that actively protest high-end condominium development.²² These efforts sometimes pit social preservationists against those old-timers who might benefit from economic investments, while in other instances old-timers join them.

In all four sites, social preservationists engage in efforts to prevent the displacement of old-timers. However, the methods employed by preservationists vary across the sites. In the urban sites, political activity more often takes the form of protests, while residents of the small towns typically join town boards or committees in order to accomplish preservation goals. In the Massachusetts sites, social preservationists regard development as the primary indicator of gentrification, and therefore work to restrict new construction. In the Chicago sites, social preservationists are not as uniformly opposed to development as their rural counterparts are; in fact, they welcome mixed-income or subsidized housing. However, social preservationists are nearly unified in their battle against the construction of/conversion to high-end condominiums.

In Andersonville and Argyle wards, rallies for low-income development are common. At a 2002 rally, Chicago social preservationists chanted: “We don’t want Starbucks or the

Gap, low-cost housing is where it's at!" A rain-drenched speaker said: "The rich are *not* enriching! [We want] vibrant racial and sexual diversity." In an interview, a 20-something Andersonville resident expressed a similar belief: "This sort of gentrification you see taking place in the Northside of Chicago is a threat to city culture. The demands increase homogeneity: homogeneous households, homogeneous retail outlets, homogeneity on the streets and in public places." Because of these concerns, she attends monthly meetings to prevent gentrification and participates in organizations that co-sponsored rallies against gentrification. At one such rally a 26-year-old graduate of a Seven Sisters College spoke.

Here is a neighborhood which is vital and diverse and beautiful already. If the city keeps on sponsoring gentrification, its gonna reverse history. Its gonna RESEGREGATE us! . . . This gorgeous fertile mixture of people will disappear. People come from all over to go to cities, because cities offer a place where people can be fundamentally different and still share space. It is essential that we protect that vision. It is imperative that we save what we have built from homogenization, the corporate appetite, and spiritual death.

The language social preservationists use is not about maintaining their ability to stay in the neighborhood, but rather reflects a concern for a decline in neighborhood quality should gentrification lead to homogeneity—to the presence of others of the speakers' class, race, or culture. Emails seeking participants for protests against condominium development stress "quality-of-life" concerns opposite to those traditionally espoused by the middle class about their low-income neighbors: "[This] is a vibrant community . . . The building of new low-cost housing is necessary if we are to preserve the incredible racial, ethnic, and economic diversity of our neighborhood."

In Provincetown, social preservationists are similarly wary of developers and their proposed condominiums, which increasingly dot the town's dunes.

Developers, and people who want to build condos to the moon are coming in, and saying to somebody who's lived here for a hundred years, giving them an offer that they literally can't refuse, like "I'll give you \$4 million for your little dumpy house." I mean, how do you say no? But you know, the more people say yes to that, the less sort of fishing village it is and more commercial, rich people summer home it is.

In 2002, Provincetown residents met to discuss the need for additional low-income housing. Although many facing homelessness are Portuguese working-class residents, organizers were primarily highly educated property owners. Even wealthy *seasonal* residents joined the movement to find housing for displaced community members. Meanwhile, on Sundays at the Leyden town hall, newcomers sell *The New York Times* and *The Boston Globe*; a fundraiser to preserve a blacksmith shop, operational until the mid 1980s, owned by a family of old-timers.

Social preservationists maintain multiple political allegiances. As a result, they are often caught between their political orientation and their desire to prevent old-timers' political displacement. For instance, a Provincetown social preservationist who holds a political position is critical of newcomers who, like himself, occupy positions of influence in town: "A lot of the yuppies that moved into town, a lot of them came and the first thing they do is they got on the boards. I don't mind politics if it was the same for everybody. But when it's not the same for everybody . . . I don't like it." Another Provincetown preservationist complained:

“I’d say most of the town’s regulatory boards aren’t made up of Portuguese people and they’re lucky if they even have a small percentage. Mostly it’s the newly enfranchised people.” For social preservationists, the displacement of old-timers from town boards and neighborhood committees symbolizes the changing nature of community.

One thing that’s really changed in town is the way that town meetings work, because *originally* the town meetings were run by lineage priorities. But, more recently, as the lineage began to fade through attrition, people moving out and people selling out, or people taking advantage of high rent and simply going to Florida more of the *new local people would be there and the priorities began to change to a more populous views on things, which I considered were appropriate because of course I was one of those people.* (emphasis added)

Social preservationists are faced with the quandary of honoring their political orientation (often leftist), or voting against their beliefs in order to sustain the political presence of old-timers (often, although not always, centrist or conservative). For instance, Leyden newcomers who are both social preservationist and environmentalist must negotiate the conflicts between the two ideologies, for example, when a farmer wishes to sell pasture in order to make ends meet or an old-timer asks for zoning approval to build in a forested lot.

Some social preservationists abstain from political committees or community groups for fear that the tenor of the organization violates social preservation ethics. A white, professional Andersonville social preservationist told me:

I hardly ever go to Block Club now. They’re completely trivialized. . . . There was a big fight over a residential facility for disabled people—people with cognitive disabilities. Folks wanted them moved. God knows, we have more than our share. But they’ve been here for 30 years! The next thing was an attempt to come down over Hispanic kids—there *were* gang hangers, but now they’re wiped out. Block clubs saw all these Hispanic kids as a threat. . . . I’d just fight over it.

While the above informant referred to conflicts at least 10 years old, at a recent Andersonville block club meeting conversation turned to “those gang bangers at [the] grocery store . . . you know, those kids who hang out in the parking lot. . . . Another person got held up in front of my house and maybe I just associate that with the kids in front of the store.” She went on to assert that the store sells crack pipes and rolling papers. With her words, the mood of the block club meeting changed from one of friendly affability to obvious discomfort. A political figure in attendance known for her advocacy for the downtrodden told the woman: “People who can’t afford cigarettes use rolling paper and loose tobacco.” Several block club members nodded in agreement. These two vignettes demonstrate that (1) social preservationists sometimes use political abstinence as a strategic tool, and (2) almost any venue serves as a space for the propagation of gentrification or social preservation, and often both exist in the same space.

PRIVATE PRACTICES

Social preservationists wed the symbolic to the practical in their use of neighborhood or village space. Their appreciation for space bestowed with the symbolic value associated with old-timers shapes their everyday lives—demonstrated by social preservationists’ choice to

patronize the local Swedish-owned bar, rather than its gay or yuppie counterpart, by the decision to frequent the “townie’s” garage, rather than the one specializing in foreign repairs, hiring an old-timer’s child to mow the lawn, and so forth. An Argyle preservationist ended a romantic relationship because he was uncomfortable with his partner’s interest in rising property values and crime education. A Provincetown summer resident and homeowner rents her property year-round for less than market rate, not only foregoing substantial summer rental revenues, but also staying in a small cottage on the property rather than in the rented home. These practices are minute, largely unarticulated, and almost imperceptible in the individual social preservationist. However, together, these patterns take on a new meaning and force, as they may keep the Swedish bar in business, the townie’s garage open, and encourage interaction between the children of newcomers and old-timers.

Social preservationists often experience tension between their chosen ethic and other values; tensions arise in daily decision making, such as selecting where to dine. A leftist, 25-year-old corporate professional spoke glowingly of an Argyle restaurant. “The best part,” he said, “was that we were served by an eight year old girl, the daughter’s owner. I mean I’m all against child labor, but there’s something about being served by an eight year old girl.” The outcome of these political quandaries varies by the individual preservationist, as well as by the circumstances of the particular dilemma. Yet, social preservationists are nearly universally conscious of the (potential) tension between preservation and their other political beliefs.

They are also conscious of the tension between the social preservation ethic and their place of residence. Many are aware that their presence threatens the authenticity of the communities to which they moved. This consciousness shapes their choices—from how to vote to how to interact with other newcomers. For instance, at a town meeting, a Leyden social preservationist, who is an Ivy League graduate and mother of two, criticized other newcomers for failing to recognize that their “basic needs” threaten to displace old-timers.

You went down and bought land and bought the house. You had to drive down that dirt road. *You made a choice to live at the bottom of that dirt road*, and now you’re wanting to have it maintained to a level far beyond what it would have been if you hadn’t moved there . . . that doesn’t make sense. There’s a way you could make a similar comparison to the school. . . . You have this quiet little country school and you move to town with twenty or thirty other kids. . . . You’re creating the need, but everybody’s paying for it. So it feels like a mixed bag. It’s still the new people moving in and creating a need . . . having the whole community pay for that new need.

The impact of newcomers’ presence is especially visible in the rural sites, where the small population makes the loss of one farm or a neighbor’s moving truck unmistakable. Still, urban residents are also aware of their impact on the communities they wish to preserve. A graduate of a prestigious Chicago university asked nervously: “You don’t think we’re urban pioneers, do you?” An Andersonville social preservationist, a 50-something white professional, mourned the declining authenticity of the neighborhood, but then admitted: “We were part of the change process, although unwittingly.” In this way, social preservationists engage in preservation work despite an acknowledgment of the threat their own presence poses to old-timers’ community. This acknowledgment and other private practices bridge the ethic of social preservation with symbolic and political practices.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals a distinct social process, social preservation, previously conflated with gentrification. Social preservation is the culturally motivated choice of certain highly educated people to live in the central city or small town in order to live in authentic community embodied by the sustained presence of old-timers. Social preservationists and gentrifiers, though demographically similar, diverge in the impetus for their move to the central city or small town, the way they think about their place of residence, their reaction to neighborhood or town change, as well as in their practices.

Underpinning social preservation is the actors' taste for authentic community. For social preservationists, authentic community is contingent on the presence of authentic people—old-timers—who they select and construct from among a population of original residents. Specifically, social preservationists associate authentic community with those bound together by family ties, shared legacies, economic strata, membership in a geographically rooted social network, as well as with shared racial, ethnic, or cultural traits. Social preservationists value the distinction between their place of residence, suburbs, and affluent urban neighborhoods, and from an imagined, gentrified version of the space. As I have demonstrated, for social preservationists, authentic people constitute authentic place, and therefore valuable space.

Social preservationists' aesthetic, political, and moral valuation of old-timers' community leads them to engage in a set of practices to prevent the displacement of old-timers and the disruption of old-timers' community. These efforts include symbolic practices, such as festivals and other symbolic acts that cement the relationship between the neighborhood or town and old-timers, as well as symbolic and aesthetic preservation in the event of old-timers' physical displacement. They also employ political practices, including overtly political acts such as protests against upscale development, private political acts such as voting for a city or town politician closely aligned with one's preservation ethic, and political abstinence, or compromising one's political alliances for preservationist purposes. Finally, social preservationists engage in private practices to prevent the displacement of old-timers. These consist of a set of interactional practices, such as befriending old-timers, patronizing old-timers' businesses, and the decision to stay in the neighborhood or town, rather than to sell property for profit. Another private practice is the articulation of a self-reflexive set of intentions toward the area and its old-timers—including recognition of the risk of gentrification and displacement wrought by their very presence.

This article identifies and analyzes the ideology and practices of social preservationists, previously unnamed and little explored. It is likely that social preservationists' desire to avoid disrupting old-timers' community—to leave the wilderness untrammelled—made them difficult to discern. Social preservation pushes us to understand community change as a process fueled by a variety of social actors, characterized by *perspectival positions* in the community, as well as by a material hierarchy. Having identified social preservation as one important perspective, much remains for us to explore; particularly the relationship between social preservationists and the old-timers they celebrate. We might anticipate that just as attempts to preserve wilderness, both successful and unsuccessful, are the result and cause of much conflict, so too will be the preservation of social groups.

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Notes

¹ The "original" residents that embody the "authentic" community are "original" only in the sense that they were there before the social preservationists arrived. This notion does not acknowledge the long history of neighborhood succession. Claims of authenticity discussed in this article are those of informants, not of the author.

² Social preservationists use the term old-timer, or its equivalent, to differentiate "real" locals or original residents from other inhabitants. Provincetown social preservationists refer to Portuguese lifelong residents as "townies" or "locals"; in Argyle they are "the Asians." I use the term old-timer, rather than varying between that term and others, for purposes of ease, as the significance of the term is constant across the research sites. Further discussion of the process by which social preservationists select old-timers from among the pool of original residents is in the section, "The Real People."

³ See Zukin (1995), Anderson (1990), Mele (2000), Grazian (2003), and Lloyd (2002).

⁴ To give the ethic and practices of social preservation the analysis they warrant, this article primarily uses data on social preservationists, rather than my interviews with old-timers and gentrifiers, and related fieldnotes. Future work will explore other groups' response to social preservationists.

⁵ This is the real name of the research site, as are the names of the other sites. Real place names, rather than pseudonyms, are used for two reasons. First, Provincetown and the Chicago neighborhoods are easily identifiable, no matter what name they are called. Second, the use of pseudonyms would have required disguising important characteristics of the sites, which would have hindered discussion of the findings. However, all informants are referred to by pseudonym.

⁶ Much of the data for this research site was collected in 1998 and 1999 by the author (Brown-Saracino, 1999).

⁷ Examples of other comparative research designs include *Law and Community in Three American Towns* (Greenhouse et al., 1994), *Cultures of Solidarity* (Fantasia, 1988), and *Money, Morals and Manners* (Lamont, 1992).

⁸ The units of analysis for this study vary across the research sites. Argyle and Andersonville are unofficial neighborhoods within overlapping official Chicago neighborhoods, while Provincetown and Leyden are both incorporated towns.

⁹ My relationship to the sites studied aided the research. I have either lived in or paid an extended visit to each of the research sites prior to or during the period of observation.

¹⁰ Some argue that gentrification began in the mid-19th century, then known as "embourgeoisement" (Smith, 1996, p. 36).

¹¹ For instance, many social preservationists are quick to use terms such as “gentrification,” “urban pioneers,” and “social networks.”

¹² In this way, social preservationists regard old-timers as a status group, bounded by “some common characteristic shared by many people,” or a style of life that is independent of economic class (Weber, in Runciman, 1978, p. 48). Indeed, social preservationists give status to those shared characteristics that differentiate “old-timers” from newcomers and make them worthy of preservation. This status is *not* dependent on old-timers’ access to economic resources. Rather, “‘status’ is not necessarily connected with a ‘class situation’: normally, it stands rather in glaring contradiction to the pretensions of naked property ownership” (Weber, in Runciman, 1978, p. 49).

¹³ A newcomer described Argyle old-timers as “struggling new citizens in America, and [they] have their own little ethnic businesses.” Despite the fact that most of the Asian-American residents of Argyle street have lived in the United States for 30 years or less, social preservationists grant them “old-timer” status. This is indicative of the centrality of “character” to the definition of old-timers—of the extent to which the category is predicated on nontemporal factors such as race, occupation, and class.

¹⁴ Some scholars argue that this is not a myth at all. For instance, Amitai Etzioni writes that one of the key principles of community is a “commitment to a set of shared values, norms and meanings, and a shared history and identity—in short, a shared culture” (Etzioni, 1996, p. 5). If this is, in fact, an accurate definition of community, then it is almost impossible for the social preservationist to become a member of a community composed of those whom he or she considers to be “other.”

¹⁵ “One of the more obvious and unambiguous local social statuses is the number of years lived in a community . . . the local distinctions between ‘newcomers’ and ‘old-timers’ are very real. It is a social typology that legitimizes and qualifies a person’s behavior within a community, signifying investment and commitments to a local area and its citizens” (Hunter, 1974, p. 96).

¹⁶ “Scholarship, journalism, and grassroots expressions celebrate white ethnics for their family loyalties and neighborhood ties. In fact, advertising in this period began to exploit ‘cute’ white ethnic imagery—the pizza-baking grandmother, the extended family at the laden dinner table—in order to invest frozen and canned foods with the cachet of the *gemeinschaft*” (di Leonardo, 1998, p. 94).

¹⁷ From a survey conducted by an Andersonville streetscape taskforce. Three groups were surveyed: “Customers, operationalized as the attendees of the 1997 Midsommarfest; merchants, surveyed from the fall of 1997, and residents, operationalized as the surrounding block club members, surveyed in the early months of 1998” (Andersonville Streetscape Memo).

¹⁸ In his study of “Yankee City,” W. Lloyd Warner focuses on the town’s tercentenary celebration, particularly the “ritualization of the past” in a procession, the marking of objects of “historical interest,” and the reenactment of historic events (Warner, 1959, pp. 114–115). For Warner, the ritualization of the past is a collective statement of what residents believe themselves to be. Although he pays careful attention to tercentenary events, he devotes equal emphasis to the planning process, to which social groups became the “custodians of tradition in Yankee City” (Warner, 1959, p. 147). For a more contemporary application of festival analysis, see Horton et al. (1995).

¹⁹ Community festivals can be viewed as representative of the production and dissemination of the “symbolic economy” (Zukin, 1995, p. 265). Festivals serve as an embodiment of community identity or as a marketing strategy; a close analysis reveals those imbued with the power of identity “making” or marketing.

²⁰ Arlene Dávila writes: “The commodification of ethnicity also presupposes the re-authentication of U.S. minorities in terms of the ‘right’ way of being an ‘ethnic’ . . . one underlying assumption . . . is that each group has a distinct, identifiable culture that is unique, bounded and separate from U.S. culture, which is simultaneously constructed as homogeneous, white, and mainstream” (Davila, 2001, p. 235).

²¹ The Leyden Summer Festival did not occur during the period of observation.

²² Gentrifiers use some of the same sites to forward their own agenda.

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