

Joel Sánchez
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ARCH Radial Preservation
Professor Jermone Haferd
Exercise 1B

What is the cost of forgetting history? Between the row of apartment buildings that line Riverside Drive in the Washington Heights neighborhood, lies the Harris-Newhouse home, a non-descript home hidden behind rows of parked cars. Once a center of abolitionist activity, the Harris-Newhouse home is a residence that has a storied history of fugitive activism, and one of the few known sites with ties to the abolitionist movement left in the neighborhood. While local activists are fighting to convince the local preservation society for landmark status, their intentions—as well as their biggest critique against preservation—ultimately lies in having the residence restored to its original condition. The home's exterior architecture was changed from its original architectural style towards an Italianate revival style home. Only a few abolitionist's sites have been chosen to be preserved by the local preservation society's lengthy portfolio. The current owners want to demolish the residence to construct a new apartment building. Conventional preservation would restore the house to a past appearance, transforming it into a sanitized heritage site. Yet such an approach, risks erasing the very conditions of neglect and vulnerability that define its historical significance today. Radically preserving this site offers a different path: to preserve the Newcastle House as it stands, not as a polished relic, but as a living reminder of erasure, resistance, and futurity. This framework acknowledges that preservation is not neutral but socio-political, and that what must be preserved is not only stone and wood but the animate histories of abolition and Black sovereignty.

What is ultimately at stake is the visibility of the subaltern in New York City's historical landscape. This residence embodies the otherness and fugitivity of the subaltern, once central to black liberation whose lives and struggles were marginalized within dominant narratives. These abolitionists and enslaved risked their safety and liberties to do what was ultimately deemed morally correct despite the action to do so was deeply illegal at the time. This home's appearance should be preserved as is, preserving the modifications made over time can make visible the consequences of its neglect and erasure of its history and significance, hopefully starting a public discourse. The power of community organizing and moral obligation towards fugitive activism as a political act; a living archive of resistance, its success, and sustaining its futurity. If demolished, the community would lose one of its rare physical links—its inanimate history—to its abolitionist history, as well as the erasure of its—animate—oral history; given how little is known about the home's history today. Its survival offers the chance to remake preservation into an act of justice, centering marginalized voices rather than silencing them.



NO PARKING

BAYS FISH
RIVERSIDE DRIVE
7/18/18



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