

The Preservation of Historic Sounds, Community Efforts to Restore and Maintain the Paul Robeson and John Coltrane Houses

Michael Jean, with Professor Molly McGlone
Penn Undergraduate Urban Research Colloquium Spring 2017



Paul Robeson House Timeline of Preservation



Frances Aulston

1984 Frances Aulston, former research librarian of The Free Library of Philadelphia, community leader, and activist, formally founded the West Philadelphia Cultural Alliance to stimulate community participation in the arts after the MOVE bombing tragedy.

1994 WPCA works with Professor Charles Blockson of Temple University, begins discussion concerning murals and celebrating Paul Robeson's 100th birthday in Philadelphia.

1998 City of Philadelphia proclaims Thursday April 9, 1998 as Paul Robeson Day.

1999 WPCA stimulates community support for the Paul Robeson House—Board of Directors, friends of Paul Robeson House, and WPCA Advisory Board.

2000 Paul Robeson Dedared Historic Landmark.

2000-2010 Development of Educational Programs such as Teen Writers Academy, Urban Scholar workshops, and History Summer camp. Relationships formed with local civic organizations, churches, as well as Kimmel Center and Mann Center.

2003 Board began development and assessment process, building up the organizational strength of WPCA, making connections with UPenn, Temple University, and Kelly/Maiello Architects. Other professionals began to help restructure a high interest rate mortgage on the property resulting in successfully refinancing of debts.

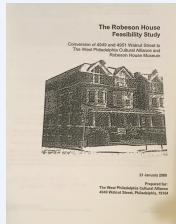
2006-2010 3 Strategic Feasibility Proposals for house created under planning committees. William Penn Foundation gives biggest grant of \$49,500 over 36 months.

2012-2013 Fundraising events including Restore America event with HGTV and Save America's Treasure and the tribute concert.

US Postal Service Dedication of a Paul Robeson stamp at a ceremony at the Paul Robeson House.

2015 Vernoca Michaels, former promoter of Blue Horizon Boxing and family-friend of Paul Robeson's family becomes new director of WPCA.

2017 Open house showcases new exhibits and plans for Development in Paul Robeson House.



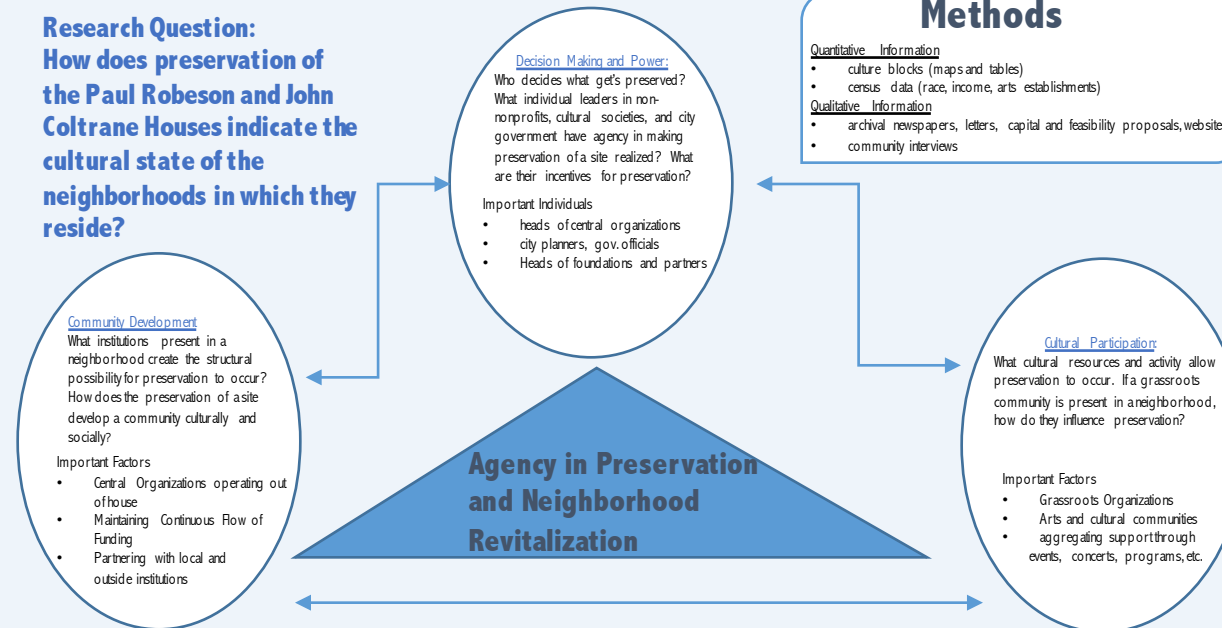
Vernoca Michael



Research Objective

This project looks at the preservation of places of artistic significance, specifically the John Coltrane House and the Paul Robeson House. Both houses posses immense cultural and historic value and were designated as National Historic Landmarks. This study will discover why the Paul Robeson House has seen more success in historic preservation than the John Coltrane House and how the two houses affect the cultural state of the surrounding neighborhoods in which they reside. This study will also ask questions of how community organizations, city government, and city planners choose the cultural landmarks that they invest in.

Research Question: How does preservation of the Paul Robeson and John Coltrane Houses indicate the cultural state of the neighborhoods in which they reside?



John Coltrane House Timeline of Preservation



1984 John W. Coltrane Cultural Society (JWCCS) Formed by Mary L. Alexander (Coltrane's first cousin) and group of Trane Stop Resource Institute Board of Directors.

1989 JWCCS begins Backyard Concert series in house, and invites Philly jazz artists Kahn, Jamal, Albie Pollitt, Bayard Lancaster, Barbara Walker. JWCCS also organizes children's music workshops, where lessons in African drumming are given in the backyard.

1990 First major fund given by Black United Fund of Pennsylvania. State Representative Frank Oliver funds organization nearly every year thereafter.

1995 John W. Coltrane Society 10th Anniversary celebrated with fundraising concert held the Mill Creek Jazz Center in West Philadelphia.

1996 JWCCS works with local partners to develop year-long Coltrane Project, a long series of events, including concerts, commissioned works, residents, and workshops directed towards continuing the legacy of John Coltrane.

1997 John W. Coltrane Society reviews \$10,000 grant from Crown Royal's "Monuments of African American Achievement" program.

1999 John Coltrane House obtains designation of National Historic Landmark
2004 Mary L. Alexander undergoes health problems, drops out of JWCCS and group becomes defunct. House sold to community member and friend of Mary, Norman Gadson, who is also deeply connected to Philadelphia jazz community.

2004-2005 Norman Gadson lives at Coltrane house, working on small repairs and begins holding meetings with supporters of house with incentives to transform house into arts center.

2011 Anita and Lenora Early Gadson create non-profit group called John Coltrane House Organization.

2012 Philadelphia Jazz Day invites several Philly jazz artists and musicians to the house in Strawberry Mansion to celebrate Coltrane's legacy. Mayor Michael Nutter attends and gives official Jazz Appreciation Month proclamation to Philly Jazz legend Charlie Rice.

2012-2013 Flurry of cultural activity including Jazz Day Coltrane guided house tours, black music month celebrations, Youth Build volunteer work at house, and Coltrane Birthday Celebration.

2013 Capital campaign for house preservation continues, with \$50k acquired thus far.

2014 Pew Arts Heritage Grant Received of \$71, 825

2016 Lenora Early passes away, JCH Organization becomes defunct. House acquired by Hather Fernandez (Early) Gadson.



Amnita Gadson