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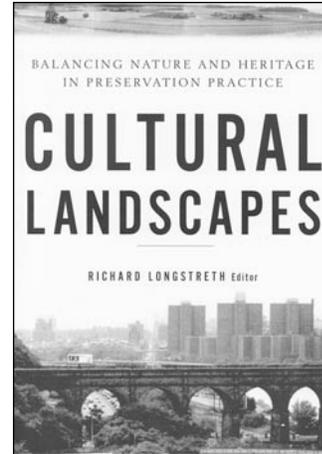
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Richard Longstreth, ed. ***Cultural Landscapes: Balancing Nature and Heritage in Preservation Practice***. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008, 218 pp., black-and-white photographs and illustrations, paper, ISBN 978-0-8166-5099-6.

C*ultural Landscapes* is a book whose time has come. Here, the fields of cultural landscape study, architectural history, and heritage preservation are presented in a useful set of essays on the history of preservation, the preservation of cultural heritage, and the contradictions inherent in cultural landscape “preservation.” It is a useful guide for scholars, students, and preservationists from all three fields.

Divided into two sections, “Interpreting Landscape” and “Balancing Change and Continuity,” *Cultural Landscapes* begins with an introduction richly illustrated with examples of change over time. Essays explore the perils of attempting to “freeze” any landscape within a single time frame for the purpose of heritage preservation. As Longstreth illustrates, any attempt to thwart the natural organic change of a landscape can produce unanticipated consequences (p. 15). Moreover, such efforts are inherently selective and result in cultural constructions that are never purely neutral.

The first section explores the politics of preservation in an array of situations, including Los Angeles’s Little Tokyo, the construction of the N.Y. Cross-Bronx Expressway, and the construction of the National Park system by the CCC. Each essay highlights the cultural

construction of its subject projects and their long-term results. In natural landscape preservation, the necessity of a “hands-off” policy emphasizes the importance of preserving an organic landscape over time. In the built landscape, however, the essays on Los Angeles and New York City highlight the importance of cultural sensitivity and the significance of considering organic neighborhoods within a larger preservation plan. Both built and natural landscapes require growth over time, without interference, despite the inherent contradiction this implies for heritage preservation.

Part Two, “Balancing Change and Continuity,” focuses closely on landscape heritage preservation, including the rehabilitation of vegetation in Oklahoma’s Platt Historic District, rural historic landscape preservation on Whidby Island, Washington, the protection of vernacular landscapes, and the use of cultural landscapes for conservation. In the last essay, Robert Melnick ruminates on the importance of place in the context of historic preservation, emphasizing that preservation is about exploring the meaning of past landscapes in present-day life. Each essay illustrates not just a single imagined past but multiple pasts that are not easily reconciled through preservation. The challenge of mapping time across place and space requires the understanding that preserving landscapes depends on what Melnick refers to as “landscape ownership,” a concept that is not widely embraced in this country; Americans need to recognize that land ownership is viewed through a cultural lens, and thus our search for a static past to preserve is nearly futile, particularly when cultural ownership and actual use collide.

In these highly interesting and informative essays, Longstreth et al. rightly assert that learning about environmental history is instrumental to sensitive cultural landscape preservation. This requires a multidisciplinary approach that includes archaeologists, anthropologists, horticulturalists, and natural resources specialists, in addition to specific specialists, who together can address the particular issues of landscape without fear of traditional territorial rivalries (p. 206). Furthermore, preservation management and maintenance must be addressed and planned for, so as to account for change over time. The historic

designed landscape can, through maintenance challenges, prove unpreservable; exotic plant control, for example, can pose significant difficulties and should be actively managed to prevent future problems. All of these concerns must be addressed within the context of the community, so that future citizens will appreciate and value landscape preservation.

Cultural Landscapes is broadly applicable to many disciplines and useful for the environmental historian, preservationist, and scholar interested in the natural sciences as they are applied to social landscapes. Its essays are accessible, thought provoking, and highly useful starting points for classroom discussion. It is a text whose places, and times, have arrived.

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