

# Slave Roots and Preservation: Cultural/ Ethical Legacy of Colonialism in the New World

MARILYS R. NEPOMECHIE, AIA  
Florida International University

Without fanfare, African-American neighborhoods of the post-Reconstruction South are disappearing. With them, a legacy of the African experience in the New World is also disappearing, destroyed—not by developers bent on demolition for profit—but, more alarmingly and infinitely more poignantly, by well-intentioned African-American residents who see in them stigmatizing reminders of a Jim Crow past. Not only do these neighborhoods comprise some of the largest repositories of wood frame vernacular architecture in the urban South, but they constitute a large percentage of the contemporary morphology of those urban areas. Their destruction—that of the only remaining physical record of the African-American experience in the southeastern United States at the end of the nineteenth century—becomes the destruction of a material culture of exile for a group whose coerced presence in the New World did not parallel the search for opportunity, freedom or adventure that characterized the early years of exploration and colonization for European immigrants. In the realms of identity and self-definition, the eradication of neighborhoods such as these—either through a physical dismantling or through the gentrification that often accompanies historic preservation—begs the question of whose history deserves a place in the collective memory of the New World.<sup>1</sup>

This paper raises and attempts to answer a myriad of complex questions surrounding the historic preservation of residential buildings that evidence an African presence in the southeastern United States. The exploration forms part of a larger research/ publication project documenting and analyzing the vanishing architecture of turn of the century African-American neighborhoods in the post-Reconstruction South. Rather than discuss the relevant issues generally, these are explored through a description of the fate of a decidedly contextual, site-specific, affordable infill house designed by our office for one such neighborhood on the Florida Gold Coast.

The city of Delray Beach and its Community Redevelopment Agency sponsored a competition to design affordable infill houses for scattered vacant lots throughout the turn-of-the-century African-American neighborhood of Mount Olive in the spring of 1992. The brief advocated a contextual response. Our entry was a hybrid/transformation of two vernacular housing types: the shotgun house indigenous to Mount Olive and the Charleston sideporch, native to a region with similar climate and history, and original home to many of the neighborhood's first residents.<sup>2</sup> Finding merit in its dignified approach to filling missing teeth in the fabric of a historic neighborhood, judges awarded our small house a first prize.

The cold reception that met their announcement took sponsors and judges of the competition completely by surprise. Although prospective African-American residents of Mount Olive acknowledged that ours was an ideal tropical house, sensitive to and respectful of their historic neighborhood, they insisted that the erection of houses with such clear lineage to a slave past could only stigmatize

and marginalize them further. As a result, they refused to commission any building with a resemblance to the quarters of their ancestors and in fact feel that they would prefer to see existing examples of those quarters destroyed. Nearly five years after the Delray competition, our small house has not been built.

What follows is an attempt to understand the issues raised by that competition. Specifically, we explore it as the perfect hypothetical for a broad-ranging discussion of current historic preservation practice. Not simply another instance in a long history of miscues between architects and clients, Delray is the theater in which a fundamental tension in the direction of current practice has inadvertently been revealed.

This competition has prompted us to examine the implications of supporting historic preservation in the context of affordable housing for persons of diverse ethnic and social backgrounds—specifically in view of academic work that defines the house as an important vehicle for identity and self-expression. Competition results have caused us to explore building typology as a contextual design tool—a possible response to the limitations imposed on an interpretive community by the socially constructed meaning of a built form. Finally, they have raised important questions relative to the generation and communication of meaning in architecture.

## THE MOUNT OLIVE STORY: ARCHITECTURE AND THE RACIAL PAST

The shotgun house is not unique to Delray Beach. Many can be found throughout the South, precisely in African-American neighborhoods such as Mount Olive. Most shotgun houses of the American Southeast were constructed as slave and agriworker housing during the 1880's, but variations on the type were built in the United States during much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>3</sup> The typology has subsequently been the basis for much contemporary design exploration across a range of regional, cultural and economic contexts.

Despite its role in the slave history of the American South, the shotgun house originated in a West African Yaruba residential prototype. Historians of vernacular architecture such as John Vlach note that it was first brought to the New World in the 1700's by the West Indian slave trade, taking hold in the Caribbean and finding its way to the United States through New Orleans and other cities on the Gulf of Mexico. An expression of African cultural heritage maintained in the face of extraordinary strife, today the house is widely regarded as a significant contribution to the American built landscape.<sup>4</sup>

Interestingly and conversely, evidence of an African presence in the Americas can also be found in Africa. John Vlach writes of "the Brazilian house" that can be seen throughout Nigeria as a result of

the New World experience of repatriated former slaves who, after years in Brazil, found their way back to the African continent in the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Artist/photographer Max Belcher records a version of American colonial architecture that became the house type of choice for American Africans returning to Liberia in the middle years of the twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> In both continents, the house-as-artifact forms the basis for a material culture that defines a people, a place and an experience.

As built throughout Delray Beach, the shotgun house is uniquely suited to a sub-tropical urban environment. One room wide with a narrow structural bay, extended in length (and sometimes height, as in the camelback or double-stack variation on the type), the Delray version of the shotgun generally has a gabled roof with wide, break-away overhangs, a deep front porch and cross ventilation in every room. Its simple framing system makes it hardy, inexpensive and easy to build. Like the Charleston single house, the nineteenth century, New World version of the shotgun was erected without front setbacks on contiguous narrow urban lots. These generated tight urban environments of pedestrian scale whose focus was life on the street as filtered through the semi-public space of front and side porches.<sup>7</sup>

Part of a program to provide well-designed, affordable single-family houses for residents with annual incomes ranging from \$17,000 to \$25,000, the Delray competition was intended to assemble a limited portfolio of houses for an area housing “a population of approximately 9,000 residents, nearly 3,000 housing units and some 300 scattered buildable lots of varying dimensions.”<sup>8</sup> Potential residents, pre-qualified by the CRA and state lending agencies, would be free to choose among the winning designs for a new home in their historic neighborhood.<sup>9</sup>

Originally built amid pineapple and mango groves of the 1890’s, Mount Olive centers around (and unofficially takes its name from) the Mount Olive Missionary Baptist Church. The original structure, which has since been destroyed, dates from 1896. It was the first home of the oldest African-American congregation still active in Palm Beach County.<sup>10</sup> Product of a deeply segregated post-Reconstruction South, its namesake neighborhood was established on property purchased from the Model Land Company along the right-of-way of Henry Flagler’s Florida East Coast Railway. At the easternmost edge of the Everglades, the railroad—and the new African-American community—virtually defined the very frontier of contemporary civilization.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Mount Olive was one of many “Colored Towns” whose labor supported the agricultural and tourist economies of the Florida Gold Coast through the middle of the twentieth century. Despite far-reaching changes brought about by the civil rights movement of the 1960’s, Mount Olive today—where the descendants of many of the founding families still live—is full heir to a history of post-Emancipation Proclamation racial injustice.<sup>12</sup>

Currently, housing stock in Mount Olive consists primarily of single-family detached residences—wood-frame Florida Cracker houses, one and two stories high, as well as Mission-style masonry houses. Lots range in width from 50 to 75 feet, but are uniformly 130 feet deep. Utility easements in the rear of lots are undeveloped mid-block alleys.<sup>13</sup> Despite the pull of cool, air conditioned interior space (most neighborhood houses boast window air-conditioning units), much of neighborhood social life continues to center on the street, played out on front porches, yards and driveways. In varying stages of disrepair, the houses of Mount Olive comprise the fabric of an imperiled historic neighborhood—a neighborhood losing its upwardly mobile population to the suburbs.

Our \$40,000, three-bedroom, two-bath, 1,250-square-foot, single-family wood-frame house was intended neither as a literal reconstruction of neighborhood structures nor as a romanticized, sanitized version of the past. Rather, it represented a desire to reinforce and validate the morphology of an architecturally significant place, adding to it in (relative) kind, while upgrading the new housing stock

to include spatial variety and modern conveniences—such as air conditioning and a myriad of house machines—not found in existing examples of the type.

Like the modest shotgun house of the turn of the century, our proposal is a long thin house essentially (but not exclusively) one room wide. The addition of neutral passage space allows for privacy that was unavailable in the traditional shotgun houses. Nonetheless, our proposal retains the spirit of the existing houses by ensuring that this passage space is always secondary to other, larger use functions (dining, reading, storage, laundry, etc.) In order to accommodate and formalize the role of the automobile at the center of neighborhood social activity, our small house wraps its front/side porch around its narrow front elevation to create a carport. This space doubles as additional covered outdoor living area in the absence of the automobile. Unlike most examples of the local type, but much like Charleston single house, ours is a two story house. It appears as the small neighborhood home perched atop the new ground generated by its stucco-clad base. Of course, our 1990’s shotgun house is centrally air conditioned. Not only does it satisfy a contemporary demand for privacy in family life, but it also provides all the machine conveniences for domestic life considered necessary at the end of the twentieth century.

Although traditional West African and later Caribbean shotgun houses are essentially small places to sleep rather than places to live—in West African tradition it is the yard that comprises one’s true living quarters<sup>14, 15</sup>—our proposal respects and transforms that tradition by incorporating the wish for a release of space in a two-story living room. That room is immediately adjacent to the front porch and to the street that can thus continue to play an important role in community life. Moreover, by hugging one side of its narrow lot, the house opens visual access and makes usable exterior space between front and rear of its site.

A conviction that urban infill presupposes the neighborhood as a social construct and urban artifact worthy of preservation fueled our interest in the Delray competition. It was and continues to be our belief that designing within a recognizable building tradition allows forms to become the rich repositories of multiple simultaneous meanings. We had no intent to freeze Mount Olive in time either physically or psychologically. Rather, we assumed that both current and prospective residents shared our respect for the history and physical make-up of their neighborhood. We hoped to encourage simultaneous processes of preservation and transformation by working within the framework of the existing spatial urban structure (*de facto* zoning codes) and the parameters of existing typology (vernacular building strategies).

Nonetheless, prospective home owners who have approached the Delray CRA in search of a future residence have shied away from ours precisely *because* it draws, however indirectly, upon these architectural roots. They explain that despite the authenticity of its African heritage, the image suggested by our house carries with it far more powerful and abhorrent associations to the Jim Crow history of Delray Beach. Instead, would-be residents of Mount Olive appear to prefer what can only be described as white middle class housing circa 1960 to any form associated with their own history and heritage. To date, only single-story, block-and-stucco, developer-designed suburban boxes have been commissioned through the affordable housing initiative.<sup>16</sup>

### SELF DETERMINATION, PRESERVATION AND THE IRONIC SOLUTION OF GENTRIFICATION

Predictably, this reaction has placed the physical integrity of Mount Olive in real jeopardy, as missing teeth in the neighborhood fabric are filled with impoverished versions of suburbia and, gradually, existing vernacular houses are demolished and replaced with more of the same. Although it is surely possible to argue that variations on the local building types either less faithful or otherwise different

from our own might have met with a warmer welcome, the conclusions to be drawn here are nevertheless troublesome. For imprisoned by their interpretations and associations, Mount Olive residents have effectively devalued and are destroying what the larger interpretive community has slowly come to hold dear and is trying to emulate: a cohesive urban and tectonic construct that can support community.

The houses that Mount Olive residents are choosing to build suffer all the hallmark ills of the region-neutral, developer houses that have destroyed the American middle class suburb. In part responsible for a breakdown in local community life, such houses turn their backs on the streets that are traditionally its focus and center instead on private rear yards and interior spaces. They undermine the neighborhood by the non-contributing aesthetic of their setbacks, materials, tectonics and proportions. And in flagrant contradiction to the demands of the a subtropical climate, they have deep building sections, low ceilings, shallow roof overhangs and single-exposure spaces that prohibit cross-ventilation.

Ironically, our site-specific, wood-frame, affordable house may well be built—not in a modest neighborhood of coastal Delray Beach, where it has deep historic significance as a typology and where it represents a direct extension of local building traditions—but rather in one of the many neo-traditional “theme park” towns springing up near Seaside and Disney’s Town of Celebration. Alternative, nostalgic re-visions of suburbia for the middle and upper classes, several of the developers of these New Urbanist towns have shown an interest in the published house. They have responded to it solely as artifact—and so have focussed on the objective merits of a region-specific architecture rather than on the socio-economic and historic context in which that form was originally built.

We are left confronting the distinct possibility that only gentrification will ensure the physical survival of historic Mount Olive. Inhabitation by a middle class disassociated with the neighborhood or its history, responding instead to a reinvented, commodified take on the small-town America of yesteryear, is far more likely to result in the preservation of the place than the total reconstruction that would apparently be necessary in order to render Mount Olive palatable to its current residents. The neighborhood, bereft of the descendants of its original inhabitants, would remain physically intact—if sanitized, restructured and ultimately romanticized. Nonetheless, the most valuable part of the *genius loci* of Mount Olive would be lost—as would the hope of the Delray CRA to provide *in situ* housing for a sector of its population.

Our lament notwithstanding, the scenario sketched above is hardly unique. Historically, the artifacts that are cities become the repositories of sequential and often mutually conflicting meanings largely as a result of economic forces: Since vast amounts of infrastructure capital have been spent to generate the artifact—and since legislation and tax incentives are in place to maintain it—its permanence is a given.<sup>17</sup> Persons of varying cultures, social classes, economic means, political ideologies and aesthetic sensibilities each inhabit the artifact in turn, reinventing its meaning but not its form. As described perceptively in Michael Sorkin’s *Variations on a Theme Park: The Definition of Public Space in America*, this is the typical gentrification pattern for most American cities: A run-down but valuable downtown real estate holding inhabited by the city poor is acquired by developers. In the absence of a more lucrative offer to tear down the existing building(s) in order to make way for a new one, it is refurbished and subsequently marketed under circumstances that displace its original residents in favor of the upwardly mobile in search of the newly fashionable.<sup>18</sup>

Mount Olive might have represented an unusual variation on that pattern: Originally built inexpensively, its form is only now beginning to be considered significant and its geographic location in Delray Beach has yet to become truly valuable. As a result, although demolition and reconstruction were not economically out of the question here as it often is in traditional inner city conditions, it did become possible to consider retaining the neighborhood in its

valuable morphology for its current population. The competition brief written by the Delray CRA underlined and supported that possibility. Its outcome has denied both.

#### AT WHAT COST PRESERVATION? THE INSTRUCTIVE CASE OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Over the years, the definition of that which deserves to be preserved has broadened considerably. Beginning with the preservation of Mt. Vernon by the DAR, of colonial Williamsburg by John D. Rockefeller and of Greenfield Village, constructed and maintained by Henry Ford—preservation has grown from a movement formed to protect the history of the privileged few to one inclusive of the histories of the varied and often disenfranchised ethnic, racial immigrant groups that have made a life in America.<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, in recent years Delray Beach has gone to considerable lengths to identify its own historic structures—both private and public—offering owners economic incentives to conserve and improve them. A majority of Delray residents has enthusiastically supported municipal preservation efforts: Citizens have voted funds to aid in the restoration of their City Hall, art museum and other buildings of civic significance. Yet despite the fact that the larger community is eager to refurbish old Delray, and that this same community appears willing to extend its financial support to historic Mount Olive, residents find it impossible to separate the physical form of their neighborhood from its history. Given a choice, they unanimously prefer—not incomprehensibly, but perhaps without full assessment of the consequences—to leave that history behind.<sup>20</sup>

Our suggestion that new wood frame construction in Mt. Olive would acknowledge and support the historic character of the neighborhood, was more deeply controversial than we had imagined. For although the existing bungalows, cottages and shotgun houses of Mt. Olive were originally built using elements of what has since become recognized as balloon frame construction, these houses were erected at the turn of the century under the guidance and supervision of itinerant African-American builders and craftsmen<sup>21</sup> whose labor and expertise transformed the simple act of construction into “an essential element of the collective narrative of rural society.” I have come to believe that our own proposal was seen not as an extension of that tradition, but as the introduction of an imported, industrialized version of balloon framing that, in the context of affordable housing, effectively commodified the traditional houses and “linked them more strongly to the forces of the marketplace, signalling their transformation from vernacular architecture to an architecture of the poor.”<sup>22</sup>

While it has not yet done so, the city of Delray Beach could choose to designate Mount Olive an historic district and so *insist* on its preservation—while encouraging residents to remain and engage in the effort. In fact, since the original competition, an important grass roots effort to secure historic district designation for a portion of this neighborhood is under way, a written proposal at the state capitol awaiting approval. As drafted, the proposal is limited, and in significant respects, its perceived gains are ambiguous. Among its recommendations is the suggestion that some of the “better” examples of Mt. Olive housing be moved from their original sites within the African-American neighborhood to new locations near an existing historic district that preserves remnants of white Delray. That this process would succeed in dismantling rather than preserving Mt. Olive—that it would destroy the relationship between buildings and land, between building and building, between resident and place—are all largely overlooked. That, in dealing with architecture solely as a matter of the built artifact these relocated structures would serve to paper over the history of segregation in Delray is also largely forgotten. But organizers of the preservation effort contend that it is difficult to garner support for their proposals either within their own community or outside of it. As a result, they are willing to entertain suggestions that they agree may dilute the power of what they hope to achieve.

They fear that historic district designation will fail to wield much persuasive power with either current or prospective inhabitants. Instead, they contend that architectural and zoning codes in support of preservation could easily be seen as coercive efforts to keep a disadvantaged segment of the local population oppressed. For them, it is far more likely that placing Mount Olive among protected historic districts will only serve to hasten gentrification, taking it away from its current residents altogether.<sup>23</sup> Locally, there are few examples of modest, historically protected neighborhoods. It is still an unfortunate reality that a poor neighborhood with an unsavory history is not readily seen as worthy of preservation unless the proposal is accompanied by an economically and socially attractive promise of a move toward gentrification. Indeed, historic district status for places like Mount Olive, while not unheard of, is hardly commonplace in South Florida. In cases where context itself is socially embarrassing or otherwise questionable—and where gentrification is not the ultimate goal—mandated preservation immediately becomes suspect. This holds true in the eyes of the current and prospective residents (who devalue their own holdings and can only envision a positive transformation of the neighborhood by the most radical of means), of community building and zoning boards (who do not necessarily understand that the goals of preservation are not solely economic) and for the general public (whose support both fuels and protects preservationist activities). Such facts speak volumes about the typically exclusive character of our historically protected areas—and suggest a need for a more careful scrutiny of their economic and social dynamics both before and after historic district designation.<sup>24</sup>

At stake is nothing less than the very definition of the city—an organism whose physical form preservationists work to maintain, but whose social, cultural and economic “content” are the *sine qua non* of its multi-dimensionality and authenticity. As a result of our experience in Delray Beach, we have come to understand that the price of preservation for a neighborhood such as Mount Olive may be unreasonably high. Clearly it is necessary to redefine the economic and social structures that attach themselves to a historic district.

### FORGING A DESIGN ATTITUDE FOR A POST-ROMANTIC PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

In what Thomas Fisher calls “a post-Romantic era of professional practice,”<sup>25</sup> the disjunction of form and content represented by the Mount Olive case study raises important questions. Not only do these probe the ambivalent social role of preservation, but they also direct self-reflexive inquiries about the design stance of the profession: As architects, how independent do we want to make form from content? How independent do our clients want us to make the two? In the context of a competitive process such as this one, in which the jury and the intended inhabitants of its product turn out to have vastly different agendas, is it ever really possible to reconcile form, content and meaning?

Amos Rapoport has written eloquently on the definition of the house as a cultural phenomenon, explaining that no single factor determines its form in primitive and vernacular cultures. Indeed, he writes that indigenous cultures often build irrationally—against the dictates of climate, site conditions and even available technology—in favor of expressing religious beliefs, prestige, status instead. Rapoport explains that “what finally decides the form of a dwelling is the vision that people have of the ideal life.”<sup>26</sup>

It seems clear that we (and the prototype clients we conceived) harbored a widely different vision for the ideal future of Mount Olive from that of its present and prospective residents. Nevertheless, their response to the offer of affordable housing had one important parallel to our own as well as one significant difference: Like us, Mount Olive residents assumed a correspondence among the place, its form and its inhabitants. But while we posited a necessary

*correlation* among place, form and user, they posited a complete *identification* between themselves and their physical surroundings. Not surprisingly, that distinction led them to diametrically different conclusions regarding the form of their housing from our own. In a contemporary social context that imbues image with tremendous power—especially in the areas of self-identity and self-determination—it is not surprising that in their rejection of the history and associations of the shotgun/sideporch house, the residents of Mount Olive rejected its image, and thus its form.

In her 1974 think piece “The House as Symbol of the Self,” Clare Cooper Marcus argues along similar lines that the house is our most intimate and universal means of self expression. She concludes that architects will only serve their clients well when they are able to empathize with and respond to their clients’ concepts of self.<sup>27</sup> Yet neither Cooper Marcus, thinking at the scale of the individual, nor Rappoport, at the scale of the community, addresses the fundamentally *fluid*, character of self definition. With the passage of time and with increasing self knowledge, self-definition invariably changes. Neither author acknowledges that the spaces which once described our highest aspirations might, as we change, also change.

Nor do Rappoport and Cooper Marcus confront the very real physical costs of disregarding the complexities implied in that fluidity. Invariably, places like Mount Olive are destroyed—either by the external forces of redevelopment and gentrification or by the internal need of residents for self re-definition. Unfortunately, such communities seldom consider themselves—nor do others consider them—as meriting the attention that will garner them funds to ensure their own archival survival in the face of near certain physical extinction. As a result, all evidence of the early presence of an entire group of persons in the New World disappears.

### EPILOGUE: THE RE-INTERPRETIVE AGENDA:

Our proposal was a cry for pride in both place and history through preservation and through new construction in a manner that supported that preservation. We saw these as a source of strength from which to forge a future, rather than as shackles to an oppressive past. We wished to look at Mount Olive as cultural as well as physical phenomenon: a place whose complex, socially constructed meanings might be transformed, over time, from an expression of oppression to one of self-affirmation. At the heart of our proposal was the intent to educate, and, with dignity, to safeguard. Nevertheless, we find ourselves re-evaluating a scenario in which preservation and continuity—even as interpreted through the elastic prism of typology—are perceived as symbols of a coercive rather than natural fit between form and content.

We regretfully acknowledge that unknowingly, we may have been insensitive in proposing a derivative of the shotgun house for this particular place and this particular group of people. We had hoped that the West African roots of the typology might have effectively lifted it above the stigma of its more recent history and refocused the attention of residents on its cultural authenticity and historic significance. The example of the Charleston sideporch house, which, from its inception, existed in both ramshackle and luxury editions, seemed reason enough to assume that the shotgun, too, might be allowed to bridge the gap in cultural, economic and class differences.<sup>28</sup>

Yet the reaction of Mount Olive residents to our shotgun/sideporch house is fully comprehensible. The desire to leave a position of social and economic marginality in favor of full assimilation and acceptance into the larger culture virtually defines the ethnic, racial and immigrant experience in America. But the social history of this country during the past two centuries clearly demonstrates that membership in the larger culture is dearly bought. The cost of assimilation and accommodation for racial, national and ethnic groups in America has always included a collective forgetting, a loss of specific identity, history and past.

And it is precisely against that loss that our small house was a physical argument. We chose to rail against a collective amnesia because we considered that it should be difficult to accept an inauthentic, fictionalized history in lieu of a hard-earned past. We hoped that design based on vernacular types in a meaningful context would allow real history a chance to survive the trivialization and commercialization that are the hallmarks of gentrification. We hoped to mark out a way to preserve the history of marginalized groups long enough that the pain of old memories might be incorporated into a newly positive collective identity.

Ironically—and precisely as a result of a competitive process that separated user from professional—we have ended up exactly where we did not want to be: deciding that the best interests of a place and its people are served by something other than what they themselves expressly desire. We are anything but smugly comfortable in our position. Although we believe strongly that we see far-reaching consequences in blind acquiescence to as narrow a reading of an architectural form as Mount Olive residents wish to impose on themselves, post Pruitt-Igoe we understand the historically devastating results of professional hubris. Nevertheless, it seems worthwhile to point out that in the apparent absence of corroboration on the part of a larger interpretive community relative to whom this limited reading of an architectural form might make sense, Mount Olive residents might reconsider the voluntary self-imprisonment of this particular social construction of meaning.

Despite the perceived unacceptability of its echoes, we cannot help but suspect that our small shotgun/ sideporch house would appeal to the very same Mount Olive residents who reject it so soundly today, were they to come upon it in their own, long-since-gentrified former community. By then, however, Mount Olive would have become a different place, transferred to people unfamiliar with, and perhaps uncaring about, its history. By then, it would be far too late for former Mount Olive residents to salvage, reclaim and ultimately transform their own past with authenticity in its historically meaningful location.

After considerable self-reflection, then, after acknowledging frankly that our solution may not be the best or most appropriate one in all cases, we have (gingerly) returned to our original position regarding construction in Mount Olive. Despite the public outcry, we find ourselves unable to ignore the vast chasm that separates a transformation and reinterpretation of the history of enslavement from its abandonment—either through the destruction of its physical remnants or through gentrification. We must conclude that in our own estimation, at least, genuine empowerment for Mount Olive residents lies in preserving, embracing and celebrating their history rather than in succumbing to the urge for its destruction.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> *Environmental Design* January, 1997, and forms part of a larger research project documenting and analyzing vernacular housing in African-American neighborhoods of the Post-Reconstruction South. While the earlier paper centered on issues of affordable housing and community, this paper focuses on historic preservation and gentrification.
- <sup>2</sup> Vera Farrington, "Delray Beach: An Oral History," City of Delray Beach Historical Archives, 1997.
- <sup>3</sup> Allen George Noble and Margaret Geib, *Wood Brick and Stone: The North American Settlement Landscape*, vol. I. (Amherst: Univ of Massachusetts Press, 1984.), p. 60-62.
- <sup>4</sup> John Michael Vlach, "The Shotgun House: An African Architectural Legacy," in *Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture* (University of Georgia Press, 1986), p. 58-78.

- <sup>5</sup> John Michael Vlach, "The Brazilian House in Nigeria," in Camille Wells, editor, *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, II* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986), pp. 224-225.
- <sup>6</sup> Jock Reynolds, curator: Max Belcher, Beverly Buchanan and William Christenberry, *House and Home: Spirits of the Old South* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1994), pp. 15-16.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 62. See also, for a discussion of the shotgun house, John Vlach, "The Shotgun House: An African Architectural Legacy," in *Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture* (University of Georgia Press, 1986), p. 58-78.
- <sup>8</sup> Beth Dunlop, "Home, Sweet Home for \$44,000 Per Year," *The Miami Herald*, Nov. 1, 1992, 1G.
- <sup>9</sup> See generally, Brief, "City of Delray Beach Affordable Infill Housing Competition," May 1992.
- <sup>10</sup> Beth Dunlop, "Home Sweet Home for \$44,000 per Year," *The Miami Herald*, Nov. 1, 1992, 1G.
- <sup>11</sup> Vera Farrington, "Delray Beach: An Oral History," City of Delray Beach Historical Archives, 19—.
- <sup>12</sup> Lora Sinks Britt, *My Gold Coast: South Florida in the Earlier Years*, (Palatka, Florida: Brittany House, 1984).
- <sup>13</sup> See Brief, "City of Delray Beach Affordable Infill Housing Competition," May 1992.
- <sup>14</sup> LaVerne Wells-Bowie, "Sustaining Caribbean Environments: Past and Present Assets," paper delivered at Florida International University, Miami, Florida, Spring, 1997.
- <sup>15</sup> For a discussion of traditional Danish West Indies (now U.S. Virgin Islands) housing and slave village housing see C.G.A. Oldendorp, a German Moravian traveler who visited the islands in 1767-69 and whose work is in the Royal Library in Copenhagen in William Chapman, "Slave Villages in the Danish West Indies" in Thomas Carter and Bernard Herman, editors, *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture IV* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1991), pp. 108-120. Chapman also discusses post-Emancipation housing and its relationship to earlier house types and building/ ground arrangements.
- <sup>16</sup> Source: City of Delray Beach Community Redevelopment Agency.
- <sup>17</sup> See Mike Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), pp 178-221 for an illuminating discussion of the social and political history of the historic preservation movement in the United States.
- <sup>18</sup> Michael Sorkin, ed. *Variations on a Theme Park: The Definition of Public Space in America* (New York: Hill and Wang, The Noonday Press, 1992).
- <sup>19</sup> See Mike Wallace, "Visiting the Past: History Museums in the United States," in *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), pp 4- 32.
- <sup>20</sup> See *Ibid*, "Preserving the Past: A History of Historic Preservation in the United States," pp 195-196 for a lively description of the difficulties in procuring agreement between traditional preservationists and black constituencies in the face of black reluctance to preserve "places indelibly connected with white supremacy and/or poverty."
- <sup>21</sup> Vera Farrington, editor Delray Beach Historical Society, *Newsletter*, Spring, 1995. Delray Beach Historical Archives.
- <sup>22</sup> Luis Aponte-Pares, "Casitas, Place and Culture: Appropriating Place in Puerto Rican Barrios," *Places, A Quarterly Journal of Environmental Design* (Winter 1997): p. 59.
- <sup>23</sup> Mike Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History and Other Essays on American Memory*, pp 196- 197.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p 231.
- <sup>25</sup> Thomas Fisher, "Escape From Style," *Progressive Architecture*, (Sept.1994): pp. 59- 63, 100.
- <sup>26</sup> Amos Rapoport, *House, Form and Culture*. Foundations of Cultural Geography Series (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969), p. 47.
- <sup>27</sup> Clare Cooper Marcus, "The House as Symbol of the Self," in Jon Lang, *Designing for Human Behavior: Architecture and the Behavioral Sciences* (Stroudsburg, PA: Dowden, Hutchinson and Ross, 1974), p.130-148.
- <sup>28</sup> See *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* for a discussion of the social effects of mixed black and white labor forces in residential construction throughout the South.