

## A Discussion Concerning Preserving Cultural Heritage

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Perhaps as a result of the early American pioneer spirit to move forward to explore new territory Americans sometimes seem to have a shallow awareness of their cultural heritage when living within the midst of it and in retrospect regret their destruction of it in the past. Progress and growth are important yet preserving our cultural heritage is essential to our survival as a species and this includes not only ideas but also their physical results. The fast-food/instant-gratification American contemporary society sometimes neglects through ignorance our rich cultural heritage. Americans make great efforts to travel to Europe and other countries to view the creations of past civilizations yet systematically destroy their own. The idea seems to be to make each building bigger and grander than its predecessor while forgetting human scale and individual need and neglecting the originators from which the derivatives arose. Barbarism, or strength through brutality, is as old as history itself and its effects are still evident today in the ruins of ancient civilizations and in the tendency in human behavior to destroy or violate through violence and its effects must be countered by the enlightened few.

The trend now is to add to, refine, and improve on what was done in the past rather than destroy it. All of culture, or transmitted, learned behavior, is cumulative and all progress is based on the application of past ideological and technological discoveries and inventions. In other words, all progress is based on prior knowledge. Cities are built bit by bit, brick by brick, and building by building -- not instantaneously, although through the imagination, they can be instantaneously conceived yet their realization or execution is gradual. Our cultural heritage must be preserved and institutions that dispense our heritage, such as universities, are our highest

institutions.

With today's technology it would be relatively easy to erase centuries or even millennia of the results of civilization and thus the loss of world's heritage. With destructive agents and atomic energy the destruction would be immediate and complete. Even though such macrocosmic speculation is interesting and its realization possible most of us are more involved in the microcosmic reality of community interaction and day to day human interdependence. As the Fox theater in Atlanta was almost demolished by an insensitive mega-corporation some want to demolish the historic structures to "create a view" or to accommodate larger numbers of people, essentially expressing the dominance of quantity over quality. Although some say language is the greatest human invention since it involves the communication of complex, abstract ideas, words are easily spoken whereas deeds are more difficultly done.

As a society we must continue to grow and create new societal structures which will later become the cultural heritage of the future yet we must preserve our historic origins. Sadly, the future to soon becomes the past, but in a society we must look toward the future while preserving the best of the past. Although we as a society continue to become more civilized, some say we will learn from history; others say we never will.