

# Chapter 6

## The Sweet Auburn Historic District in Atlanta: Heritage Tourism, Urban Regeneration, and the Civil Rights Movement



Costas Spirou, Shannon Gardner, Mary Spears and Adelina Allegretti

**Abstract** This contribution focuses on the role of heritage tourism as an economic (re)development tool by examining the development of the Sweet Auburn a Historic District located west of downtown in Atlanta, Georgia. In 1976, the site received the National Historic Landmark designation. In 1992, the National Trust for Historic Preservation identified the area as one of the most threatened historic places in the United States. The significance of Sweet Auburn derives from its position as a center of heritage for the city's African American population as well as its contributions to the civil rights movement. The Big Bethel A.M.E. Church, the Wheat Street Baptist Church, Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church, and the Ebenezer Baptist Church are all located within its boundaries. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was pastor at the Ebenezer Baptist Church and his nearby boyhood home is part of the Martin Luther King, Jr National Historic Park (designated in 2018). Many African American businesses and organizations were established along Auburn Avenue in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including the first African American owned daily newspaper, the Atlanta Daily World (founded in 1928). The construction of the massive Downtown Connector (Interstate I-75/85) through Atlanta's urban core in the 1950s and early part of the 1960s divided the Sweet Auburn District. Disinvestment and urban decline followed, further accelerating social problems including population loss, housing decay, crime, and unemployment. The Historic District Development Corporation, an organization founded in 1980, has focused on revitalizing and preserving the area. Since then, the promotion of the historic designation, tourist attractions, and commercial opportunities, helped create a vibrant locale with eateries, bars, outdoor and indoor markets, museums, exhibits, and festivals. The recent addition of a stop by the Atlanta Streetcar has substantially increased the number of visitors, making this one of the most sought-after neighborhoods of the city.

**Keywords** Historic preservation · Civil rights movement · Urban revitalization · Atlanta · Sweet Auburn district

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C. Spirou (✉) · S. Gardner · M. Spears · A. Allegretti  
Georgia College & State University, Milledgeville, GA, USA  
e-mail: [costas.spirou@gcsu.edu](mailto:costas.spirou@gcsu.edu)

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## 6.1 The Preservation Movement and the Rise of Historic Districts

This chapter focuses on the Sweet Auburn District in Atlanta, Georgia, and examines its development first as a center of African American history and culture, its subsequent decline during the middle and latter part of the twentieth century, and its recent revitalization aided by heritage tourism connected to the civil rights movement. The re-emergence of the Sweet Auburn District is an example of the powerful role that the preservation movement can play in urban regeneration. A number of legislative acts and organizational initiatives following World War II set the stage for an increase in the number of historic districts across the country. For years, local citizen outreach drives through private sources operated separately from government, successfully identifying, protecting, and preserving the nation's historical places. These public and private efforts came together, initially through the formation of the National Council for Historic Sites and Buildings, and later by the induction of the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1949. The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 would prove the most important legislation. Enacted after a National Trust for Historic Preservation report released in 1965, the law called for a new direction. The document, titled *With Heritage So Rich*, urged for a renewed commitment across all levels of government to preserve important structures and settings. The document pushed for the completion of a national survey that would identify historically significant buildings, sites, and districts.

The National Historic Preservation Act's impact was extensive and included many other elements. It established the National Register of Historic Places and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and introduced the idea that historic districts should be certified. This allowed fund preservation activities to receive support from legislative acts. The result of this Act cannot be underestimated. By the mid-1980s, between 2,000 and 3,000 organizations were observed, engaged in preservation, education, advocacy, and restoration work. The National Trust for Historic Preservation saw its membership increase from 10,700 in 1966 to 185,000 in 1986. In addition, more than 35 university courses in various aspects of historic preservation appeared in the curriculums of colleges and universities across the country, professionalizing this field and employing more than 54,000 people in its administration (Stipe and Lee 1987).

The 1966, the Act also redefined historic districts. In previous years, only individual structures could receive that designation. However, the National Trust for Historic Preservation legislation recognized that historic objects often exist within a broader physical context, making the surrounding environment equally important. The notion that building groups could be identified in the designation proved unique, not only from a preservation perspective, but also from a tourist perspective, since visitors would be able to gain a more comprehensive understanding and appreciation for the location. Subsequent legislative acts, the Tax Reform Act (1976) and the Revenue Act (1978), helped further solidify the preservation movement. The removal

of existing incentives to destroy deteriorated buildings was also significant. Instead, tax benefits would be offered for rehabbing historic structures.

These changes increased the number of national parks, monuments, and historical and military areas from 17 in 1940 to 277 in 1970. The number of tourists who visited parks after World War II also grew significantly, but these parks were lacking accommodations and visitor services. To meet the increased demand in this area, Congress provided more than \$1 billion in the 1950s and 1960s. By 2004, more than 387 national park units were administered by the National Park Service. An upward trend has been observed in recent years. In 2009, the government designated nine new historic landmarks, bringing the total number of historical places close to 2,500. By 2017, the number of these designations increased to 2,600 (National Park Service 2019).

Interestingly, while these designations increased tourism, they also proved to positively impact economic development. Many cities looked to historic preservation as a way to revitalize their neighborhoods. In recent years, historic district properties have gone from 17,000 in 2000 to 34,400 in 2005. In Memphis, Tennessee, the number of neighborhood historic districts included from 2003 to 2005 doubled in comparison to those added in previous periods (Schaeffer Munoz 2006). According to the National Park Service, by the latter part of 2018, a total of 94,364 properties (i.e., districts, buildings, structures, sites, and objects) were listed in the National Register.

Historic districts have grown considerably in recent decades as the rise of the historic preservation movement helped their growth. Examples include the Georgetown Historic District in Washington, DC and the Martin Luther King Historic District in Atlanta, Georgia (Public Law 96-428). Officials have aggressively pursued local preservation ordinances to protect the historic character of buildings and neighborhoods. Slowly these initiatives are integrated into urban tourism policy development. The protection of special landmarks by halting demolition and upgrading streetscapes not only maintains the historic value of these areas, but it also creates growth potential and is central to the economic affairs of cities.

## 6.2 Rise and Fall: The Sweet Auburn District in Atlanta

Like many other cities in the southeastern part of the United States, Atlanta, GA has a unique history in reference to slavery, the Civil War, and the Reconstruction period. The city began in 1837 as a railroad terminus with a store, tavern, and blacksmith. During the early period, it was the end of the Western and Atlantic railroad line. At the time, centrally located Milledgeville, GA was the capital of the state and few thought anything would grow from this railway crossroads which was originally named Marthasville. However, the city grew rapidly and eventually emerged as a key commercial and cultural hub. The area, east of downtown Atlanta, evolved into a robust center of African American entrepreneurialism and social life (Auchmutey 2017).

With the ratification of the 13th Amendment, there was a need to educate newly freed slaves. Atlanta University was founded in 1865 and located approximately 2–3 miles from what became known as the Sweet Auburn District. Early classes were held in the Friendship Baptist church, where what later became Spelman College, an all-female school, started in 1881 (Lefever 2005). Morris Brown College, also established in 1881, started in the Big Bethel A.M.E. church and was the first college owned by African Americans (Evans et al. 2002). The Freedmen's Aid Society opened Clark University in 1869 and Gammon Theological Seminary, with help from the Methodist Episcopal Church, in 1883 (Dorsey 2004). These early institutes of higher education included high school classes as there were no public high schools for African Americans at the time. As students graduated and became doctors, lawyers, and other professionals, places were needed for them to practice their trade.

In addition to being the location in the center of educational activity, the Sweet Auburn District has a long history of commercial activity. *Georgia Real Estate Loan and Trust Company*, established in 1890, was a joint investment firm. The main organizer, Floyd Crumbly, was a grocer with real estate investments. *The Atlanta Loan and Trust Company* and *The Union Mutual Insurance Company* were formed in 1891 and 1897, respectively. All were born from a lack of credit available to former slaves. When the 1895 Cotton Exposition took place, it was a chance for Atlanta to show off the “New South.” Booker T. Washington was asked to give his now-famous speech, titled the Atlanta Compromise, to a mixed-group of Whites and Blacks, to show that Atlanta “was no longer racially divided” (Jean-Laurent 2014). The listeners were seated separately, which hinted at the idea of “separate, but equal.” On the outskirts of the exposition, the Negro Building allowed students from nearby colleges, entrepreneurs, and many others to showcase their accomplishments; and allowed leaders to meet about civil rights and the future for America's African Americans. The building's entrance faced south toward the Auburn District.

Churches were some of the first large buildings in the district and played an important role in building up the area. Church buildings were not only used for worship, but also for the “economic and social needs of freed African Americans” (Dorsey 2004, 54). In 1840, land had been given to African Americans to build a place of worship. The church building was destroyed during the Civil War, but the property was returned after the war which was then sold to purchase another property on what would later become Auburn Avenue. The church, known as the Big Bethel A.M.E., housed the first African American public school in Atlanta in its basement. Many elementary schools began in churches until permanent buildings were found. Other churches were formed including Ebenezer Baptist Church in 1886 and Wheat Street Baptist Church in 1870. Nearby, Friendship Baptist Church was established in 1862 (Hamilton 2002; Dorsey 2004).

Tension between Black and White Americans in Atlanta was steadily increasing. Jim Crow Laws were already in effect and getting worse. African Americans were increasingly moving into the Auburn Avenue neighborhoods. In 1904, Henry Rucker, who had been born a slave, constructed Rucker Building on Auburn Avenue. The brick building consisted of retail space and professional offices and proved to be the first office building for African Americans, owned by African Americans in the city.

Benjamin Davis and the Grand Order of the Odd Fellows brought a new building to Auburn Avenue in 1912. There was space for businesses, including a pharmacy, office space, and an auditorium. The roof even had a garden. Booker T. Washington dedicated the Odd Fellows building in 1912. Unfortunately, the roof garden had to be closed due to an outbreak of the Spanish Flu in 1918. However, the building hosted many dances and other social affairs in the 1920s and 1930s (Hamilton 2002). In 1921, a branch of the public library opened on Auburn Avenue. The Auburn Branch of the Carnegie Library of Atlanta was the first in Atlanta for African Americans (Nosakhere and Robinson 1998). The branch was open until 1959 and was operated by African American women.

Across the street from the Odd Fellows Building, Alonzo Herndon constructed the Herndon Office Building in 1924, which was large enough to house around 60 offices, a handful of storefronts, and a hotel. A school for social workers was located there from 1925 through 1935. Other buildings erected around this time period include the Prince Hall Masonic Temple and Tabor Building in 1927 which housed the Prince Hall Masons. It was later used by Martin Luther King Jr. as the president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the Women's SCLC in the adjacent Tabor Building (Hamilton 2002). A *Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA)* had been established in 1894 on Auburn Avenue to give young, Black men a place of recreation as well as a meeting place for older African Americans, and a Sunday afternoon prayer meeting. The property was sold in 1918 and a new site was built nearby on Butler Street (now Jesse Hill Street) (Hamilton 2002).

The *Atlanta Daily World* began in 1928 as a weekly newspaper for African Americans by African Americans. The newspaper's office was on Auburn Avenue from inception until 2008. Subscriptions were solicited in the Black community and businesses who extensively advertised in the paper. The Historic American Building Survey (HABS) recognized the Sweet Auburn District as "a center for black enterprise with established black religious institutions" in the late nineteenth century (HABS 1979, 6). Sweet Auburn was considered a springboard for many successful businesses and African American institutions. During segregation, "the neighborhood around Auburn Avenue became a symbol of black success in American society" because of "its religious institutions and fraternal organisations, its business enterprise and social activism, its famous citizens and anonymous ones" (HABS 1979, 15).

However, following World War II, the Sweet Auburn District was faced with problems that affected Atlanta in general. These included a declining population base, the erosion of neighborhood retail services, and the deterioration of the physical plant (HABS 1979). The fall of the Sweet Auburn District can be attributed mainly to two factors: the integration of Atlanta and the construction of the Downtown Connector, a massive highway cutting through the city's downtown. These developments caused Auburn Avenue to fall from its position as the height of African American excellence to a neighborhood filled with deteriorating buildings and lack luster curb appeal.

Chronologically, the first threat to Sweet Auburn's prosperity was the construction of the Downtown Connector. The project began with the Lochner Plan in the 1940s that was drafted as a solution to Atlanta's congestion and safety issues (Lichtenstein Consulting Engineers 2007). Construction began in 1948, but it was not until the

passage of the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956 that the gravity of this project was realized. This Act provided the states with the necessary funds to expand the highway systems, and it brought interstates 75 and 85 to Atlanta. The Federal Aid Highway Act (1956) was the catalyst of the largest highway construction program in history. The plans for the highway specifically went through marginal neighborhoods, like Sweet Auburn, so the highway companies could acquire the land at a lesser cost. This also exemplified the intention of “slum clearance” that originated in the National Housing Act of 1949 and would become known as urban renewal. The construction of the Connector had major implications for the Sweet Auburn District because the highway ran directly through the middle of the neighborhood. This cut the neighborhood in half, and it made the area a less desirable place to live. Residents of the area expressed concerns about the construction, which unfortunately continued as planned. The highway made the Sweet Auburn District an unfavorable place to live, and it undermined the thriving African American community that had been established there.

Along with the construction of the Downtown Connector, the integration of Atlanta also impacted the future of the district. While integration was a monumental victory for the African American community, it also represented the nail in the coffin of the once flourishing neighborhood. Sweet Auburn was a hub of African American businesses and institutions, but this was a byproduct of necessity. During segregation, the community had to rely on itself, but once African American business owners saw opportunities outside the confines of the corridor, they took them. Upper- and middle-class citizens withdrew from the area, and this caused a loss of revenue. Working-class residents felt abandoned by the upper and middle class who had the ability to move away and take their business elsewhere (Inwood 2011). The middle class capitalized on the opportunity to move to the open spaces of the suburbs that had once been reserved for the white population. This left Sweet Auburn “as a decaying memorial to a bygone era” (Pomerantz 1996, 485). Businesses withdrawing,—coupled with the unattractive prospect of living near the Downtown Connector,—stunted any further growth in the area. The once prosperous community fell into disarray and had remained that way until its historic revitalization during the latter part of the twentieth century.

### **6.3 Heritage Tourism and the Revitalisation of the District**

The Sweet Auburn District boasts historical significance well beyond old buildings, but the meaning of the landmarks is what drove the efforts in historical preservation. The Martin Luther King Jr. Historic Park is located in the Sweet Auburn District and is one of Atlanta’s top tourists’ destinations. The park includes Martin Luther King Jr.’s birthplace which hosts an average of 300,000 visitors a year. The King Center is also a part of the park and is the final resting place of Dr. and Mrs. King. The Center houses a collection of King’s papers and the documents of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Near his birthplace is Ebenezer Baptist Church, the church

Martin Luther King Jr. attended and led as a preacher. Finally, in the district is the Big Bethel A.M.E. Church. This church is a cornerstone of African American culture in Atlanta. All of these landmarks line the street of Auburn Avenue, and they provide a clear picture as to why this district holds significance in American civil rights history.

In 2003, the Eastside Atlanta Stakeholders generated a redevelopment plan that incorporated the Sweet Auburn District. The associates argued that a tax allocation district was “essential to ensure that the City of Atlanta maintains its historical position as the commercial center of the metro region” (Invest Atlanta 2003). Mayor Shirley Franklin supported the idea through the Redevelopment Powers Act, which allowed for the area’s property taxes to directly fund the district’s revitalization plans. The City of Atlanta hoped the tax allocation district would protect authentic properties from the Civil Rights era and incentivize businesses to open in the Sweet Auburn area to increase tourism (Trubey 2018). In 2018, there was controversy surrounding the Atlanta City Council’s choice for the Sweet Auburn District to receive another year of tax incentives, as some members thought it was time to move the tax allocation district from Sweet Auburn Avenue to another area of the state.

To help revitalize the area and keep traffic to a minimum, the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) added three streetcar stops near historical properties to assist tourists in reaching a variety of popular places around the city. These new stops, known as Sweet Auburn Market, the King Historic District, and Auburn at Piedmont, feature significant destinations like the Atlanta Daily World building, Martin Luther King Jr.’s birth home, and the APEX Museum. The City of Atlanta, in a partnership with MARTA (local transportation agency), spent a total of eight years strategizing and constructing the new streetcar route. Through government appropriations by the United States Department of Transportation in 2010, they were able to apply for grant funding for the Atlanta Streetcar system. The department awarded \$47.6 million for an infrastructure plan using the Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) II program under President Barack Obama’s administration (City of Atlanta 2010).

Another \$50 million was raised by the City of Atlanta and other preservation organizations to cover further costs of installation and maintenance of the system (Ball 2015). By routing the streetcar through almost 3 miles of impoverished areas, the City of Atlanta laid the foundation for investment and commerce to occur around the new stops. This financial support had a positive effect on the regeneration of the Sweet Auburn District due to the amount of potential growth that could transpire from the project’s outcome.

The Sweet Auburn Market stop offers visitors an inside look into the daily life of local residents through regional cuisine and the authentic flavor of the area. The destination is well known for its historical associations to the Sweet Auburn Curb Market, which helped revitalize the area after the Great Atlanta Fire in 1917 (Ward 2017). It survived untouched for decades until 1974 when it was threatened to be demolished. Local banks were able to finance renovations on the building for historical preservation purposes and it remained standing. However, it never reached its full potential again until the 1990s. Toward the end of the decade, the site’s title was



changed from the Municipal Market to its current name to acknowledge the segregation that had once taken place there. The redevelopment of the market really picked up in 2010 with the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, when the national government gifted the city with a \$1.8 million grant to renovate the building. The Sweet Auburn Curb Market has continued to grow as the revenue went from \$7 million in 2012 to \$9.5 million in 2016 (Cauley 2018). The Sweet Auburn Curb Market stays regularly visited by thousands of nearby Grady Hospital workers and Georgia State University students because of its central location and variety of cuisine from locally owned businesses (Cadmus Group 2019).

The Historic District Development Corporation was formed in 1980 with the purpose of revitalizing areas with historical significance which included the Sweet Auburn District. (Historic District Development Corporation 2018). This non-profit, redevelopment organization commenced their efforts with housing initiatives using a plan that slowly went from street to street, starting with the houses located closest to the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site. The volunteers would construct brand new homes on empty properties, but also improve the houses and establishments that were there prior to their work. Their efforts in the Sweet Auburn District have revitalized single-family living in over 120 homes and multi-family housing in nearly 500 apartments, while maintaining the same demographics of a majority African American population (Historic District Development Corporation 2018). To make the neighborhoods safer and more cost-effective around the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site, the HDDC has created spaces that join together apartment living with commercial businesses. Studioplex is one of the more sizable versions using this strategy (HDDC 2018). Through partnerships with financial entities, such as the Bank of America, HDDC was able to invest \$18.5 million into the expansion of mixed-use complexes that cultivate economic success in low-income households. In the Old Fourth Ward, which borders the Sweet Auburn District to the north, the HDDC created 40,000 square feet of additional commercial space to help further boost the fiscal practices in Atlanta.

As more money was invested into the revitalization of the historic site, more people began to visit. Heritage tourists come from all parts of the world to experience the preservation district which includes the Dr. King Jr.'s birth home, Ebenezer Baptist Church, the Visitor Center, the "I Have A Dream" World Peace Rose Garden, and Fire Station No. 6. After a full interior and exterior restoration of the King family home was completed in 1982, the National Park Service, in a partnership with the King Center, began giving tours of the property. To ensure tourists had a quality, authentic experience, the National Park Service consulted with the King family to set up the original floor plan during Dr. King Jr.'s adolescence, even considering decor and furnishing details. After the National Park Service signed a five-year lease agreement for \$50,000, the King Center was able to grant free tours to the general public (Suggs 2018). This lease also made the National Park Service responsible for the overall maintenance of the home on a daily basis. Because guided tours are also offered for the entire district, it becomes an attractive place for visitors looking for affordable destinations to visit. In 2018, the birth home was no longer owned by a member of the King family. The National Park Foundation bought the home



from Bernice King for \$1.9 million (Suggs 2018). This made federal preservation funding for the historic site more accessible and allowed Ms. King to focus solely on enhancing the information and programs at the King Center.

Ebenezer Baptist Church, the religious home of Rev. King Jr., always struggled to get the necessary resources for crucial renovations until 1996 when the National Park Service took out a 50-year lease on the property (Southeast Region National Park Service 2001). However, the National Park Service could not start the redevelopment project immediately due to lack of funding. Eventually, then (NPS 2019) was awarded a combination of federal and private funding for their project. The building was completed in two stages. The cost for the overall structural improvements involved in stage one reached over \$1.8 million, while stage two had a lower budget that focused more on furnishings and appearances of the church. After the renovation was completed, the National Park Service added it to their historic site tour route so visitors would gain a fuller understanding of Rev. King Jr.'s religious life.

A Visitor Center was added in 1996 when the area's popularity began to rise. The building houses multiple exhibits that help tell the story of Dr. King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement in Atlanta. Across from the Visitor Center lays a patch of flowers designed by the International World Peace Rose Garden that reminds viewers of Dr. King's work to pursue change through nonviolence and peaceful protest. Not only did this beautify the area, but it added one more public display for tourists to experience. In 2016, the Martin Luther King Jr. Historic Site earned \$27.3 million in visitor spending, which generated over 450 jobs in the tourism industry (Pew Charitable Trusts 2017).

In order to increase the average number of tourists that come to the Sweet Auburn District, organizations stage numerous annual festivals that celebrate African Americans. The largest of these events is the Sweet Auburn Springfest which occurs in May. With over 350,000 attendees each year, the outdoor festival shut downs almost two miles of road in the Sweet Auburn District to set up a dozen stages for musical performers, tents for international vendors, and even a play area for children. The Atlanta Life Insurance Company, Citizens Trust Company, and Mutual Federal Savings & Loan Association, three of the biggest African American financial firms, began the festival around 35 years ago to bring attention to the community's assets and history. Because of heritage tourism, this event is an economic boon to the area.

A similar event held in October, the Sweet Auburn Music Festival, allows the community to come together over R&B, Hip-Hop, and Gospel music to celebrate Auburn Avenue's culture. The event also includes food vendors, a car and motorcycle show, and a kid's area. For over 26 years in the month of November, Auburn Avenue has closed for the Sweet Auburn Heritage Festival to allow vendors to promote their business which in turn encourages economic development. In July, the National Black Arts Festival promotes music and art, and celebrates African American humanities and culture. The festival began in 1988 and has hosted well-known figures such as Maya Angelou, Gladys Knight, and Alfre Woodard. Their success in the Atlanta community even received the attention of Congress in 2008, who called it a part of "the cultural fabric of greater Atlanta and all of America" (Pousner 2012, 14). To

appeal to international tourists, the festival brings in artists from all across the globe, including the Caribbean, Africa, and Latin America.

Sweet Auburn has started to revitalize because those in the area saw the historic value of the landmarks, street, and buildings and decided to capitalize on them. After the recognition of the tourism possibilities thanks to the important history housed there, it became apparent that the area's potential was significant. The street-car expanded visitor access. Additionally, the annual history celebrations, musical festivals, and art shows have also become common activities. The Curb Market helped attract residents. The vibrancy of the shops, restaurants, and public spaces made Sweet Auburn a competitive neighborhood as regeneration continued. The Big Bethel A.M.E. church began a project named the Big Bethel Renaissance Walk. Their goal is urban revival to enhance the "vibrancy and economic success of the past by focusing on not only the African American character of the neighborhood but also on the spirit of cooperation between African Americans of different classes" (Inwood 2011, 157).

The growth of heritage tourism has helped re-create the Sweet Auburn District into what it once was. However, it takes consistency from the community and outsiders to keep the area maintained and growing. The National Trust for Historic Preservation listed the historic district as one of the United States' "Eleven Most Endangered Historic Places" in 1992 (Atlanta Preservation Center 2019). Soon after, the Atlanta Preservation Center (2019) brought awareness to the avenue by placing in on their list of "Most Endangered Historic Places" in 2005. Even after significant progress, it was put back on the list in 2009 and 2011. The historic area in eastern Atlanta has an authentic story to tell, including tourist sites that bring that story to life. Over the years, the area has continually formed partnerships with investors and organizations to educate the general public and build pride in the community.

## 6.4 Conclusion

Preservation has become less about a physical space or piece of architecture and more about the emotional and cultural significance of a place. It is about the cultural environment and its multiple manifestations. This pull toward historical preservation favoring the culturally important has also been coupled with an increased interest in catering to the cultural interests of minority groups. In what can be referenced as calls for "counter-public" sites, there has been increased attention paid to those areas that are important to the historically, non-dominant cultural groups. Counter-public sites are "alternative spheres of public engagement, where marginalised groups form alternative, oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (Inwood 2011, 148). Enclaves like this have always existed, but they have not merited the same historical awareness that some of the more obvious historical landmarks like memorials and mountains warrant. That is, however, until recently. Heritage tourism of these counter-public sites has sparked an interest in the economic value of smaller yet historically significant sites all across the United States.

The Sweet Auburn Historical District is a revitalized area based on its establishment as a trendy neighborhood. This particular district, however, merits a different kind of attention as well. Those redeveloping the area are capitalizing on the immensely important historical landmarks. The district's future rests on a delicate balance between, on the one hand, acknowledging the historical significance of the area while, on the other hand, fueling economic growth and urban change. Gentrification is also now emerging as a key concern. The Sweet Auburn Historic District near downtown Atlanta has benefitted greatly from both the increased interest in historically preserving culturally important areas and the gravitational pull of modern urban living furnished by urban revitalization. Heritage tourism helped set up the interest in the area and redevelopment projects have kept people in the area. The Sweet Auburn Historic District has become one of the most sought-after neighborhoods while revealing to residents and visitors one of America's most compelling chapters of history.

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