

RED HOOK, BROOKLYN: Equitable Resilience through Preservation

A6750 HP STUDIO II - Spring 2020, Tue & Thu 2-6pm

Faculty: Erica Avrami (studio coordinator) eca8@columbia.edu
Tim Michiels t.michiels@columbia.edu
Bryony Roberts bwr2101@columbia.edu

Teaching Assistants: Erin Murphy em3387@columbia.edu, Micah Tichenor mct2168@columbia.edu

Studio II Aims and Scope: Studio II is the second in the program’s three-studio sequence, and is a central focus of the second-semester Historic Preservation curriculum. Building upon the skills applied in Studio I, a core aim of Studio II is to promote an understanding of cultural heritage and of preservation practices using a context-oriented lens. Whereas Studio I focuses primarily on *the building* as an inroad to investigation, analysis, and proposition, Studio II engages students in the more complex exercise of contextualizing their research and proposed interventions within a broader social environment and physical setting – or *community*. In doing so, Studio II takes a very broad view of heritage, recognizing the ways in which multiple publics ascribe values and narratives to places and how the intangible and tangible dimensions of those values and narratives are encountered spatially.

2020 Studio Inquiry and Context: The work of preservation is not simply about protecting historic fabric and values; cultural heritage can serve as a potential catalyst for positive social and environmental change. This 2020 studio will explore the role of preservation in promoting *equitable resilience*. Resilience refers to the capacity to adapt in the face of climate change. Per research by the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI), equitable resilience takes into account “power relations and how the complexity of social dynamics determines outcomes of environmental change and governance...[and] places focus on the needs of those who are disadvantaged by relations of power and inequalities of opportunity, and on how these barriers to human flourishing can be identified, understood and addressed.”¹

In light of sea level rise and storm surges related to climate change, New York City – with more than 500 miles of coastline – faces significant environmental challenges. While municipal, state, and federal agencies are advancing efforts to enhance resilience and promote adaptation in vulnerable areas of the city, very little attention is afforded historic resources/cultural heritage in resilience plans and adaptation schemes. Likewise, financial resources for adaptation are often focused on areas of the city through which there are significant capital flows, as these are critical to New York’s economy. Communities with less economic, and thus political, power often face the threats of climate change with more uneven investment and fewer resources. Statistically, such communities are also underrepresented with regard to their built heritage resources, as NYC historic districts skew older, whiter, wealthier, and better educated.

This 2020 Studio II will focus on how preservation can serve as a tool to promote equitable resilience in the community of Red Hook, Brooklyn (a map of the study area is attached). This will involve critically exploring the following questions:

- How are diverse histories, narratives, and multiple publics represented in the built environment of Red Hook?
- In what ways have the community values and heritage resources of Red Hook evolved and been challenged -- historically and more recently -- by environmental factors (e.g. land reclamation, coastal flooding, pollution/brownfields contamination, etc.) as well as socio-economic and political factors (industrial shifts, demographic change, new development, etc.)?
- How can the preservation enterprise intervene, so as to instrumentalize heritage toward equitable resilience in Red Hook?

¹ For a brief on equitable resilience, see: <https://www.sei.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/equitable-resilience-discussion-brief-ensor.pdf>. For additional research see: Matin, N., Forrester, J., & Ensor, J. 2018. What is equitable resilience? *World Development*. 109 (September): 197-205 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2018.04.020>