Section 106 and African-American Archaeology


At the recent Society for American Archaeology (SAA) conference in Minneapolis, it seemed to be the consensus that at least 70 percent of the archaeology being conducted in the country today is in response to federal regulations. Similarly, compliance archaeology is the impetus for the rapid and massive growth in the field of African-American Archaeology since the late 1970s noted by Theresa Singleton in her recent bibliography on African-American Archaeology. This newsletter is, in part, a response to that massive growth. Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act is the basis for virtually all of this private sector or contract archaeology. Recently, it has been made clear in the House and Senate that the President's Advisory Council on Historic Preservation will be underfunded, zeroed out or eliminated altogether as part of the contract with America. From all appearances, the second 100 days will be as busy or busier than the first 100 days. Other historic preservation programs will also be sharply curtailed or headed toward zero funding.

You might ask yourself why this should be of concern to you or to African-American Archaeology. The reason is simple. The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation is the agency that enforces the implementation of Section 106, without which there would effectively be no African-American Archaeology. We are not talking a huge amount of money here. The Advisory Council has a budget of around $3 million to oversee implementation in all 50 states and U.S. territories. The Advisory Council and African-American Archaeology need your help. Please write a letter to your Senator and Representative supporting funding of the Advisory Council and Section 106.

Below are some hints from Loretta Neumann, a historic preservation lobbyist working with SAA and the new American Cultural Resources Association (ACRA) to promote historic preservation. Follow them or not, but please write. Include (in readable print) your name and address. Better yet, use your personal, professional, or organizational letterhead stationary. Without an address, the Member has no way of knowing whether you are a constituent. Do not, however, use an organization's letterhead or appear to represent that organization's view without permission. Be polite. Don't alienate the Member and his staff. Even if they disagree with you on this issue, they may be more friendly on the next. You always want to keep the door open. Be brief, to the point, and try to discuss one issue only. If you write on too many topics, your message is diluted. State in the first sentence why you are writing. If the subject is complex or technical, include a separate fact sheet rather than include all the information in the letter itself. Ask for the Member's position on the issue. This will force the member's staff to research the issue and ensure that you receive a response. Most importantly, it lets the Member know you are taking his or her actions seriously. Always clearly state what action you want your member to take. Underline your request.

Date:
Dear Representative (last name) or Senator (last name):

**Opening:** State why you are writing. Mention Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. State briefly that you want to see the Council funded this year.

**Background:** Provide applicable background information or describe the issue. If you have an article or fact sheet, enclose it.

**Your Interest:** Briefly explain why this issue is important to you and/or how it specifically impacts your community or state.

**Closing:** Thank the member. Restate your request. Ask for a response. Provide your full name and title (if appropriate). Sign with your full name unless you are on a first-name basis. Indicate to whom copies are being sent (it is often useful to show that others will see your letter, too). Sincerely yours,