ABSTRACT
Title: What We Do and Who We Are: Impacts of the Tribal Historic Preservation Program
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For centuries, American Indian tribes have engaged in complicated and often controversial relationships with the U.S. Federal Government. In recent decades, many of these controversies have hinged on the issue of Native American culture and the degree of recognition, protection, and preservation warranted. The discussion of how to acknowledge, incorporate, and learn from the preservation concerns of Indian tribes culminated in the beginning of the last decade with an amendment to the National Historic Preservation Act. Following the findings of a National Park Service study, the amendment established preservation grants and other forms of recognition, and empowered tribes to take on the duties of the State Historic Preservation Offices on tribal lands. Ten years after the first Tribal Historic Preservation Officers assumed these duties, this thesis asks, is the assumption of Tribal Historic Preservation Officer Status by Native American Tribes successfully enhancing historic preservation?

This thesis examines the way in which the THPO program functions, a still-evolving process that continues to be the source of ongoing disagreement between Tribal Historic Preservation Officers, the governing bodies at the National Park Service, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. Additionally, it investigates the interaction, or lack thereof, between THPOs, SHPOs, and tribal entities without THPOs. Case studies in New York, Wisconsin, and Oklahoma, where Indian tribes are pursuing preservation both with and without the THPO program, provide specific examples and illustrations of complexities facing THPOs, and tribal preservation in general, within those states.

This study of the THPO program furthers an understanding of the controversies and cultural differences that continue to influence the field of preservation for Indian tribes and at large. It considers the philosophical differences in tribal preservation concerns, and they way they are or are not addressed under the THPO program. Additional consideration given is to the implications of the THPO program beyond preservation; namely, the way in which tribes’ interests in maintaining their sovereignty and autonomy is impacted by assumption of THPO status.