WHOSE PARK IS IT ANYWAY?
The Evolution of Preservation Advocacy
Case Study: Washington Square Park

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of
Master of Science in Historic Preservation

Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation
Columbia University
May 2007
ABSTRACT:

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As the field of preservation matured, it became professionalized, policy-driven, and part of the greater consciousness of the American people. One part of the preservation movement that is rarely discussed is preservation advocacy, the very root system out of which historic preservation grew. This thesis provides an analytical dialogue on preservation advocacy, and how it has been manifested in the past and present. It compares and contrasts major preservation battles that occurred (and are occurring at the time of this thesis) over proposed redesigns of Washington Square Park. The three most representative battles to occur over Washington Square Park stemmed from three New York City Parks Department redesign proposals: Robert Moses’ 1930s scheme, which earned the disdainful nickname the “Bathmat” plan; Moses’ 1950s attempt to run a highway through the center of the park; and the project which was introduced in late 2004, which many believe is threatening the quirky, fringe elements of the park (i.e. the unaligned fountain and arch and the sunken plaza used for performances). This thesis also examines the motives behind the community’s desire to preserve Washington Square Park and analyzes how methods of preservation advocacy and activism have changed or not changed over time. With this approach, four major types of preservation advocacy are considered: community organizing, media strategy, political strategy and legal strategy.