



ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY

STOP THE WRECKING BALL!

Preserving City Landmarks 1950-1965



OVERVIEW

Students will learn about the significance of the demolition of Pennsylvania Station in the context of preservationist activism in New York City.

STUDENT GOALS

- Students will analyze photographs of Penn Station to discover its rich history.
- Students will explore the mission of activist organization AGBANY by studying its petition to “Save Our City.”
- Students will create their own petitions and advocate for the preservation of a site.

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

Grade 1:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.2.1

Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.

Grade 6:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.

Grades 11-12:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media in order to address a question or solve a problem.

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KEY TERMS/VOCABULARY

- Architecture
 - Commission
 - Demolition
 - Landmark
 - Petition
 - Preservation
 - Vandalism
-

ACTIVISTS

- Ada Louise Huxtable
- Jackie Onassis
- Margot Gayle

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INTRODUCING RESOURCES 1 & 2**Resource 1:** George P. Hall and Son, *Interior of Pennsylvania Station, 1911*. Museum of the City of New York.**Resource 2:** Aaron Rose, *Untitled [The demolition of Pennsylvania Station, 1965]*, 1964-65. Museum of the City of New York.

The original Pennsylvania Station, designed by New York architectural firm McKim, Mead and White, opened on November 27, 1910. At that time, it was the largest building ever built at one time with the biggest waiting room in history. Fifty years after Penn Station opened, the owners of the station, Pennsylvania Railroad, went bankrupt as airplanes and automobiles became more popular than rail travel. At the same time, Madison Square Garden was outgrowing its location on Eighth Avenue and 50th Street, and a real estate deal was made to combine the Garden with a new Penn Station. Between 1963 and 1966, the original Penn Station was demolished, and its 16-ton decorative eagles and 84 Doric columns were dumped into the marshlands of New Jersey. Discuss the significance of the demolition of Penn station through using the following photographs.

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George P. Hall and Son, *Interior of Pennsylvania Station*, 1911. Museum of the City of New York.



Aaron Rose, *Untitled [The demolition of Pennsylvania Station, 1965]*, 1964-65. Museum of the City of New York.

An icon representing environmental advocacy, showing a person holding a sign.

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DOCUMENT BASED QUESTIONS

- What are the architectural features of the original Pennsylvania Station? How would you feel walking into this space?
- What qualities must a building have in order to be worth preserving?
- In “A Vision of Rome Dies,” Ada Louise Huxtable writes, “The passing of Penn Station is more than the end of a landmark. It makes the priority of real estate values over preservation conclusively clear.” In a city like New York, why might the interests of the real estate industry and preservationists be at odds with one another?
- Why do you think photographer Aaron Rose decided to capture the demolition of Pennsylvania Station? How might this action be considered a form of activism?

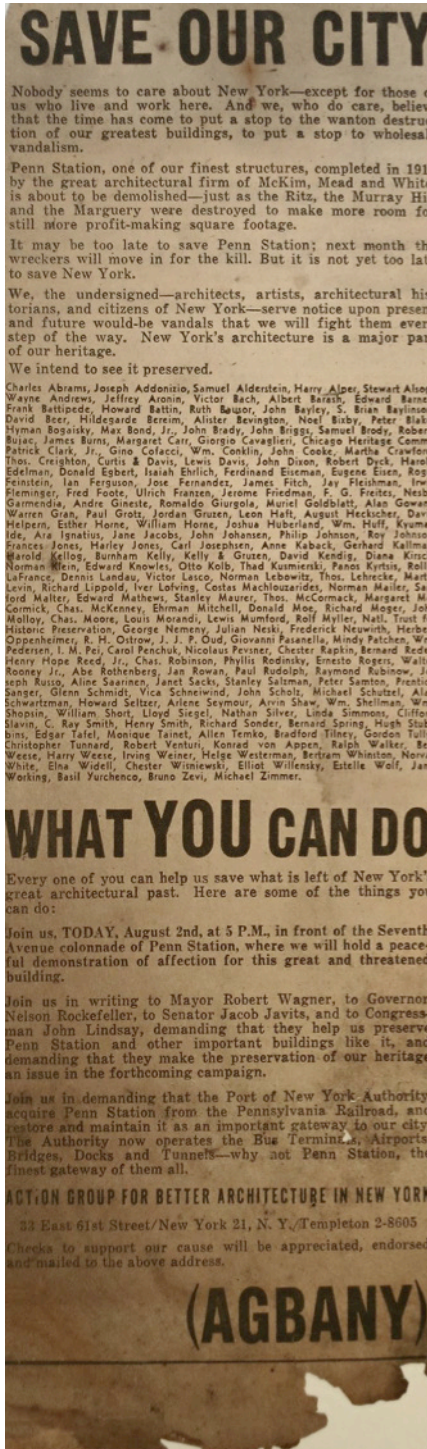
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INTRODUCING RESOURCE 3**Action Group for Better Architecture in New York (AGBANY), Save Our City, 1963. Courtesy of Peter Samton, FAIA.**

After the announcement of Penn Station's demolition, a small group of architects came together to form the Action Group for Better Architecture in New York (AGBANY). AGBANY organized a public protest against the station's destruction, carrying signs that read "Shame" and "Don't Amputate – Renovate." After Penn Station's demolition on April 15, 1965, Mayor Robert Wagner signed the Landmarks Preservation Law, which created the Landmarks Preservation Commission, the first agency with government power to designate and save historic buildings and neighborhoods. Examine their petition below to reveal their preservationist mission.

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Action Group for Better Architecture in New York (AGBANY), *Save Our City*, 1963. Courtesy of Peter Samton, FAIA.

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DOCUMENT BASED QUESTIONS

- What is the purpose of a petition?
- According to AGBANY, what does it mean to “care” about New York?
- Why did AGBANY believe Penn Station was worth saving?
- What does it mean to vandalize? How might tearing down Penn Station be considered vandalism?

An icon representing environmental advocacy, showing a person holding a sign.

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ACTIVITY 1

Explain to your students that landmarks are buildings or places that are special because of their historical, architectural, or cultural significance. The Landmarks Preservation Commission, founded after the demolition of Penn Station, has the power to designate a building or place as a landmark, which means it cannot be taken down to build something new. Ask your students to each select a building or place in their community that they think should become a landmark. Drawing inspiration from AGBANY's "Save Our City" petition, have your students create their own petitions that lobby for that building or place to be designated as a landmark. Have your students devise a plan to get as many signatures as possible before sending their petitions to the Landmarks Preservation Commission (Municipal Building, 1 Centre Street, 9th Floor, North, New York, NY 10007).

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ADDITIONAL READING

THE NEW YORK TIMES ARTICLES

“The Courthouse that Escaped the Gavel,” by Christopher Gray, October 31, 2014, tells the story of how Margot Gayle fixed the clock at Jefferson Market, which led to its preservation.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/02/realestate/the-preservation-of-greenwich-villages-jefferson-market-courthouse.html>

“Farewell to Penn Station,” by Ada Louise Huxtable, October 30, 1963, outlines the importance of preservation in response to the demolition of Penn Station.

<http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9407EFD8113DE63BBC4850DFB6678388679EDE>

“Jackie Onassis Fights for Cause,” by Diane Henry, January 31, 1975, describes the fight to preserve Grand Central Station, which brought the Landmarks Preservation Law to the national stage.

<http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9E01E6D9153AE034BC4950DFB766838E669EDE>

CONTEMPORARY CONNECTIONS

“City Room; A Long Wait for Historic-District Signs” by Sydney Ember, July 26, 2011, advocates for informational signs to be placed in landmarked historic districts.

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C05E1DE123FF935A15754C0A9679D8B63>

“Forest Hills Tennis Stadium Loses Bid for Landmark Status” by Dan Bilefsky, May 5, 2011, examines the history of the Forest Hills Tennis Stadium, which had just been denied Landmark status by the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9503EFDE143AF936A35756C0A9679D8B63>

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SOURCES

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George P. Hall and Son, *Interior of Pennsylvania Station, 1911*. Museum of the City of New York.

Huxtable, Ada Louise, "A Vision of Rome Dies," *The New York Times*, July 14, 1966,
<http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive/pdf?res=9C06E3DC1531E43BBC4C52DFB166838D679EDE>

Osman, Suleiman. *The Invention of Brownstone Brooklyn: Gentrification and the Search for Authenticity in Postwar New York*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Rose, Aaron, *Untitled [The demolition of Pennsylvania Station, 1965]*, 1964-65.
Museum of the City of New York.

Wood, Anthony C., *Preserving New York: Winning the Right to Protect a City's Landmarks*. New York: Routledge, 2007.