In 1945, Teodoro Moscoso, President of the Puerto Rico Industrial Development Company (PRIDCO), made a startling announcement: he would create “an industry without factories, without assembly problems and without machinery.” That industry was of course tourism. Instead of new factories, which required heavy investment, tourism could be built on the back of an already existing infrastructure: unique historic places, which could only be experienced in Puerto Rico, and which would entice tourists to visit. Moscoso worked hard to reduce the friction that might prevent tourists from dragging themselves out of the comfort of their homes and paying for a visit to Puerto Rico’s colonial cities of San Juan and Ponce. He signed deals with Pan American Airlines to set up regular flights, and convinced Conrad Hilton to build his first hotel outside of the Continental US in San Juan. The Caribe Hilton, designed by Toro, Ferrer y Torregrosa, opened in 1949. But the hardest resistance to overcome was cultural, as most Americans stereotyped Puerto Rican culture as unrefined and even violent. Moscoso turned to David Ogilvy, the advertising pioneer and partner of the legendary New York agency Ogilvy and Mather, to re-position Puerto Rican culture within the US tourism market. Ogilvy commissioned photographer Elliott Erwitt, then 26 years old, to produce “mouth watering” images of historic buildings framing elegantly dressed young Puerto Rican women. Ogilvy very carefully constructed an image of the “other” that would be more pleasing to potential US tourists. He made no claims to portray Puerto Rican culture as it really was. In 1955, the government created the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, assigning it the responsibility to authentically preserve the island’s heritage, and to present it to the public as being equally valuable as that of other cultures. Over time, the Puerto Rican tourism industry and heritage institutions, developed a complex relationship, of both antagonism and mutual reinforcement, which has analogies in the history of preservation and tourism in many developing countries. In this essay, Nezar AlSayyad takes up the ethical dilemmas that preservationists face as they find themselves caught between their deontological commitment to historical accuracy and material authenticity, and the political and economic pressures to play down those aspects of heritage that might shock tourists, or simply cause sufficient friction to keep them from visiting. He sees these pressures mounting in the current era of globalization, in which tourism has become a major industry and often the only plausible engine of economic development certain areas of the world. He posits that preservationists find themselves in a paradoxical position, at once having to emphasize the uniqueness of heritage, in order to distinguish it in the tourism marketplace, and to simultaneously smooth out differences deemed too radical for mass appeal. To break out of this double bind, he theorizes the need for non-profit non-governmental institutions to take over the management of heritage from what he sees as the colluding interests of governments and tourism corporations. Nezar AlSayyad is professor of architecture, planning, urban design and urban history at the University of California at Berkeley, where he is also chairman of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies and director of the International Association for the Study of Traditional Environments (IASTE). His books on urbanism, identity, tradition and tourism include Dwellings, Settlements and Tradition (1989), Consuming Tradition, Manufacturing Heritage (2000), Hybrid Urbanism (2000), Muslim Europe or Euro-Islam (2002) Making Cairo Medieval (2005) and Cairo: Histories of a City (2011).

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