



Foundation Document Overview

African Burial Ground National Monument

New York



Contact Information

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Purpose

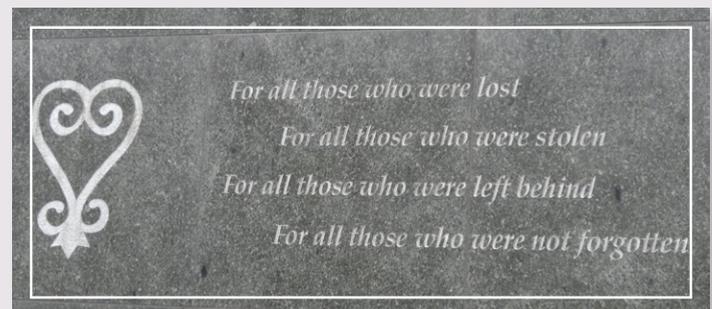
The purposes of AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND NATIONAL MONUMENT are to:

- *Preserve and protect the approximately 15,000 square feet of land and its associated resources—including those interred and reinterred—the memorial, collections, and archives on the corner of Duane and Elk Streets in Lower Manhattan. This parcel is part of the larger 7-acre national historic landmark commemorating the area that—from approximately 1690 to 1790—served as a burial place for free and enslaved Africans.*
- *Encourage and foster opportunities for research, public understanding and appreciation, dialogue, education, and interpretation of*
 - *the culture, heritage, legacy, and contributions of Africans and Americans of African descent to New York City and our nation*
 - *Africans and Americans of African descent as integral and fundamental to American history*
 - *the way in which science and scientific exploration can help to rediscover lost and hidden history*
 - *related resources and sites in New York City, including the national historic landmark*
- *Provide a place for quiet contemplation, commemoration, and ceremony to honor the spirit and legacy of Africans and Americans of African descent, both free and enslaved, to our nation and the greater global community.*

Significance

Significance statements express why African Burial Ground National Monument resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- The African Burial Ground is among the oldest, and is the largest known burial site of enslaved and free Africans in the United States. The site is one of the most significant archeological discoveries in the 20th century—with an estimated 15,000 burials—and challenges the economic and public perception that there was very little or no chattel slavery in the North.
- The African Burial Ground attests to the extent of slavery in New York City, one of the most important northern cities—geopolitically, culturally, and financially—in the eventual formation of the nation. In the 1700s, the city's population included more enslaved Africans than any other English colonial settlement except Charleston, South Carolina. The site highlights and explores the considerable contributions—physically and culturally—of Africans and Americans of African descent in this influential city during the 17th and 18th centuries.
- Skeletal remains and associated archeological artifacts demonstrate the extent to which Africans struggled to maintain and adapt traditional African cultural and ceremonial practices, even under threat of physical and other forms of harm. These adapted practices continue in African American communities today. Bioskeletal studies reveal the harsh labor regime and environmental conditions that Africans endured and the high rates of infant and child mortality, as demonstrated by the preponderance of graves of persons under age 16.



Significance



- The African Burial Ground National Monument is a site where the history and implications of the African Diaspora can be studied, contemplated, and discussed; it is a site that redefines and makes accessible to all the history and contributions of Africans in the building of the Americas. The national monument is an active place of commemoration, contemplation, ceremony, and celebration of the defiance, courage, endurance, and flourishing of an oppressed people beyond all odds. As a final resting place for thousands of free and enslaved Africans, the national monument is a place for the continued reclamation of both lost individual stories and the rich and compelling history of a people.
- The African Burial Ground National Monument is the place where a national movement to rediscover, reclaim, and teach the story of hidden African Burial Grounds began. This is a movement that is ongoing nationwide and is reshaping our understanding of the past.



Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **The Memorial and its Associated Cultural Landscape.** The national monument contains seven burial mounds including 419 buried individuals, the memorial sculpture and fountain, and pathways leading around the site.
- **Anthropological and Archeological Resources.** The anthropological and archeological resources of the national monument include buried human remains and archeological resources and the human remains and archeological resources that are part of the collections excavated from the site.
- **Archival Collection.** The archives documenting the archeological excavation and subsequent research and the archives documenting the public efforts to protect the site, including the journey of the human remains from Howard University in Washington, DC, to New York and the reinterment ceremony at the memorial in 2003.
- **Opportunity for Memorialization.** The possibility and opportunity to experience and contemplate the sacredness and solemnity of the African Burial Ground; to discover, celebrate, and honor those whose remains rest there; and to inspire visitors to form their own meaningful connections with the African Burial Ground.

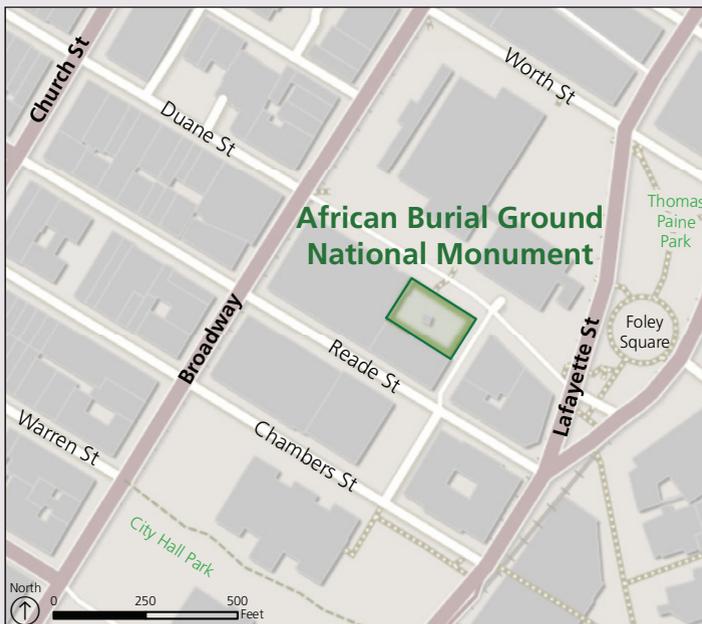
African Burial Ground National Monument contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **African Burial Ground National Historic Landmark.** The African Burial Ground was designated a national historic landmark on April 19, 1993. Designation as a national historic landmark acknowledges the national significance of all contributing resources within the landmark boundary. The boundary of the landmark includes approximately 7 acres of land in the Borough of Manhattan in New York City.

Description

In 1991, a startling discovery changed forever the way Americans would understand their history. During excavation prior to the construction of a federal office building at Broadway and Duane Streets in New York City, workers began to unearth dozens, and then hundreds, of sets of human remains buried more than 30 feet below the surface of the street. With construction halted, researchers and scholars began a 10-year process of uncovering the stories behind those forgotten graves. They learned that the remains were those of an estimated 15,000 Africans and Americans of African descent, both enslaved and free, whose burial had been forbidden within New York City limits during the 17th and 18th centuries. Their research uncovered the long-neglected history of slavery in the city and in the North and brought to light the critical contributions of Africans in New York to the building of early America.

A remarkable and controversial campaign by advocates on behalf of African Burial Ground National Monument resulted in the site's designation as a national historic landmark in 1993. On February 27, 2006, President George W. Bush proclaimed the African Burial Ground National Monument under the authorities of the Antiquities Act of 1906. The African Burial Ground National Monument became the 390th unit of the national park system. The national monument is approximately 15,000 square feet in area and includes a memorial, the dedication of which took place on October 5, 2007.



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- **Rediscovery of the Burials Reshapes History.** Rediscovery of the African Burial Ground demands that history be retold and forever altered by a more complete understanding of the African Diaspora, the scope of efforts to enslave Africans, the nature of resistance to dehumanization, and the roles played by Africans and Americans of African descent in building New York City, the nation, and in shaping their respective cultures.
- **The Struggle for Human Rights.** The African Burial Ground demonstrates how individuals, singly and collectively, can create lives that transcend the inhumanity of forced immigration and enslavement, the burdens of the harshest labor, and the repression of cherished cultural and societal practices.
- **Treatment of Sacred Sites—Sankofa and Scholarship.** Guided by the spirit of Sankofa, a West African Akan concept and symbol that exhorts us to “learn from the past to prepare the future,” efforts to preserve, study, and commemorate the African Burial Ground have triggered a vigorous activism and dialogue on the treatment of sacred sites, ancestral remains, and sites of conscience in New York City and around the globe.

