

African Burial Ground National Monument

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

National Monument
New York



Link to the Past

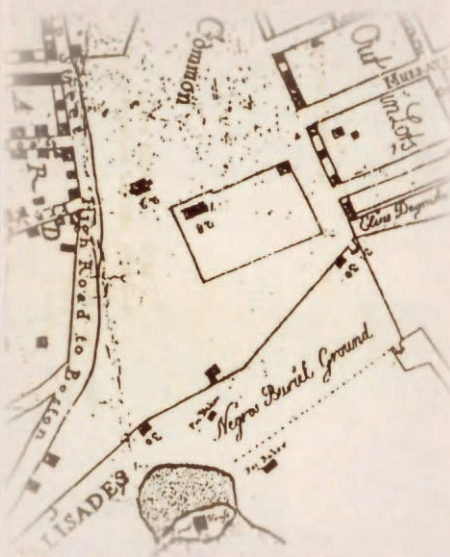
The stories of the burial ground teach us how free and enslaved Africans contributed to the physical and spiritual development of Lower Manhattan during the 17th and 18th centuries. In addition, this history reveals how New York played a critical role in the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Africans were separated from their families and subjected to a voyage across the Atlantic in closely packed ships where disease, abuse and death were common.

The Africans in New York came from diverse areas with different cultures, languages and religions. They combined the traditions from their homelands with new world customs.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, more than one quarter of the labor force was enslaved. These Africans worked on the docks, farmed, provided domestic labor, milled and were involved in other trades that were critical to the development of early New York.

The first eleven enslaved men were brought to the colony of New Amsterdam, today Lower Manhattan, by the Dutch West India Company in 1626. Under the Dutch Company, the enslaved men were able to gain conditional freedom; these men could own property, file grievances, be baptized, and marry. In 1644, they petitioned and successfully won partial freedom. In this act, they received 100 acres of land which was referred to as the Land of the Blacks. Although it put them and their wives at liberty as a reward for their many years of service and granted them land for cultivation, the measure required that the men pay for their freedom each year by providing thirty skepels of maize or wheat, peas or beans, and one fat hog to the Dutch West India Company. Additionally, the men



The 18th century map showing the African Burial Ground originally known as the "Negroes Burial Ground." It was situated outside the northern boundaries of the city at that time.

were required to work for wages whenever they were needed. The men would be returned to a life of enslavement if they failed to meet these conditions. Even more disturbing, their children (born or yet to be born) remained enslaved. In 1664, the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam was renamed New York when the British took control of the colony. In New York, laws governing enslaved and free Africans were more restrictive than they had been under Dutch rule. Under this system of disenfranchisement and oppression, by the 1720s, no black families lived in the Land of the Blacks because the British eventually prohibited Africans from owning land. In response to these unjust laws, there was a slave revolt in 1712. In 1741, a rumor of a slave revolt led to the execution of two white men, two white women, and thirty black men.

The New York Manumission Society was

founded in 1785 to end slavery, and opened the first African Free School in 1787. Then, in 1794, the New York African Society formed as the first black benevolent association to organize burials as well as provide medical and unemployment insurance. Other organizations in the late 1700s and early 1800s that used the title "African" included the NY African Society, Mother Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church, NY African Mutual Relief Society, African Grove Society, Infant African School and NY African Mutual Instruction Society. In 1827, New York became the next to last northern state to abolish slavery.

Men, women, and children from Africa died every day of malnutrition, physical strain, punishment, and diseases such as yellow fever and small pox, in colonial New York. Family members and community members came to the African Burial Ground to bury their loved one with dignity and respect, in ceremonies rich with traditions. The burial ground's rediscovery inspired research on the lives and countries of origin of these Africans revealing the diversity of their cultures, and their transformation in the Americas. It is estimated that nearly 15,000 Africans are buried within the 6.6 acre site, which mostly lies hidden beneath present day buildings, streets and sidewalks today.

On February 27, 2006 a portion of the African Burial Ground was established as a National Monument by Presidential Proclamation. A memorial has been constructed on the National Monument site where local, national, and international communities honor and celebrate this sacred and historic area.

Sankofa, a West African Akan symbol represents the site. It tells us that in order to inform the future we must return to our roots to gather wisdom.

"You may bury me in the bottom of Manhattan. I will rise. My people will get me. I will rise out of the huts of history's shame." —Maya Angelou, Reinterment Ceremony 2003

African Origins

These ancestors found meaning through participation in cultural rituals. Even though there were extraordinary assaults on their humanity, they maintained a sense of dignity.

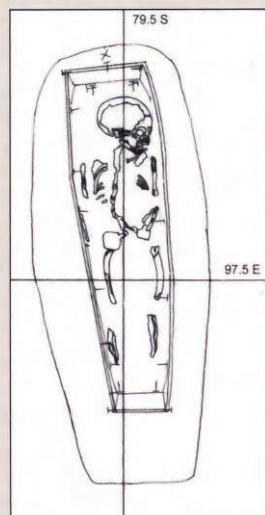
Burial 254

This young child has a silver pendant, originally used as a Native American nose ring, placed around their neck as a pendant.

Sankofa, West African Akan symbol, telling of the importance of learning from the past.



FREEDOM



HUMANITY



Burial 340

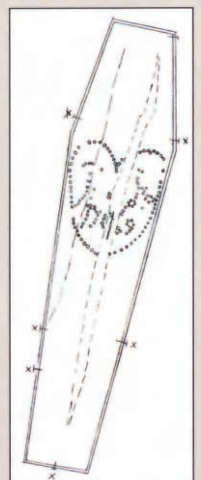
This woman was buried with waist beads and had hour-glass shaped filed incisors. These cultural elements reveal that African practices continued in New York.

DIGNITY

Burial 101

This man had a heart-shaped object that some believe to be the Sankofa symbol on his coffin lid. It was created with brass tacks and nails.

Silver pendant found with Burial 254



Rediscovery



The Archeological Excavation in Lower Manhattan

The African Burial Ground was uncovered during the pre-construction phase of 290 Broadway. Less than an acre of the 6.6 acre historical cemetery was excavated between 1991 and 1992. However, a research design plan for the study and care of the remains had not yet been established. Efforts of concerned citizens, politicians, anthropologists, scientists and historians, including petitions and a 24-hour vigil, eventually led Congress to halt this excavation. A total of 419 African ancestral remains

were removed from the cemetery. The ancestral remains were later transferred to the Cobb Laboratory located at Howard University in Washington, D.C.

Reinterment Burial Coffins

On October 4, 2003 419 ancestral remains were reinterred in the African Burial Ground in hand carved mahogany coffins lined with kente cloth from Ghana. The six-day ceremony began September 30, 2003 at Howard University where thousands attended a departure ceremony. The ceremonies continued in six cities: Baltimore, Maryland; Wilmington, Delaware; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Newark and



Jersey City, New Jersey; and New York City. Each participating city commemorated the lives, culture, and invaluable role of Africans as colony builders in the Northeastern United States.



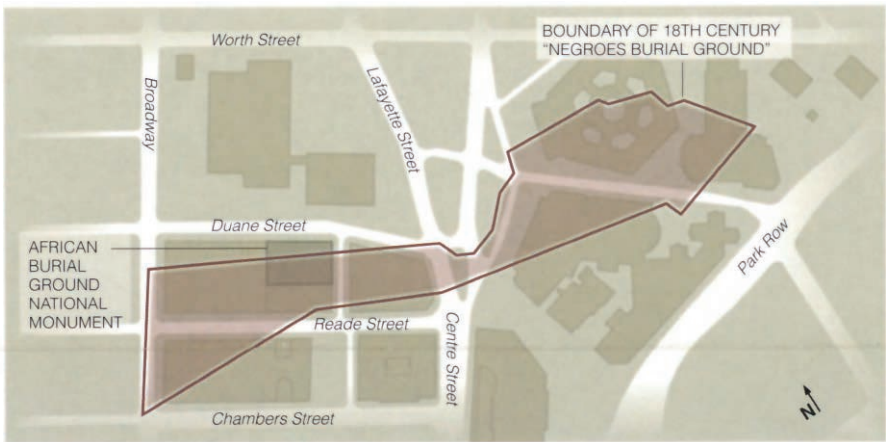
The "Ring Shout" Ceremony

Here children hold signs with handwritten messages for the ancestors during the Ring Shout ceremony. The children form a perimeter ring around the 6.6 acre African Burial Ground in honor of their ancestors.

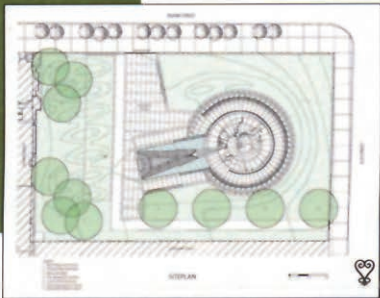
African Burial Ground Memorial designed by Rodney Leon

In April 2005, Rodney Leon's design for the African Burial Ground memorial was selected in a public review process managed by the National Park Service in partnership with the General Services Administration. The memorial constructed on the African Burial Ground National Monument site is a living tribute to past, present and future generations. The African Burial Ground National Monument opened the memorial October 2007.

This memorial is an Ancestral Libation Chamber. At its center is a cosmogram, the crossroads of birth, life, death, and re-birth in Congo cosmology. This contemporary architectural expression combines feminine and masculine forms and is inspired by art, music, painting, and sculpture. It is oriented towards the rising sun along the west-east axis in the same direction that ancestors were buried.



Partial view of a 18th century map indicating the "Negroes Burial Ground" which is placed over a map of the area today.



Planning Your Visit

Getting to the African Burial Ground National Monument

The African Burial Ground National Monument is located in Lower Manhattan, close to Foley Square, just north of City Hall. It is easily accessible by public transportation. The 4, 5, 6, R, W, J, M and Z subways stop at Brooklyn Bridge/City Hall; the A, C, E subways stop at Chambers Street and 2,3 subways stop at Park Place. The buses include the M15, M22, B51, M1 and M6.

Visitor services are free. Since the Visitor Center is located in a Federal Building, all visitors must pass through

airport-style security. Groups are urged to make reservations for tours to ensure quality programs and staff availability.

More Information (Hours of Operation)

AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND NATIONAL MONUMENT VISITOR CENTER
Monday-Friday from 9-5pm, except federal holidays. There is a 25 minute documentary film, exhibits, commemorative artwork and tours that relate to the African Burial Ground. The African Burial Ground NM visitor center is located at 290 Broadway on the first floor.

Address:
African Burial Ground NM
290 Broadway, First Floor
New York, NY 10007

www.nps.gov/afbg; 212. 637.2019 phone; 212. 227.2026 fax

AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND NATIONAL MONUMENT MEMORIAL
Monday - Sunday from 9-5 pm, except Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Years Day.
It is located at the corner of Duane Street and African Burial Ground Way (Elk Street).