"The fact there were so many Africans in colonial New York was a surprise for most people. The most fundamental thing was it established that slavery was as much an institution of the north as it was of the south."

— DR. MICHAEL BLAKEY
Director, Institute for Historical Biology, National Endowment for the Humanities Professor, College of William and Mary

From left, the memorial aerial view; exhibit at the memorial; a park ranger watches over the memorial

106 SUCCESS STORY

African Burial Ground Discovery Rewrites History of American Slavery

New York, New York

THE STORY

The Dutch brought the first African slaves to New Amsterdam around 1625 to build a fort, mills, and residences for the early colony. After the British conquered what would become New York City in 1664, use of slave labor continued for more than 160 years to support the growing port and shipping operations. Information about slavery in New Amsterdam and subsequent New York City was relatively unknown until the discovery in 1991 of the African Burial Ground changed historical understanding of the practice and place of slavery in the early years of the United States of America and the colonial period preceding the nation's founding. An estimated 15,000 mostly enslaved people of African origin had been interred between 1650 and 1794 in what was described on old maps as the "Negros Buriel Ground (sic)."

THE PROJECT

Plans for a new federal building in Lower Manhattan began in 1987. Like much of Manhattan, the site chosen had been filled with 12 feet of dirt, and a variety of structures were built over the area for centuries. Anticipating that an adjacent alley could still have remnants of the cemetery, an agreement was crafted to direct how a modest discovery might be handled. However, surveys prior to construction revealed a surprising number of human remains in 1991, and it quickly became clear that they had found a portion of a sizeable cemetery, thickly covered by two centuries of urban growth.

THE 106 PROCESS

Under the National Historic Preservation Act, the General Services Administration (GSA) was the agency responsible for the project and therefore responsible for conducting the Section 106 review when the African Burial Ground re-emerged. Section 106 requires each federal agency to identify and assess the effects of its actions on historic resources and consult with the appropriate State or Tribal Historic Preservation Officer. It is also

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From left, inscription on the memorial; vaults being lowered into the ground

essential to inform and include in consultations other people, groups, levels of government and organizations that might have a demonstrated interest in the historic property in order to reach agreement on how to avoid, minimize harm, or mitigate the effects.

In the early stages of the project, the number of human remains was significantly underestimated. Initial burial discoveries were removed from the construction site before local archaeologists contacted the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) to determine an alternative approach and broaden consultation with the growing number of concerned parties.

Public interest and consultation in the project increased and, following an onsite congressional hearing in July 1992, GSA stopped work on the site until an acceptable resolution of the burial situation was reached. Ultimately, dozens of groups were formally involved as consulting parties, and through Section 106 consultation GSA and the community found a successful resolution. The building footprint was redesigned so more of the burial ground could be preserved without disruption. The descendant African American community worked with the academic and scientific communities on a respectful archaeological plan and eventual re-interment of the human remains removed from the project site — eventually totaling 419 individuals.

THE SUCCESS

The African Burial Ground is considered one of the most significant archaeological and historic finds in the United States of the 20th century, expanding understanding and knowledge of the lives and contributions to New York and the nation of generations of the African American Diaspora. At the urging of the ACHP and other consulting parties, the project was significantly redesigned, and the site was designated a National Historic Landmark in April 1993, memorializing the ongoing struggles of enslaved Africans. On February 26, 2006, President George W. Bush declared the African Burial Ground a National Monument.

Consulting parties involved in the African Burial Ground Section 106 process:

General Services Administration
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
National Park Service
Then-New York State Senator David Paterson
ACHP
Federal Steering Committee for the African Burial Ground
New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission
Mayor's Task Force on the African Burial Ground
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

Community Representatives:

African Burial Ground volunteers
Descendents of the African Burial Ground
Friends of the African Burial Ground
Howard University

For more about Section 106 and the ACHP go to **www.achp.gov**

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