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# CHAPTER 1

## PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE REPORT



**T**hrough the survival of the African Burial Ground in the heart of New York City, the past reaches across time to teach the present. The lives of those interred “outside the wall” of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century New York City remind the living of the ever-present struggles for human freedom and dignity. Examination of the human remains reveals how resolutely the burial ground occupants resisted injustice, even when faced with the inhumanity of forced emigration and enslavement, harsh labor in a strange land, and the repression of cherished cultural and societal practices.

New York City’s African Burying Ground National Historic Landmark (NHL) is one among few U. S. landmarks that memorializes the struggles of Africans, forcefully brought here and enslaved, and those of so many of African descent who have endured the injustices of slavery, segregation, and discrimination. The site reminds us that slavery existed as an institution not only in the South, but in New York City, as well as in other northern colonies and states. Above all, the burial ground is a place to acknowledge the persistent humanity exhibited by those subjected to these injustices throughout history. It offers truths concerning our collective national heritage that most have never been fully taught and many have conveniently chosen to excise from our national memory. For individuals of African descent, the African Burial Ground represents a journey of mind and spirit where one may reconnect with beginnings, ancestry, and heritage; bring together the stories of those interred there, and explore the continuing relevance of those stories to life today. To all who may visit, the African Burial Ground presents an opportunity to clearly understand, acknowledge, and celebrate the vital contributions of generations of Americans of African descent to New York City, our nation, and the world. It is a place of national significance and, for many, a spiritual shrine, a cherished place of preserved memory, once paved over and forgotten and recently rediscovered. Today, it is recognized as a

national treasure and partially preserved, in large part through persistent and effective citizen action. With appropriate, sensitive stewardship, the African Burial Ground is poised to become a permanent place in the American conscience.

This summary report, which keeps in mind the importance of the African Burial Ground to U. S. history, has been prepared by the National Park Service (NPS) at the request of the General Services Administration (GSA). The report summarizes the history of the African Burial Ground, proposes a mission statement, identifies the site’s nationally significant elements and basic resources and values, and presents for public discussion alternatives regarding the burial ground’s future management. Finally, the report provides a summary of a suggested interpretive plan that would enable the nation’s citizens and others to fully understand the site’s meanings and importance to our history and society. GSA also requested that the NPS’s representatives become active participants in the selection of an appropriate memorial to be placed at the African Burial Ground. A separate report will present the results of that important assignment.

## Background and Scope

In 1987, the GSA began planning construction of a federal building at 290 Broadway. Subsequently, in March 1989, the GSA entered into a Memorandum of Agreement with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP). The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 established the ACHP to ensure that federal agencies act as responsible stewards of our nation’s cultural resources when agency actions affect historic properties. The Memorandum of Agreement, amended in December 1991 after the discovery of human skeletal remains at the burial ground site, requires the GSA to:

- Develop and implement a research design for the cemetery and other archeological sites within the project area
- Sensitive remove all exposed human remains



- Analyze the human remains and associated grave artifacts
- Reinter the human remains and associated grave artifacts
- Develop a memorial, site interpretation, and a public outreach program.

To fulfill the requirement to develop a memorial, interpret the site, and engage in public outreach, the GSA undertook the following:

- Contracted in 1993 with John Milner Associates to establish the Office of Public Education and Interpretation (OPEI) to provide for public outreach. OPEI has sponsored numerous events and programs, developed educational materials, and conducted tours of the African Burial Ground and associated resources at 290 Broadway.
- Contracted in 1997 with IDI Construction, Inc., to undertake interpretive center design work on the ground floor of 290 Broadway. IDI produced preliminary interior designs and interpretive plans, but no longer holds a contract with GSA.
- Developed and implemented in December 1997 a memorial design process with the creation of a GSA Source Selection Executive Board (SSEB) to conduct the process of selecting a memorial. The SSEB was aided by a Memorial Advisors Committee comprised of design professionals of African descent. GSA announced the selection of the memorial design on April 29, 2005.

Five pieces of public art associated with the African Burial Ground were funded through GSA's Arts-in-Architecture Program. GSA prepared and printed brochures on each piece and currently displays the work at 290 Broadway. GSA and the British Broadcasting Corporation also funded a sculpture and accompanying brochure, both of which are now on display.

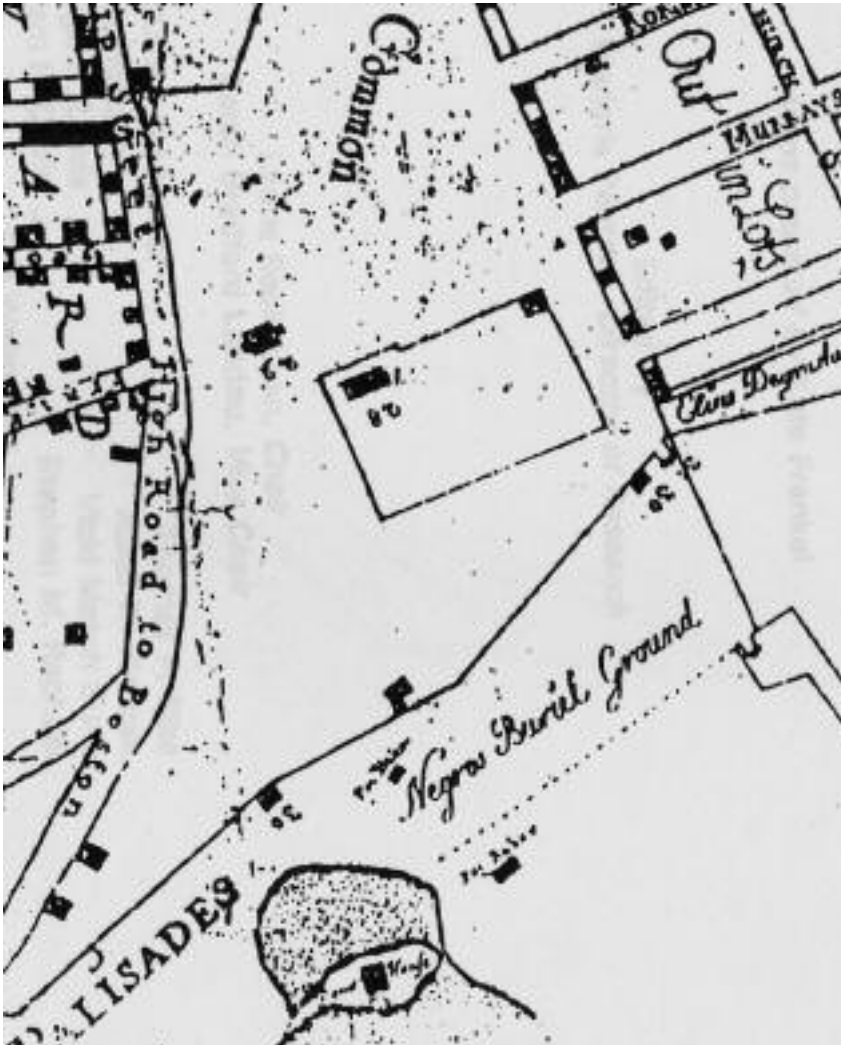
Understanding the need for an organization with expertise in interpretive and manage-



ment development, the GSA requested technical assistance from the NPS in 2003. The NPS has as its core mission the preservation and interpretation of significant natural and cultural resources of the U. S. and its territories. It is responsible for the National Register of Historic Places and for stewardship of the National Historic Landmarks Program. In 1993, the "African Burying Ground" was designated a National Historic Landmark (NHL) by the U. S. Secretary of the Interior, bringing

**View of African Burial Ground Site, 1991.**

*Courtesy of U.S. General Services Administration*



1755 map of the "Negro Burial Ground."

with its formal NPS interest in the site. (This report uses the term African Burial Ground, since it is the name commonly recognized in the larger New York community).

In September 2003, the NPS entered into an interagency agreement with GSA to provide a variety of technical assistance services relating to the African Burial Ground. These services include planning, design, programming, and operations related to interpretive facilities, and participation in the SSEB deliberations for the memorial design. The specific services to be provided by NPS are identified in three technical assistance support agreements that flow from the interagency agreement. They include:

- Support Agreement 1: provides for the NPS's assistance in the selection of a design for the African Burial Ground exterior memorial, and for its active participation on the GSA's SSEB.
- Support Agreement 2: provides for NPS to (1) make available technical assistance services relating to the planning, interpretive media design, programming, and operations of the African Burial Ground and related interpretive functions and facilities; and (2) design and implement a civic engagement process for assessing public receptivity to proposals for the future development and operations of the African Burial Ground and related interpretive facilities.
- Support Agreement 3: provides for NPS's assistance to the GSA in management of the latter's contracts with IDI, Inc. (no longer in effect) and with John Milner Associates for the Office of Public Education and Interpretation.

This report describes the outcome of work performed under Support Agreement 2.

The NPS entered into an agreement with the GSA for several reasons. First, NPS recognizes the African Burial Ground as one of America's nationally significant places, with enormous potential for (1) telling the story of the early African experience in New York City and the nation, and (2) increasing public knowledge of the critical contributions of enslaved and free Africans to the foundation and growth of New York City and the nation. The NPS also saw an opportunity to provide for effective community input in defining the significance and meanings of the African Burial Ground and in helping to determine future interpretation of this precious resource.

The NPS's technical assistance team effort was purposely structured not simply to concentrate on the memorial site adjacent to 290 Broadway and the two thousand square feet within 290 Broadway that had been intended as an interpretive center, but to include analy-



ses of the entire African Burying Ground NHL and other locations within the City of New York that are related to the site's meanings, themes and stories. The African Burying Ground NHL includes the roughly seven acres (the extent that the boundaries are understood, to date) that are described in the NHL nomination. The NPS technical assistance team considered facilities and operational needs for implementing effective programming using both the GSA's previously planned facilities at 290 Broadway and those related to a potentially more complete visitor experience and expanded interpretive and educational opportunities.

During the course of its work, the NPS technical assistance team received many public comments calling for the establishment of an African American Museum in the City of New York. Creating such a museum was beyond the tasks set in the GSA/NPS agreement, and neither GSA nor NPS has received congressional authorization either to study the feasibility of a museum or to provide for its construction. On April 28, 2005, Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton introduced a bill in the United States Senate (S-970) that, if enacted, would designate the African Burial Ground as a National Historic Site and a unit of the National Park Service, and establish an African Burial Ground International Memorial Museum. Congressman Jerrold Nadler introduced a companion bill into the United States House of Representatives (H.R. 3581) on July 28, 2005. Nothing in this report would impede the development of a museum associated with the African Burial Ground or the African American experience in New York City.

## Report Contents

This report examines the potential mission and significance of the African Burial Ground as a site for visitation and reflection. It seeks to identify the basic resources and values associated with the African Burial Ground and suggests themes that the public may use to gain an understanding of the site, its history, and its relevance to today's society. Additionally, the NPS technical assistance

team has developed a range of possible alternatives for the future management and operation of the African Burial Ground and its related visitor facilities. Succeeding chapters are described below.

### Chapter 2: Historic Background of the African Burial Ground

Chapter 2 provides an African Burial Ground historical time line within the context of New York City history. The chapter also presents an overview of critical decisions made concerning African Burial Ground interpretation and activities that resulted from the GSA construction of the federal building at 290 Broadway. It summarizes the various studies and work contracted for by the GSA with John Milner Associates, OPEI, IDI Construction, Inc., Howard University, and the Army Corps of Engineers.

### Chapter 3: Civic Engagement

Chapter 3 describes the process of dialogue, discussion, and public input that informed this report. It highlights the wide range of materials consulted to determine public interests and opinions, records of workshops with OPEI staff and volunteers, and documentation of NPS meetings with consulting professionals. Each type of information helped establish a working knowledge base and ultimately facilitated the report's findings.

### Chapter 4: Elements Underlying Interpretation and Education

Chapter 4 identifies the underlying elements upon which the African Burial Ground alternative interpretation and educational suggestions are built. It proposes a mission statement for the site and explores its national significance, identifies its basic resources and values, and sets forth suggested themes that could be used to convey the significance of the African Burial Ground and its meanings to a wide variety of audiences. The chapter also discusses other factors that affect administration of the site.



### **Chapter 5: Mission Goals**

Chapter 5 offers suggested mission goals (those goals to be achieved by managers) that provide the basis for management alternatives in the document and for potential operational use by future site managers. These goals provide a suggested framework for sound decision making in the future.

### **Chapter 6: Choices for the Future**

Chapter 6 presents a range of potential organizational alternatives for managing and interpreting the African Burial Ground. Management alternatives must respond to the site's mission and significance, be technically feasible, distinct from one another, and meet the requirements of law.

### **Chapter 7: Long-Range Interpretive Plan Summary**

Chapter 7 provides a suggested approach for enhancing audience understanding of the mission and the significance of the African Burial Ground and for increasing support for its protection and preservation. This chapter also identifies suggested goals that could guide interpretive programming. The various interpretive pieces in this chapter are intended to serve as suggested tools for choosing appropriate interpretive media, for setting priorities, and for achieving interpretive goals. The chapter also contains guidance on interpretive messages, audiences, activities, and practical issues that may need to be addressed no matter

which management alternative is chosen.

Upon releasing this summary report for a 30-day comment period, NPS will conduct two public meetings in Brooklyn and Manhattan, to receive oral and written comments. After consideration of the public comments, the findings of this summary report will be revised, as appropriate, and a final, more detailed report will be released to GSA and the public.

In developing this report, the National Park Service's technical assistance team reviewed existing studies and the previous and ongoing contributions of many organizations and individuals. Of primary importance to this study's findings, however, is the productive interaction between members of the NPS team and the many organizations and citizens who provided written comments and participated in conversations, meetings, and workshops conducted during the course of this endeavor. The NPS technical assistance team is indebted to all who have given of their time and talents up to this point and hopes that others will contribute as well. The demonstration of commitment to the African Burial Ground and the thoughtful visions for its preservation are cause for confidence that it shall never be neglected again. The NPS team is hopeful that in the following pages readers will recognize the important contributions they have made to our findings. The team also expresses its appreciation for the cooperation extended by staff of the General Services Administration during the course of its work.