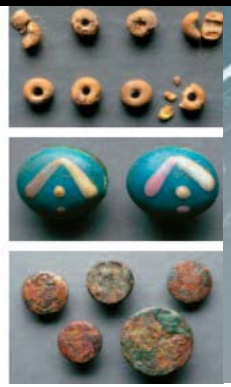
What We Heard and Learned

National Park Service
US Department of the Interior



Over the spring and summer, many of you graciously shared your ideas, thoughts and inspirations for the future of the African Burial Ground with us as we launched the beginning of the GMP. To help us record these important contributions from both New York residents and interested folks far away, we added a new section to the National Monument's website entitled General Management Planning. The first newsletter, comment form and additional information are available there.

On June 9th, 10th and 11th the National Monument staff hosted Open Houses in Brooklyn, Harlem and Lower Manhattan. Superintendent Tara Morrison, rangers, volunteers and planning team members were on hand o share information and answer questions on the GMP process and other exciting up-coming events, such as the opening of the new visitor center in early 2010. Many of you had a chance to preview "Our Spirit", a video segment which will be featured in the new visitor's center as well as look at posters with information on the new visitor center and the GMP process. The same posters displayed at the Open Houses are available on the website under Virtual Open House.

The highlight of the Open Houses was hearing from you. We appreciate the thoughtfulness and passion for the African Burial Ground that was displayed through your video comments, conversations with staff and the court reporter and in writing on the forms we provided. All ideas and suggestions that were received at the Open Houses, by mail, on-line or fax are equally valuable to us.

Looking ahead to the next 20 years, we asked you to reflect on the big questions that the GMP will tackle. Following is a summary of what you shared with us including responses to our questions as well as your other ideas and thoughts. While there are some differing opinions and ideas, the planning team will consider all comments with an eye towards feasibility and the fulfillment of its mission to preserve and protect the National Monument for current and future generations. A complete listing of responses is available on our website at: *www.nps.gov/afbg/parkmgmt/heard-and-learned-spring-2009.htm.*

Protection and Preservation

- *How can the National Park Service better preserve and protect the African Burial Ground?*
- *How should the NPS best work with others to ensure protection of the entire African Burial Ground?*

Your Ideas for future protection and preservation of the National Monument were broad and inclusive; they ranged from practical on-the-ground measures such as the installation of cameras and fencing to marking and placing signs throughout the entire National Historic Landmark area (NHL). Some of you expressed concern about any new development in the NHL.

Other ideas included increasing public awareness locally, nationally and internationally about the existence of the Monument and its history, *"The best way to preserve and protect is to spread the word internationally about the African Burial Ground… "* another commented that *"The only way in my estimation you can protect something like this is to continue to talk about it, continue to share information, demanding that it become a part of school curriculum."* Others cautioned that any additional or future efforts at protection be balanced and mindful that this is a historic and "sacred" site.

Current and Future Programming and Facilities

- *What do you think about our current programs?*
- *What suggestions do you have for future programs and visitor experiences?*
- *Recognizing that the new visitor center will soon open and be in operation for some period, do you believe that the NPS should consider developing a different facility in the future?*

While most of you had positive things to say about current programming, there also was anticipation for the opening of the visitor center and for more and varied interpretive and educational experiences. Regarding the visitor center, some expressed concerns that the size may not be adequate, but most want to see and experience this facility first before advocating for additional space.

Regarding exhibits and programming, some wanted to know more about what the day-to-day lives of those buried in the African Burial Ground were like: What did they wear? What did the children play with? What did they eat? What kind of work did they do? What kinds of things did they own? What traditions were they able to hold on to and practice? One idea was *"Educational program and visitor experiences should include "hands-on" workshops that give attendees a more realistic view of the value of the deceased… How they made clothing, jewelry, ethnic foods, and honored their God(s)."*

Another sentiment expressed was access to the information that the forensic research has revealed, including what future advancements in DNA testing could reveal in regards to the origins of those buried at the ABG; this was a desire for many who had their own DNA tested or who were doing genealogical research on themselves and their families.

Some stressed the arts—poetry, music, dance, drama, film, and the fine arts—and the need to have youth use their creativity to help enliven the themes associated with the National Monument; another suggestion was historic reenactments.

Additional ideas included interactive, on-line and virtual programming; travelling programs and exhibits; and relevant books, CDs and videos.

Accessibility and Outreach

- *How can we make the African Burial Ground accessible and meaningful to a student in Nigeria or a grandmother in Paris?*
- *Do you have suggestions on how we can raise public awareness that the burial ground extends beyond the National Monument?*

The web, including virtual tours, on-line libraries, digitized resources and social networking sites were suggested. Most responders want to see the web as a major vehicle to bring people across the globe to the National Monument. Additional ideas included local access channels, radio, and local and regional print media.

Many commented that outreach efforts locally, nationally and internationally need to be increased. *"I live 2 blocks away and was on the community board for decades and really know very little about the site. Outreach hasn't been working for the local area."*

There was a suggestion to physically mark and sign the entire NHL area to help inform those who live and work in, and visit the area about the National Monument and the extent of the National Historic Landmark boundary; *"…in terms of providing information to the public re: the site, it might be interesting to have signs/plaques throughout demarcating the full area/i.e. beyond the monument itself that designates the full area of the historic burial ground…"*

Suggestions also included going beyond schools to libraries, adult education and senior centers, local and regional neighborhoods, faith-based institutions, chambers of commerce and tourism-based organizations. A few suggested having high-profile African American entertainers participate in an event or a public service announcement to bring attention to the site. Other ideas to access the Monument's history and programs included books, CDs and DVDs for various age groups and traveling exhibits.

Partnerships

- *Which local, national and global communities, organizations, businesses and civic groups do you think the NationalMonument should partner with?*
- *What types of partnerships—educational, philanthropic, tourism, etc-should the NPS pursue?*

Partnerships are integral to the success of NPS sites all over the country; they help to foster protection, preservation and understanding of the natural and cultural resources that have been designated as nationally significant. We asked for your ideas on who the National Monument should partner with and the list you generated was rich! Your ideas spanned everything from educational institutions to Hollywood. Suggestions for academic partnering included local schools to universities, boards of education and African American fraternities and sororities.

Your suggestions for partnering with other institutions and organizations included other sites of conscience, museums, libraries, churches and tourism-related organizations. Some stressed the importance of partnering with established African American institutions such as the NAACP, the National Urban League and Pan-African organizations.

Other suggestions fell under an international umbrella such the United Nations and the World Health Organization. Philanthropic institutions and foundations funded by large corporations were also suggested, as well as philanthropic organizations with celebrity spokespersons or "socially conscious celebrities".