

0001

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8 AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND OPEN HOUSE

9 THURGOOD MARSHALL ACADEMY

10 200-214 WEST 135TH STREET

11 NEW YORK, NEW YORK

12 WEDNESDAY, JUNE 10, 2009

13 6:00 - 8:00 P.M.

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

0002

1 P R E S E N T:

2 L. Charles

3 Eve Clyburn

4 Baba Stephen Griffith

5 Ella Harris

6 Rosalind Savage

7 Dr. I.M. Spence-Lewis

8 Baba Stephen Griffith

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

0003

1 PROCEEDINGS

2 (Time noted: 6:00 p.m.)

3

4 MR. CHARLES: The first question applies

5 to people being there to look after it. It should

6 be looked after, just like all the other national

7 monuments. It should be looked after; upkept.

8 I'm glad there is a new visitor center

9 in the works. I hope it will open in 2010. I

10 think it is a good program so far.

11 Number 5: It should stay open year

12 round.

13 Number 6: I think it should be partners

14 with the NAACP. It should be partners with all the

15 organizations. It should be partners with the

16 Urban League; churches, as well.

17 Number 8: It should be guarded and have

18 security. I think it should be year-round, to

19 protect it, the entire African Burial Ground.

20 Number 9: I think it should be done

21 through the organizations, the black organizations;

22 the Urban League, the NAACP, the churches.

23 I don't know about Number 10.

24 Number 11: I think the politicians

25 should get into this and make all of this happen.

0004

1 African Burial Ground - 6/10/09

2 That's my last comments. The politicians should be

3 vocal, very vocal about it to make sure it happens.

4 I think they are the only ones to make all of this

5 happen.

6 MS. CLYBURN: I like the idea that -- I

7 think, my understanding is that this big burial

8 ground will spawn interest in people -- you can't

9 necessarily discover -- they're usually found by

10 accident; am I right? Can people, researchers,

11 find out where --

12 What I want to say is, I hope the

13 interest in a big city like New York, I hope the

14 interest of a burial ground being discovered here

15 will cause people around the country to have an

16 interest in promoting other grounds becoming known.

17 I really think, this being a big city,

18 New York City is one of the premier cities. If

19 people know there is a burial ground here, for sure

20 there are other grounds in this nation. And maybe

21 that realization will cause them to want to protect

22 them and to care for them and to make sure their
23 family members, and especially the youngsters, know
24 about this burial ground.

25 Very often, young people and old people,

0005

1 African Burial Ground - 6/10/09

2 too, think it is a morbid curiosity, but it is not.

3 It is historical, and we have to think of it in

4 those terms.

5 Another thought occurs to me. With so

6 much DNA, so much scientific studies about

7 genealogy, lineage, family lineage perhaps -- with

8 these grounds being maintained, maybe at some point

9 people can find their family history through the

10 burial grounds being established and protected.

11 I live in New Jersey. Not too long ago

12 there was a ground discovered in Little Ferry, New

13 Jersey. And also in Teaneck, New Jersey, there was

14 a relatively small ground they thought was a slave

15 burial ground. And there has been some interest

16 and they are trying to preserve it.

17 I knew about in from the news. I never

18 visited the New York city burial ground. I think

19 many, especially African-Americans, many of us

20 don't think of burial grounds in the north,

21 necessarily. We think all the burial grounds of
22 interest would be in the South.

23 We forget in New York that a people were
24 enslaved and were segregated from the burial sites.
25 There were not integrated burial sights in the
0006

1 African Burial Ground - 6/10/09
2 North. I think many times we overlook that.

3 The 17th century or 18th or 1900s, these
4 burial grounds would have been -- I noticed the
5 bulletin board over there, I didn't pay attention
6 to the dates -- the fact that there were burial
7 grounds is, again, of how many people of African
8 descent lived in the North.

9 This question, how could we make the
10 African Burial Ground accessible and meaningful to
11 a student in Nigeria, a student in Paris?

12 I think it is obvious. There could be
13 videotapes, there could be DVDs. Activities -- it
14 occurs to me that the burial ground would be an
15 excellent place for historical music, appropriate
16 for a cemetery, could be sung at a place like that.

17 Even artwork could be -- this is in
18 terms of sharing it with people abroad, so they
19 would know these places exist in the United States;

20 and if they ever came to this country, they would
21 have an idea of what to expect, similar to what
22 people see when they go over to Normandy.

23 The president just returned from the
24 commemoration of D-Day, and they go to the
25 cemetery, Arlington and other places.

0007

1 African Burial Ground - 6/10/09

2 The burial grounds could be treated in
3 that fashion. There could be the laying of a
4 wreath, the way they do at Arlington. Since these
5 are civilians, I don't expect there would be
6 sentries or anything like that; I don't know if
7 that would be appropriate.

8 But something that could show the
9 respect and the honor that is paid, similar to the
10 forever flame, the eternal flames we see in some
11 places like that, could be part of a DVD or video
12 presentation of the burial ground.

13 And definitely, if people ever were able
14 to trace some of their family members to these -- I
15 guess it is possible in the future that could
16 happen -- then families could think in terms of
17 visiting, the way we visit cemeteries where we know
18 the people that are buried; to make it relevant to

19 people.

20 I'm assuming there would be protection

21 on the same order of the protection that will be

22 given to the restoration of the 9/11 monuments that

23 are going to be established.

24 I would expect -- it says "How should

25 the National Parks Service best work with others to

0008

1 African Burial Ground - 6/10/09

2 insure protection?"

3 If they work with the City or the

4 federal government, the same way they will be

5 protecting the 9/11 monuments that were going to be

6 built.

7 I think I can best participate -- they

8 ask me how I believe I can best participate: It

9 would be to spread the word, let people know about

10 the project, let them know there already is a

11 burial ground there, and that there are plans to

12 extend the area around it.

13 And it's word of mouth. You have to

14 share the information with people. And especially

15 when people come to visit New York, tourists and

16 family members who come visiting, that would be one

17 of the sites they ought to visit. I'm pretty sure

18 they don't think of New York in those terms. They
19 think in terms of fun, holiday fun and all. I'm
20 pretty sure that could be a way to extend the
21 information.

22 MS. HARRIS: What do you think about the
23 program?

24 I think the program should be
25 educational as well as entertaining. However, I do
0009

1 African Burial Ground - 6/10/09
2 feel we need more participation with the community.

3 What suggestions do you have for
4 visitors' experiences?

5 I think for visitors, to reenact the
6 lives of the Africans at the burial ground; this
7 way to better understand what the African lives
8 buried there was like.

9 How could we make the African Burial
10 Ground meaningful to students in Nigeria or a
11 grandmother in Paris?

12 You can reach others by streaming and
13 have recorded programs on the African Burial Ground
14 website. Also, you can invite them to put the
15 African Burial Ground on their itinerary when
16 visiting New York City and the surrounding areas.

17 Which local, national and global
18 community organizations, businesses and civic
19 groups do you believe the African Burial Ground
20 should partner with?

21 How to have serious interest and
22 preserve this historic site, in terms of museums,
23 churches and learning institutions, et cetera.

24 How can the National Park Service better
25 preserve and protect the African Burial Ground?

0010

1 African Burial Ground - 6/10/09

2 I feel they should set up a community, a
3 watchdog community, to keep watch over the
4 government or whoever else is involved to protect
5 the African Burial Ground, to preserve it, to have
6 it upkeep.

7 MS. SAVAGE: Regarding Question 1, how
8 can the National Parks Service preserve and protect
9 the African Burial Ground?

10 Speaking as somebody who worked in
11 museums, preserving -- I'm going to look at the
12 technical part of the question. I would imagine
13 that -- I'll also say I don't know very much about
14 what is going on now, so this is based on what my
15 ideas are.

16 I would think that they would have
17 someone who is expert in the preservation of
18 artifacts and historical items. But in terms of
19 preserving and to protect, I look at it
20 idealistically and historically, that you must
21 preserve the integrity of African history, you must
22 preserve the integrity of sharing that with the
23 public, especially with young people.

24 And regarding the preservation and to
25 protect, the only way in my estimation you can
0011

1 African Burial Ground - 6/10/09
2 protect something like this is to continue to talk
3 about it, continue to share information, demanding
4 that it be a part of school curriculum, and also
5 making sure that young people, even college
6 students, are trained and understand that this is a
7 part of all our histories, especially people who
8 come from New York and of African descent.

9 But it should be something that is
10 taught in schools, and that's how you preserve it
11 and that's how you protect it. And I'm not talking
12 about just in February. I would hope it is not
13 just for Black History Month. It should be done
14 365 a year.

15 Most importantly, I think a project like
16 this, a program like this, makes everyone remember
17 and appreciate the ancestors; and that is what
18 needs to be taught to young people. They must not
19 forget their heritage.

20 The second question states, "What do you
21 think about our current program?"

22 I have already stated I don't know
23 anything about it. I know about the history about
24 it, but I'm really not knowledgeable in that so I
25 won't be able to comment.

0012

1 African Burial Ground - 6/10/09

2 But regarding the third question, what
3 do you suggest as future programs and experiences?
4 I always go back to training children, because I
5 know the importance. I have dealt with kids from
6 high school to college.

7 What I see coming to college, they have
8 no knowledge of their history. This is everybody's
9 history and there's definitely not knowledge of
10 American history and African-American history.

11 So I believe in a kiosk; I know it is
12 expensive. I don't know the mechanics about it.
13 All I know is, when people see something moving and

14 talking and when they hear sounds, they usually go
15 to that.

16 So, considering what the expense would
17 be, it would be a wonderful idea if the National
18 Park Service invests in several kiosks so they can
19 be loaned out to various schools. Again, I don't
20 know what the cost is. I don't know even if they
21 can be moved back and forth. And if it can't, then
22 there are other ways to share that information that
23 makes it interesting for kids.

24 I think it should be mandatory in the
25 public schools, the New York public schools, since
0013

1 African Burial Ground - 6/10/09
2 this is New York. Historically, I do know that I
3 grew up here in Harlem. I know there has been
4 problems adding some black history in the
5 curriculum for New York State or New York City, the
6 public schools. That is the great discussion.

7 But in my estimation, it should be
8 mandatory. You can fit something like that into
9 the curriculum. You are working with 17th and
10 18th-century history, and prior to that. So those
11 things can be worked into a curriculum.

12 And you must have the politicians who

13 say they are interested in it and they support it.
14 They need to make these things happen. It can
15 happen. And there should be no options. When I
16 say that, I mean I used to work also in the Boston
17 public school system.

18 What they call standards in the school
19 curriculum, they gave teachers -- let's say they're
20 doing the civil rights movement era. They gave
21 them options. If they don't know very much about
22 that subject matter they can deal with Europe,
23 European history, what was going on during that
24 time. In my estimation, many of the teachers did
25 that. Now, that's why I say it should be

0014

1 African Burial Ground - 6/10/09

2 mandatory, no options.

3 It should also be mandatory that the
4 state -- this is educational information that can
5 be shared throughout the country and beyond.

6 Number 4, my answer to that would simply
7 be that yes, and exclamation points; that the
8 question regarding recognizing this will open soon,
9 be in operation for some period.

10 Do you believe the NPS should consider
11 developing a different facility in the future?

12 My answer is yes. This is not just New
13 York history. It is world history, because it
14 touches on a lot things, the slave trade. These
15 things don't stand alone in terms of world history
16 and history in the United States.

17 The fifth question asks how to make the
18 African Burial Ground accessible, meaningful to
19 students in Nigeria and grandmothers in Paris.

20 Number 1, you can do that through books.
21 I know that is the old-fashioned way,
22 unfortunately. However you can do that, through
23 books, booklets, comic books, graphic novels.
24 Those things really are popular now in schools with
25 kids. As a librarian, I supply graphic novels to
0015

1 African Burial Ground - 6/10/09
2 kids and they love it.

3 There's computer programming and
4 websites. These are the normal things. I would
5 hope the NPS would support educational trips to
6 selected places, to introduce, talk about the
7 programs. You're talking about Nigeria, you're
8 talking about a grandmother in Paris; I understand
9 the type of question you asking.

10 How would you disseminate this

11 information to people throughout the world? And so
12 my answer would be, you have to go over there, go
13 to certain places. Again, economics plays a great
14 -- everything is a great part of this.

15 These are my suggestions. As I said, a
16 curriculum based book, not just for the school
17 system. But a curriculum based book you could buy
18 at Barnes & Noble, any book store. You can talk,
19 they can read, they have exercises to do. They
20 have a narrative about history and things like that
21 and I find those things very helpful.

22 Let's say the child is home-schooled.
23 That's something that should not be difficult to
24 do. Even if the child is not home-schooled, the
25 parents may want to just have something like that

0016

1 African Burial Ground - 6/10/09

2 on hand. That's my suggestion.

3 Number 6: Local, national, global
4 community organizations concerning partnerships.

5 What would be my suggestions to partner with?

6 Number 1, I would suggest all black
7 publications; and also publications whose
8 readerships are black. It doesn't have to be black
9 owned.

10 I suggest that there be curricula-based
11 books and book stores. Major book stores and
12 neighborhood book stores. And I believe also that
13 there needs to be a partnership with the black
14 organizations. There should be a partnership with
15 churches; and I am aware of the separation of
16 church and state. These churches can take money
17 from the state; they can also partner with this
18 program.

19 Also, TV shows, TV networks that have a
20 large black viewership. I guess that would be the
21 Fox Channel, the Fox stations and those type of
22 stations. They have a lot of black shows and they
23 have a very large public.

24 What types of partnerships, educational
25 philanthropy, tourism they should pursue? If they
0017

1 African Burial Ground - 6/10/09
2 don't already, pursue the touring agencies. Up and
3 down Harlem. They may visit the monument and they
4 may not, I don't know. These are things they can
5 pursue.

6 They also can go to many of the schools.
7 Of course, they probably do. That's one of the
8 suggestions that I have. They should also tap into

9 black-owned businesses in our communities; and also
10 the businesses that are in our communities that are
11 not black owned.

12 This is an interesting question. How
13 should the NPS best work -- Number 8 -- with others
14 to insure protection of the entire African Burial
15 ground?

16 And my answer is that -- a little
17 radical -- there should be a contract of
18 responsibilities that has no limits in terms of
19 time. And it could be called anything, a Bill of
20 Rights, their particular bill of rights. That's
21 the best way I can explain it. Many organizations
22 in the early 70s and late 60s had a contract of
23 responsibilities of "so and so is needed to do, and
24 this is agreed upon." And it would be forever,
25 until the organization dies or whatever.

0018

1 African Burial Ground - 6/10/09

2 Do you have suggestions on how we can
3 raise public awareness?

4 I always say, it is important to go in
5 education, to talk to students. They are the best
6 ambassadors. The youth are our future; all
7 students are our future. And again, the public

8 school curriculum.

9 DR. SPENCE-LEWIS: These comments are
10 being made within the context of the fact that not
11 all the remains have been removed from the burial
12 ground.

13 The African Burial Ground came to my
14 attention while I was living in London, England.
15 That would have been more than 10 years ago. I was
16 sent documents by the participants in the burial
17 ground relating to the work that was being carried
18 out with participation of the community.

19 As a physician, I was particularly
20 interested in the history of medicine aspect. What
21 was being done with the bones, how they were being
22 examined, the protocols that were used for
23 examination of the bones, and so on; within the
24 context of the history of medicine, and of course,
25 the context of forensic science.

0019

1 African Burial Ground - 6/10/09

2 One of the features of the burial ground
3 that concerns me is that it not become a public
4 spectacle. If we look at burial grounds around the
5 world, whether military, civil, or historic, and
6 where there is some participation by the government

7 and the community, they are very much limited in
8 the manner in which the public can have access;
9 particularly with the historical importance of
10 this.

11 There are similar burial grounds in
12 Ghana, where I now live and work as a physician.
13 And I think that within the context of UNESCO and
14 given the depth of the public burial grounds
15 throughout the world, it needs to be documented how
16 they were implemented to serve best the interests
17 of the community, particularly the African-American
18 community.

19 I know the Catholic burial grounds you
20 cannot get in; as with the Jewish burial grounds
21 you cannot get in; as with the military burial
22 grounds in Europe, such as Germany, France, or
23 other places, you cannot get in as you would like.
24 I think the same standards are to be applied to the
25 burial ground related to African-American

0020

1 African Burial Ground - 6/10/09

2 ancestors.

3 My page is www.cddfafrica.org, and I'm a
4 board member. The acronym stands for "Community
5 Directed Development Foundation." I'm a board

6 member in Ghana.

7 MR. GRIFFITH: The first question, how
8 can the National Park Service better preserve and
9 protect the African Burial Ground?

10 One thing is, they can get rid of the
11 proliferation of rats in the area.

12 Preserve and protect -- I would be
13 interested in terms of the preservation of an
14 interactive educational center, some kind of way
15 for scholarly or scholarship studies, or people --
16 say, high school or college students, et cetera,
17 even smaller, younger students, to be able to, in
18 terms of African or African-American studies. To
19 me they are the same.

20 National Monument, Question 2. Ongoing
21 interpretation program. What do you think about
22 our current --

23 I think the current programs are a
24 start. I think that more in-depth research into
25 African-American history needs to be done, so that

0021

1 African Burial Ground - 6/10/09
2 they are not only skimming the surface when they
3 put forth their educational tours and educational
4 materials.

5 If there are those who would like to
6 know more in depth, they should have the facilities
7 or the material available. To those who only wish
8 to skim the surface, well, give all and let them
9 choose to take a little.

10 What do you think about future programs?

11 One thing people should come away with
12 is, all people who come through should leave with
13 the understanding that Africans were the first
14 humans. And as a result of that, we are all
15 related.

16 I think that future programs should
17 stress that point. I think that future programs --
18 I don't know if they have it already -- interactive
19 computer set-ups for visitors and students and so
20 forth who may come.

21 Question 4: I think that the new
22 facility should be housed in the adjacent red brick
23 building, and should be an African Burial Ground
24 museum.

25 I think that presently, looking at the
0022

1 African Burial Ground - 6/10/09
2 plan, the 40-seat theater is too small for what the
3 future of the burial ground will entertain as it

4 grows. The future of the burial ground lies with
5 the future of America, actually.

6 The future of the burial ground, now
7 that we have Barak Obama as president, is an
8 indication of the importance of the history, not
9 only to African-Americans, but to the whole country
10 and to the visitors from all over the world who
11 come to New York City and will come through the
12 burial ground.

13 I would like to see the burial ground in
14 the future, 15, 20 years; but let's say 50, 75
15 years in the future, be standing; just as Ellis
16 Island is standing; how the Statute of Liberty
17 monument is still standing, and other such
18 monuments.

19 Once again, how can we make accessible
20 to a student in Nigeria and a grandmother in Paris?

21 Interactive computer network, like unto
22 real estate online, where you can go from room to
23 room and see things and interact with them. I
24 think that would help a student in Nigeria or a
25 grandmother in Paris, or even somebody in New York

0023

1 African Burial Ground - 6/10/09

2 who may not be able to come down and visit.

3 I think that partnerships are very
4 important and there are many organizations --
5 they've already partnered with the Schaumburg
6 Center, which is one. There is the Malcolm X
7 Center in upper Manhattan. I think that there are
8 many traditional or African-based religious located
9 here in the City; and some extension of a hand
10 needs to be put out to them in order to garner more
11 information about Africans, African burial rights,
12 and so on.

13 Caribbean Cultural Center -- Marta
14 Moreno Vega is the director; that's another
15 organization I can name outright.

16 What type of partnerships, educational,
17 philanthropic, tourism, et cetera, should the NPS
18 pursue?

19 All of those listed; and not only that.
20 African burials around the world. What is the
21 typography, what is the differences, what are the
22 similarities? There are Africans in South America;
23 there are Africans in Germany; there are Africans
24 in the Netherlands. There are Africans in other
25 parts of the world who are alive, who have

0024

1 African Burial Ground - 6/10/09

2 ancestors buried in those countries. We should
3 cross-reference the information.
4 The best way to insure protection of the
5 African Burial Ground is to get the information
6 out, to continue public education, to realize it is
7 joint ownership. Although the government per se
8 may at this point have the land or the building and
9 so on, it is the joint partnership with the
10 community, the African community of New York, but
11 also the African community beyond New York.

12 To answer that question directly, I
13 think the reach-out to these various communities
14 and then the conversation that ensues will give
15 answers to how to protect the entire burial ground.

16 Extension of public awareness beyond the
17 physical borders of the burial ground we know
18 today, because it is a much larger land mass. And
19 in fact, the buildings that stand on top of the
20 rest of the burial ground continue to show it's
21 Africans that support the city, the government and
22 the United States; even with their dead bones.

23 Public awareness can be garnered by
24 outreach programs which you have; by mailings; by
25 audio-visual materials, being put in public places,

1 African Burial Ground - 6/10/09
2 libraries and so on and so forth, and made
3 available to the public, perhaps in your learning
4 center or the new center coming up or in the shop
5 that you have now, the small space now.

6 The people who come from China or Japan
7 or Turkey or New Haven, California, should be able
8 to take away the video to purchase the video or
9 take it away for future reference, the video on the
10 burial ground.

11 How can you participate in its
12 development and implementation?

13 I'm doing that now.

14 Number 2, I would have to have further
15 information on the GMP in order to find out what I
16 have to offer. As I garner more information about
17 the general management, see what it is, I can offer
18 in the development and implementation.

19 (Time noted: 8:00 p.m.)

20

21

22

23

24

25

0026

1

2 CERTIFICATION

3

4 I, Jeffrey Shapiro, a

5 Shorthand Reporter and Notary Public, within and

6 for the State of New York, do hereby certify that I

7 reported the proceedings in the within-entitled

8 matter, on Wednesday, June 10, 2009, at the

9 THURGOOD MARSHALL ACADEMY, 200-214 West 135th

10 Street, New York, New York, and that this is an

11 accurate transcription of these proceedings.

12 IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have

13 hereunto set my hand this _____ day of

14 _____, 2009.

15

16

17

JEFFREY SHAPIRO

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

