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Update #4: New York's African Burial Ground

Submitted by Jerome S. Handler, Southern Illinois University

This newsletter has provide three earlier reports on the African burialground in lower Manhattan (Spring 1992, Spring 1993 and Winter 1993). This update covers the period ending October, 1994.

Artifacts from the burial site, as well as the neighboring Five Points site, are still housed in a laboratory at the World Trade Center where they are being conserved by a team from John Milner Associates. The burial groundartifacts will be separated from those recovered at Five Points, and they will be shipped to Howard University for analysis. All of the approximately 400 skeletal remains are now at the Bioanthropology Lab at Howard where their analysis is supported by a contract between the General Services Administration and Howard University (see the accompanying article by Mark Mack). After being analyzed, the skeletal population will be reinterred at the burial site. The formal ceremonies that will accompany reinterment have yet to be formulated.

In April, 1994, the General Services Administration (GSA) and the National Park Service (NPS) entered into an agreement concerning the Interpretative Center to be located within the new Foley Square Federal Office Tower Building, adjacent to the burial site. This agreement provides for the NPS to design and construct the Interpretive Center which will encompass an approximately 2,000 square foot area. Through the use of archaeological data and historical records, the Interpretive Center will interpret the African burial ground within the wider context of the sociocultural history of Africans and their descendants in the New York area in the early colonial period.

The Federal Advisory Committee (or Steering Committee on the African Burial Ground) was established in 1992 for a two year period to make recommendations to the GSA concerning the skeletal remains and associated issues relating to the burial ground. The committee, of which this author was a member, met monthly at the Schomburg Center in New York. With the expiration ofits charter, the final meeting of the committee was held on August 22, 1994. Further information concerning the current status of the African Burial Ground Interpretive Center and related issues can be obtained from the Office of Public Education and Interpretation of the African Burial Ground, U.S. Custom House, Room 239, 6 World Trade Center, New York 10048; phone 212-432-5707; fax 212 432-5920.