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Abstract

Reinterment at The African Burial Ground:
The Material Result of Ideology

Laura E. Rocke

In 1991, during ground clearing for the construction of two Federal Buildings in lower Manhattan, human skeletal remains were unearthed. The remains belonged to 18th century African New Yorkers who used the land, known historically as the Negros Burial Ground, to bury their dead during the majority of the 1700s. As a result of this discovery, a more than decade long political and cultural struggle ensued between the General Services Administration (the federal agency in charge of the construction project), scientists and scholars, and a community of activists who advocated on behalf of the remains. The activists sought reinterment of the remains as well as memorialization of the burial ground, now referred to as the African Burial Ground, and the 18th century individuals buried there. A team of archaeologists studied the four hundred nineteen sets of remains exhumed from the site, which is estimated to contain approximately twenty thousand burials. The goal of their research was to better understand how these 18th century African New Yorkers lived and their role in the development of colonial New York. Upon completion of this research, the remains were reinterred on October 4, 2003, at the site from where they had been disinterred, where the New York African Burial Ground National Monument would eventually be. This thesis examines the process and significance surrounding reinterment of the remains: the decision to do so and who was involved in and responsible for that decision, as well as the discussions, negotiations, and planning process that eventually culminated in the five day long event to reinter and
memorialize the men, women, and children originally buried at this site over two-hundred years prior. It argues that reinterment was advocated for and undertaken by activists due to the shared set of ideas among them regarding the significance of the remains and the consequent significance of reinterring and memorializing them.
To my father—you are always with me, and Duane—my little black one.
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Abbreviations

ACHP: Advisory Council on Historic Preservation
EIS: Environmental Impact Study
FSC: Federal Steering Committee
GSA: General Services Administration
JMA: John Milner Associates
LPC: Landmarks Preservation Council
MOA: Memorandum of Agreement
NBG: Negros Burial Ground
NHPA: National Historical Preservation Act
NPS: National Park Service
NRHP: National Register of Historic Places
OPEI: Office for Public Education and Interpretation
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Introduction

In 1991, during preliminary ground clearing for the construction of a federal courthouse and office building in lower Manhattan, the skeletal remains of African New Yorkers from the colonial era were uncovered. The more than four-hundred burials that would eventually be exhumed from the site—thought to hold approximately twenty thousand burials total—were part of what had been known historically as the “Negros Burial Ground,” actively in use from at least 1712 until its official closing in 1794. As a result of this discovery, a more than decade-long political and cultural struggle ensued between: the General Services Administration (GSA)—the federal agency in charge of both acquiring the land upon which the structures would be built and overseeing the construction of said structures; scholars and scientists—primarily archaeologist Dr. Michael L. Blakey of Howard University and his team of archaeologists; and a community of activists—politicians, religious leaders and members of the general public, many of who considered themselves part of a “descendant community”—who contested the excavation and what they considered to be the subsequent mishandling of the remains. The activists advocated for reinterment of the remains and memorialization of the burial ground and the 18th century African New Yorkers buried there.

Several outcomes resulted from this advocacy. A portion of the GSA’s construction project was cancelled in order to: properly exhume and study a total of four hundred nineteen burials; to leave undisturbed the majority of those presumed to be there; and to eventually reinter the exhumed remains and memorialize them and site from where they came. The New York African Burial Ground (as it was officially designated in 1992) was declared a New York City and National Historic Landmark. Blakey and his
team conducted an exhaustive study of the remains. The goal of their research was to better understand the lives of those individuals to whom the remains belonged in order to amend the historical record to more accurately reflect the role of Africans and people of African descent in the development of colonial New York. Upon completion of this research, the remains were reinterred on October 4, 2003, at the approximate site of original interment, where the New York African Burial Ground National Monument (NYABG) would be erected and opened four years later, and a museum seven years later.

This thesis examines the process and significance surrounding the reinterment of the remains: the decision to do so and who was involved in and responsible for the decision; as well as the discussions, negotiations, and planning process that eventually culminated in the five-day long event to memorialize and reinter the men, women, and children originally buried at this site over two-hundred years prior. Reinterment was proposed as early as 1991; after a twelve-year struggle and several botched attempts to bring reinterment to fruition, it finally occurred in 2003. While previous studies have examined and analyzed the NYABG as a site of public history and from a public history perspective, none have focused on reinterment, which as mentioned, occurred before the monument and museum were opened. Thus, understanding reinterment—how and why it occurred—is important to understanding the NYABG as a site of public history considering that reinterment was the first substantial memorialization measure and public history component of the African Burial Ground (ABG). Yet, none of the scholarship pertaining to the ABG addresses reinterment to any considerable degree. Moreover, as

this thesis demonstrates, reinterment and the other memorialization measures that took place at the ABG represent the culmination of the ABG’s discovery and the controversy that ensued. Therefore, the scholarship of the ABG is incomplete without this element of its history.

I argue that reinterment was advocated for and undertaken by activists due to the shared set of ideas among them regarding the significance of the remains and the consequent significance of their reinterment and memorialization. Activists subscribed to an ideological construction regarding the significance of and their relation to the remains, which otherwise had no basis in reality. Yet, that ideological construction went seemingly unchallenged and essentially resulted in a portion of a federal construction project being cancelled in order to memorialize the site and the 18th century individuals associated with it in an elaborate fashion, all at the expense of the federal government. In addition, that ideology has an enduring legacy in concrete expressions at the NYABG.

Chapter 1 traces the struggle over the disposition of the remains that ensued upon their discovery. Chapter 2 examines and analyzes the ideology surrounding the activism that brought about reinterment at and memorialization of the African Burial Ground. The thesis concludes with a discussion of the NYABG as a site of public history and evaluates how the ideology that brought this site into existence manifests itself in the interpretive direction of the NYABG.
Chapter 1
Interment, Disinterment, Reinterment

On October 4, 2003, four hundred nineteen sets of human skeletal remains were reinterred in lower Manhattan, where they had been discovered and subsequently disinterred twelve years earlier. Reinterment of these remains was the result of a lengthy and contentious social and political struggle between activists, politicians, and the federal government. Reinterment was the final stage of a five-day long funerary event, “The Rites of Ancestral Return,” that began on September 30, 2003. It was planned and coordinated mostly by activists from the general public and was managed and produced by said individuals in conjunction with other political and scholarly figures under the official title of the African Burial Ground Reinterment Project. It spanned eight different U.S. cities and involved the participation and attendance of thousands of individuals from across the U.S. and around the world. The entire event was international in scope, with individuals and groups from all over the world—a heavy concentration from Africa—in attendance. Events culminated on October 4 with the exhumed remains once again being laid to rest where they originally had been over two hundred years prior.²

The Rites of Ancestral Return officially kicked off in Washington D.C. where, for over ten years, the exhumed remains had been located and studied at Howard University under the direction of physical anthropologist Dr. Michael Blakey.³ Washington D.C. was one of eight cities—D.C.; Baltimore, Md.; Wilmington Del.; Philadelphia Pa.; Camden, Newark, and Jersey City, N.J.; and New York City—to hold funerary events in honor of the remains. Such events included commemorative ceremonies and symbolic

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³ Dr. Blakey is now at The College of William and Mary.
funeral services with elements such as: vigils; libations; musical selections; tributes; prayers and bible readings delivered by religious figures from each community; and speeches by prominent members of each community.\(^4\) Between September 30 and October 3, four sets of remains—those of a man, woman, boy, and girl, symbolizing a family—traveled from city to city in individual wooden coffins made in Ghana, and represented and eventually joined the four hundred fifteen sets of remains that had already been transferred from Howard University to their original and now final resting place in Manhattan.\(^5\)

Of the eight total stops that the family made along the way to their final resting place, six were representative of the history of slavery in the U.S. They were thus chosen for their symbolic value, in order to “both document and celebrate…the important role and major contribution that enslaved African men, women, and children made to the economy, development, and culture of America, both in the South and the Northern States.”\(^6\) Washington D.C. (where the remains had been studied at Howard University and thus from where they departed) as well as Baltimore, M.D. and Wilmington, D.E. all represented slavery in the Chesapeake, while Philadelphia, P.A., Newark, N.J. and New York, N.Y. represented slavery in the middle colonies between the Chesapeake and New England.

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5. According to Ollie McClean, (ABG activist, descendant community member and member of the Committee of Descendants of the Afrikan Ancestral Burial Ground—one of several community activist groups involved with planning and orchestrating reinterment), the wooden coffins from Ghana were her idea; Ollie McClean, in discussion with the author, November 10, 2014.
On the morning of Friday October 3, 2003, the family left Jersey City on a flotilla and made their way on the Hudson River to Manhattan. “The remains arrived...at the foot of Wall Street [at the Wall Street Pier], the former location of the 18th century ‘Slave Market.’” Here, an arrival and tribute ceremony was already underway with over four hundred attendees, prayers, libations, music, and speakers such as former Mayor of New York City David Dinkins, Mayor Michael Bloomberg, Senator David Paterson, and Blakey. From Wall Street, the family embarked upon a five-borough tour, carried and accompanied by eight pallbearers—four male and four female, and dozens of honorary pallbearers—male and female. Many such individuals—such as Senator Paterson, Blakey, Peggy King-Jorde, Miriam Francis, and Adunni Oshupa Tabasi—had been involved with the African Burial Ground, in some capacity, from very early on (as will be seen in the pages that follow).

Finally, the family arrived at the site from where they had been exhumed, the African Burial Ground—now a New York City and National Historic landmark. Here they joined the other four hundred fifteen sets of remains, in their wooden coffins (also from Ghana) and on display, and an overnight commemorative vigil was held with tributes and rituals performed by “institutions and organizations wishing to pay tribute to

8. Wilson, “Rites,” 1, 6.
9. Wilson, “Rites of Ancestral Return” Update 3, no. 10 (Fall/Winter 2003): 1, 6, and “Rites of Ancestral Return: Commemorating the Colonial African Heritage, Foley Square, New York City” (Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture: African Burial Ground Reinterment Project, New York City, 2003), 1. Ollie Mclean, one of four female pallbearers, was not pleased with the fact that there were female pallbearers because according to her, this was not in keeping with African funerary customs; Ollie Mclean, in discussion with the author, November 10, 2014.
10. The African Burial Ground received both of these landmark statuses in 1993.
the ancestors.” At 10:00am the following morning, a pre-tribute ceremony with song and dance was held. “The final tribute ceremony began at 11:00am and included a host of celebrities and clerical and spiritual leaders…The program concluded with [closing remarks from Maya Angelou], a song…and closing prayers.” Shortly after 2:30pm, Chief Alagba Egunfemi Adegbolola offered final prayers accompanied by song and drumming. Simultaneously, the first of seven porous concrete crypts in which the coffins had been placed—sixty coffins to a vault—was lowered into the earth where, to some degree, the remains had originally been buried and where the New York African Burial Ground National Monument would eventually be erected, encompassing the reinterment site with its seven burial mounds. “As the crypts descended…throngs of living descendants…reach[ed] out and touch[ed] for the last time the coffins of the African men, women and children…Between 3:00 and 5:00pm, the final farewell was made to those African ancestors…”

11. The African Burial Ground Reinterment Project collected applications from “organizations and institutions wishing to pay tribute to the ancestors.” Such tributes were limited to twenty minutes each.; “Rites of Ancestral Return: Commemorating the Colonial African Heritage. Application Form: Commemorative Vigil Schedule” (Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture :African Burial Ground Reinterment Project, New York City, 2003), 1.
14. Sherrill D. Wilson, “The Rites of Ancestral Return” Update 3, no. 10 (Fall/Winter 2003): 1, 6. Additionally, “prior to September 11, 2001, over 2,000 ‘Ancestor Cards’ were collected for the purpose of being buried with the ancestors.”; “OPEI Prepares for Rites of Ancestral Return: Press Release” (African Burial Ground Office of Public Education and Interpretation, New York City, 2003), 1. However, these “ancestor cards,” upon which individuals wrote personal messages to the remains that would be buried with them at the time of reinterment, were kept at the original OPEI headquarters at the World Trade Center. Thus, they were destroyed in the 9/11 attack. A campaign to collect new ones was initiated by the OPEI in August of 2003. The cards were placed in vessels and buried with the remains.; “OPEI Prepares for Rites
The Negros Burial Ground

The remains that were reinterred in 2003 were those of 18th century African New Yorkers. From the mid to late 17th century, colonial New Yorkers, Africans among them, were often buried in the “common burying ground, at Bowling Green, the city’s first public cemetery.”15 Trinity Church acquired the cemetery and, in 1697, barred Africans (as well as Jews and Catholics) from using it.16 It is thus likely that the Negros Burial Ground (NBG) began to be used very near this time; however, documented evidence of its official use dates from 1712, when Chaplain John Sharpe wrote about the burial of Africans among other Africans within one particular area. This area came to be designated on maps as the “Negros Burial Ground,” although, Sharpe did not call it by that name.17 The area referred to by Sharpe was near lands that had been given to a group of previously enslaved African men and women as part of the conditional freedom granted them by the Dutch in approximately 1640. However, as historian Edna Greene Medford explains, “Extant records provide no explanation for the origins of the use of the land for a black cemetery and give no indication of why the African community was permitted throughout the eighteenth century to appropriate the land as a burial ground.”18

Based on historical evidence, it is known and accepted that slavery existed in New York from its settling up until the Civil War. Such evidence includes: slave owners’ inventories and advertisements selling and looking for run-away slaves. In addition, the

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15. Greene Medford, 1.
Dutch—whose Dutch West India Company monopolized the trade in African slaves for most of the 17th century—were the initial European settlers of the area that eventually became New York. What is more, the English took over the colony in 1644 and no doubt imported African slaves into New York via their Royal African Company, which soon came to monopolize the trade.\(^{19}\) Thus, it is quite likely that many of those interred at the NBG were slaves. In addition, physical characteristics present among the exhumed bones point to a host of degenerative bone conditions, metabolic diseases, and musculoskeletal stress markers, all of which are indicative of nutritional deficits and occupational stress—conditions commonly associated with life under slavery.\(^{20}\)

It is also likely however, that some of those interred at the NBG were free. Historical evidence exists which suggests that, like the group of freed slaves mentioned above, other African slaves were granted their freedom, often on an individual basis. Children born to such Africans would thus also be free. Therefore, free Africans comprised at least a small portion of the colonial New York population. It is likely that some such Africans were interred at the NBG. There is no historical evidence that suggests an additional area existed specifically for the burial of deceased Africans. Nor does the language employed in either the Trinity Church ban or Sharpe’s description specify free or enslaved Africans. Thus, it is unlikely that free Africans were any less limited in where they could bury their dead than were their enslaved counterparts. Some of the exhumed bones show fewer signs of degeneration and stress, suggesting less occupational stress and better overall living conditions, perhaps resulting from a life of

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\(^{19}\) Medford, 25, 36.
\(^{20}\) Medford, 51.
freedom. However, such evidence is not particularly conclusive because a variety of other explanations are possible.\textsuperscript{21}

Africans in New York likely originated from a variety of western African locations: “Five key areas in western Africa funneled adults and children into colonial Manhattan’s homes, shops, and industrial yards: the Senegambia, Sierra Leone–Liberia, the Gold Coast, the Bight of Benin, and the Niger Delta.”\textsuperscript{22} African New Yorkers—enslaved and free—labored in a variety of capacities and industries. These included: agriculture; woodworking; shipbuilding; brewing; cloth making; and domestic service. As Medford explains: “…enslaved people were owned by merchants who kept them at labor in their mercantile houses and small shops; they also worked for professionals, such as attorneys and physicians, and for a variety of artisans…People of African descent labored as farmhands and mariners, domestics and dockworkers, bakers and brewers, tanners and millers, chimney sweeps and washerwomen, street vendors, and goldsmiths.”\textsuperscript{23} Women and children predominantly worked as domestic servants but were also known to work in agriculture, mercantile houses, and small shops.\textsuperscript{24}

When not toiling for their owners, some enslaved Africans hired themselves out or found other ways to engage in economic endeavors. This enabled them to exercise a degree of agency while simultaneously supplementing their diets and other material aspects of their lives. As Medford explains, “The ‘internal economies’ that developed

\textsuperscript{21} For instance, such bones may be those of individuals who were enslaved but were utilized in less strenuous labor settings such as shops and homes.
\textsuperscript{23} Medford, 55, 61.
\textsuperscript{24} Medford, 55, 61, 63.
among them helped to mitigate the deficiencies they suffered under slavery and surely provided psychological satisfaction as well…The sale of independently grown crops and livestock, wild foods acquired from hunting and gathering, and crafts work (to say nothing of pilfered items) enabled enslaved workers to enhance their level of subsistence and earn money or other goods.”

In addition, Africans who ran errands for their bosses and/or owners or whose bosses/owners were away for extended periods of time would use such opportunities to engage in their own economic pursuits. They also used such opportunities, as well as allotted “free-time,” for their own activities and to socialize.

According to Medford:

Marginalized by a society that defined them as property, Africans and people of African descent created a world in which they found respite from the drudgery of labor as they pursued their own social and cultural interests. Despite numerous laws that attempted to restrict their behavior, enslaved people enjoyed a variety of secular cultural expressions within the environment of New York City. Men [and women] gathered at the various establishments where they could drink and talk freely—taverns, dram shops, tippling houses, and the tea-water pump…[They] found white proprietors (and black ones too) more than willing to bend or break the laws for profit. Such gatherings afforded enslaved [people] opportunities for fellowship as well as the chance to share lamentations concerning their bondage.

Moreover, those enslaved under the Dutch and who labored for their West India Company “did so absent many proscriptions that slave codes in later years imposed.”

However, when the English took over the colony, they brought with them their “greater

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25. Medford, 63.
27. Medford, 74.
emphasis on order and control; hence, enslaved laborers and their free counterparts saw numerous proscriptions placed on their lives.”

Another area of their lives in which African New Yorkers were able to exercise some control was in their burial practices. Legal restrictions were placed on the times at which funerals and burials could take place, as well as the number of attendees allowed at such events. This was in an attempt to mitigate the risk of conspiracy and rebellion. Nonetheless, despite such restrictions and the fact that they were relegated to their own segregated burial ground, Africans were mostly free to bury their dead as they saw fit. While most aspects of their daily lives were out of their control, in death they exerted some agency. As Medford explains, “In their mortuary practices, New York Africans exhibited unity and humanity; both challenged the legitimacy of slavery and threatened to undermine its very existence…In a sense, [such practices were] an example of passive resistance, practiced by a people who were left with few alternative ways of challenging the legal status that had been imposed upon them.” This helps to explain why 20th and 21st century activists so vehemently sought to honor and respect, via reinterment and memorialization, the minimal agency enjoyed and exerted by these 18th century individuals. Activists considered the disinterment of these individuals to be a negation of what little control they had been able to exercise in their lives. Thus, reinterment was the way to symbolically recapture and honor that control.

In the NBG, “…ethnically diverse Africans shared agreed-upon traditions that had been created by drawing on the similarities of many African customs and adapting to the

31. Medford, 89-90.
circumstances they found in New York.” According to Medford, the NBG “was a powerful symbol of the strength of the African community and the commitment that its members had to each other.” The NBG was officially closed in 1794, once the land it occupied became a commercial commodity. The site was filled over and divided into lots for sale and, until 1991, the burials there were lost history.

The Controversy Begins

A series of events spanning sixteen years transpired before the Rites of Ancestral Return was planned and orchestrated. Human skeletal remains were discovered and exhumed, followed by public interest, concern, and activism regarding the remains and their exhumation. The controversy of the African Burial Ground (ABG) ultimately began in 1987, when the GSA expressed to Congress its interest in purchasing two plots of land in lower Manhattan upon which it intended to construct an office building and a courthouse. One plot was located at Foley Square, the other at 290 Broadway. The courthouse was intended for the Foley Square plot, and the intention for the 290 Broadway plot was a 34-story office building with an adjacent 4-story pavilion. In March of the following year the GSA submitted a prospectus outlining the land development plans to the Committee on Public Works and Transportation of the House of Representatives. According to Frohne, “This prospectus was written before research and an environmental impact statement revealed that an African Burial Ground existed. Thus, Congress accepted the prospectus without the knowledge of any cemetery on the

32. Medford, 88.
33. Medford, 89-90.
34. Medford, 4.
land. When GSA did become aware of the burial ground, it did not go back and provide Congress with the information.”

The GSA’s and other entities’ awareness of the burial ground came from the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)—a standard procedure for any construction project—that began to be drafted in 1988 and was published in 1990 by the GSA’s contractor, Edward and Kelsey. Edward and Kelsey’s knowledge of the burial ground resulted from finding a series of 18th century maps depicting “The Negros Burial Ground” during their research of the area of interest. Edward and Kelsey mentioned the burial ground in the EIS. However, as Frohne explains: “The draft was disseminated to two hundred federal, state, and city agencies and community organizations. Also, public hearings were held concerning the draft. Through all of this, no comments were made about the African Burial Ground…”

This lack of commentary or the raising of concern included that on the part of incumbent New York City Mayor Edward Koch and incoming New York City Mayor David Dinkins, the latter of whom was one of the first individuals to act on behalf of the ABG. According to Andrea Frohne, both men may have been “aware of the historical documentation that located an African cemetery on the site,” as a result of the EIS’s dissemination. Nonetheless, the sale was finalized in December of 1990, at which point the existence of burials at the site had not been confirmed since physical testing at the site would not be performed until May 1991. The contractors and consequently the GSA largely dismissed the possibility that remains would be found because the area had

37. Frohne, 17.
38. Frohne, 20. Edward and Kelsey subcontracted the agency Historic Conservation and Interpretation to perform archaeological salvaging.
already been affected by urban development. It was widely assumed that any artifacts or remains once there would have long ago been disturbed and destroyed.42

Additionally, in the case of certain land purchases, the plot at 290 Broadway being one such purchase, a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) must also be drawn up in addition to an EIS. As is stipulated in section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA): “federal building projects planned for construction on historical property are required to excavate to determine whether the soil contains resources that are worthy of preservation.”43 In addition, a MOA is necessitated when a particular piece of land is determined to have historical significance and is thus eligible for placement on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). As Frohne explains: “if there will be adverse effects to historic property, then a Memorandum of Agreement must be drawn up to ensure […] that the purchase of the lands be ‘subject to environmental, landmark and other City review procedures.’ Details explain what the Federal agency will perform ‘to avoid, reduce, or mitigate’ the adverse effects. Included in this review of historic preservation is consultation with the public.”44 Additionally, the formulation and adoption of a research design for dealing with artifacts and remains that may be found is often included in the MOA.

Due to the alleged existence of a historical burial ground on the land being purchased by the GSA, it was eligible for inclusion on the NRHP. Thus, a MOA was drawn up and signed on March 15 of 1989 by the GSA and the Advisory Council on

42. Frohne, 23-24.
44. Pearce, “Africans on This Soil,” 22.
Historic Preservation (ACHP)—the body that implements the NHPA. This MOA stipulated that:

…if archaeological materials are discovered at the site, such materials shall be evaluated [and curated] in terms of their verification and information values, and treated in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archaeological Documentation…any discoveries would be evaluated in terms of the research design determined in the preceding point, which would then be considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.  

The MOA did not stipulate any provisions for what would happen after the “evaluation and curation” of any human remains discovered at the site. This issue would not be dealt with until the 1989 MOA was amended in December of 1991, after human remains had actually been unearthed. No research design existed until much later, however.

*These Old Bones*

On May 20, 1991, during initial ground clearing for the portion of the construction project at 290 Broadway, the first intact burials were “discovered.” The burials were unearthed thirty feet below the surface by a backhoe. The find was

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45. Frohne, 27.
46. While the MOA did not specify what would happen to the remains and other materials after evaluation and curation, the NHPA stipulates the following: “appropriate solutions regarding treatment and disposition of human remains (as well as associated funerary objects and material remains recovered from archaeological sites) can be arrived at through a process of consultation with government agencies, affected parties, members of the descendant community and interested parties...Current practice in many professions allows for the views of the descendant community to prevail in reaching solutions to particular questions. Invariably, cost, logistics and political factors may also come into play. It is likely that agreement by all parties on a proposed action will not be unanimous, but some kind of general consensus can usually be reached.”; “The Landmarks Preservation Commission’s Policy on Reinterment,” *Update* 1, no. 7 (Spring 1995): 18. Although the NHPA information described herein comes from an issue of *Update* that post dates the 1989 and 1991 MOAs, it is likely that it refers to NHPA stipulations contained in the version of that document to which the plot at 290 Broadway was subject.
47. The word “discovered” is enclosed by quotation marks here because, as Frohne explains: “any kind of ‘discovery’ of the cemetery is erroneous because the parties involved knew what was at stake at least from 1989. GSA actually knew all along about the eighteenth-century ‘Negroes Cemetery’ beneath the land in question even before the land was purchased. The unearthing of bones was no accident, but rather a confirmation of both the Environmental Impact Statement and HCT’s salvage archaeological report.”; Frohne, 25.
immediately reported to the GSA, which then anxiously pressed their contractor for an estimate of how many burials existed. The contractors continued to dig, finding many more artifacts and remains. As Frohne explains: “A full scale excavation was in operation by September [sic] 1991… and by September 15, it was apparent that a far higher number of burials existed.” As a result of these findings, the ACHP insisted on having a new MOA drawn up and signed that would adequately address the scale of the discovery. The new MOA began to be drafted in September 1991, and was signed by the ACHP, the GSA, and the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) on December 20 of the same year. As Frohne explains, the new MOA, unlike the original, “called for a memorial, interpretive center, and documentary video. Additionally, the new MOA contained a section for public involvement. Members of community groups, organizations, and institutions as well as local professional organizations would be involved in reviewing plans for the analysis and reburial of the remains.” Thus, it was in this document that reinterment was first officially legally stipulated.

**Discovery Goes Public**

On October 8, 1991—the same month that construction of the 34-story office building began—the GSA held a press conference and officially announced the discovery.

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49. Frohne, 24, 31. In May 1991, GSA once again hired HCI, its archaeological salvage contractor, to actually excavate for the possibility of any burial remains before construction of the skyscraper commenced. A site supervisor from the initial digging wrote that although GSA knew about the possible presence of a cemetery from the beginning, the physical investigation was delayed by GSA to such an extent that when the bones were finally unearthed, "there was little time left before construction was to begin." Site supervisor Philip Perazio commented, “This mess is entirely of the GSA’s own making...it is an example of how a federal agency can get itself into a tremendous amount of hot water by trying to sabotage the 106 process.”; Philip Perazio, “Archaeological Monitoring,” ACRA-L archive, 27 April 1997, http://lists.gardencity.net/listproc/archives/acra-l/9704/0134.html.
50. Frohne, 28.
51. Frohne, 28.
of human remains.\textsuperscript{52} Initial word about the discovery spread to the general public from this press conference and a few other media sources that mentioned it. For instance, the \textit{New York Times} published an article about the discovery that, as Susan Pearce explains: “reported on the significance of the rediscovery and was simultaneously a piece of ‘historical’ reporting with maps and some background information on the site.”\textsuperscript{53} However, press coverage of the site and discovery was initially rather limited and vague. As a result, political and community concern, involvement, and activism were slow to emerge and develop. A few individuals had taken an active interest in the situation and attempted, mostly to no avail, to spread word, to raise awareness, and to procure legitimate intervention into what they considered to be the GSA’s negligence and mishandling of the remains and, ultimately, the entire situation.

Nonetheless, widespread knowledge of, interest in, and activism for the site was slow to emerge. As Pearce explains, “The earliest interventions were those of individuals who had learned about the site through their profession or through hearsay…”\textsuperscript{54} However, a construction accident in February of 1992 wherein several burials were unearthed and damaged in the process, provided early activists with the proof they needed to support their claims of foul play at the site in terms of the GSA’s contractor not taking proper precautions and measures surrounding both the potential burials there and

\textsuperscript{52} Frohne, 27. This was not technically the first time news of bones being discovered at the site occurred: the New York Times ran a story about the discovery on June 15, 1991.
\textsuperscript{53} Pearce, 194. It is also worth noting that this article contained a subheading titled “Treating Remains with Dignity,” underneath which GSA Regional Director William Diamond was quoted as saying: “it is absolutely essential that the remains…be treated with the utmost respect and dignity. We are committed to re-interment of these remains to an appropriate site” 53. The significance of this subheading and its contents is that it is a rather early example of the appearance of the ideology and discourse of “respect/honor/dignity”—as evidenced by both the title and Diamond’s quote, and it also demonstrates that in the fall of 1992, the GSA had already accepted the reality that they were responsible for seeing to the reinterment of the remains.
\textsuperscript{54} Pearce, 73-75.
those that were in fact being unearthed. As a result of the February 1992 incident, the press followed up at the site and began to cover it more closely. According to Pearce, “Once this accident was publicized through the press and community networks, activists began to argue for protection, memorialization, respect for the remains, and African-American involvement in decision making.”

*Whistle Blower*

New York Senator David Paterson was one of the first individuals to take an interest in and become concerned over the site. According to Pearce, Senator David Paterson’s “…Harlem office had a history of preservation activity and was positioned to organize around this.” Prior to the accident in February of 1992, Paterson had closely followed what little press coverage the situation had received. He became increasingly skeptical of the GSA’s motives and tactics concerning the site, suspecting that the GSA was being purposefully vague with the press and other concerned parties (about what was really going on at the site) in an attempt to keep the construction project on schedule and budget. Thus, as Frohne explains, “Difficult situations with GSA…spurred…Paterson to establish a Task Force on December 16, 1991. They would oversee the excavations and follow any problems.” In fact, when the February 1992 accident occurred, it was Paterson’s Task Force—the Task Force for the Oversight of the Negro Burial Ground—that spawned media coverage of the event. Pearce explains that: “The tip that generated the news interest, however, came from Senator Paterson’s Task Force. These reports represented the beginning of broader public interest in the discovery. Ms. King-Jorde

55. Pearce, 73-75.
56. Pearce, 75.
57. Frohne, 33.
observed, ‘…it really did not hit a lot of people until some of the remains were destroyed. And then it just hit the papers. And then there was this hysteria about what the government was actually doing.”  

In addition to Paterson’s Task Force, New York City Mayor David Dinkins established his own task force in late April of 1992—the Mayor’s Advisory Committee. This committee was chaired by Howard Dodson, director of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Dinkins, like Paterson, had kept himself abreast of the developments surrounding the discovery—King-Jorde (of the Mayor’s Office of Construction and assistant to the Mayor) served as Dinkins’s monitor and liaison regarding the discovery—and he received dozens of phone calls and letters from concerned citizens. After attempting to negotiate with the GSA regarding the site, Dinkins became increasingly frustrated with and suspicious of the GSA and its “negligence and non-responsiveness.”

The Advisory Committee’s purpose was, as its title implies, to advise Dinkins on issues and matters pertaining to the discovery, including developments at the site and community concerns, ideas, and demands regarding what should be done at/with the site, as well as with the remains. As is evidenced by a series of agendas from the committee’s meetings—upon which are chairman Dodson’s hand-written notes—as well as minutes from these meetings, reinterment was already a top priority. Acquiring federal funds for

58. Pearce, 199. Another incident occurred on March 6, 1992, when “vandals had broken into the excavation site and disturbed six burials. They had damaged skulls and stolen teeth and pelvic bones. This had occurred because one of the two private guards left the grounds due to illness” (Frohne, 36).
59. Also known as: The Mayor’s Negro Burial Ground Committee or The Mayor’s Committee on the African Burial Ground
60. The Federal Steering Committee, to be discussed in the pages that follow, absorbed many of the Advisory Committee’s members including Dodson, and would hold the majority of its meetings at the Schomburg.
61. Frohne, 47.
carrying it out was being proposed.\textsuperscript{62} There was ongoing debate during the meetings as to where the remains should be reinterred. The majority opinion within the group seemed to favor reinterment at the original site; the GSA was resistant to this proposal, more than likely because it would complicate its proposed construction project. There was also a question of whether the remains should be studied first or simply reinterred as soon as possible.\textsuperscript{63}

Partially as a result of advisement received from the committee, Dinkins composed and sent two letters to the GSA—one in September, 1991, and the other in July, 1992. The letters requested: “‘immediate suspension of excavation and construction activities at the site; that the GSA adapt their plans for completing the building so that no further excavation occurred; that the GSA adhere to the amended MOA and provide a research design wherein the remains be studied and preserved by professionals ‘familiar with the historical and cultural traditions of African people.’”\textsuperscript{64}

Dinkins also requested a series of memorialization measures, including: “reinterment of the remains, a museum, an interpretive exhibition in the office building, and a memorial.”\textsuperscript{65} Although these memorialization measures would eventually come to fruition, the GSA rejected Dinkins’s requests for halting excavation and construction and failed to provide a research design, after which Dinkins went to the press.\textsuperscript{66}

\textsuperscript{62} “Mayor’s Negro Burial Ground Committee: Agenda; April 30, 1992” (Federal Steering Committee Papers, New York City, 1992), 1-2.
\textsuperscript{63} “Mayor’s Committee on the African Burial Ground: Minutes-Meeting of July 29 and November 9, 1992” (Federal Steering Committee Papers, New York City, 1992), 1.
\textsuperscript{64} Frohne, 47-48.
\textsuperscript{65} Frohne, 47-48.
\textsuperscript{66} Frohne, 49. Regarding reinterment, Pearce explains that in regards to the possibility that human remains might be found, the GSA “had identified a church or somebody in Brooklyn who would be able to take the remains and rebury them somewhere.”; Pearce, 62. After remains were found and activists began
Activism Accelerates

In the summer of 1992, activism efforts expanded beyond politicians and professionals and several grass-roots endeavors were launched, including: a petition drive, a newsletter, several local meetings, and efforts to gain the site more media coverage and publicity. In addition, as stipulated by the amended MOA, the GSA was required to consult with the public regarding the remains. It was during public meetings held by the GSA in late spring and into the summer of 1992 that various individuals and groups (such as Paterson’s Task Force) voiced their concerns, dissatisfaction, and in many cases, all out distrust and disdain for the GSA and its handling of the situation. Activists were already vehemently demanding reinterment of the remains and demonstrating their subjection to and invocation of the ideology that came to surround activism at the ABG, as will be explored in the following chapter. For instance, as Frohne explains, during a meeting held at City Hall on April 21, 1992, “Over two dozen speakers pressed the government to rebury the remains.”

During a meeting held two days later at Trinity Church, similar demands were heard:

New York City Councilperson Adam Clayton Powell drew applause when he lamented, ‘You do not disturb the deceased. You leave our people alone. You should let them rest in peace.’ Reverend Herbert Daughtry of the House of the Lord Church exclaimed, ‘Had it not been for the bodies and labor of our ancestors, there wouldn't have been a United States of America.’ He reminded the audience that they could be the descendants of those in the Burial Ground and insisted upon a proper memorial.

advocating for reinterment, the GSA offered to reinter the remains in a public park fifty yards away from their site of discovery (Frohne, 38).

67. Pearce, 76.
68. Frohne, 40.
69. Frohne, 40-41. It is not clear whether this meeting was held at Trinity Church in lower Manhattan or Harlem. If it was Trinity Church in lower Manhattan, the irony of the meeting being held there is that it was from Trinity Church’s graveyard that the African population of the colony was originally banned from burying their dead in 1697, which is thus why the ABG existed in the first place (Frohne, 41).
During another meeting in June of 1992, GSA Regional Director William Diamond mentioned that the GSA was willing to reinter “the remains in a public park fifty yards away [from the discovery site], off federal land.”\(^70\) This proposal was met with resistance, as activists were already demonstrating an adamant desire to have reinterment occur at the site of original interment.

Two petition drives (one of which was organized by jazz musician Noel Pointer) collected more than one hundred thousand signatures and demanded: “‘a halt to construction until the African-American community determines a fitting memorial; ‘on-site reinterment’ of the remains; Designation of the site as a National Monument or National Historic Landmark; Reparation for the loss of resource (Remains lost during construction).’”\(^71\) The petitions, as well as a newsletter and other publicity efforts were an attempt to more thoroughly and accurately spread information about the discovery because, as Pearce explains, “The work of garnering supporters, especially the critical mass needed to send a strong message to the federal government, was nevertheless difficult. Since news reports were sketchy, some needed to be further informed, and others needed to be convinced.”\(^72\)

**Congress Intervenes**

Illinois Representative Gus Savage was made aware of the situation surrounding the discovery by an attorney friend in New York.\(^73\) Consequently, Savage, like so many others, became increasingly concerned. Savage chaired the House Subcommittee on Public Buildings and Grounds which, as Frohne explains, both appropriates funds for the

\(^{70}\) Frohne, 38  
\(^{71}\) Pearce, 76.  
\(^{72}\) Pearce, 120.  
\(^{73}\) Frohne, 48 and Pearce, 88.
GSA and “begin[s] the approval process for any major construction, repair, or leasing of federal office space…Savage’s subcommittee had authorized the 290 Federal Office Building prior to his position as chair.”74 Thus, Savage was in a position to legally intervene in the situation; and intervene he did.

Savage held an emergency public hearing on July 27, 1992, at the Court of International Trade in New York City, directly across the street from the excavation site at 290 Broadway.75 During the hearing, witnesses including Mayor Dinkins, Howard Dodson (of the Schomburg Center and chair of the Mayor’s Advisory Committee), preservationists from the LPC, and a host of other activists, all offered testimony regarding the burial ground. As Pearce explains, “Each speaker emphasized the significance of the rediscovery and its history.”76 The consensus among the testimonies was that: “the excavation is proceeding without a research design, without central involvement by scholars of African descent, and without involvement of a federal agency that is devoted to managing cultural resources…that the remains and artifacts will be jeopardized by the lack of oversight…”77 Additionally, as Frohne notes, “Reinterment of the remains at 290 Broadway was another big issue during the hearing. However, GSA was not interested in this option.”78 The source of this disinterest was, as can be expected, a financial one.

74. Frohne, 48 and Pearce, 88.
75. Pearce, 81.
76. Pearce, 81.
77. Pearce, 81.
78. Frohne, 51. While reinterment of the exhumed remains was almost unanimously advocated for among the range of activist involved, debate existed over whether it should occur immediately or after the remains were studied (Pearce, 111-116). Again, GSA was willing to reinter but not at the site of original interment—290 Broadway.
After hearing these as well as the GSA’s testimonies, Savage adjourned the hearing by stating that:

The ‘hearing is going no further because this regional director [William Diamond] is opposed to responding to the wishes...that were expressed here today and has been in violation of Section 106 as well as a memorandum of agreement…whatever Congress authorizes, it can de-authorize…And don't waste your time asking this subcommittee for anything else [money] as long as I'm chairman, unless you can figure out a way to go around me! I am not going to be part of your disrespect.’

As a result of this hearing and Savage’s criticism and rebuke, the GSA called off excavations at the site on July 29, 1992. The GSA would not proceed with their project until it adhered to both the MOA and additional conditions put forward by Savage and his subcommittee.

These conditions stipulated that African American scientists would study the four hundred nineteen burials that had been exhumed up until that point. Thus, on September 18, 1992, Blakey, physical anthropologist at Howard University in Washington D.C., was officially appointed by the GSA as the scientific director of the project. Blakey had already been involved with the site as a result of New York City community members contacting him in October of 1991. As Frohne explains, community members contacted Blakey due to “…their deep apprehension concerning the lack of African American involvement in the project…He [Blakey] is one of only a handful of African American physical anthropologists and so his expertise and sensitivity to African American projects was invaluable.”

In addition, the GSA replaced their original contractor HCI with John Milner Associates (JMA), when the project proved to be beyond HCI’s depth.

79. Frohne, 49-51.
80. Frohne, 60-61.
JMA requested the assistance of Blakey who then worked with the contractor between July and September of 1992. The public, pleased with this collaboration, pressured the GSA to bring Blakey on full-time as the project’s official scientific director, and the GSA heeded that pressure. Blakey’s appointment was one of several elements of African American involvement with the ABG.

An additional element of African American involvement with the ABG was that the GSA was required to fund a Federal Steering Committee that, as Frohne explains, “would ensure African American involvement and ‘provide recommendations on the future of the site.’” A definite part of that future would be the conception and construction of a memorial with community input and involvement. To accommodate that memorial, the 4-story pavilion portion of the original construction project was cancelled. The site was officially closed on October 9, 1992. All in all, four hundred nineteen burials would be exhumed from the burial ground and the majority of those presumed to be there—approximately twenty thousand—would be left undisturbed.

Finally, as Frohne explains, in “October of 1992…the Senate Appropriations Committee allocated three million dollars for protection and memorialization of the African Burial Ground within the 1993 Treasury, Postal and General Government

81. Frohne, 61-63.
82. Frohne, 54.
83. As mandated by Public Law 102-393, signed by President Bush.; Frohne, 54. Reinterment would also occur at this location.
84. 419 is the most commonly cited figure for the final number of exhumed remains. However, figures of 408, 420, 424, 425 and 426 have also been seen in the literature pertaining to the ABG. It is not clear what accounts for this discrepancy. However, as the archaeology report states: “The total number of graves identified in the excavated portion of the cemetery was 424, and the total number of individuals for whom skeletal remains could be inventoried numbered 419.”; Perry, Howson, and Bianco, eds., The Archaeology of the New York African Burial Ground, Part 1, 367.
Appropriations Bill.” This was mostly the result of New York Senator Alfonse D’Amato’s response to GSA regional director William Diamond’s initial offer of $250,000 for an exhibit within the office building once its construction was completed (and no other memorialization components). The larder amount demonstrated D’ Amato’s belief in the importance of reburial at the original site.

The Federal Steering Committee

As was stipulated by Congress, the GSA was to fund a committee—The Federal Steering Committee (FSC)—whose primary responsibility was to make recommendations to the GSA and Congress regarding what should be done with the remains and artifacts exhumed from the ABG, (and at the site in the way of memorialization). The FSC members were also to act as a liaison to the general public regarding developments at the site. Moreover, according to Frohne: “Dodson, the Chair of the committee explained, ‘We are advisors to both GSA and Congress. The idea is not to be an advisory to GSA, but a watchdog over the GSA.’ The steering committee would be involved with the pavilion [memorial] site and ensure that GSA carried out its Section 106 responsibilities.”

The FSC’s recommendations to the GSA and Congress would result from the collaboration of the FSC members, who included: scholars and scientists; politicians; professionals; religious leaders; and activists from the general public—the majority of whom where African American and considered themselves part of a “descendant community,” as evidenced by their introduction of themselves as such when speaking

85. Frohne, 55-56.
86. Frohne, 55-56
87. Frohne, 65.
during FSC meetings. Many of the FSC members were drawn from Paterson’s Task Force and Dinkins’s Advisory Committee, including Howard Dodson, who had chaired the Advisory Committee and would now chair the FSC.

In addition, many of the meetings were open to the public and during such meetings a portion of time was dedicated to hearing from non-committee members of the general public—many of whom considered themselves part of the descendant community, as evidenced by their signing in as such at FSC meetings and by their introduction of themselves as such when speaking during FSC meetings. The goal was to secure broad and inclusive of input about the ABG’s future.

The FSC was officially chartered in October, 1992, and held its first meeting soon after—the Mayor’s Advisory Committee continued to meet and discuss ABG business up until the FSC’s official chartering. From the outset of the FSC’s convening, reinterment—and “respectfully” treating and reinterring, specifically—was a topic of discussion. For instance, the minutes of the November 9, 1992 meeting reflect that: “…specific demands voiced within the community have been reinterment of the exhumed

89. One of the first items of business that the FSC dealt with was the language/terminology surrounding the ABG. At its chartering, the site was still being referred to as the “Negros Burial Ground”—the title that had been lifted from the 18th century maps representing the cemetery. However, the majority of FSC and lay community members were adamant about changing it the name to the “African Burial Ground.” As Pearce explains, “This [name change] reflected both a well-grounded belief that this name was true to the ancestors’ self-identification and a statement against a name that was considered offensive and dated…A related debate surfaced over the use of the word ‘slave.’ Those who opposed this term explained that its use implies an essential, person characteristic, rather than an imposed status. Speakers and writers began to use ‘enslaved African; instead’ (Pearce, 99). It is my opinion that this matter of language is in inextricably linked and pertinent to the crux of this thesis, which is to understand why the “descendant community” conceived of themselves as such and thus why, as a result, they insisted upon “honoring” their “ancestors” by “respectfully” reinterring them.
remains on the site…”91 Additionally, the matter of whether or not to study the remains versus immediately reinterring was discussed: “Chair Dodson asked for a presentation of the arguments against analysis [archaeological study] to be prepared for the next meeting.”92

By January 25, 1993, the FSC had drawn up a document entitled “Resolutions: Memorializing the African Burial Ground” that cataloged a list of the FSC’s seven resolutions concerning memorialization of the ABG, accompanied by a list of “action items.” Both lists included the following stipulations regarding reinterment:

That the +425 human remains excavated from the African Burial Ground be reinterred in the former Pavilion site of the Federal Tower Building; That a temporary memorial be installed to commemorate this site during the research phase of the African Burial Ground Project and that a permanent memorial be installed there after reinterment; That a sacred international memorial service be held in New York City at the time of reinterment.; …that the property previously designated for the pavilion of the Federal Tower Building be established as the most sacred site in the burial ground memorial district and that the human remains exhumed from the burial ground be reinterred in the former pavilion site.93

Thus, by at least January 1993, the FSC advocated for on-site reinterment. When reinterment did finally occur on October 4, 2003, it did in fact take place at the site and

92. “Steering Committee for the African Burial Ground: Minutes-Meeting of November 23, 1992” (Federal Steering Committee Papers, New York City, 1992), 2. The matter of whether or not to study the remains or to simply reinter them as soon as possible would remain an issue among the FSC as well as lay community members until at least the summer of 1994; See “Mayor’s Committee on the African Burial Ground: Minutes-Meeting of February 28 and August 22, 1994” (Federal Steering Committee Papers, New York City, 1994).
with the international memorial service in New York City, as stipulated in the
“Resolutions.”

Plans for reinterment got more specific as a result of the collaboration of members
of the FSC’s Reinterment Subcommittee (one of many FSC subcommittees). The
Reinterment Subcommittee’s purpose and mission, as its title implies, was to: “design
and implement a plan for the memorialization and reinterment of the African ancestral
remains that will reflect the feelings of Africans throughout the United States and in the
international arena;” to make recommendations to Congress regarding such designs; as
well as to “always emphasize sensitivity to the remains of our African ancestors,
protective and respectful consideration for the integrity of the Historic District,
involvement of African professionals with appropriate expertise and commitment, as well
as the African community…”

94. The “Resolutions” also called for a museum and learning center to which the GSA responded that,
“some [resolutions] go beyond the responsibilities of the GSA.”; Steny H. Hoyer, letter to Howard Dodson,
May 3, 1993. The GSA did accept responsibility for the remains being unearthed as a result of its
construction project and thus was willing to “assume full responsibility for appropriate remedial action
pertaining to the Federal [290 Broadway] site” (Hoyer). (“Remedial action” in this case, seems to refer to
cancelling a portion of the construction project to leave undisturbed those burials not unearthed and seeing
to the reinterment of the remains that were unearthed as a result of the GSA’s construction project).
However, they were not particularly willing to take responsibility for the establishing and construction of a
museum and learning center, stating that such elements “go beyond our traditional area of expertise and
responsibility, beyond the Federal site, and beyond our authorization” (Hoyer). Nevertheless, and as Frohne
explains, despite the GSA’s resistance, “Through hard work and continuous pressure, many of the
resolutions would be met” (Frohne, 67).

95. The Reinterment Subcommittee was also known as the Subcommittee on Reinterment, the International
Reinterment Subcommittee, and the Reburial Subcommittee. These different names appear on various
documents both from and to the subcommittee.

Administrator, General Services Administration and The United States Congress, August 6, 1993” (New
York City, 1993), 34-36; “Federal Steering Committee on the African Burial Ground: Meeting Transcript;
March 28, 1994” (Federal Steering Committee Papers, New York City, 1994). The Reinterment
Subcommittee was also responsible for “developing recommendations for the handling of disturbed
fragmented and intact human remains and artifacts discovered within the boundaries of the African Burial
Ground and the Commons Historic District. In addition, the subcommittee was asked to submit
recommendations to the City of New York for the development of a protocol for the district.” See
The FSC’s and its subcommittees’ final recommendations, submitted to the GSA and Congress on August 6 of 1993, included the following goals, strategies, elements, and conditions for reinterment. “It is imperative that this memorial reflect…an international apology to our African ancestors for the desecration of their remains and the total disrespect for the final words, ‘REST IN PEACE.’”97 As will be further explored in the following chapter, activists considered the exhumation of the remains as disrespectful and an affront to the latters’ original choices and actions. Thus, to rectify and apologize (symbolically) for that insult and to respect the agency of the individuals to whom the remains belonged, activists felt that the remains should be honored, memorialized, and reinterred in the location and manner in which they originally had been (with their heads pointing in a particular direction, with their bodies/limbs arranged in a particular position, with particular items accompanying their bodies).98

Additionally, reinterment was to be accompanied by “an international and interfaith ceremony.”99 The remains exhumed from the ABG as well as those left undisturbed belonged to individuals born in both Africa and North America. Thus, activists wanted to include “Africans from Africa and those of the diaspora, representing the religious and cultural communities, including historians, educators and civic and

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98. After considerable debate, it was also decided that the artifacts found with the remains would be reinterred as opposed to being put on display in a potential exhibit or museum. The basis of this decision was that the artifacts originally buried with the remains were reflective of the ancestors’ original choices and actions and thus, their reburial with the remains—just like the reburial of the remains themselves—was a way to honor the ancestors’ original choices, actions and agency.; “Federal Steering Committee on the African Burial Ground: Meeting Transcript[s]” (Federal Steering Committee Papers, New York City, 1992-94), 35.
political personalities.” Activists also wanted to include aspects of the various religions/faiths that the individuals to whom the remains belonged had possibly subscribed to. In order to accomplish this, another of the FSC’s recommendations and goals was “to identify the beliefs and practices of the researched African remains with particular emphasis on their burial practices.” Moreover, reinterment and its accompanying ceremony was to take place “within a year of the conclusion of the studies at Howard University for the reinterment ceremonies at the site of the African Burial ground,” and said event and its various components were to be planned and coordinated a month prior to its culmination.

In addition to these general recommendations made in the official report submitted to the GSA and Congress, the Reinterment Subcommittee submitted an additional and more specific set of recommendations for reinterment to the GSA in May of 1994, with the goal of establishing the approximate cost of reinterment. This new list stipulated that the remains should be placed and buried in wooden caskets (to allow for the natural deterioration of the remains) made by African craftsmen, and that representatives of Islam, Christianity and other indigenous African religions would advise on the orientation of the burials in an attempt to rebury the remains in the original

ways in which they had been based on the customs of such religions.\textsuperscript{105} The religious affiliation of particular individuals exhumed from the ABG was not known. However, due to the history of the colony of New York, it was assumed that such individuals subscribed to at least some elements of one, some, or all of these religions (Islam, Christianity and other indigenous African religions). Thus, in an attempt to respect the original choices and actions of the individuals to whom the remains belonged, activists sought to mimic those actions in reburial.\textsuperscript{106}

Finally, in February of 1994, more human skeletal remains were found near the ABG during the repair of a steam line.\textsuperscript{107} Due to the proximity of these remains both to those from the ABG and to the area labeled the “Negros Burial Ground” on colonial New York maps from the 18\textsuperscript{th} century, it was widely assumed that they were also “part of” the Negros Burial Ground. The Reinterment Subcommittee insisted that these newly discovered remains be reinterred on September 19, 1994, at the location where they had been discovered, just as was being proposed for the remains from the ABG. It was thought by the subcommittee that this initial reburial of “sixteen boxes of remains (fragments)” would be “a pilot project to prepare us for the larger scale project to take

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\textsuperscript{105} Verna Francis, “Reinterment Subcommittee Report” (Federal Steering Committee Papers, New York City, 1994), 1.
\textsuperscript{106} Similar to this line of thought and as with the artifacts found with the burials (see note #57), the list also stipulated that: “soil removed from the skeletal remains should be returned to be replaced gravesite.”\textsuperscript{106} The soil was considered as a much a part of the original burials as were the artifacts, according to Francis, “Reinterment Subcommittee Report” (Federal Steering Committee Papers, New York City, 1994), 1.
\textsuperscript{107} Frohne, 314. “…cranial bone fragments, animal bones, and a human femur bone were dug up and found lying in piles of earth on Reade Street near Broadway. Peggy King-Jorde, director of the Federal Steering Committee, kicked a pile of dirt to find the femur bone. She stopped the workers and their digging….LPC did review the job and issued a permit to Con Ed for ‘minor work dated 2/2/94’.” (Frohne, 71).
\end{flushright}
place five years later when the research ends at Howard University…”

Many of the specific details for this reburial, articulated in a proposal drafted and submitted to the GSA in May of 1994, were similar and added to what had previously been proposed (and would be carried out) for the final reburial at the ABG in 2003. These details included: the wood for the coffins be African wood; the coffins be located and oriented as closely as possible to how they originally were; a logo be designed in conjunction with the preparation and printing of invitations and programs for the event.

After the Federal Steering Committee
The FSC dissolved in August of 1994 when its charter expired and attempts to extend it failed. A conversation took place during one of the last FSC meetings among members of the Reinterment Subcommittee—documented in the meeting’s transcript—wherein plans where discussed for how the subcommittee would proceed to make plans for reinterment after disbandment. As is documented in the transcript, subcommittee members were going to join up immediately after the meeting was over and discuss what was next. No documentation exists for what did, in fact, next take place. Such documentation may have existed at some point and it may have been housed in the archive of the Office for Public Education and Information (OPEI). The OPEI was established by the GSA in 1993, “for the express purpose of informing New York and national communities about the ongoing status of the ABG through monthly reports [a

108. H. Glenn Bennett, “Reinterment Subcommittee Report” (Federal Steering Committee Papers, New York City, 1994), 1. While the subcommittee, the FSC and most other parties involved, for that matter, thought that the research at Howard University would commence in five years; it in fact was not completed until 2003. This was a major source of frustration, content, and controversy among Howard University (Michael Blakey), the GSA, and ABG activists.
newsletter called *Update*] and with an archive about the project [...] including newspaper articles, government documents, laboratory photographs, and transcripts of meetings [...] and responsible for site interpretation.”

However, the OPEI office headquarters and its archive were both located in the World Trade Center and a good portion of the archival materials were destroyed in the 9/11 attacks. It is possible that members of the subcommittee continued to meet and make plans after the FSC was dissolved, and it is additionally possible that they kept records of such meetings. However, no documentation has been found.

What is clear however, is that, as Frohne explains, architect King-Jorde—who had served as Executive Director of the FSC, “was contracted [by the GSA] in October 1996 as Project Consultant to head the memorialization aspect of the project…She organized the Interpretive Center and exterior Memorial competitions and prepared for the reinterment ceremony.” Documentation, if it exists, has not been found cataloging King-Jorde’s planning activities, nor confirming whether King-Jorde continued to work with ex-FSC/Reinterment Subcommittee members. Ultimately, the GSA replaced King-Jorde with Lana Turner when the former’s contract ran out in January of 2001.

Explanation as to why King-Jorde’s contract was not renewed involves a good deal of speculation. According to Blakey, “They let Peggy King-Jorde go for no failure of her own—in fact the Interpretive Center and Memorial competitions she oversaw were in

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111. When the visitor center/museum opened in 2010, what materials survived from the OPEI archive in the World Trade Center, as well as materials produced after the 9/11 attack, were transferred to and are still housed in the library located within the museum that is part of the ABG National Monument.
112. Additionally, contact was attempted, to no avail, with former FSC or Reinterment Subcommittee members to corroborate this possibility.
113. Frohne, 78.
advanced stages, but were stopped by GSA and would, in 2004 need to be restarted.”

Additionally, race was often suggested to be a factor in the entire “saga” of the ABG, the situation with King-Jorde’s dismissal being no exception. According to a February 5, 2001 article in the *Daily News*: “The researcher [Blakey] and the consultant [King-Jorde], both black, suggest that the agency [GSA] never made the project a priority because the people who were buried at the site—like those pressing for a memorial—were black.” Nonetheless, Blakey additionally explains that: “We lost Peggy King-Jorde from the process, unfortunately, but the others were still in place to see that the new plans remained consistent with what she had done and the Steering Committee had decided.”

The “others” to whom Blakey refers were: “…community members and groups who maintained an interest in and activity around reburial. These included the Federal Steering Committee members where the first commitment to reburial was made, and concluded with those at the Schomburg where the final arrangements were made for the Rites of Ancestral Return from Howard University through several cities, to NY in 2003.” In the years leading up to reinterment, there were two prominent community groups as well as many individual activists involved with its planning and making sure that it was brought to fruition (pressuring the GSA to follow through on its obligation). These two groups were: Friends of the African Burial Ground, lead by Ayo Harrington; and the Committee of Descendants of the Afrikan [sic] Ancestral Burial Ground (a.k.a. Descendants of the African Burial Ground), which included members Charles Barron and

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114. Michael Blakey, e-mail message to author, November 12, 2014.
116. Michael Blakey, e-mail message to author, November 12, 2014.
117. Michael Blakey, e-mail message to author, November 12, 2014.
Ollie McClean.\textsuperscript{118} Members of both of these groups had attended and at times spoke during FSC meetings.\textsuperscript{119} According to Blakey, “Ollie McClean was one of the 2-3 individuals whom GSA was able to sway at the end of the 20th century, complaining about the delay and accelerating a reburial that would be in the hands of those few under Ron Law [GSA]…‘Friends of the African Burial Ground’…pressured for the resources needed to complete the research as planned.”\textsuperscript{120}

Before the remains could be reinterred, it was necessary to complete the research on them. Explanation as to why it took twelve years to reinter the remains after they were exhumed involves a political and financial struggle between the GSA and Blakey that delayed and, to some extent, hindered research of the anthropologist and his team on the remains. Blakey and his team were granted approximately six million dollars in federal funds to study the remains.\textsuperscript{121} While part of Blakey’s research design was chemical and DNA research for the purpose of “ascertaining specific African regions and cultural groups of the dead,” when the time came to perform this research the GSA would not fund it.\textsuperscript{122} As a result, Blakey’s work came to a standstill and he and his team became the target of activists’ discontent.

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\textsuperscript{118} According to \textit{Update} 3, no.1 (Winter 2000), there was a “recently formed Committee for Reinterment.” Whether this referred to the FSC/Reinterment Subcommittee members, Friends of the African Burial Ground, the Committee of Descendants of the African Ancestral Burial Ground, a combination of these or a different group/committee altogether, is not made clear in the issue.; Ronald Law, “General Services Administration Update” \textit{Update} 3, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 13.  \\
\textsuperscript{119} Although individuals from these groups attended and sometimes spoke during FSC meetings, it does not seem that these groups were yet in existence during the FSC’s tenure. According to Frohne, Friends of the African Burial Ground was founded in the fall of 1998 and the Committee of Descendants of the African Ancestral Burial Ground first emerged on the scene during a public forum in October, 1999 (Frohne, 81, 85).  \\
\textsuperscript{120} Michael Blakey, e-mail message to author, November 12, 2014.  \\
\textsuperscript{122} Frohne, 65 and Blakey and Rankin-Hill, 16.  
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In October of 1999, the GSA held a public event for the purpose of updating the community on the status of the ABG (the state of the research being done on the remains by Blakey and his team, and estimated timelines for completion of research and subsequent reinterment). This was the first update the GSA had provided the public since the FSC dissolved in 1994.\textsuperscript{123} By this point, unrest and suspicion had began to turn from the GSA to Blakey, who was now being accused of “hoarding the remains.”\textsuperscript{124} Blakey explained that most of the originally proposed research had been completed and he was ready to undertake the final aspect of the research—DNA research/analysis—but first he needed additional (although already agreed to) funding from the GSA.\textsuperscript{125} For several more years, the GSA and Blakey engaged in finger pointing, blame shifting, and political volleying that ultimately resulted in stalemate. Nonetheless, as Blakey states, “We got done nearly all of what we had originally planned” which, generally speaking, was to deduce from the remains “how these people [those to whom the remains belonged] once thought and lived.”\textsuperscript{126}

More specifically, Blakey’s research revealed a number of things about the individuals buried at the ABG. Based on evidence gathered from the bones, deductions

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{123} Frohne, 84.
\item \textsuperscript{124} Frohne, 85. “GSA had previously agreed to the DNA work in its 1993 contract and budget,” according to Frohne, 79.
\item \textsuperscript{125} Frohne, 85. Blakey additionally explains that: “At around 2001 the GSA attempted a premature reburial under the management of Ron Law. This was part of an effort that had begun around late 1999 when the GSA attempted to end the Howard research project prior to paying for the complete project to which we believe they had agreed…premature reburial folded by a combination of poor management and 9-11-2001 that crumbled the building where our archaeology lab and OPEI were located.”; Michael Blakey, e-mail message to author, November 12, 2014.
\item \textsuperscript{126} Michael Blakey, e-mail message to author, November 12, 2014; Blakey and Rankin-Hill, 15. The FSC and descendant community informed the general research agenda of Blakey and his team. “Four overarching topics of concern to the descendental community were identified during public hearings. These topics included the cultural and geographical origins of the men, women, and children whose remains were uncovered at the cemetery; the quality of their lives under captivity; the ways they resisted enslavement; and the transformation from African to African American—in other words, the ways they made new identities and formed new communities.” (Perry, Howson, and Bianco, 365).
\end{itemize}
were made regarding factors such as place (continent) of birth, and general conclusions were drawn about the daily lives of individuals. For instance, the presence of culturally modified teeth (“decoratively filing, chipping, ablating, or otherwise modifying dentitions”) suggests that the individual to whom they belonged was born in Africa because certain archaeologists have “made a strong case for the assumption that this cultural practice was discontinued under enslavement in the Caribbean and the Americas.”\(^{127}\) Additional evidence provided indication of origin: “As to the origin and affiliation of the persons buried in the New York African Burial Ground, the results of genetic analyses, coupled with historical and archaeological research, suggest that most individuals were derived from a variety of known states and empires mainly, but not exclusively, in West and West Central Africa.”\(^{128}\)

In addition, the bones provided evidence regarding the daily lives and living conditions of individuals buried at the ABG. According to the archaeology report, “The most consistent results of this study are those that suggest strenuous labor began at an early age for at least some individuals, based on the presence of” various indicators on the bones, such as: “osteophytosis, osteoarthritis, enthesopathies, and Schmorl’s nodes in the youngest age category of 15–24 years.”\(^{129}\) The presence of such conditions on particular areas of certain bones such as the ankles, “suggests high general stress, perhaps walking on rough terrain, inclines, or stairs with loads.”\(^{130}\) Evidence on the bones of certain muscle conditions such as hypertrophy, “provide evidence of lifting and carrying

\(^{127}\) Blakey and Rankin-Hill, 105, 96.  
\(^{128}\) Blakey and Rankin-Hill, 270.  
\(^{129}\) Blakey and Rankin-Hill, 221.  
\(^{130}\) Blakey and Rankin-Hill, 221.
loads on the back, shoulders, or head.”\textsuperscript{131} The lack of variation of such conditions among the bones of male and female corpses suggests that both sexes performed much of the same work and other activities. Based on “the overlap in evidence of muscle hypertrophy in the limbs and degenerative joint disease across gender…[it is] clear that most men and women were exposed to arduous work for extended periods of time.”\textsuperscript{132}

Osteological (bone) and odontological (teeth) studies produced evidence of nutritional deficits and the presence of disease, which indicate the generally poor living conditions of the individuals buried at the ABG, additionally suggesting their enslavement.\textsuperscript{133} According to the archaeology report:

The information…suggests that infectious disease, in conjunction with inadequate nutrition, was another source of chronic stress for the enslaved population of the New York African Burial Ground…The overall high rate of dental pathology may reflect deficiencies in diet and dental hygiene…[and] provide additional evidence of poor dietary regimens, unhealthy living conditions, and lack of dental care that characterized the quality of life for the majority of those who lived in bondage.\textsuperscript{134}

In regards to the burial practices of those interred at the ABG, several consistent characteristics were observed, such as shrouded corpses in individual coffins, situated in an extended supine body position with their heads facing the west.\textsuperscript{135} According to the official archaeology report, the consistency of these characteristics among the exhumed burials: “suggests that a model of a proper burial was in place by the time the graves in the excavated portion of the cemetery had been interred. Conformity can be seen in the context of the individual’s relationship to family and to the larger community. Funerals

\textsuperscript{131} Blakey and Rankin-Hill, 221.
\textsuperscript{132} Blakey and Rankin-Hill, 221, 271.
\textsuperscript{133} These odontological studies “focus[ed] on dental caries, dental abscesses, and tooth loss.”; Blakey and Rankin-Hill, 157.
\textsuperscript{134} Blakey and Rankin-Hill, 198, 166.
\textsuperscript{135} Perry, Howson, and Bianco, 109.
were communal and public expressions of loss, transformation, and restoration, and the cemetery provided a space where such rituals could help to forge a developing African American identity.\textsuperscript{136}

Lastly, a small portion (less than ten percent) of burials contained material items such as beads, rings, cuff links, coins, and shells. According to the archaeology report, the presence among burials of unique items of “personal adornment” such as beads, rings and cufflinks, reveal more about the lives of the buried individuals than the more uniform burial practices such as shrouded corpses positioned and oriented certain ways because such elements:

…are the stuff of cemeteries. Adornments, in contrast, are personal effects that presumably kept company with their wearers prior to death. Moreover, adornments may have been among the most meaningful of the personal effects that New Yorkers living under slavery used or owned…

Men and women configured their worlds when they wore adornment…Adornment worn every day also put a stamp on the routines and rituals in which adults engaged…black New Yorkers enlisted their adornments to redress constraints slavery placed on their day-to-day lives.\textsuperscript{137}

Adornment was an aspect of these individuals’ daily lives that they had some control over. Thus, the presence of such items among burials demonstrates that the individuals buried at the ABG exercised agency in their lives and attempted to declare their humanity, identity, and some degree of individuality in spite of being subjugated by an institution that managed to largely eradicate such qualities.\textsuperscript{138} Additionally, items such as coins and shells resemble “…similar objects and placements from Africa and the African

\textsuperscript{136} Perry, Howson, and Bianco, 371.
\textsuperscript{137} Perry, Howson, and Bianco, 328, 329.
\textsuperscript{138} This can account for why activists were insistent upon making replicas of such items for later display/exhibition and reburying the originals with the remains: the items had been buried with the corpses by choice and thus those original choices/actions should be honored.
Diaspora…” As the archaeology report explains, “the material from these graves clearly points out that at least some of the African people of eighteenth-century New York remembered and honored their ancestral traditions.”

Reinterment, Alas

Once research on the remains was officially completed in early 2003, final arrangements for reinterment began to be made. According to a March 18, 2003 article in Caribbean Life, the “GSA is in preliminary discussions with several organizations, including the New York Public Library Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, for the planning and coordination of a comprehensive and inclusive reinterment ceremony to be held later this year.” Members of the FSC, members from the Descendants of the African Burial Ground, and other activists consulted with the GSA regarding the specific details of reinterment. Finally, beginning on September 30 and culminating on Oct 4, 2003, the Rites of Ancestral Return—organized, produced, and managed by the Schomburg Center, “under the leadership of Dr. Howard Dodson” and under the official title of the African Burial Ground Reinterment Project—took place and the twelve year struggle to return the exhumed remains to their original resting place was over.

The following chapter examines and analyzes why the momentous series of events recounted in this chapter transpired, and why reinterment (as well as other memorialization measures) was initially proposed, continued to be adamantly pursued even after years of postponement and a few unsuccessful attempts, and was finally

139. Perry, Howson, and Bianco, 349.
140. Perry, Howson, and Bianco, 373.
142. Sherrill D. Wilson, “Rites of Ancestral Return” Update 3, no. 9 (Spring/Summer 2003): 1
executed in an elaborate fashion. Activism at the ABG was fueled by an ideologically constructed familial relationship between activists and the remains. That constructed relatedness and its significance to activists compelled them to advocate on behalf of the remains. What is more, that advocacy was acknowledged and accommodated to the extent that part of a federal construction project was cancelled and millions of federal dollars were allocated for the study of the remains and for the planning and implementation of extensive memorialization measures. Thus, understanding that ideology is pivotal to understanding the history of the ABG because, without it, that history would be a different one.
Chapter 2
Reinterment: The Material Ritual of Ideological Recognition

Equally important and indeed complimentary to understanding how reinterment occurred is understanding why it occurred. To understand why activists and especially the descendant community so vehemently sought and advocated for reinterment, understanding what constituted that community is first necessary. What can follow is an understanding of the desire among that community to reinter the exhumed remains in order to respect and honor them. Reinterment—and more specifically the motivations surrounding it—can be understood in terms of ideology. Activists and members of the descendant community held a set of ideas about the significance of the remains that in turn dictated their appropriate treatment and disposition.

Individuals who identified themselves as “descendants” of the anonymous corpses were unified by that conception. Africans and African Americans alike positioned themselves in a familial relation to the exhumed remains of the people they claimed as their “ancestors.” This will be referred to as the ideology of ancestry/descendancy.

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143. It is important (and somewhat challenging) to understand the distinction between activists and the descendant community—and in some circumstances, such a distinction did not exist. Ultimately, the distinction is best understood in the following terms: all descendant community members—at least those who consciously identified as such (and the distinction will be made in the pages that follow), were activists, but not all activists were descendant community members. For instance, Mayor Dinkins, Senator Paterson, and Howard Dodson were all activists, but no evidence has been found of any of these men explicitly referring to themselves as descendant community members or as descendants of the ancestors and their remains. However, as will be seen throughout this chapter, these men did often refer to the remains as “ancestors” and to the “descendants” and the “descendant community”—thus demonstrating their acknowledgment of the community’s existence and validity. When it is not clear or explicit whether the activists being discussed in a particular instance or example also identified as descendant community members, they will simply be referred to as “activists.” Additionally, all Federal Steering Committee (FSC) members were activists but not all activists were on the FSC. Also, some FSC members also identified as descendants.

144. At various points throughout this chapter, “descendant community” and “descendants” will be used interchangeably.

145. When referring to actual ancestry/descendancy, in the sense of actual or “real” biological relatedness between the ancestors and the descendants, the term “biological ancestry/descendancy” will be used.
These “descendants” shared the belief that exhumation of their ancestors was disrespectful, considering it an affront to the ancestors’ agency—their original choices about their burials. These ideas led, in turn, to an insistence on a ritual reburial of the inadvertently unearthed remains. Reburial would honor what little control the predominantly enslaved ancestors had in their lives, and rectify the disrespect that they had presumably suffered in life and were now thought to be suffering in death as a result of the exhumation of their remains. This is an additional component of the ideology that will be referred to as respect/honor/rectification.146

Louis Althusser’s theory of ideology offers further insight into the circumstances and dynamics that informed and ultimately produced reinterment at the African Burial Ground (ABG). According to Althusser, “ideology ‘acts’ or ‘functions’ in such a way that it ‘recruits’ subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or ‘transforms’ the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called interpellation or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the

146. Additionally, the explanation/categorization of ancestry/descendancy as an ideology is not meant to reduce or diminish what was and is deeply felt and thus considered as very real by the descendants. Ancestry/descendancy was very real to the descendant community and the material “consequences” of it cannot be denied and, in fact, demonstrate that regardless of whether ancestry/descendancy was “real”/biological, or ideological, it produced real material results—such as reinterment. Ideology is ubiquitous, and often insidious; no one is immune to it, it is non-discriminative and takes no prisoners. As Althusser explains, ideology is pervasive and more often than not unrecognizable to those who have been interpellated by it: “What is represented in ideology is therefore not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live.”; Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 165. The ideology surrounding the ABG produced the corresponding material reality and results of not just reinterment, but also the various other preservation and memorialization measures that resulted from the activist and descendant communities’ subjection to that ideology. Moreover (and as already pointed out), even though such activists may not have personally identified as descendants, oftentimes they nonetheless demonstrated (via their comments, again to be explored) their subjection to that element of the ideology.
most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: ‘Hey, you there!’”\textsuperscript{147} Applying Althusser’s theory to this case, it seems that those individuals who considered themselves descendants of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century corpses exhumed from the ABG were recruited or interpellated by the ideology of “ancestry/descendancy” and transformed into its subjects.

Precisely when and how this interpellation occurred is difficult to discern. However, the following is one possibility. The National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) states that: “appropriate solutions regarding treatment and disposition of human remains…can be arrived at through a process of consultation with…the descendant community…”\textsuperscript{148} This passage in the NHPA and Congress’s subsequent ordering of the General Services Administration (GSA) to adhere to it and establish the Federal Steering Committee (FSC) for the express purpose of consulting with the descendant community regarding the ABG’s future, hailed individuals and made them subjects of the ancestry/descendancy ideology—it made them descendants.

Another factor offers an additional explanation for why members of the descendant community conceived of the unearthed remains as their ancestors. One of the many and perhaps most predominant consequences of chattel slavery is the impact it had on the families of its victims. Immediate and extended family members were sold and exchanged frequently and indiscriminately, resulting in the separation and wide dispersal of families. Historian Hubert G. Gutman describes this situation by quoting sociologists Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Morgan: “‘Migration, uprooting, urbanization always create

\textsuperscript{147} Althusser, 174.
\textsuperscript{148} “The Landmarks Preservation Commissions’ Policy on Reinterment” Update 1, no. 7 (Spring 1995): 18.
problems…The experience of slavery left as its most serious heritage a steady weakness in the Negro family. This, combined with the larger African diaspora, lead to the phenomenon in which enslaved individuals had little choice but to adopt and consider other individuals with whom they shared enslavement in common as their theoretical or fictive, as opposed to biological, kin.

This social practice was one of necessity, a coping mechanism that offered enslaved individuals the sense of a bond, support, and comfort that result from familial relationships and connections, and kinship networks. According to anthropologist Sidney Mintz, as quoted by Gutman, “enslavement…compelled the slaves ‘to define themselves and to work out new patterns of life under extremely repressive conditions.’” Gutman goes on to explain that “young slaves were the product of a long and often tragic process by which their forebears had adapted to enslavement and developed fragile communities…”

What is more, this tradition has an enduring legacy in African and African American culture, accounting for the tradition among such individuals of referring to one another as “brother” and “sister” in the absence of actual biological relatedness. Thus, the descendant community’s conception of the exhumed remains as their ancestors and the entire ideology that accompanied that conception was likely the partial result of the fictive kinship networks that have come to be a predominant element of African and African American culture.

150. Gutman, 356.
151. Gutman, 356.
The descendant community of the ABG was sizeable, broad, and rather diverse. It consisted of individuals primarily from around New York City and its five boroughs, such as Raenice Goode of Bronx, NY; Ollie McClean, a teacher in Brooklyn, NY; and sisters Miriam and Verna Francis of Brooklyn, NY. Most individuals who identified as descendants or who at least identified the remains as “ancestors” did not know one another prior to meeting at various events related to the ABG, such as FSC meetings. Thus, the descendant community was simply an amorphous group of disparate individuals who shared a common feeling of connection to and concern for the remains, and advocated on behalf of the remains as a result. The community was not an established group of activists known as the Descendant Community. Their awareness and identification of themselves as descendants did not result from them coming together and explicitly establishing that they, as a group, were descendants of the remains—“ancestors”—or that they shared a set of sentiments and objectives in relation to the remains as a result of their descendancy from them. Here again, Althusser is helpful in explaining their identity as descendants:

…ideology has always-already interpellated [sic] individuals as subjects, which amounts to making it clear that individuals are always-already interpellated [sic] by ideology as subjects…individuals are always-already subjects…if it [ideology] interpellates [sic] them in such a way that the subject responds” ‘Yes; it really is me!’ if it obtains from them the recognition that they really do occupy the place it designates for them as theirs in the world, a fixed residence: ‘It really is me, I am here, a worker, a boss or a soldier [or a descendant].”

A public notice written by Amal A. Muhammad—processing archivist at the Schomburg and member of Paterson’s Task Force—demonstrates Althusser’s point and

152. Althusser, 175-176, 178.
offers an additional explanation for how individuals were interpellated by the ancestry/descendancy ideology. Muhammad identified as a descendant and his notice was broadly, although not explicitly, addressed and directed toward his fellow descendants—whoever might identify with the notion—imploring them to get involved with the activism surrounding the ABG. Muhammad stated:

Right now, we [all emphasis added] need your voices to support the efforts to preserve and memorialize this historic plot and its contents…I strongly urge you to write letters to representatives of New York City and New York State to express the urgency of according our ancestors and fellow humans the proper and humane respect they deserve…I also urge you to attend public hearings, town meetings, and other activities that revolve around this critical issue…we must get involved…These are our remains. Join us NOW in this community effort. We can do no less.153

The language that Muhammad employed in his notice—“we,” “you,” “us,” “our ancestors,” and “our remains”—is the equivalent of Althusser’s “police (or other) hailing: ‘Hey, you there!’” Muhammad hailed individuals when he said “you” “we” “our ancestors,” and “our remains,” obtaining from the individuals, as Althusser explains, “the recognition that they really do occupy the place it [ideology] designates for them as theirs in the world, a fixed residence.” In the case of Muhammad’s notice, the place designated for them was as descendants.

Those individuals who identified to any degree (and whether consciously aware of that identification or not) with Muhammad’s declaration that “we must get involved” with “our ancestors,” were already primed to be interpellated by and subjected to that ideology. Regardless of Muhammad’s otherwise seemingly vague addressing of “you” and “your,” the pronouns “you” and “your” were enough to hail any individual who, as

already a subject of ideology, identified with those pronouns. Indeed, therein lies the power and pervasiveness of ideology: Muhammad did not have to directly address any particular individual(s). In effect, ideology transformed Muhammad’s “you” into “You,” hailing or interpellating anyone who identified with what Muhammad’s “you” specifically referred to, which, in this case, were the ancestors and their remains, and consequently, their descendants—anyone primed to identify as such.

Althusser discusses “the Christian Religious Ideology” and uses it as an example of a system or functioning of ideology. In this example, he distinguishes between a “Subject” and “subjects.” In this particular case, God is the Subject, “in whose Name the religious ideology interpellates [sic] all individuals as subjects [(Christians)].” What is more, there are rituals that exist within this religious ideology and that are performed by the subjects—Christians—in the name of the Subject—God. Althusser refers to these as the “practices of the well-known rituals” and they include: baptism, communion, and confession. If we apply this model to reinterment at the ABG, ancestry/descendancy is the ideology, the ancestors and their remains are the Subject, members of the descendant community are the subjects, and reinterment—for the sake of respecting and honoring the ancestors—is the ultimate ritual. Thus, baptism, communion, and confession could not take place without Christians performing such acts—rituals—and Christians could not exist without God. Similarly, reinterment could not have happened without the descendants advocating for and eventually executing it, and the descendants could not

154. Althusser, 177.
156. Althusser, 178.
have existed without the ancestors; but, so too, could the ancestors not have existed
without the descendants conceiving of the remains as such.

Regardless of when and how the descendants constituted themselves as such, they
nonetheless engaged in and performed rituals of ancestry/descendancy such as respect,
honor, and rectification. Such rituals ranged from their constant reference to and
declaration of themselves as descendants, to their holding of candlelight vigils at the
exhumation site, to their advocacy for various memorialization measures for the sake of
respecting and honoring the ancestors, to the ultimate ritual of reinterment—in effect, the
culmination of the previous rituals. These rituals can be understood in relation to
Althusser’s “practices of well-known rituals” as well as what he additionally refers to as
“the rituals of ideological recognition…a material ritual practice in everyday of
ideological recognition in everyday life.” The descendants’ engagement in any of the
above rituals of ideological recognition not only help to identify and sustain the
descendant community but simultaneously also constitute the ancestors.

This point can additionally be thought of in relation to Althusser’s concept of “the
duplication of the Subject into subjects and of the Subject itself into a subject-Subject.” Thinking of this in terms of his example of the Christian Religious Ideology, he explains
that: “Were not men made in the image of God? As the theological reflection proves,
whereas He ‘could’ perfectly well have done without men, God needs them, the Subject
needs the subjects, just as the men need God, the subjects need the Subject.” Thus,
while God could “technically” or “physically” exist (although this runs counter and

158. Althusser, 180.
159. Althusser, 179.
seems diametrically opposed to the traditional Christian theology and conception of “God,” the point will be entertained for the sake of this example) without subjects—Christians, His significance or the ideology surrounding him could not exist; He needs Christians—and the entire ideology which Christianity encompasses—to constitute His existence as “God” (Subject). Moreover, Christians cannot exist without God—yes, men and women can physically exist, but without God, they cannot be “Christians” (subjects).

Applying this to the ABG, the exhumed remains exist physically but they are not the remains of “ancestors” (Subject) without the descendants acknowledging them as such; conversely, the descendants can physically exist as men and women but without the ancestors they are not, ideologically, “descendants” (subjects). Thus, the ideological dynamic that occurred at the ABG is the reciprocal, or what Althusser refers to as the “speculary” or “mirror-structure” that constitutes any ideology “and ensures it functioning.”¹⁶⁰

Finally, and related to the reciprocality of ideology is an explanation for the descendant community’s vehement insistence upon ceremonially reinterring the ancestors. Both entities exist within, and in fact constitute, the ideology; thus, any ideological action or ritual, (in this case reinterment), is mutually beneficial. In reinterring their ancestors as an act of respect, honor, and rectification, the descendants were also respecting, honoring, and redressing themselves. The remains (ancestors) were obviously not alive to know or be conscious of the fact that they were being respected and apologized to. Thus, reinterment was a symbolic act, significant to the activists and descendants as well as the broader audience that they intended to reach.

¹⁶⁰. Althusser, 180.
Historian Michael Kammen’s study of cases of reinterment in the U.S. helps to interpret the motives behind reinterment at the ABG. Part of the descendant community’s (as well as non-descendant activists’) sentiment about and resulting advocacy for the remains was linked to what Kammen describes as the various “levels and layers” of pride. He discusses several types, including: local pride, pride of place, pride of possession, familial pride, and ethnic/racial pride.\textsuperscript{161} In the case of reinterment at the ABG, it seems all were at play. For instance, citizens of the U.S., and New York in particular, felt a sense of pride in connection to the exhumed remains (as well as those left undisturbed) considering the direct link that the latter represented to the city’s and, by extension, the county’s history. This is what Kammen calls local pride.\textsuperscript{162} Various statements made by activists and descendants demonstrate this sense of local pride. For instance, Mayor Dinkins expressed local pride in relation to the remains: “…it is important that we not take this issue lightly. A critical part of our city’s history…[is] at stake.”\textsuperscript{163} To Dinkins, the remains represent a vital part of New York City’s (NYC’s) history and the integrity of that history is dependent upon the treatment and future of the remains.

Local pride in relation to the remains is additionally demonstrated by an excerpt from a proposal made during a FSC meeting regarding memorialization at the ABG.

“\textit{WHEREAS the African Ancestral Burial Ground is regarded…as a final resting place of…[the] founding fathers and mothers of New York City and State and the United States}

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item\textsuperscript{161} Michael Kammen, \textit{Digging up the Dead: A History of Notable American Reburials} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 7.
\item\textsuperscript{162} Kammen, \textit{Digging up the Dead}, 7.
\item\textsuperscript{163} “Testimony Presented to the House Subcommittee on Public Buildings and Grounds by David Dinkins: September 24, 1992” (United States Congress, New York City, 1992), 5.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
of America…” Here, the remains—their significance and value—are discussed in terms of what they contributed and thus mean to NYC and the U.S. In this expression, the remains are those of the people responsible for the establishment, construction, and development of both city and country.

A similar sentiment, expressed by FSC and descendant community member Reverend Herbert Daugherty, demonstrates that local pride was particularly strong among descendants: “This rediscovery [of the remains] represents reconnecting with the earth and with the great gift that was America. These ancestors brought culture, language, dress, and life that formed the foundation of this great city, one of the greatest cities in the world.” Daugherty’s reference to the remains as ancestors demonstrates his subjection to the ancestry/descendancy ideology, and his expression of what those ancestors contributed to NYC demonstrates his local pride in relation to them.

This local pride is closely related to what Kammen refers to as “pride of possession.” New Yorkers felt possessiveness over the remains considering that they were discovered in NYC. Pride of possession was particularly strong among descendants because, as already established, they conceived of the remains as those of their ancestors. This was closely related to the strong sense among descendants of what Kammen calls familial or ancestral pride. The descendants felt a personal pride in the remains, since they considered the remains to be those of their ancestors. As a result, descendants felt a

166. Kammen, 7.
degree of guardianship (possession) over the remains and their “wellbeing”—a
responsibility to make sure they were properly and respectfully handled, treated,
eventually reinterred, and memorialized. Blakey commented on the presence of this
sentiment among descendants: “New York’s African Americans were driven by a sense
of responsibility for the protection of ancestral heritage and a desire to ensure that the
dead were honored and memorialized.” Blakey’s use of the words “ancestral” and
“honored” is evidence of the ideology behind ABG activism. Blakey, like the activists he
discusses, is a subject and, consequently, a perpetuator of ideology.

In the case of the ABG, since the exhumed and their supposed descendants were
African and African American, the latters’ familial and ancestral pride was linked to and
perhaps the source of what Kammen calls ethnic and racial pride. In fact, race can
account for the degree of activism surrounding the ABG and the memorialization
measures (including reinterment) that resulted. Due to the fact that the exhumed remains
were known to be those of Africans and African Americans—black people from the
colonial period—the discovery garnered far more attention and concern than it might
have had if the remains had been thought to be those of white people. A shared history of
oppression and suffering among black people provides them with a sense of a shared past

169. Kammen, 7. Race played a somewhat coincidental role in the controversy of the ABG. The discovery
of the ABG coincided with the administration of New York’s first African American mayor, David
explicitly acknowledged the connection between the city’s first black-led administration and discoveries at
the Burial Ground, stating that the ‘ancestors’ had chosen this particular time to be discovered.”; Sarah R.
University of Pennsylvania, 2006), 49.
that fosters racial solidarity. The same can be said for other racial groups with a shared history of oppression—Native Americans being a prime example.\(^{170}\)

White Americans do not share this same history of oppression and suffering. Only particular religious, ethnic, or national groups such as Jews, Italians, or the Irish share such a similar past. Thus, when something like inadvertent exhumation of remains belonging to white people occurs, it does not resonate generally for all white people as it does for individuals belonging to a racial group that has been historically oppressed. Had the remains discovered at the ABG been those of white people, the GSA would have reported the discovery, few questions would likely have been asked, and the remains might have been dealt with quietly and privately, as the GSA was initially attempting to do in order to accommodate the pavilion portion of the construction project. However, the interment of the 18\(^{th}\) century black people in a segregated cemetery helped make their

\(^{170}\) In fact, partially as a result of the historical oppression of Native Americans, (similar to that of African Americans), The Native American Graves Protection Act (NAGPRA) was passed, providing Native Americans with rights over the “disposition of Native American human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony, referred to collectively in the statute as cultural items, with which they can show a relationship of lineal descent or cultural affiliation...One major purpose of this statute (Sections 5-7) is to require that Federal agencies and museums receiving Federal funds inventory holdings of Native American human remains and funerary objects and provide written summaries of other cultural items. The agencies and museums must consult with Indian Tribes and Native Hawaiian organizations to attempt to reach agreements on the repatriation or other disposition of these remains and objects.”; Francis P. McManamon, “The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act,” National Park Service U.S. Department of the Interior: Archaeology Program. Accessed July 7, 2015, http://www.nps.gov/archeology/tools/Laws/nagpra.htm. NAGPRA does not pertain to the ABG and, having been enacted in November, 1990, was relatively new legislation at the time of the ABG discovery and controversy. However, as Katz explains, “During the 1990s, calls to extend NAGPRA’s protections to African Americans citing the African Burial Ground began to appear in the literature,” (45). A body of scholarship pertaining to NAGPRA exists. Since the act does not apply to the ABG, that scholarship will not be engaged with here, but it includes the following: Kathleen S. Fine-Dare, \textit{Grave Injustice: The American Indian Repatriation Movement and NAGPRA} (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003); Steven Conn, \textit{Do Museums Still Need Objects?} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); James W. Bradley and John Bryant, “NAGPRA’s Implications” \textit{Science} 264, no. 5161, (1994): 890; and \textit{Museum Anthropology} 32, no. 2 (2010), in its entirety.
subsequent disinterment but one more element of that shared history of oppression that had engendered the activists’ interest and concern in the first place.

Race possibly also accounts for why the descendants’ claims of relatedness to the remains, which had little likelihood, were unquestioned. Certainly, the descendants were accepted as such because actual African American genealogy is quite challenging to trace due to the African diaspora. Moreover, since both the exhumed corpses and those who advocated on their behalf belonged to a historically oppressed racial group, they may have been afforded more consideration.

Those advocating for reinterment were adamant that it occur at the same site as the original interment. This was of paramount importance to activists because they felt that the remains should have never been disturbed and removed in the first place. Central to the motivation to reinter was the fact that by doing so, the ancestors’ original choices and actions—their agency—were being respected and honored. Thus, reinterring them where they had originally been buried was central to the entire exercise. This insistence upon reinterring in the exact place as interment is a result of what Kammen calls pride of place. 171

In the case of the ABG, reinterment provided an opportunity for the descendants to honor their ancestors in death after the latter had likely been dishonored in life, whether the particular individuals had been enslaved or not. This point becomes increasingly apparent in consideration of the fact that the ABG existed in the first place because colonial Africans (and later African Americans) had been banned from burying their dead at other burial grounds and were restricted to the Negros Burial Ground. Thus,

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171. Kammen, 7.
the discovery of this site and its subsequent investigation and memorialization gave contemporary Africans and African Americans an opportunity to rectify the mistreatment; dismissal; and the lack of social, cultural, and political freedom, equality, and respect of their ancestors. Their demands illustrated Kammen’s observation that: “Historically considered, reburial has [...] meant, with the passage of time, renewed honor and frequently some form of reconciliation, or at least movement in the direction of reconciliation...”

While the restriction of Africans (and later African Americans) to their own burial ground was an act of discrimination, it ironically provided them with an opportunity to engage in their own burial rituals, which in turn equated to a degree of agency. Given

172. Kammen, 8.
173. The evidence that scientific director Dr. Blakey and archaeological director Dr. Warren Perry (head of the archaeological branch of the project that concerned the artifacts found with the burials) gathered from the studied burials points to the following conclusions about the burial practices of the 18th century individuals buried at the Negros Burial Ground, and what those practices reveal about said individuals: “It is likely that one of the most important things enslaved people did on their ‘own’ time was participate in wakes, funerals, and grave-site gatherings... By participating in burial-related activities on behalf of departed loved ones and community members, Africans acted for themselves and each other, reclaiming their own labor from those who purported to own it. Labor also extended to the work needed to obtain the necessary accouterments of proper burial... The coffin was a key component... Typical accouterments appear to have also included, at a minimum, the shroud or cloth with which to wrap the body or the limbs and chin, with or without pins... Other material goods found with the deceased also can shed light on how Africans acted on their own account. When a person was buried wearing jewelry or clothing, or with other objects that belonged to them in life, a claim was made about the inalienability of their possessions. Those possessions were likely obtained through own-account activities. Africans in colonial New York, including those who were enslaved, created opportunities to earn money of their own to purchase small luxuries... The burial of possessions took them out of circulation and fixed them to the deceased, symbolically defying a system that denied property to, and defined as property, an entire people... Based on the material record, it is reasonable to propose that an insistence upon the full humanity of the deceased might well have been at the spiritual and political heart of burial at this cemetery... the digging of an individual grave for the deceased, care in the orientation of the grave, and the placement of each body in a specific position (supine and extended) and probably wrapped, testifies to a degree of attention and respect accorded to all... The acts of interment that we are able to witness at a historical distance speak most importantly of the individual’s relationship to others—to family but also to a larger community... We think the cemetery provided a way for a community to form through the communal performance of a fundamental rite of passage... Because the African Burial Ground subsequently would have been one of the few sites where black men, women, and children could act communally and on each other’s behalf, it would have been a key place and institution for the continual incorporation of diverse newcomers into the fold.”; Warren R. Perry, Jean Howson, and Barbara A. Bianco eds., The New York African Burial Ground:
the limited options for these individuals to exercise such control, their descendant advocates considered these rituals sacrosanct. Accordingly, the exhumation of their ancestors represented an affront to the latters’ original choices and actions. This explains why reinterment at the site of original interment *in particular*, was so important to, and vehemently fought for by, the descendant community. Reinterment was a way for the descendants to symbolically rectify the various transgressions suffered by their ancestors—both in life, and now in death as a result of their exhumation. While respecting and honoring their ancestors, the descendants were simultaneously respecting and honoring themselves—a point that will be discussed and illustrated in the pages that follow.

Ultimately, Kammen’s explanation of the types of pride and how they influence and motivate people to reinter can be understood or thought of in terms of ideology. Whether it is the case of the ABG or any other instance of reinterment, those who reinter do so based on a set of ideas they have—or the ideology that has interpellated them—about the significance of the remains that they want to reinter and what that reinterment means. Whether it is about pride (various types), respect, honor, and/or rectification—or, as in the case of the ABG, all four—those are all ideas, or ideology, held by *subjects* about what the *ritual* of reinterring the *Subject(s)* means and why it is significant.

**Ideology at Work at the ABG**

Having established a theoretical framework for thinking about and ultimately understanding the motivations behind reinterment at the ABG, specific examples from

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the ABG—in the form of comments and conversations as well as official documents and literature pertaining to reinterment at the ABG—can be examined and analyzed using that framework in order to see specifically how ideology functioned in relation to reinterment.174

Actual biological ancestry/descendancy between those exhumed from the ABG and those who identified themselves as descendants was never confirmed or legitimized. Since biological relatedness between the remains and living individuals was never proven, the connection between the two was ultimately an ideological one. That said, the notion of ancestry/descendancy and a descendant community was just that, an idea. That idea was subscribed to by those who identified as descendants, as well as those who did not but who still accepted its existence and validity by not challenging it.175 The descendant community included anyone who subscribed to the idea that they were descended from the remains. This point is illuminated by Pearce’s explanation that:

In the discussions and speeches on behalf of the African Burial Ground, activists began to refer to New Yorkers and others of African descent as ‘the [descendant] community.’ While no one explicitly offered a definition that indicated the entire span of the community…the term [descendant community] connoted a similar meaning that it communicated during the Civil Rights era. It is the group that is bonded by its experiences of living

174. Althusser admitted that: “…it is essential to realize that both he who is writing these lines and the reader who reads them are themselves subjects, and therefore ideological subjects…i.e. that the author and the reader of these lines both live ‘spontaneously’ or ‘naturally’ in ideology in the sense in which I have said that ‘man is an ideological animal by nature’…The writing I am currently executing and the reading you are currently performing are also in this respect rituals of ideological recognition, including the ‘obviousness’ with which the ‘truth’ or ‘error’ of my reflections may impose itself on you.” Thus, she who is writing these lines and her analysis of reinterment at the ABG is also a product of ideology—no one is free from or immune to ideology and it is indiscriminate. Its pervasive and at times insidiousness results from the very fact that, as Althusser states, “man is an ideological animal by nature.” It is difficult to resist and/or combat that to which we are subject as a result of our own creation/production and thus subjection—even if we are aware of that fact; Althusser, 171, 173.

175. No evidence has been found of any one or any group ever challenging the validity of the descendant community and thus, by extension, its advocacy. However, as will be seen, some challenged who actually “belonged” to the descendant community, which further points to its ideological nature.
as African descendants in a diaspora where their ancestry is devalued and despised. Thus it may be described as an identity that is constituted politically and culturally. This community is connected biologically only by virtue of ancestral descent which may or may not have meant family relations on the continent of Africa. I delineate this from the biological category of ‘race,’ ...

Varying and often conflicting notions and expressions of ancestry/descendancy are exemplified in various documents and comments made by activists, descendants, and scholars. For instance, one document produced by the FSC in November, 1992—at the very outset of the committee’s tenure—has ancestry/descendancy built into the title: “A Proposal for Temporary Memorialization and Sacred Preservation of the African Ancestral [emphasis added] Burial Ground.” Additionally, the language used in the document to discuss what members of the FSC felt should be done at the ABG in the way of memorialization demonstrates one notion of ancestry/descendancy: “We, the direct survivors and offspring of these Africans…” The document originally contained the word “descendants” instead of “offspring,” but “descendants” was crossed out and “offspring” was written in by hand. Perhaps those who drafted the document thought that “offspring” better captured and articulated their conception of and sentiment towards the remains. Perhaps the drafters though that “offspring” connoted a closer or more contemporary and thus legitimate relationship between 20th century individuals and the remains of the 18th century individuals. Nonetheless, what this adjustment demonstrates is that, even within one document, ancestry/descendancy is variable and adaptable, thus highlighting and confirming its ideological nature.

176. Pearce, 110.
Additionally, this same document contains a list of memorialization measures, each one describing how “living Africans” can “memorialize,” “respect,” and “honor” “their dearly departed Ancestors.” Notice that a qualifier, such as “Americans,” does not follow the word “Africans.” In this particular conception of ancestry/descendancy, the “Ancestors” belong to all “living Africans” (or all living individuals of African descent), regardless of their nation of origin or occupancy. Thus, while it is more likely that actual biological ancestry/descendancy is between the ancestors and living African Americans—given that both were located in North America—than between the ancestors and living Africans, in this particular conception, ancestry/descendancy is based in notions of race and racial solidarity wherein African equates to black and outweighs in importance an “American” or other national modifier.

Biological ancestry/descendancy was a different matter. Some of the remains may have belonged to the first Africans in New York. These Africans may have had family members still in Africa. Thus, the offspring of those still in Africa would be genetically related to both these first Africans in New York and the latters’ offspring, for countless generations. Additionally, whether any of the remains were actually those of the first Africans in New York or simply the remains of their offspring, genetic relatedness certainly could exist between them and certain African Americans. Therefore, potential biological ancestry/descendancy spans at least two continents—North America and Africa, not accounting for the possible migration of relatives from North America and/or

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Africa to other continents, which expands the potential for biological relatedness internationally.

Additional examples of the varying conceptions and expressions of ancestry/descendancy can be seen in the statements of two descendants who spoke during various FSC meetings. For instance, a Ms. Franklin described her feeling of kinship with the remains with the following sentiment: “See, the main thing, Mr. Kimbrough [of the GSA], is that’s our ancestral burial ground…Do you know how deep that is and how we feel about that for the past two years?…Its [sic] deep honey. Its [sic] your history. It’s our history. Its [sic] America’s history…it’s us. That’s a part of me. That’s grandma, that’s grandpa, you see? Its [sic] deep…They [the community] love their ancestors a lot.”179

During a different meeting, another descendant expressed a similar sentiment: “The brother[s] and sisters that were buried and still are buried underneath the cemetery, the gravesites that were unearthed and all of the people that were there and are still there, are brothers and sisters…we are looking at a family matter, our family, and the people who are buried in the Burial Ground.”180 In both statements, specific familial relations and titles were assigned to the ancestors, suggesting that these two individuals’ conceptions of ancestry/descendancy in relation to the remains are more like those of the nuclear family than those of distant relatives and ancestors, which also seems to suggest the degree of closeness and regard that some descendants personally felt towards the remains. Ultimately, the distinction between the expressions of these conceptions—“grandma/ grandpa” compared to “brothers/sisters”—demonstrates that

ancestry/descendancy was ultimately ideological and not biological. Otherwise, such discrepancies in its conception and subsequent expression would not have existed.

The ultimately ideological (as opposed to biological) nature of ancestry/descendancy is illuminated by (varying and often times conflicting) expressions of it, in comments made by members of the general public, descendants, politicians, and scholars. For example, Adunni Oshupa Tabasi—not on the FSC nor someone who identified as a descendant, but who consistently showed up to FSC meetings, and signed in as “Representative of the African Ancestors/Committee.” Tabasi frequently spoke when the floor was opened up to general public. She explained her relationship to the remains at length:

I am not a descendant. I’m African by birth, so that automatically excludes me...We had said from the outset when it came to the art and all of the history and everything, that we the African community are to be in total charge of that. There is nobody that can interpret or do our history for us, and that includes some of the Africans themselves because they have been so programmed to be non-African that they are walking around in African bodies with European mentalities….there’s many of the Africans who look like one, talk like one and act like one but don’t think like one...We take great, great concern in the burial of our African ancestors...Those of us who are sitting at this table as African community representatives...”

Tabasi, who was born in Africa and thus identified as African, acknowledged the fact that she could not be a direct descendant of anyone buried at the ABG. Yet, later in her comments, she refers to the remains as “our African ancestors.” Tabasi considered the descendant community to be African American—which she, African born, was not. Nonetheless, she referred to the remains as her ancestors (when she said “our”). Here, and when she signed in at FSC meetings, Tabasi identified as an ancestor, but not a

descendant, exemplifying how the claim and identification with ancestry/descendancy was ideological and constructed and varied from person to person. What is more, Tabasi contradicted her own conception of ancestry/descendancy when she said, during a later FSC meeting: “…these are our Afrikan bodies, those are our ancestors. I spin off directly from those Afrikans.” This inconsistency within the same person’s conception of her own ancestry/descendancy speaks to its constructed, rather than strictly biological nature.

An additional example of the personal contingency of ancestry/descendancy can be deduced from the comments of Miriam Francis, a member of the Reinterment Subcommittee, who signed into at least one FSC meeting as an “African Community” member. On August 27, 1994, during the same meeting as the first comment from Ms. Tabasi above, Francis explained:

What I did, I did for my ancestors. I did not do it for him [Kenneth Kimbrough] and I did not do it for the world out there. I did it because it needed to be done, because it was making a statement as far as we as an African people are concerned, wherever we are on this planet…and I think they [the GSA] owe it to us being descendants of the people that the GSA took up out of the ground and all we did was try and stand and defend them. One day you may have to defend your ancestors, or you may want someone to defend you when you become an ancestor.

Francis’s comment demonstrates that she, unlike Tabasi, viewed anyone of African descent—whether African, African American, British African, et cetera—as a descendant of the 18th century people who were buried in the ABG. All were part of a broad, yet

183. This signing in may have occurred at a meeting that preceded Miriam Francis assignment to the Reinterment Subcommittee. Miriam’s sister, Verna Francis, was also on the Reinterment Subcommittee and often acted as the spokeswoman for it.
184. “FSC on the ABG: Meeting Transcript; July 25, 1994” (Federal Steering Committee Papers, New York City, 1994), 63-64. It is not clear whether in this particular case and expression “African Community” and “descendant community” are the same.
unified African people. For her, ancestry/descendancy applied to the remains from the ABG and anyone of any degree of African heritage—past, present, and future.

One last comment from a FSC meeting demonstrates the ideology and ultimate constructed-ness of ancestry/descendancy. Annie Fraser, a descendant, stated that, “They [the remains] belong to us, the African people. Some of those remains could be my relatives.”\(^{185}\) Here, Fraser’s use of the word “could” as opposed to “are” demonstrates that she was aware of the fact that actual biological ancestry/descendancy was not confirmed and was thus largely theoretical; kinship was ideological, as opposed to literal. Yet, her insistence upon the importance of that relationship, even if it was only a hypothetical one, demonstrates that to the descendants, even the possibility of relatedness between them and the remains (their ideological ancestors) was as significant and carried as much consequence as a confirmed or actual one.

Politicians and scholars further illuminated the variable nature of the ancestry/descendancy ideology. For instance, in a letter to a congressman about his concern regarding the ABG’s and FSC’s current state of affairs, Mayor Dinkins stated that: “…the Steering Committee meetings are now mostly attended by members of the public and the actual participation of appointed members is minimal. The public members call themselves ‘The Community’, which I believe they define as the community of the descendants. The community members vote on recommendations with the [FSC] committee members.”\(^ {186}\) Anthropologist Warren R. Perry explicitly recognized the variability of the descendant community: “Although I have spoken of the descendant

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185. “FSC on the ABG: Meeting Transcript; August 22, 1994” (Federal Steering Committee Papers, New York City, 1994).
community throughout, there is, of course, no homogenous African descendant community; this entity is actually multi-dimensional and ideologically heterogeneous.”

Dinkins and Perry are individuals outside of the self-described descendant community, commenting on those individuals claiming kinship between themselves and the remains. While Dinkins and Perry do not identify as descendants, their acknowledgement of the community and their individual comments about it, especially Perry’s explicit description of it being “ideologically heterogeneous,” demonstrate the ideological, as opposed to biological, nature of ancestry/descendancy.

Finally, Blakey commented about certain individuals involved with the GSA during the final stages of the negotiation process regarding reinterment, stating that: “The entire process of hand-picking a few people who were not fully representative of the descendants (although they had an organization with "Descendants" in its name) as the Steering Committee had been, was, I think, illegal.” The illegality to which Blakey refers here likely has to do with the fact that the GSA was legally required by Gus Savage and the Subcommittee on Buildings and Grounds to fund the FSC that would make recommendations about the future of the site. Thus, Blakey considered the GSA’s solicitation and implementation of recommendations from sources other than the FSC to be illegal. However, the ultimate relevance of Blakey’s comment and his reference to “people who were not fully representative of the descendants…” is what it demonstrates about the ideology surrounding the ABG. While Blakey may not have considered the individuals to whom he refers to be as representative of the descendant community as

188. Michael Blakey, e-mail message to author, November 12, 2014.
others, those to whom he refers would probably disagree. Indeed, therein lies the point that his and the other two statements demonstrate: if ancestry/descendancy was in fact biological and confirmed as such, its meaning would be more specific and there would not be so many varying and often conflicting conceptions of it among those who both did and did not identify themselves as descendants.

While there is undeniably some degree of biological ancestry/descendancy between the remains and certain descendant community members, that degree does not correlate with the degree to which the community members invoked the claim of descendancy (and the ideology from which it derived). Perhaps some of the descendant community members were actual biological descendants of these dead, but it is more likely that many were not; and regardless, this was never scientifically proven. Thus, ancestry/descendancy and expressions of it were ultimately more ideological than biological. Biological ancestry/descendancy was not proven because Blakey and his team did not pursue that avenue, not because it could not be. There were individuals in the descendant community who could or could not have been biologically descendant of the ancestors and their remains. However, so too, were there individuals not in the descendant community—in the sense of not consciously identifying as such and who might not have even been aware of the ABG—who yet, had it been pursued, would have been verified as biologically descendant of the remains. Therein lies the point: such individuals were not subjected to the ancestry/descendancy ideology but could have actually been more biologically descendant than people subjected to and subscribing to the ideology. Therefore, the ideological conception of ancestry/descendancy, more so
than any real biological familial relation, is what ultimately motivated and produced reinterment at the ABG.\textsuperscript{189}

As individuals who identified themselves as descendants of the exhumed remains emerged, they simultaneously began to advocate for various measures in relation to their exhumed ancestors. Such measures were motivated by notions of how the actions would not only respect and honor the ancestors, but also redress past injustices suffered by them. Reinterment emerged as a means to compensate for the injustices suffered by the latter in their 18\textsuperscript{th} century lives, and now again in death, as a result of their 20\textsuperscript{th} century exhumation. While not all 18\textsuperscript{th} century black New Yorkers were enslaved, they did all suffer oppression as a result of their race. Their segregation in death to a separate and all black cemetery is evidence of that fact.

The exhumation of the remains was construed by the descendants as an additional act of disrespect because the enslaved Africans’ (and later, enslaved African Americans’) burial practices and rituals were one of the few aspects of their lives over which they were able to exercise a degree of agency. Thus, the descendants considered exhumation of the remains to be a violation of their ancestors’ wishes. The remains lay where they did and precisely in the way(s) in which they did—with their heads pointing in a particular direction, with their bodies/limbs arranged in a particular position, with particular items accompanying their bodies—because the family members and friends who buried them (some of whom would also be buried at the Negros Burial Ground and possibly unearthed) did so intentionally and deliberately. Those intentions, choices, and

\textsuperscript{189} Althusser speaks to this point when he states: “What is represented in ideology is therefore not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live.” (Althusser, Essays, 165).
actions—agency—were effectively negated by the exhumation of the remains.

Reinterment was a way to reclaim that agency. Descendant Raenice Goode appealed to the History Area Committee and Parks Systems Advisory Board while seeking their endorsement of a National Landmark status for the ABG. Goode demanded: “Re-interment of the Remains to be placed back exactly [emphasis added] where you found them. There’s a reason for our ancestors [sic] discovery and you had no right to disturb their sacred burial place.”

Significant time, energy, and money was ultimately spent by the federal government to determine and replicate the specific details of the exhumed burials: again, the directional orientation of the individual burials, the arrangement of the bodies in their particular graves (not every body was housed in a casket), and with whatever additional items originally accompanied the corpses.

Examples of the respect/honor/rectification element of the ideology of ancestry/descendancy are numerous. For example, New York State Senator David Paterson wrote to Howard Dodson on July 1, 1992, while Dodson was the chairman of Mayor Dinkins’s Advisory Committee on the Negro Burial Ground and Paterson served on his own task force. Paterson forcefully stated the case for agency:

> It is imperative that the Mayor communicate to the New York City Congressional Delegation...the following desires of the community...and implement these desires as well as appropriate the necessary monies to accomplish them; (a) Reinterment of the remains of the African ancestors from the Broadway site within the Federal Office Tower itself. It is my firm belief, as it is that of many members of the Task

191. This last detail is evidenced by the fact that the debate over whether to rebury the remains with the artifacts that originally accompanied them or to display the original artifacts in the eventual museum came up early and often in FSC meetings and documents. Ultimately, the decision was made to rebury the original artifacts with the remains and to display replicas of the former in the museum.
Force for the Oversight of the Negro Burial Ground, that these individuals have suffered too much in their lives to now suffer removal, for eternity, from the ground in which they were laid to rest by their loved ones. It would be intrinsically wrong to remove these martyrs permanently from this space. They have spoken to us from these 200 years of burial, they can only tell us their story through the archaeologists and anthropologists, which necessitates their removal for a period of time, but eventually they must be returned to the space they were meant to lay for eternity, anything less would be disrespectful.192

For Paterson, reinterment was the only way to rectify the numerous historical transgressions against the dignity and humanity of the buried individuals. He demonstrated his subjection to and engagement with the entire ideology when he referred to the remains as ancestors; when he referenced their suffering—both in life and now in death as a result of their exhumation; when he referenced the affronted agency of the loved ones who originally buried them (many of who would also be buried at the Negros Burial Ground); and when he declared that reinterment must occur in order to avoid disrespecting the 18th century individuals and their remains any further.

An example similar to Paterson’s letter is presented by Mayor Dinkins’s testimony before the House Subcommittee on Public Buildings and Grounds during the Hearing on the African Burial on September 24, 1992. Dinkins reminded the committee of the historical oppression suffered during the lifetimes of those to whom the remains belonged:

As many of you know, several hundred years ago, slavery was common in this region, and Africans in our city were second-class citizens—in death as well as in life. They could not be buried within city limits, and thus the Burial Ground north of Chambers Street became the[ir] final resting place…That’s one reason why it is so important to recognize African

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192. Senator David Paterson, letter to Howard Dodson, July 1, 1992. Due to Paterson’s lack of qualifying the “community to which he refers in this letter, it is not clear what community in particular he refers: the descendant community, the emerging activist community, both, or perhaps a different community altogether.
culture and contributions;...and to treat these remains with the dignity and respect so cruelly denied during their lifetimes.¹⁹³

Dinkins’s statements, like Paterson’s, demonstrate the belief among contemporaries that respectful and honorable treatment of the remains was a way to rectify the historical lack of social, cultural, and political equality during the 18th century.¹⁹⁴

Dinkins later demonstrated the same line of thought in a letter to Mayor Elect Rudy Giuliani on December 13, 1993. Dinkins hoped that the incoming mayor would exercise his political influence to effect action at the ABG:

…the African Burial Ground…is believed to hold the remains of as many as 20,000 Africans and African descendants. I am very concerned that the African Burial Ground receive appropriate attention to ensure the respect due to all those who were buried here and to their descendants…The certain degradation endured by those Africans and African Americans during their lifetime as slaves cannot be allowed to continue in their graves…it is essential that the Mayor’s Office…be sensitive to the needs of the descendant community.¹⁹⁵

Here, Dinkins invokes the ideology surrounding the ABG to convince Giuliani of its importance, especially for those exhumed from it and for those claiming descent. Dinkins advocated on behalf of others. He positioned himself as a politician representing a constituent group: “the needs of the descendant community.”

In addition, Dinkins’s statement: “…to ensure the respect due to all those who were buried here and to their descendants,” demonstrates the mutually reinforcing nature of the belief that respectful handling of the remains was necessary to demonstrate the value of African American contributions and to address the historical mistreatment of African Americans.

¹⁹⁴. The excerpt from Dinkins’s testimony included herein does not explicitly mention reinterment. However, the purpose of his testimony was ultimately to convince Congress of the overall value of the discovery to contemporary America; to American history and the history of New York; and to its evidence of the historical and social/cultural contributions and relevance of African Americans. In addition, Dinkins aimed to express what he thought was the proper way to proceed with the site, including issues of memorialization, of which reinterment was among the most prominent elements.
of the ideology surrounding the ABG (what Althusser referred to as the “speculary,” “mirror-structure,” or “double speculary”). Both entities (the ancestors and descendants) exist within, and in fact constitute, the ancestry/descendancy element and thus any ideological action or ritual is mutually beneficial, reinforcing, and/or felt. Thus, Dinkins’s insistence upon respect (itself an ideological action/ritual) for “those buried here” (the ancestors), equates to respect for the descendants, as well.

This point is further demonstrated by comments made by FSC and descendant community members during FSC meetings. One example was addressed to Chairman Dodson on April 25, 1994, by an individual who saw historical and contemporary circumstances as related: “…as we continue to struggle to bring dignity to the lives and deaths of our ancestors…we must also fight for the respect and dignity of our people here today.”

Conversely, disrespect for the remains equated to disrespect for the descendants. This point is demonstrated by a comment from a descendant—Ms. Dicks—during a FSC meeting on January 24, 1994. “…we was disrespected when they uprooted the African Burial Ground. That was the first disrespect.” If, as Althusser’s model suggests, the remains only exist as ancestors if the descendants conceive of them as such, and if the individuals who conceive of themselves as descendants need the ancestors to have someone to be descendants of, then it follows that what affects one, affects the other. By this logic, Ms. Dicks could feel the disinterment as deeply as if the body had belonged to her own parent, sibling, spouse, or even herself.

196. “FSC on the ABG: Meeting Transcript; April 25, 1994” (Federal Steering Committee Papers, New York City, 1994), 56.
197. “FSC on the ABG: Meeting Transcript; January 24, 1994” (Federal Steering Committee Papers, New York City, 1994), 72. Ms. Dicks’s first name is unknown.
In such an ideological context, it is no surprise that FSC chairman Howard Dodson’s hand-written notes on his copy of a FSC meeting agenda from November 23, 1992 repeated the theme. Dodson wrote: “respect for the human remains [is] paramount” and “respectfully reinter the human remains on site.” Whether Dodson was revealing his own thoughts about the ABG, or writing down what was being discussed, they nonetheless demonstrate the emotional investment of 20th century individuals in the fate of 18th century corpses.

The following examples additionally demonstrate the notion among activists and descendants that the ancestors had been mistreated and disrespected both in life and death, and thus, that mistreatment and disrespect needed to be rectified via memorialization, of which reinterment was one element. During the hearing held by the House Subcommittee on Public Buildings and Grounds on September 24, 1992, Howard Dodson presented testimony before the subcommittee regarding the purpose, objectives, and goals of the FSC. Dodson stated that, “These include but are not limited to: Correcting past injustices and indignities by creating appropriate memorials…Preserve and reinter the exhumed remains in the burial ground site in a dignified and culturally appropriate ceremony.” During a FSC meeting on July 26, 1993, Josephine McCauley, a member of the Reinterment Subcommittee stated: “It is imperative that this memorial reflect a spiritual reconsecration [sic] and an international apology to our African ancestors for the desecration of their remains and the total disrespect for the final words...

‘rest in peace.’” Both of these statements exemplify the commonly held opinion that the ancestors and their remains had been mistreated and disrespected by being disturbed. Ritual reinterment and memorialization were seen as the way to apologize (figuratively or ideologically) for and rectify those insults.

Transcripts of FSC meetings are rife with examples of the respect/honor/rectification theme. For instance, on May 23, 1994, Verna Francis of the FSC Reinterment Subcommittee reported to the FSC the subcommittee’s discussions. She insisted that: “…adequate resources in terms of manpower and funding are crucial. Without this[,] appropriate planning and implementation of the events attendant to the honoring and respect of our African ancestors is jeopardized.” On July 25, 1994, Chairman Dodson addressed the Reinterment Subcommittee’s concerns over the fate of their plans for memorialization and reinterment after the FSC was dissolved. Dodson assured them that they shared the same goal: “This has been a means to a larger objective that all of us had, and that larger objective has been to ensure that our ancestors were properly respected and that whatever memorial activities, et cetera, were carried on, were done with proper dignity, respect, et cetera.” These examples, and countless others like them, demonstrate that by then the bureaucratic structure of planning for memorialization of the ABG was pervaded by the ancestry/descendancy ideology surrounding it.

Conclusion

Once human skeletal remains were unearthed at the ABG, ceremonial reinterment was not inevitable. It became imperative only when a community of individuals who invested meaning into those remains by construing them as ancestors (thus making the former descendants of the latter) emerged. That community, in turn, had to interpret exhumation of their ancestors to be an insult and act of disrespect in order for reinterment to be advocated as an apology for and rectification of those injustices. Biological ancestry/descendancy was never really at issue. Instead, reinterment was a symbolic ritual, the material result and reality produced by the ideology of ancestry/descendancy and respect/honor/rectification. The history of reinterment at the ABG illustrates that regardless of whether the activists’ and descendants’ ideas—ideologies—about the remains and what reinterring them meant were “real,” nonetheless, that ideology undeniably produced real material results. It had the power to bring an otherwise disparate group of individuals together as an imagined community, united by their ideas regarding this collection of unidentified bones. It ultimately resulted in a substantial concession and sizable grant from the federal government for the express purposes of studying, reinterring, and memorializing the remains and the 18th century African New Yorkers to whom they had belonged. What is more, this ideology continues to manifest itself at the NYABG, and is the topic of the following chapter.
Conclusion: Ideology’s Enduring Legacy at the African Burial Ground

The ideology that produced reinterment at the African Burial Ground also helped bring about the other memorialization measures there (the monument/memorial and museum), and influenced their interpretive direction. The ideology therefore has an enduring legacy beyond the reinterment event in October 2003; it manifests itself in concrete expressions at the New York African Burial Ground National Monument.

Memorialization of the African Burial Ground (ABG) ultimately occurred as a result of the ideas held by those advocating for it. The ultimate significance of those ideas is apparent when considering the material reality that they produced—reinterment, a national monument/memorial, and a museum. After a twelve-year struggle to get the remains back into the earth from where they came, the “ancestors” were finally reinterred on October 4, 2003. Reinterment was the culminating event of an elaborate funerary ceremony that took place over five days, spanned six U.S. states and eight cities, with the participation of dozens of prominent political, cultural, and spiritual figures, and attended by thousands of observers.

Additionally, the reinterment site became encompassed within the monument/memorial site at large, which opened to the public in 2007. The museum or “visitors center” opened in 2010. The entire public history site, which includes the reinterment site, the monument/memorial, and the museum, is referred to as the New York African Burial Ground National Monument (NYABG). The Federal Steering Committee (FSC) explained the need to hold design competitions for both the monument/memorial and the museum: “The justification for using a competition is the
need to design ideas, to provide an open process and to generate challenging, far-ranging ideas for what has developed as an internationally significant site…”203 The FSC, “in partnership with a wide range of civic and professional groups,” was supposed to be the mechanism for selecting the winning design. However, as a result of their disbandment in 1994, this was not the case.204 Until she was replaced in 2001, Peggy King-Jorde, in conjunction with the General Services Administration (GSA), oversaw both design competitions. The design competition for the monument/memorial was complicated and delayed due to uncertainty regarding the remains: when Blakey’s research on them would be complete and they would thus be ready for reinterment. Partially as a result of this, it took seven years from the original solicitation for proposals in 1998, to choose a winning design. In 2003, the National Park Service (NPS) became the primary entity handling both the memorial/monument and the museum.205 In 2004, the GSA and NPS chose five finalists “to receive public comments and refine their designs before the final selection.”206 In 2005, the GSA and NPS chose and announced Rodney Leon’s design.

205. The NPS was involved with the ABG because, “[r]ecognizing the need for expertise in cultural resource management, GSA had also begun negotiations with the National Park Service to provide consultation for the project. Following a meeting on December 9, 2002, NPS agreed to administer the design and operations of the proposed interpretive center and to participate in the memorial selection committee. On September 23, 2003, GSA entered into a formal interagency agreement with NPS.”; Sara R. Katz, “Redesigning Civic Memory: the African Burial Ground in Lower Manhattan.” (master’s thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 2006), 85.
Construction of the monument/memorial began later that year and was completed in 2007.\textsuperscript{207}

Design proposals for the separate museum were submitted in June of 1998. The following year the GSA held several public forums where the five entrants were present and their proposals were on display. The purpose of this was to ensure “…that ideas, goals, and themes could be shared…[and] the public could meet the five teams and air their reactions and opinions…”\textsuperscript{208} The entrants were given surveys that had been administered to the public at these forums and via mail, “so that they could involve the public in their projects.”\textsuperscript{209} A winner was chosen and announced in early 2000: “IDI Construction Company…a New York based African American/African/Caribbean multidisciplinary team.”\textsuperscript{210} However, the museum would still not open for another ten years. As was the case with the monument/memorial, work on the museum was partly delayed due to the scientific research being performed on the remains and IDI’s lack of access to the research findings.\textsuperscript{211} After the GSA and NPS decided to terminate IDI’s contract, the NPS began “working with historians, scientists, and community members to develop plans for the interpretive center” and it was opened in February 2010.\textsuperscript{212} It is housed within the federal building the construction of which was the cause of the remains being unearthed in the first place. This building is adjacent to the reinterment site and monument/memorial.


\textsuperscript{208} Frohne, 301-303.

\textsuperscript{209} Frohne, 301-303.

\textsuperscript{210} Frohne, 303.

\textsuperscript{211} Frohne, 315.

\textsuperscript{212} Katz, “Redesigning Civic Memory,” 116.
Memorialization of the ABG (reinterment, the monument/memorial, and the museum) is a particularly illuminating example of the power of ideology to produce material results. Starting with reinterment, the fact that the remains exhumed from the ABG were reinterred is not particularly groundbreaking. A burial ground being unearthed during a construction project is a somewhat common occurrence. So too, is the reburial of remains exhumed in such instances. However, reinterment at the ABG is unique and significant because ultimately, it did not have to happen in the way that it did. Indeed, the GSA’s plan (should remains be unearthed) was to reinter them in Brooklyn. Once remains were unearthed, the GSA proposed reinterment at a park one hundred feet from the ABG (as to not interfere with the original construction project).

Instead, a twelve-year struggle over the disposition of the remains ensued. A momentous series of events had to transpire in order not only for reinterment and the elaborate funeral ceremony that accompanied it to occur, but also for the later monument and museum to materialize. Such events include: convincing the federal government to cancel an entire building to accommodate the reinterment site and the later monument/memorial; and eliciting the federal government to expend millions of dollars for the study and reinterment of the remains as well as the eventual monument/memorial and museum. These two developments were ultimately the result of the advocacy of activists.\textsuperscript{213} That advocacy was motivated by the articulated and shared ideology of numerous individuals—the descendant community’s ideological attachments to the remains, as well as the ideology of individuals such as Illinois Congressman Gus Savage.

\textsuperscript{213} “Activists” here and for the duration of this chapter will refer to Federal Steering Committee members, descendant community members, and any other individuals advocating and acting on behalf of reinterment at and memorialization of the ABG.
and New York Senator Alfonse D’Amato. Neither of these individuals seems to have officially identified as descendants, but they nonetheless subscribed to the idea that the remains exhumed from the ABG were significant enough to reinter and memorialize in an elaborate fashion.

Initially and ultimately, it was merely bones that were exhumed from the ABG—that is the material reality; however, peoples’ ideology transformed those bones into the ancestral remains of living descendants. Ideology turned the remains and activists into ancestors and descendants—that is the socially constructed ideological significance of the material reality. Moreover, race, another ideological and social construction, informed much of the ideological arrangement described above. As previously mentioned, it is common for remains to be unearthed and consequently reinterred during construction projects. Such occurrences usually transpire with little to no ceremony. Often, such cases involve the remains of either unidentified individuals or those of white Americans of European descent. Thus, it is more difficult for living individuals or groups of individuals to identify with and feel an attachment to such remains due to the wide range of possible relatedness (blood or otherwise) between the two. However, in the case of the ABG, the remains were identified as belonging to Africans and/or African Americans. Thus, living Africans and African Americans could more readily identify with the remains because of a more common shared cultural heritage and history between the two—the possibilities of relatedness (blood or otherwise) in this case are somewhat more limited than in the case of white people. The shared heritage and history of Africans and African Americans, or anyone of African descent, is more readily identified than that between white people. This is due to an additional factor at play: oppression.
Many black people in various parts of the world conceive of themselves as sharing a history of slavery and racial discrimination. Those black people are connected and unified via this shared history of oppression. Thus, when a burial ground containing the remains of their racially oppressed counterparts is discovered, living black people can readily identify with the remains due to their sense of a shared past. This can occur whether the remains are conceived of to be those of ancestors or merely those of “other black people” who have suffered as a result of their race. White people in general do not have this same history of oppression. Some particular groups of white people do, such as Italians, the Irish, or Jews. However, Jews are perhaps the only group of white people who share a history of oppression, suffering, and struggle comparable to that of black people. Both were subjected to and suffered unparalleled systemic oppression. Jews around the world are united by their religious culture, as well as by the historical oppression they have for so long suffered as a result of that religious culture and the broader social and cultural prejudice and discrimination against them that has evolved from that initial discrimination. The Holocaust is perhaps the most significant phenomenon of oppression suffered by Jews as a result of the prejudice and discrimination against them. Presumably, any Jew feels a connection to the Holocaust, whether they had family, friends, or anyone they knew who was a victim of it. Symbolically, all Jews feel as though they are victims of the Holocaust because it happened to their people or to them as a people—a Jewish people. The circumstances may be similar for all black people—as a people, they suffered as a result of what makes them a people, their race. In this way, slavery and discrimination are for black people what the Holocaust is for Jewish people. Thus, as a result of the oppression suffered by
black people, the ABG had race and the history of oppression associated with that race working in its favor in terms of living individuals identifying with and feeling connected to the remains that it contained.

The extent and intensity of the feeling of attachment by living individuals to the remains from the ABG was not inevitable, but its extent and intensity are undeniable. This was manifest in the drive to make sure the remains were “properly” reinterred and memorialized. Starting with reinterment, not only did activists fight to have the remains “respectfully” reinterred, but they also insisted on a great deal of pomp and fanfare. Rather than “quietly” reinterring them one day, with the participation and attendance of anyone who happened to know about the situation and was interested in being present, reinterment instead was a five-day long, intercity and international event that was largely publicized, promoted, vastly covered by the media, and participated in and attended by thousands of people. This was because the unearthed remains where those of Africans and African Americans whom living Africans and African Americans identified with and felt connected to both racially and, as a result of that racial connection, historically. Accordingly, those individuals additionally felt they needed to “take care of” and protect the remains, as well as honor and respect them via an elaborate event.

This sentiment of stewardship on the part of activists was intensified by the fact that the remains exhumed from the ABG were predominantly those of individuals who had been enslaved and thus disrespected in life. This explains the strong motivation to respect them in death with a ceremonious event that was international in scope, spanned eight U.S. cities, was widely promoted, extensively covered by the media, and involved thousands of participants and attendees. This can also account for why activists wanted to
memorialize the remains and the ABG to the extent in which they did, with a monument and museum.

Activists wanted the remains and the site from whence they were exhumed to be memorialized on a very large, elaborate, and public scale. This can partially be accounted for by the fact that the remains were mostly those of individuals enslaved during their lives. Thus, they deserved the respect and honor denied them in life as a result of their enslavement. They deserved recompense or restitution. The presence of this sentiment among activists is demonstrated by a comment made by descendant Reverend Herbert Daughtry during the reinterment ceremony on October 4, 2003: “We will never cease to demand that this country ‘fess up and pay up. There’s a day of reparation, there’s a day of restitution and that day is upon us.”

Restitution could be accomplished, symbolically, via reinterment and memorialization, affording the remains both an elaborate funerary ceremony and a permanent monument and exhibit that commemorate and celebrate their lives and contributions to New York and the U.S.

Since reinterment and memorialization were undertaken on such a considerably visible and public scale, those two measures clearly concerned and served more than the activists and descendant community. The measures involved making sure the remains were treated with respect and that the original choices and actions of the 18th century individuals to whom the remains belonged were honored. They also were about


215. Ultimately, the original choices and actions of the 18th century individuals buried at the ABG were only symbolically honored considering that a number of elements of their reinterment departed from their original interment. For instance, the remains were reinterred in wooden caskets from Ghana. However, the remains were interred either in caskets more than likely made of wood from the area, or not in caskets at all. In addition, the “caskets” from Ghana are simply boxes large enough to hold each set of remains in a
capitalizing on the discovery and utilizing it to remind and educate people about the
history of black people in America and beyond—the African diaspora, slavery,
emancipation, discrimination, and the contribution of black people to the U.S. and the
world. By memorializing the ABG, the history of the previously forgotten site and the
18th century individuals associated with it were restored to public memory. Thus, the
ideological debate surrounding the “ancestors” and their disposition was about more than
their ceremonious reinterment. It involved gaining them and their experience official and
public historical attention via memorialization.

Statements from various activists evidence the opinion among them that the ABG
presented the opportunity to restore the 18th century experiences of black New Yorkers
and preserve that history in public memory. This in turn largely influenced the
interpretive direction of the ABG’s memorialization. For example, when Howard Dodson
tested before the House Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds on July 27, 1992,
he commented on the potential of the ABG in terms of the messages it could convey and
to whom it could convey them. Dodson identified the interpretive direction of the ABG
when he stated that: “The discovery of the burial ground affords a unique
opportunity…to define and interpret…the place and role of people of African descent in
sort of stacked fashion. Thus, the remains were not reinterred in the way in which they were interred—with
the corpse lying intact in an extended supine body position. Also, while each set of remains were in their
own individual box, sixty sets were housed together in one of the seven crypts, which deviates from how
most of the corpses were interred—in their own individual grave. Factors such as this evidence the fact that
in terms of reinterment being about honoring the agency and original choices/actions of the ancestors, it
was more about getting them back into the ground that they were originally buried in, but doing so in a
much more elaborate fashion—making reinterment largely a symbolic act, primarily significant for activists
and descendants. (Of course, some factors such as the remains being individually contained and “stacked”
in smaller boxes and then housed in the larger crypt were done largely for the sake of practicality). In
addition, elements such as the caskets from Ghana and the five-day long funerary event and culminating
ceremony were surely far more elaborate than elements of the original interment. This demonstrates that
reinterment (and memorialization) was symbolic restitution for black people: past, present, and future.
the making of New York and American history and culture...”216 Additionally, when Dodson stated that this would take place “…in a publicly visible setting…” he identified the audience of this topic and its interpretation.217 Mayor Dinkins expressed a similar sentiment when he testified before the same committee on September 24, 1992: “…the ‘Negro Burial Ground’ – an unparalleled cultural resource which has already opened an important window into the lives of New York’s earliest African residents.”218 Like Dodson, Dinkins identified the potential and value of the ABG for presenting the topic of Africans/African Americans in early America.

Reinterment and memorialization were clearly intended to be for and about more than just the activists vying for and involved with those measures. Specific elements of reinterment and memorialization evidence that both were meant to reach a larger audience: the public. For instance, rather than simply reburying the remains and leaving the ground above the burials flush with the ground around them, there are instead seven rather visually prominent mounds that designate the burials.219 This is for people—the public—to see and know there is something below these mounds. The mounds bring what is below them to the attention of observers, thus restoring and preserving the history of the 18th century individuals reinterred there. If reinterment was only for the purpose of and supposed to be about reburying the bodies where and how they originally were, and nothing else, then that is precisely what would have been done. Yet, leaving a mark on

219. See figure 1.2.
the landscape for people to see memorialized the reinterment. Indeed, even if the monument/memorial had never been constructed, the reinterment site would still be a public history site in consideration of the seven visible burial mounds meant to mark the landscape and catch the eye and attention of potential observers—the public. Herein lies the evidence that reinterment was meant for more than the exclusive consumption of activists. Clearly, activists intended for reinterment to last beyond the actual event itself, and that is why the landscape was marked.

Ultimately, reinterment involved more than simply reburying the remains. It was about reinterring and memorializing: memorializing the reinterment; memorializing the remains and the individuals to whom they belonged; memorializing the site from whence the remains were exhumed and then reinterred; and memorializing the history of the site and the remains exhumed from it in relation to the history of New York and the U.S. Moreover, if activists wanted to mark the reinterment site in some way, a sign or plaque could have simply been put up. Instead, there are prominent mounds and the larger monument within which they came to be encompassed. Additionally, why a museum dedicated to the interpretation of the site, the remains, and the significance of both? Reinterment and the elaborate five-day long event that accompanied it was a moment in time that ended once the crypts were lowered into the ground and attendees departed. However, what endures is the legacy of the ABG as a public history site—the NYABG with its mounds, monument/memorial, and museum. Considering these factors, the ABG is clearly a site of public history, which was the intention of the activists responsible for
its establishment.\textsuperscript{220} Again, this insistence on the part of activists was a result of their ideas about the ancestor/descendant relationship between themselves and the remains, as well as the significance of reinterring and memorializing them and by extension, as a result of the reciprocal nature of the ideology, themselves.

The NYABG is unusual as a public history site. Due to the Federal Steering Committee, public involvement with reinterment and memorialization was required from the very beginning of the effort. It occurred to an extent and with a level of intensity that public history sites do not often experience. The historians and curators involved with other sites definitely consider their audiences—who they might be and who historians/curators would like them to be. However, direct consultation with and involvement of the public, as was the case with the NYABG, does not often occur. Rather, historians and curators more often simply think about their audiences, what “message(s)” they want their sites to convey, and how to best proceed given those two factors. Historians and other professionals involved with the designing and curation of public history sites always consider but do not necessarily consult with their potential publics. In the case of the NYABG, however, the public—the FSC, activists, and the descendant community—was actually involved in the designing, planning, and curation of the site. What is more, these individuals were also one of the site’s intended audiences. Thus, the NYABG is that rare public history site whose audience (or one of them) was also one of its direct consultants, designers, and planners.

\textsuperscript{220} Long before reinterment and the other memorialization measures to follow, the ABG was being treated/utilized as a topic and site of public history. For instance, the Office of Public Education and Interpretation opened in 1993 and existed for the express purpose of informing and educating the public about the ABG and its relation and significance to New York and American History. Additionally, a documentary (a form of public history) about the ABG was released in 1997.
A powerful ideology surrounding race and slavery spawned the activism that resulted in Congressman Gus Savage and his committee initially reprimanding the GSA, causing the latter to cancel part of its construction project to accommodate the eventual reinterment and monument/memorial, and to create the FSC for the express purpose of soliciting public input regarding the future of the site. As a result, public input was part of the NYABG from its very inception. As FSC chairman Howard Dodson observed, “This representative committee [FSC] has pledged to work to maximize public input and to consider this public input in making the recommendations for appropriate and sensitive treatment of the African burial ground [sic].” Moreover, this public input was to be broad and diverse. As explained during a FSC meeting: “there are a variety of different opinions that come from all parts of the diaspora to come to impact on how we are to memorialize this particular project. It’s not monolithic, and it certainly ought to be diverse, and in regards to that, all opinions regarding how the memorialization ought to be voiced, the final and ultimate decision on whether it is sound or not will come from this committee.”

This last consideration adds to the unconventional nature of the NYABG. Professional experts such as historians control interpretation at most public history sites. Thus, that the FSC’s input regarding interpretation at the NYABG would be considered and given precedence deviates from the standard practice of public history. This practice includes historians and other public history professionals such as museum curators deliberating about and deciding upon the content and interpretive direction of a site and

then implementing those decisions. It also speaks to the power of the descendant community’s ideology. It won them a voice in the debates and decisions regarding the future of the ABG, as well as interpretive authority at the NYABG. Therefore, the descendants’ ideology had enduring consequence at this site in the form of the interpretive direction and messages that exist at the site.

Activists had intentions and goals for themselves in terms of what they wanted to accomplish with reinterment and memorialization. They held notions of what those two elements meant to the remains and thus, by extension and particularly in the case of the descendants, to themselves. However, they also had grander aims for the NYABG both in terms of what memorialization would occur beyond just reinterment, and also regarding the target audience for whom reinterment and memorialization would exist. Various statements made by activists demonstrate such aims. For instance, as early as July 27, 1992, during the hearing held by the Subcommittee on Public Buildings and Grounds, Howard Dodson identified what he thought to be the opportunities and goals of memorialization of the ABG:

> The discovery of the burial ground affords a unique opportunity that is not likely to come again in our lifetimes, if ever—to correct some of the past injustices and to define and interpret in a publicly visible setting the place and role of people of African descent in the making of New York and American history and culture. As a consequence, the program we [the FSC] propose should serve as both a permanent memorial to the 18th century Africans who were interred in the African burial ground [sic] and a context for introducing the American and world population to the unique historical and cultural legacy of African people in the Americas over the last 500 years.”

Dodson thought memorialization of the ABG could serve two purposes. One was memorializing and by extension honoring those interred there (and the descendant community by extension, due to the ideological relationship between the two). The second was simultaneously using the site and the discovery as a way to inform people—*the public*, and specifically “the American and world population”—about Africans’ and American Americans’ roles in and contributions to America and its history.

This is precisely what any public history site is meant to accomplish: informing a public(s) about a particular historical topic via interpretation and presentation of that topic. As already explained, interpretation and presentation of that topic is influenced by the public(s) to whom the topic is to be presented. Three different FSC subcommittees made general recommendations to the GSA regarding the interpretive direction that memorialization of the ABG should take. The subcommittees recommended that:

The memorial, temporary and permanent, must celebrate the spirit of Africans—their culture, their struggles and victories in life and death. Such a monument/memorial should speak to Africans pre-slavery, Africans during slavery and Africans post slavery. This National Historic Landmark should be celebrated in a manner that brings new light to the history of “Africans in America” in addition to recognizing it as a sacred place where…African ancestors will be reinterred. The site represents one of the first known evidences of Africans in America, thus presenting an important opportunity for conveying African cultural significance and contributions. The Memorial to the African Ancestors may take a variety of forms through a creative use of materials, symbols and religious references that should speak of an African inspired heritage.

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224. The three subcommittees were: Memorial to the African Ancestors Subcommittee; Art in Architecture Subcommittee; and the Memorial Exhibit Subcommittee.; Federal Steering Committee, “Memorialization of The African Burial Ground, Recommendations to the Administrator, General Services Administration and The United States Congress, August 6, 1993” (New York City, 1993), 29.

The decision of what to present at a particular public history site and how to present it is informed by the opportunities provided by the site. In the case of the ABG and as demonstrated by the FSC recommendations above, activists identified two opportunities. One was its potential to inform people about the role of Africans and African Americans in American history. The other was its potential to ultimately write Africans and African Americans back into a historical record from which they had been largely omitted. This sentiment is additionally alluded to in a FSC document outlining the committee’s objectives and scope: “…properly commemorating and honoring the Africans and African Americans who played a substantial role in the development of this city, and providing for the ongoing reeducation of all Americans who do not know of these contributions…”

The use of the word “reeducation” here suggests that there was an initial education that was lacking or inaccurate and thus needed amendment. This speaks to a commonly held opinion that Africans and African Americans have been left out of America’s historical account in an attempt to avoid confronting the uncomfortable topics of race, slavery, segregation, and discrimination. These topics muddy what many prefer to understand and remember as America’s distinguished past. Recently however, more public history sites have attempted to address this oversight and make use of places that lend themselves to addressing what historians James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton describe as “the nation’s most enduring contradiction: the history of American slavery in a country dedicated to freedom.”

The ABG is one such site and those involved with its memorialization were aware of it. In fact, part of the ABG’s value as a

226. “Objectives and Scope of the Committee (from Charter)” (Federal Steering Committee Papers, New York City).
historical site was the fact that it was a colonial site (the Negros Burial Ground). As the FSC’s recommendations to the GSA acknowledged, “The site represents one of the first known evidences of Africans in America…”\(^\text{228}\)

That activists identified the ABG’s potential for supplementing and correcting the historical record is further demonstrated by a comment made during a FSC meeting: “Today the remains of our ancestors present themselves literally risen from their graves during a time…when evidence of the significance of racism in the United States needs desperately to be brought to bear in the mind of all persons and during a time when knowledge about African heritage is both distorted and inadequate. The memorialization of the African ancestral remains presents an opportunity to address these issues.”\(^\text{229}\) This statement exhibits the notion that the under- and/or misrepresented history of Africans and African Americans in America and the racism and slavery they suffered can be more adequately represented by memorialization of the ABG. As previously mentioned and demonstrated by the FSC’s recommendations to the GSA, this could be accomplished if the interpretive direction of the memorial “…celebrate[d] the spirit of Africans—their culture, their struggles and victories in life and death. Such a monument/memorial should speak to Africans pre-slavery, Africans during slavery and Africans post-slavery.”\(^\text{230}\) By addressing the good and the bad—the “struggles and victories”—of African and African American history and incorporating a historical narrative that spanned pre- to post-slavery, the ABG could amend the historical record.


\(^{229}\) “FSC on the ABG: Meeting Transcript; July 26, 1993” (Federal Steering Committee Papers, New York City, July 26, 1993), 72-73.

As Mayor Dinkins proclaimed during the July 29, 1992 Subcommittee on Public Buildings and Grounds hearing: “A critical part of our city’s history, and the dignity of those buried at the site, are at stake. Together, we must ensure that the Burial Ground and all that it symbolizes, both good and bad, are preserved and memorialized for future generations.” Dinkins’s statement embodies the point made by the aforementioned historians regarding the issue and challenge with presenting the topics and history of race and slavery in America and why they have often been avoided. Ultimately they challenge and blemish what people would rather understand and remember about America and its history. They force white Americans to confront the contradictions that litter their nation’s past. The activist and descendant community sought to utilize the ABG as a site that would present a more complete and accurate history of Africans and African Americans in North America and the later United States.

In addition, Dinkins’s statement demonstrates what he thought to be the audience of memorialization of the ABG: “future generations.” This broad audience that Dinkins identified speaks to what he thought was the ultimate potential of the ABG as a site of public history. Reinterment has an enduring legacy beyond the actual event of reburying the bodies on October 4th, 2003. The burial mounds are a reminder of what lies beneath: the remains of 18th century Africans and African Americans who, whether enslaved or free, played a vital role in the early development of New York. In addition, as demonstrated by the comments of activists and descendants examined herein, the remains also represent the subsequent generations of Africans and African Americans who are

conceptualized as being descendant from the remains. What is more, the mounds also represent and are a reminder of the history of the late 20\textsuperscript{th} and early 21\textsuperscript{st} century discovery of the remains, the struggle to achieve reinterment and memorialization, and the actual reinterment and memorialization themselves. As historian James W. Loewen explains, public history sites are valuable for understanding both the particular era they represent and the era in which they were erected.\textsuperscript{232}

Comments made by individuals during the reinterment ceremony and comment cards filled out by visitors to the NYABG provide insight into whether the potential opportunities (as identified by activists) presented by the ABG were seized, and whether historians, curators, and activists accomplished what they had hoped to with reinterment and the NYABG.\textsuperscript{233} For instance, one attendee of the reinterment ceremony, Charlotte Coleman, said: “It’s [sic] very spiritual to honor our culture and the suffering of our ancestors…I’m glad we can bring honor and respect to them now.”\textsuperscript{234} Coleman felt that the ceremony was an act and display of honor and respect for the remains, whom, as revealed by her use of the word “ancestors,” she too, conceptualized as such. Alice Brailey Torriente expressed a similar sentiment: “My heart is filled with both pride and sadness. Though our people laid undiscovered for so many years, the fact that we now have some idea of where they came from, how they lived, worked, and are able to give them a final resting place with dignity, makes me happy.”\textsuperscript{235}

\textsuperscript{233} There is also a NYABG Facebook page where individuals have left comments similar to those expressed on the comment cards.
\textsuperscript{235} Bernstein, “A Ceremony of Grief,” 35.
was a source of pride and dignity for the remains and for herself, and she additionally felt that insight into the history of her ("our") people was provided by the discovery, study, and subsequent reinterment of the remains. These comments demonstrate that reinterment meant the same thing to witnesses of the event as it did to those advocating for, planning, and orchestrating it.

Various visitor comment cards verify that the NYABG has the effects intended by its creators: restoring the history of the 18th century individuals to public attention and honor. For instance, the following several comments evidence the success of activists’ intentions for the NYABG to be a site that, as Howard Dodson expressed, apologizes to and honors those buried there, as well as a site that presents and interprets “the role of people of African descent in the making of New York and American history and culture.”

One visitor’s comment reveals what he or she feels is the significance of the NYABG: “…the combination of how the Burial Ground was discovered and, the process of memorializing this space and creating a museum to honor the ancestors…has become a symbol of pride and honor.”

Another visitor’s comment suggests what he or she considers to be the educational message and value of the NYABG: “…I am so grateful this is here to teach me and others about the history of African Americans. It is true the Africans built this city on their backs for white Americans.”

An additional comment affirms the message conveyed at the NYABG regarding the pivotal contributions made by individuals of African descent to the development of New York and the U.S.: “…This

is not just one part of NY’s/U.S. history, this is U.S. history. These are the people who built the city and country.”²³⁹ All of these comments (and many more like them) demonstrate the messages that visitors are receiving and their responses to those messages. These are, in fact, the very messages and sentiments that activists aimed to evoke.

Activists considered the NYABG’s potential to reach international audiences, and also to inform people about African heritage more broadly, remedying the fact that “knowledge about African heritage is both distorted and inadequate.”²⁴⁰ Three visitor comments demonstrate their success. One comment suggests that the pride and honor for the 18th century individuals and their remains that the NYABG is meant to embody is also a source of pride for living individuals: “…I myself come from Nigeria, Africa so I feel touched by this place…I feel proud to be black, to be African.”²⁴¹ This comment also demonstrates the capacity of the NYABG to impact an international audience. So too does the following comment: “As a Brit and a descendent [sic] of slaves, I found this a very powerful experience, and one I am grateful to have had…”²⁴² These two comments taken together, one from an African and the other from a Briton of African descent, verify two things about the NYABG. One is the site’s international scope. The other is that the site’s messages do in fact have the ability to reach and speak to not just African Americans but Africans and/or those of African descent living around the world.

²³⁹. Asante sana Padraig, “Visitor Comment Form” (NYABG, n.d.).
²⁴¹. Unknown author, “Visitor Comment Form” (NYABG, n.d.).
²⁴². Unknown author, “Visitor Comment Form” (NYABG, n.d.).
A third comment demonstrates that the NYABG succeeds in conveying the message that the 18th century individuals to whom the remains belonged were more than slaves or the subjugated beings—*negroes*—they had been reduced to as a result of their slavery: “I will remember this African Burial Ground…the show made me feel like I was with the Africans not Negroes…” This individual’s sentiment suggests that visitors are understanding the 18th century individuals as the people they were prior to and beyond their reduction to *negroes* and slaves. This was a goal of activists whose early concern and priority was to officially refer to the burial ground as the African Burial Ground, not the Negros Burial Ground, as it had initially been called. In addition, there was a similar effort to avoid referring to the 18th century individuals as “slaves” and rather refer to them as enslaved individuals.

Additional visitor comments confirm that, just as activists thought it could, the ABG successfully amended and corrected the historical record. As one visitor expressed, “As an African American it saddens my heart to know that my people suffered so much. Yet at the same time I am pleased to see my people are not being forgotten and the truth coming to light.” This comment demonstrates that the NYABG is considered a source of accurate information and insight regarding the history of individuals of African descent in the U.S. A similar sentiment is revealed by another comment: “The African Burial Ground [NYABG] was built to call America out on their ignorance. Africans were

244. Susan Pearce explains, “This [name change] reflected both a well-grounded belief that this name was true to the ancestors’ self-identification and a statement against a name that was considered offensive and dated…A related debate surfaced over the use of the word ‘slave.’ Those who opposed this term explained that its use implies an essential, person characteristic, rather than an imposed status. Speakers and writers began to use ‘enslaved African; instead’” (Pearce, 99).
245. Unknown author, “Visitor Comment Form” (NYABG, n.d.).
people and their spirits still live on.” Both these visitors clearly felt the history of Africans and African Americans in America was lacking and/or inaccurate and that the NYABG helped to clarify and complete the record.

All of the visitor responses, as well as the larger collection of visitor comment cards of which those included herein are but a small representative sample, demonstrate that the ideology that brought about reinterment at and memorialization of the ABG also informs the interpretive direction of the NYABG. The ideology of activists and the descendant community gained them the cultural authority to accomplish reinterment and memorialization. It gained the site and the 18th century individuals associated with it official historical attention. It also won activists interpretive authority in reinterment and memorialization, as evidenced by visitors’ comments. This is the enduring legacy of the debate surrounding reinterment and memorialization, and the outcome ultimately speaks to the potency of ideology. Ideology ascribed meaning and significance to the material reality of bones being unearthed in lower Manhattan in 1991. Ideology turned those bones into the 18th century ancestors of contemporary descendants who believed the ancestors needed to be reburied and memorialized in order to respect and honor them and monumentalize their history. The material reality of reinterment is the wooden caskets inside concrete vaults underneath mounds of dirt covered with grass. What that reinterment and other memorialization measures at the ABG mean and why they occurred in the first place is, pure ideology. Because activists identified so intimately with the remains, because they conceived of the bones as ancestors and of themselves as

descendants, the elaborate five-day long reinterment event transpired and the NYABG exists and functions precisely as it does.
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1.1 18th century map depicting a portion the colony of New York where the Negros Burial Ground was located. It was this map and others like it that contactors consulted during their research of the area upon which the GSA’s buildings were to be constructed and that alerted them to the potential of human remains existing at the site. Source: http://www.nps.gov/afbg/learn/historyculture/index.htm.
1.2 Photograph taken by the author of the reinterment site. In the image can be seen the burial mounds, underneath each of which is housed a crypt containing sixty coffins (see image 1.3 below), each containing one set of remains. *Source: author.*

1.3 The coffins constructed in Ghana wherein the individual sets of remains were placed. The reinterment site contains seven burial mounds, underneath each of which is housed a crypt containing sixty of these coffins (sixty sets of remains). *Source:* https://www.facebook.com/AfricanBurialGround/photos_stream.

1.5 Entrance to the New York African Burial Ground National Monument-Museum. This museum is housed on the first floor of the 34 story federal building, the construction of which caused the remains to be unearthed in the first place. This building is adjacent to the reinterment site and monument/memorial. Source: https://www.facebook.com/AfricanBurialGround/photos/p.386664931382564/386664931382564/?type=1&theater