

**Africans in Early New York** , In 1692, traders brought the first enslaved laborers to the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam, now lower Manhattan. Under Dutch West India company rules these “Company slaves” had certain rights: they could own property, file grievances, be baptized, and marry. In 1644, 11 male enslaved Africans petitioned and won partial freedom and over 100 acres of farmland that became known as “the land of the Blacks.” In return, They paid the Dutch West India company annually with corn, wheat, peas, beans, “and one fat hog.” This “freedom” was genius at best, and the company still considered children of freed parents enslaved. When England took control of the colony in 1664 new Amsterdam became New York and slavery codes became far more oppressive. By the 1720s, enslaved or free, no Blacks owned land.

Slaves accounted for about one quarter of colonial New York’s labor force. Often using skills they brought from their homelands, They worked side-by-side with three people and European indentured servants. Men cleared farmland, filled swamp land, and built city improvements like Broadway and The Wall (the financial district NYC). Enslaved African women toiled in their owners’ homes, Carrying large water vessels, cooking from right ingredients over a fire, boiling water for laundry, and caring for their owners’ families in addition to their own. Children started working young. Common causes of death were malnutrition, physical strain, punishment, and diseases like yellow fever and smallpox. Despite extraordinary assaults on their humanity, These Africans and their descendants found dignity and community through familiar cultural rituals, including burial of the dead.

**Sacred Grounds**, From 1626 through the late 1700s, Africans and African descendants gathered when they could to bury their loved ones. The original “**Negros Burial Ground**,” as it was labeled on a 1755 map, covered 6.6 acres and included the area that is today’s African Burial Ground National Monument. For most of the colonial era and even beyond, this was the only cemetery for some 15,000 Africans and African descendants. No accounts survive from the people who buried friends and loved ones here, but we know quite a bit about the cemetery’s history. A 1697 British law banned African burials in New York City’s public cemetery, so the African burial Ground Lane North of the city limits near a ravine. In 1745 the city expanded northward, and the new defensive wall—the “palisade” —bisected the sacred burial ground. Colonial laws prohibited enslaved Africans from gathering in groups of 12 or more or holding burials after sunset. Although these laws made funerals essentially illegal, Africans manage to adhere to their traditions. They buried their dead individually and coffins, headed toward the west, so as to face east when they arose in the afterlife. Straight pins secured the burial shrouds; coins covered closed eyes. Some burials also included reflective objects, buttons, jewelry, and shells. One young child wore a silver pendant around the neck. A woman with front teeth filed in an hourglass shape had beads placed around her waist. A man’s coffin lid had a heart- shaped pattern—perhaps a Sankofa—created with brass tacks and nails. The city closed the African burial Ground in the 1900s and divided the land into lots for sale. Over the next two centuries, the growth of New York City obscured the graves. Layers of buildings and fill material covered and protected the human remains until the burial ground’s rediscovery in 1991.

As I learn the true history of the African Burial Ground National Monument in New York City , I recognize all the more why it makes sense to feel the way I feel when I am in the financial District so hard to connect and distinguish what I was feeling i’ve always thought I didn’t connect because of the root of all evil “money“ (Financial District NYC) I grew up in New York

and always admired New York City but when I worked in the financial District it was always an eerie feeling. The most challenging to me about this visit is that yet such a small space for great history. The five to six acres site's excavation and study was called, "The most important historic urban archaeological project in the United States", The Burial Ground site is New York's earliest known African-American cemetery; studies show an estimated 15,000 African-American people were buried here. In 1697, Africans were not allowed to bury their dead and what had become New York's primary burial ground. Scholars believe that this was the reason Africans use the burial ground today recognized as the African Burial Ground National Monument. Learning African American culture and their language is what I love most, i.e "Argo" means are you listening, and "Ame" means- I hear you is what an African American woman prayed over her husband as she and her family and friends buried the dead, her beloved husband, father and strong man who's name was KWAMÉ!

As for the staff representatives, and them representing the topic or group of people exhibited in the museum didn't apply, I see no connection or example pertaining to the African-American Burial Ground history. The guards were nice and welcoming but I didn't recognize anyone's connection to its history. I appreciate the small amount of pictures and literature shown at the museum, my thoughts are; there is so much more we don't know and so much more that should be revealed, including other burial sites (throughout the USA) I don't believe that this is all there is. Justice needs to be served for all "The people who were buried and killed and who suffered brutally in the hands of the European Dutch people. I feel a pain in my heart knowing humans shed their blood, sweat and tears, for centuries without any true honorable recognition or lifestyles, therefore I feel they deserve most of all. I will definitely study more and listen closely to history and look forward to discovering the whole truth and nothing but the truth alongside my family and friends, looking forward to my next visit!

**John 8:32 Then you will know the truth , and the truth will set you free." #amen!**

<https://www.nps.gov/afbg/index.htm>