



## Legislation Text

**File #:** Res 0901-2003, **Version:** \*

Res. No. 901

Resolution calling upon the City Council to condemn the neglectful oversight by the General Services Administration of the African Burial Grounds Project and calling upon the appropriate committee of the Council to conduct an oversight hearing to address such concerns and to act accordingly.

By Council Members Barron, Boyland, Comrie, Foster, Jennings, Liu, Lopez, Nelson, Recchia, Reed, Sanders, Serrano, Vann, Yassky, Jackson and Quinn

Whereas, Over eight million Africans and their descendants were enslaved in the United States from 1619 to 1865; and  
Whereas, In addition to the South, many enslaved Africans arrived in the Dutch colonial city of New Amsterdam that later became New York City, where such slaves were integral in building many structures, such as Trinity Church, the City streets and the wall from which Wall Street takes its name and which protected the colony from military strikes; and  
Whereas, These Africans during New York City's colonial period of enslavement, cleared land, built houses, paved roads, built forts and bridges, planted and harvested crops, while being subjected to the worst crimes against humanity imaginable, such as rape, torture, maiming, terrorism and murder; and  
Whereas, The enslavement of Africans continued in New York City after the colonial period when the United States ratified its constitution in 1789 and became the United States of America, until New York City abolished slavery in the 1840's; and  
Whereas, The largest and oldest known colonial-era cemetery used by enslaved and freed blacks, the African Burial Ground, was discovered in 1991 when a federal construction crew stumbled across one of the greatest American archeological finds as it sought to redevelop downtown New York City, the wealthiest financial district in the World; and  
Whereas, Such Burial Ground encompasses six acres of land around and beyond City Hall, adjacent to the final resting place of a more recent and similarly horrific human tragedy, the grounds of the once tall World Trade Center; and  
Whereas, Such Burial Ground has been the resting place of over 20,000 African unsettled and unremembered souls, whose worldly remains, interested parties have agreed, should be properly excavated, researched and studied, and one day soon properly re-interred in their ancestral homeland; and  
Whereas, Such research has already begun at Howard University under grants from the federal government, producing a wealth of anthropological knowledge of early blacks in America, such as DNA data tracing their roots to Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal and other African nations; and  
Whereas, Such research has evinced how Africans in America endured the unendurable horrors of the enslavement, with their spines bending from malnutrition and actually breaking from the excessive strain of hauling heavy loads, scientists noting that they were literally worked to death; and  
Whereas, Such research has lain bare the irrefutable horrors of the enslavement, but is now in jeopardy of being discontinued, such triumphs halted, and such knowledge, perhaps, forever lost; and  
Whereas, Such duty to oversee the excavation and re-interment was entrusted to the General Services Administration ("GSA"); and  
Whereas, Such federal agency acts as the landlord of federal property and is more adept at procuring and managing buildings, while the important duties associated with the African Burial Ground are more properly given to agencies like the National Park Service that deal with preserving historic sites and national symbols; and  
Whereas, GSA was advised by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, an independent federal agency, to revise its 1991 construction plans to preserve the site's historic value, but GSA refused to modify such schedule and, instead, accelerated its excavations, unearthing more than 400 human remains; and  
Whereas, In 1992 Congress had to intervene to get GSA to halt construction plans and agree to a plan to fund research, develop a memorial and interpretative center at the site and to re-inter the remains; and  
Whereas, It is time to build an African Burial Ground memorial museum complex, honoring the heroes and builders of America and at the same time educating and enlightening all to the African and African-American experience in this country; and  
Whereas, Such memorial deserves worldwide recognition and designation as a site of "outstanding universal value" under the UNESCO World Heritage Convention; and  
Whereas, An African Burial Ground DNA Bank should be created to provide a valuable tool for researchers and those interested in exploring their roots; and  
Whereas, Such re-interment has taken far too long and such remains of the ancestors of today's African-Americans deserve their proper and final resting place; now, therefore, be it  
Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York condemns the neglectful oversight by the General Services Administration of the African Burial Grounds Project and calls upon the appropriate committee of the Council to conduct an oversight hearing to address such concerns and to act accordingly.

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