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**GSA Announces Significant Progress With
New York African Burial Ground Project**
*Howard University Conducting Scientific Work,
Reinterment Expected This Year*

NEW YORK CITY (February 26, 2003) - The U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) today announced significant progress toward completion of the culturally and historically significant African Burial Ground project in lower Manhattan.

“In keeping with President Bush’s direction, we are applying renewed leadership and priority to the African Burial Ground project, and the results we are achieving will lead us to the successful completion of this highly important project,” said GSA Administrator Stephen A. Perry. “We are definitely focused on completing the African Burial Ground project prudently, expeditiously, and with dignity.”

The African Burial Ground was uncovered in 1991 during construction of a federal office building at Broadway and Duane Street. At the site – since designated a National Historic Landmark – archeologists exhumed 408 remains and scores of artifacts for study, which will be re-interred once scientific work is completed.

“We have been working diligently to re-engage the parties who are working together to complete this project successfully,” said Regional Administrator Karl H. Reichelt, who is leading the project as head of GSA’s Northeast & Caribbean Region headquartered in New York. “GSA is now poised for the first time in a decade to complete the scientific work, conduct reinterment, construct a memorial, and develop an educational center befitting the site and the city. These are accomplishments long overdue, but when completed will live on in cultural and historic importance for generations.”

Central to GSA’s recent progress is a new agreement reached with Howard University to complete scientific analysis of African Burial Ground (ABG) artifacts and remains. Howard University and its research team will prepare three main reports based on research conducted at its campus in Washington, DC. A completion schedule calls for preliminary history and bio-anthropological reports by May, and a preliminary archeological report by August. A final archaeology report is due in 2004.

The expected completion of these reports allows GSA to schedule the reinterment of remains and burial artifacts in the second half of 2003. Reinterment has been pending for several years while scientific reports were completed.

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“I am pleased we have reached an agreement to complete the remaining research on the African Burial Ground Project and to prepare the scientific reports. Arguably, the New York African Burial Ground ranks among the most important bio-archaeological sites uncovered during the 20th century. This project is truly significant because through its findings we will gain insights into the lives of Africans and people of African descent who were inhabitants of New York City during the 17th and 18th centuries,” said Howard University President H. Patrick Swygert. “Howard University and its research collaborators recognize that we must move forward respectfully and expeditiously to complete this important project in order that reinterment may occur at the earliest feasible date—and this is our goal. I acknowledge the support and cooperation of GSA Administrator Perry, Regional Administrator Reichelt and their GSA colleagues in facilitating approval of the contract. With continued cooperation, collegiality and professionalism on the part both of GSA’s representatives and the University’s research team, I am confident that the African Burial Ground Project will be completed successfully and on schedule.”

GSA acknowledged U.S. Rep Charles B. Rangel of New York for providing ongoing assistance and support to the ABG project. “Congressman Rangel has been exceptionally helpful to us, and we are grateful we can rely on him for guidance going forward,” Reichelt said.

GSA is pleased to further announce the following additional accomplishments:

- ◆ **Increased efforts to inform, advise and engage public, descendant community, elected officials, contractors and other stakeholders important to ABG.**
- ◆ **Reinterment expected in 2003. Ceremony planning underway.**
- ◆ **Moving forward on design and eventual construction of exterior memorial.**
- ◆ **Established working partnership with Department of Interior, National Park Service (NPS) to develop an interpretive center adjacent to burial ground. GSA has learned of broad support for the future of the site as a National Park.**
- ◆ **Hired the US Army Corps of Engineers (ACE) as technical advisors.**
- ◆ **Recovered burial artifacts stored within 6 World Trade Center.**

See attachment for further information.

GSA Increases Outreach And Education

GSA has increased its efforts to inform, advise and engage the public, members of the descendant community, elected officials, project contractors and other stakeholders important to the current and future state of ABG.

GSA and the Army Corps team have engaged and communicated with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP) and the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (NYCLPC). The completion of the scientific reports, the construction of the site memorial and the development of an interpretive center are obligations contained within a 1991 Memorandum of Agreement with GSA, the NYCLPC and the ACHP.

“The Council is encouraged by GSA’s recent progress and is hopeful that with collaboration among the stakeholders, GSA will meet its milestones,” said Charlene Vaughn, Assistant Director for Federal Program Development at the ACHP.

GSA continues to fully fund a public education outreach program through the Office of Public Education & Interpretation (OPEI). OPEI provides information about the archeological, cultural, historical and physical aspects of the site and its contents. It publishes a quarterly newsletter that tracks developments on the scientific research, the interpretive center and the exterior memorial. This international newsletter has a distribution of more than 15,000. OPEI’s public educators have provided approximately 12,000 tours, as well as slide presentations and site visits annually to schools, organizations, and the general public. OPEI also sponsors a variety of well-attended forums, film festivals and open houses. The OPEI headquarters are located at 201 Varick Street, New York City.

Reinterment Plans for 2003

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. A ceremony is anticipated that is international in scope, ecumenical, and showcases the African American experience in New York City. A two- to three-day event is planned with a ceremony commencing at Howard University in Washington, DC, and culminating in New York City.

"I'm glad to see Administrator Perry and GSA have made the successful completion of the African Burial Ground Project a top priority. I hope these renewed efforts will give the site the historical significance it deserves," said Howard Dodson, Chief of the Schomburg Center.

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Exterior Memorial Planned

GSA has commenced planning of an Exterior Memorial upon the African Burial Ground site. A panel of interested parties selected the following firms and individuals as design finalists:

1. Joseph DePace, Joseph DePace Architect, New York, NY
2. Katherine Dean, Groundworks, New York, NY
3. Rodney Leon, Brooklyn, NY
4. Cheryl McKissack, McKissack & McKissack, New York, NY
5. Eustace Pilgrim, Eustace, Pilgrim & Christopher Davis, New York, NY

GSA plans a future exhibit of the five selected proposals later this year. Completion of the ABG Memorial is expected in 2004.

In the meantime, GSA is enhancing the appearance of the site. A more appropriate, temporary fence is being installed and a new sign will be erected shortly. Both will be removed when the exterior memorial is completed.

NPS Collaborate on Interpretive Center

The African Burial Ground is already recognized by the National Park Service as a National Historic Landmark. Now, GSA has established a working relationship with the National Park Service (NPS) to develop an interpretive center within the lobby of 290 Broadway, adjacent to the burial ground. NPS will consult on all aspects of the interpretive center, and reach out to the public for partnership and ideas. Many have voiced support for an eventual plan to operate the African Burial Ground as a national park. GSA will welcome public input on the future role of the National Park Service.

“The national importance of the African Burial Ground cannot be overstated,” said Fran Mainella, Director of the National Park Service. “It is a National Historic Landmark, which makes its national significance equal to national parks such as the Statue of Liberty, Gettysburg, and the Grand Canyon. The African Burial Ground is a crucial story of America, one that has been forgotten too long. We are delighted to have been asked by GSA to participate in this historic undertaking. We would like to use this opportunity to listen to the community about the value and meaning of the site, how the story can be told, how we can help, and how we can form a partnership with others to keep this story alive.”

A panel of GSA officials, exhibit designers, and African-American historians have selected New York-based IDI Construction Corp. to build the 3,000 square foot facility. An interpretive environment will be created that informs, engages, and enlightens visitors about the historical, archaeological, and cultural findings surrounding the burial ground and New York’s African ancestral community. Completion is anticipated by December 2004.

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Army Corps Hired For Technical Assistance

GSA has retained the expert services of the US Army Corps of Engineers (ACE) to provide technical assistance and day-to-day project management of the African Burial Ground project. Anthropologist Dr. Michael Trimble leads the Army Corps team.

“We are fully committed to assisting GSA and we are very encouraged about progress,” said Trimble. “The African Burial Ground Project is a historic urban archaeological project that has provided the scientific and African-American communities, as well as the public, with an invaluable opportunity to better understand a little-known aspect of the history of New York City and the United States.”

Artifacts Recovered From World Trade Center Disaster

Thousands of artifacts were feared lost when the OPEI office and a Howard University laboratory were destroyed in 6 World Trade Center. Miraculously, the room that contained the photographs, records, and artifacts was only partially destroyed. With the help of the Federal Emergency Management Agency and City of New York agencies, GSA recovered more than 200 boxes of artifacts. While some original records were lost, nearly all of the African Burial Ground archaeological collection was recovered. This collection will be curated in New York so that the public and scholars can continue to study the important history represented by this project. The artifacts are currently being stored at the Alexander Hamilton US Customs House in Lower Manhattan where they will be further studied as Howard University completes its scientific reports.

Financial Commitment

To date, GSA has dedicated over \$22 million towards the African Burial Ground project. From 1989 to 2000 GSA obligated \$19.6 million; from 2000 to the present GSA has obligated \$4 million, primarily for education and community outreach, and existing contractual obligations. The total GSA investment into the African Burial Ground Site is expected to reach \$26 million.

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