THE STORY

The Dutch brought the first African slaves to New Amsterdam around 1625 to build a fort, mills, and residences for the early colony. After the British conquered what would become New York City in 1644, use of slave labor continued for more than 100 years to support the growing port and shipping operations. Information about slavery in New Amsterdam and subsequent New York City was relatively unknown until the discovery in 1991 of the African Burial Ground changed historical understanding of the practice and place of slavery in the early years of the United States of America and the colonial period preceding the nation’s founding. An estimated 15,000 mostly enslaved people of African origin had been interred between 1650 and 1794 in what was described on old maps as the “Negros Buriel Ground (sic).”

THE PROJECT

Plans for a new federal building in Lower Manhattan began in 1987. Like much of Manhattan, the site chosen had been filled with 12 feet of dirt, and a variety of structures were built over the area for centuries. Anticipating that an adjacent alley could still have remnants of the cemetery, an agreement was crafted to direct how a modest discovery might be handled. However, surveys prior to construction revealed a surprising number of human remains in 1991, and it quickly became clear that they had found a portion of a sizeable cemetery, thickly covered by two centuries of urban growth.

THE 106 PROCESS

Under the National Historic Preservation Act, the General Services Administration (GSA) was the agency responsible for the project and therefore responsible for conducting the Section 106 review when the African Burial Ground re-emerged. Section 106 requires each federal agency to identify and assess the effects of its actions on historic resources and consult with the appropriate State or Tribal Historic Preservation Officer. It is also...
For more about Section 106 and the ACHP go to www.achp.gov