

South Bronx Students Uncover Slave Burial Ground In Hunts Point

By Rebecca Fishbein in News on Jan 25, 2014



Joseph Rodman Drake Park (Google Maps)

Students and teachers at an elementary school in the South Bronx may have discovered a slave burial ground, located just outside a cemetery in Hunts Point, thanks to a series of historic photos published by the Museum of the City of New York.

A photo of Hunts Point Road titled "Slave Burying Ground"—one of 50,000 released recently by the Museum—caught the attention of students at nearby P.S. 48. They researched old city documents, maps and census data, discovering that the neighborhood's Joseph Rodman Drake Park likely did indeed host a centuries-old unmarked African slave burial ground. Though researchers did pick up radar readings suggesting skeletal remains in the area, they have not yet officially recognized the burial ground; at a press conference yesterday, P.S. 48 students, faculty and

community leaders urged the state to do so. "For over 100 years, the sacred African slave burial ground in Drake Park has been treated as anything but — with grass, asphalt and dirt covering the historic remnants of slaves in this area," State Senator Jeffrey D. Klein said. "The lives of the men, women and children who rest in peace here are part of the history of not only the Hunts Point community, but of New York at large."

A spokesman for the state's Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation told the Times they'll review P.S. 48's research, and Parks Department Deputy Commissioner for Community Outreach Larry Scott Blackmon says the agency will create signs noting the park's burial ground, though no official dig can be scheduled at this time. There are a number of African slave burial grounds in the city, and in 2007 a national monument opened near City Hall to recognize the unmarked graves.

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