



\$180,000 In Funding To Memorialize African Slave Burial Ground In Hunts Point

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Standing in front of the south side of Joseph Rodman Drake Park in Hunts Point, local elected officials and Bronx community leaders announced \$180,000 in funding for Joseph Rodman Drake Park that will go towards memorializing the African Slave Burial Ground discovered last year by faculty and students at P.S. 48. In the coming weeks and months, members of the Hunts Point community will work with local elected officials and other key stakeholders on establishing a memorial that is both educational and representative of the community.



In 2013, faculty and students of P.S. 48 in the Bronx uncovered evidence of an African Slave Burial Ground Site. By reviewing maps, census records, photos, and other documentary evidence, the faculty and students at P.S. 48 have also identified this park as a burial site for over one hundred African slaves previously unacknowledged by history.

Senator Klein, who was instrumental in securing the funding, said, “For many years, Drake Park has been a forgotten corner of the Bronx, but with the recent discoveries made by the students at P.S. 48 and now, with the funding I helped to secure in this year’s budget, Drake Park is clearly a focal point in our community’s culture and history. This announcement marks a new chapter for Drake Park, as members of our community, local elected officials and stakeholders come together to both commemorate the lives of those who rest in peace here and develop a plan to properly memorialize them. Together, we will make sure that Drake Park reflects the community of Hunts Point, past and present.”

Senator Klein is currently working with the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation on placing Drake Park’s African Slave Burial Ground on to the state and national nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

Assemblyman Marcos Crespo weighed in: “Today’s unveiling and renaming of this park would not have been possible without the unrelenting leadership of Senator Jeff Klein. This is indeed a special place where Africans and slaves were laid to eternal rest at a challenging time in our nation’s racial history. It will now be remembered as such. To paraphrase Abraham Lincoln, We cannot dedicate — we cannot consecrate — we cannot hallow — this ground. The brave men and women who were buried here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. But today we ensure that this special place will never be forgotten.”

National Action Network Bronx Chapter President, Dashawn Williams said: “The National Action Network Bronx Chapter is committed to honoring the memory of our ancestors with a perpetual memorial that stands as a tribute to their enormous sacrifice and to the building of American culture and, to people of the diaspora everywhere.

“We must begin the conversation towards identifying and properly acknowledging our ancestors. The coalition will concentrate on developing a structured plan of action to get the work done and with the support of Sen. Jeffrey Klein – fighting to protect the interest of his constituents, providing funding to memorialize those buried here and to all the respective elected officials – we can get it done together.

“I want to again thank Mr. Phil Panaritis (DOE) and all the young talented students and committed educators at PS 48 for the research and study projects that has brought us all to the stages of

memorializing our ancestors to the highest level possible.”

NAACP Parkchester Branch President Beverly Roberts said: “We are witnessing a historical moment in the Bronx. Burial grounds are at least as much for the living as the dead. They are a catalyst for tribute and memory. They affirm connection to a place and it’s past.

“The rediscovery of the enslaved African Burial Ground at Joseph Rodman Drake Park must be preserved for the community to use as a place of remembrance, celebration and education for future generations to understand and respect our unique history in American. We must journey back to our past (Sankofa) so that the inhumane treatment of our enslaved ancestors will never be forgotten or repeated.

“The NAACP Parkchester Branch, along with the coalition partners and the community will remain vigilant as we lobby to completely renovate, and beautify the burial ground where our ancestors rest. They shall be granted the dignity and respect they deserve.

We appreciate the efforts of Senator Jeffrey Klein and Assemblyman Marcos Crespo to bring much needed resources to this project and we challenge all of our Bronx elected officials to stand firmly with us and support this worthy endeavor. Special thanks to Philip Panaritis, the students and staff of PS 48 for the rediscovery of the enslaved African Burial Ground..”

TAH Grants Project Director, Office of School Programs and Partnerships, Philip Panaritis said, “As the historian and co-founder and of the Hunts Point Slave Burial Ground (HPSBG) Project, I am delighted to see two years of intensive research (<http://hpsbg.weebly.com/>) by educators, PS 48 students and our community partners validated and supported by this generous allocation of funds secured by Senator Klein.

“Senator Klein contacted me in December last year to help get the HPSBG landmarked at the state or local level. When that effort was thwarted in Albany, he continued to lobby aggressively for the preservation and exploration of the now-obliterated enslaved African cemetery.

“On a frigid January 24th afternoon, Senator Klein stood with a community coalition and PS 48 children in Drake Park near the HPSBG site, and spoke eloquently on behalf of “action to prevent this site from further damage or desecration”. Now under his leadership, the allocation of these resources will help ensure that our work will be continued, expanded and preserved for the community, for scholars, and for subsequent generations of school children at PS 48 and other schools, including Middle and High Schools. It will take our efforts thus far to a level of public visibility, scholarly precision, and community partnership that can truly serve as a model for successful local history and social justice projects.

“I am profoundly appreciative of Senator Klein’s work to commemorate and revere the forgotten lives here at the HPSBG and help write them back into our collective memory.”

Reverend Kahli Mootoo, Bright Temple AME Pastor said, “Heard more clearly than gun violence, more audible than the cries of the unemployed, louder than the cacophony of prostitution, we hear the voices of our ancestors beckoning us from their resting place – so we will honor them by fighting to make our community better.”

The ability for PS 48 to do this research so thoroughly comes from a program, known as Telling America's Story (TAS). TAS is an intensive, federally-funded professional development project for American History Teachers in elementary, middle, and high schools in the Bronx Community School Districts 8, 11, & 12. The program combines content-rich traditional American History and teaching skills development for Teacher-Historians. Phil Panaritis is Bronx TAH Grants Project Director and has lived in the Bronx for 20 years.



For an overview of evidence discovered and to learn more about the Hunts Point Burial Ground Project, please go to:<http://hpsbg.weebly.com/> .

Photos c/o Hunts Point Slave Burial Ground Project.

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