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May 20, 2014 / News / Hunts Point

SEN. JEFF KLEIN ANNOUNCES \$180,000 IN FUNDING FOR AFRICAN SLAVE BURIAL GROUND IN HUNTS POINT
New funding for Hunts Point slave burial ground

By Ben Kochman
Bronx Times

A patch of Hunts Point land fourth graders discovered as a possible 19th century slave burial ground is getting attention from the state.

Joseph Rodman Drake Park has netted \$180,000 in state funding to memorialize the slave workers likely buried in an overgrown patch of land there, state Senator Jeff Klein and local leaders announced at a May 9 press conference.

Undocumented slaves

A team of students and faculty from nearby P.S. 48 has been researching the site since 2013, when Philip Panaritis of the city's Department of Education passed along a 1910 photo of the area labeled "slave burial ground."

Using maps, census statistics and other historical documents, the team has since gathered evidence that at least 100 African slaves were buried at the park. Today, the park hosts a fenced-off grave for the wealthy slave-owning families – among them, the "Hunts" and "Leggetts" –that once lived in the neighborhood.

But there is no monument acknowledging the slaves buried in the park in an area outside the fenced-off grave. Local stakeholders are now meeting to brainstorm how to best use those funds to mark off the site.

"We must begin the conversation towards identifying and properly acknowledging our ancestors," said Dashawn Williams, president of the Bronx chapter of the National Action Network, the civil rights organization founded by Rev. Al Sharpton.

Still not landmarked

Many of the same stakeholders at the May 9 press conference gathered at the site in January to call on the state to nominate the slave burial ground to the National Register of Historic Places, which would ensure that the land always be used as a slave burial memorial site. Sen. Klein said he is still working with the state to make that happen.

For now, though, the researchers and politicians are glad for the funding.



This 1910 photo of the site, labeled "slave burial ground," kicked off the research.

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"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," said Panaritis.

Klein called the funding a "new chapter" for Drake Park.

"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," he said. "Together, we will make sure that Drake Park reflects the community of Hunts Point, past and present."

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