



Legislation Text

File #: Res 0981-2019, **Version:** *

Res. No. 981

Resolution calling upon the United States Congress to pass, and the President to sign, S.522/H.R.1278, a bill to establish the African Burial Ground International Memorial Museum and Educational Center in New York City, and for other purposes.

By Council Members Miller, Barron and Cornegy

Whereas, In 1991, survey work conducted during construction of a General Services Administration office building in Manhattan found intact human skeletal remains approximately 30 feet below street level on Broadway; and

Whereas, Those remains led to the discovery of other bodies in the same area, and it was determined that these were Black New Yorkers interred in what a 1755 map calls the “Negros Burial Ground,” which is now known as the African Burial Ground; and

Whereas, The African Burial Ground, located on the corner of Duane and Elk Streets in lower Manhattan, is the oldest and largest known excavated burial ground in North America for both free and enslaved Africans; and

Whereas, The African Burial Ground, which dates from the middle 1630s to 1795, holds the remains of an estimated 20,000 enslaved Africans and early-generation African Americans, including DNA samples from well-preserved human remains from the colonial era; and

Whereas, Analysis of those remains by Howard University scientists found that children under the age of 12, who comprised 40 percent of the individual burials, experienced a high mortality rate and developmental delays caused by malnutrition and disease; and

Whereas, The young remains, Howard University historians noted, indicate that pre-revolutionary New

York, which had more enslaved Africans than any Colonial settlement except Charleston, South Carolina, preferred child slaves because they were inexpensive and unlikely to rebel; and

Whereas, Howard University scientists also found that the majority of the men and women found at the site exhibited signs of muscle tears and spine fractures commonly associated with excessive strain and heavy loads, indicating that in some instances they appeared to have been worked to death; and

Whereas, The rediscovery of the African Burial Ground altered the understanding and scholarship surrounding enslavement and its contribution to constructing New York City (NYC), transforming how New York history is understood and how Black New Yorkers connect to their past; and

Whereas, In 1993, the African Burial Ground officially became a National Historic Landmark; in 2006, it was officially designated a National Monument and placed under the oversight of the National Parks Service; in 2007, a memorial designed by Rodney Leon, the only National Monument in the United States (U.S.) dedicated to the contributions of people of African descent, was unveiled at the site; and, in 2010, a visitor center, with the purpose of providing context for the site’s significance, was established inside the federal building that was ultimately constructed over a portion of the excavation; and

Whereas, S.522, sponsored by U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, and H.R.1278, sponsored by U.S. Representative Jerrold Nadler, would authorize funding and establish a museum and education center at the African Burial Ground; and

Whereas, In a February 15, 2017 press release, the then-members of the New York Congressional Delegation said the creation of the African Burial Ground Memorial Museum and Education Center would “serve as a permanent living tribute to the enslaved and free African men and women who were buried at [the] sacred site”; and

Whereas, The African Burial Ground serves great historical, cultural, archaeological and anthropological significance, its history deserves to be memorialized, remembered and studied, and such a

museum will tell the untold stories of those who helped build NYC and shed a light on their perseverance and strength of character in the face of adversity; and

Whereas, August of this year will mark the 400th anniversary of the first documented arrival of Africans to the colony of Virginia; and

Whereas, The nation must never forget the immense trials and tribulations faced during the ongoing fight for equality and justice; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York calls upon the United States Congress to pass, and the President to sign, S.522/H.R.1278, a bill to establish the African Burial Ground International Memorial Museum and Educational Center in New York City, and for other purposes.

LS #8938
02/27/2019
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