



Past



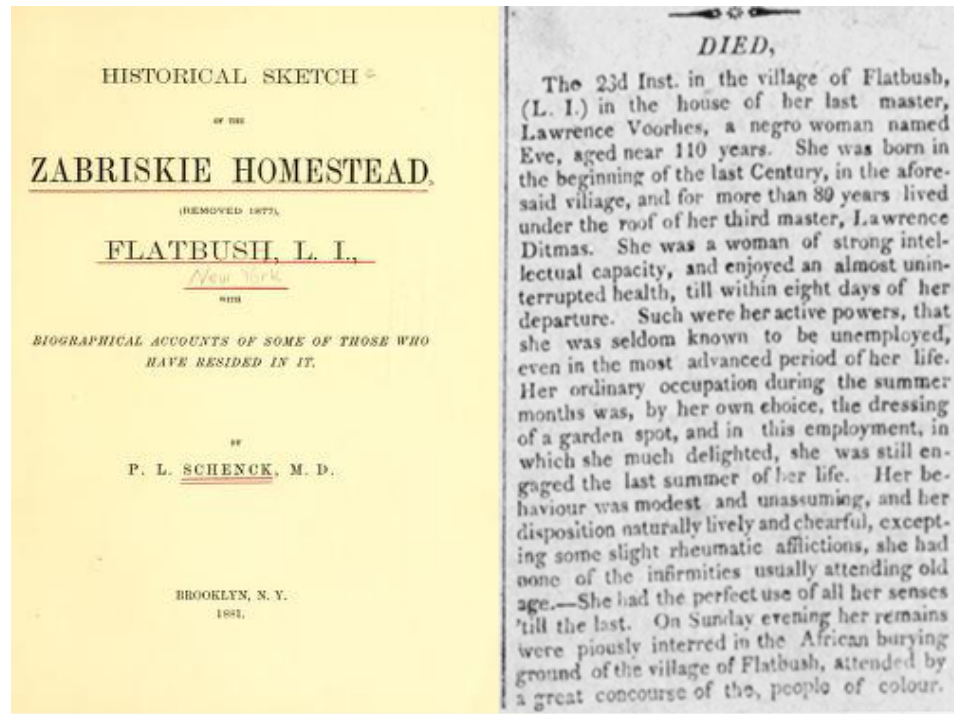
1855 map of The Flatbush African Burial Ground and map of the area today

There is evidence to support that the burial ground may have been larger

I wanted to start off by saying that it is difficult to find primary and even secondary sources relating to cemeteries and burials of enslaved Africans as they were frequently excluded from property

records, written histories, and other sources used to identify these locations in New York City and various other cities as these burial locations were often knowingly obliterated, while the graves of individuals of European descent, were relocated and preserved.

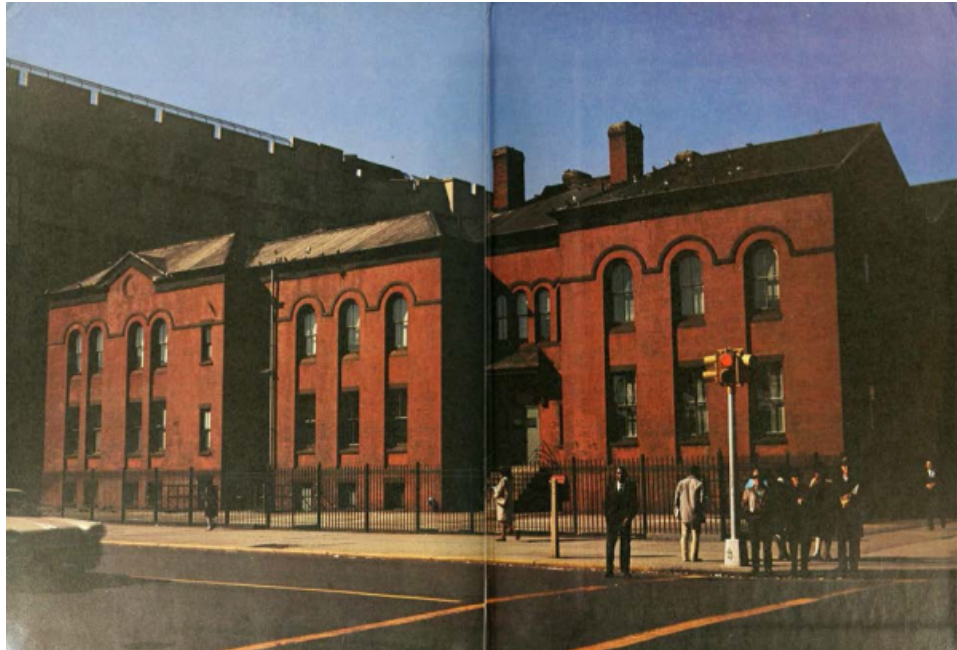
According to research, the African burial ground was in use in the 17th century, but no later than the 1840s. It was recently rediscovered in 2001(1999-98*) as an African burial ground.



There are two written documents identifying the individuals buried there. One is Phyllis Jacobs, enslaved by Jacob Lefferts, who was the twin sister of Sarah, and the other was Eve, who was enslaved by Lawrence Ditmas. Sarah wrote about Phyllis' burial. Her writing can be found in the book *Historical Sketch of The Zabriskie Homestead (Removed 1877), Flatbush, L.I. with Biographical Accounts of Some of Those Who Have Resided In It* by Peter Lawrence Schenck; wherein she details the Native American basket that she buys and fills with flowers and food to bring to her sister's grave.

Whereas, Eve's passing was found within a newspaper obituary, printed by the Long Island Star News on March 29th, 1810. It states

that she lived close to 110 years. She was blessed with good strength and health until 8 days before her departure and she liked to spend her time outside in her garden. These are the only two written accounts that have been discovered specifically referencing the individuals by name who were laid to rest in the African burial ground.



Beth Rivkah Institute

There have been several schools that have resided upon the FABG land. Firstly, the Flatbush Village School, then in 1878 the building for Flatbush school Number 1 was built.

The name was then changed to PS 90 in 1894 then it became the Yeshiva University Boys High School, and finally the Beth Rivkah Institute, which was a Hasidic all girls school. This school building was given New York City Landmark status in 2007, but was then demolished in 2016 because of unsafe building conditions.

On a final note, there are news articles from the 1890s and from 1904 that mention that human remains were found in the area and that it was known that there was an African cemetery there before, but throughout history, very little importance was given to the

cemetery or those who were interred there to the point where it became lost knowledge.

Fortunately, recently, there has been activism to bring awareness to the burial ground again so that we can give those who were buried the proper respect that they deserve.

Present

Government:

New York City Mayor - In October 2020, Mayor Bill De Blasio announced plans for affordable housing

New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development

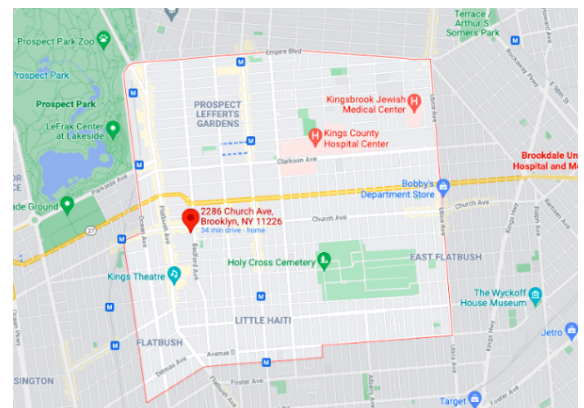
Flatbush African Burial Ground Remembrance and Redevelopment Task Force

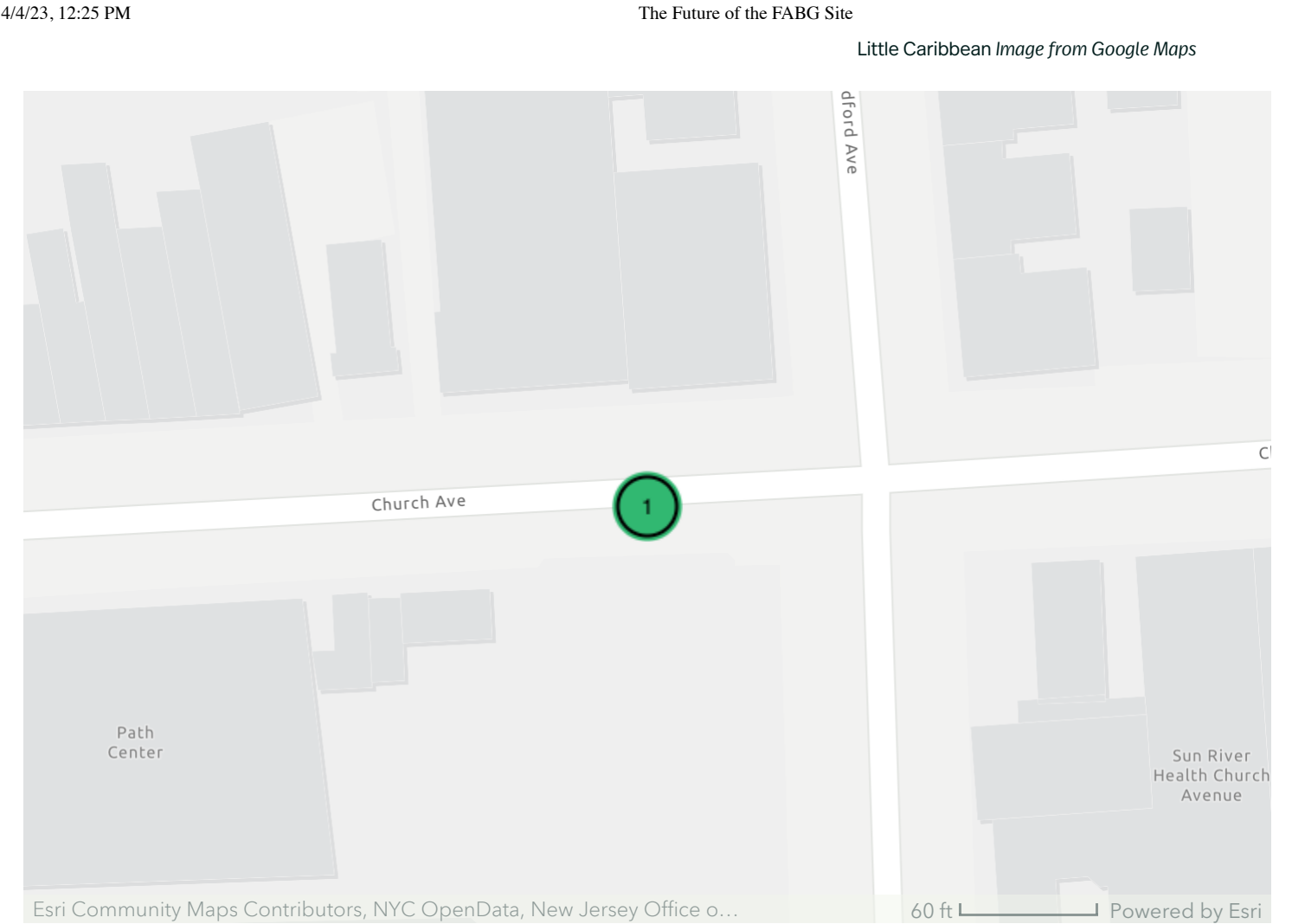
- At the time Brooklyn Borough President now Mayor-elect Eric Adams and City Council Member Mathieu Eugene co-chaired the Task Force and hosted in collaboration with HPD

Community:

Flatbush Avenue Burial Ground Coalition (FABGC)

FABG is located in the 1st ever Little Caribbean





1

FABG - Walking Tour



As a class, we visited FABG and partook in a portion of the guided tour given by community organizers from the FABG Coalition.

For more Information: <https://www.growhousenyc.org/flatbush-african-burial-ground>

The tour starts at 2274 - 2286 Church Avenue - the Flatbush African Burial Ground.

2

2nd Stop



Erasmus School and thinking about the colonial history of Brooklyn.

3

3rd Stop



Went to Public School No 6 and thought about the global context for the time when the site was an active burial ground.

4

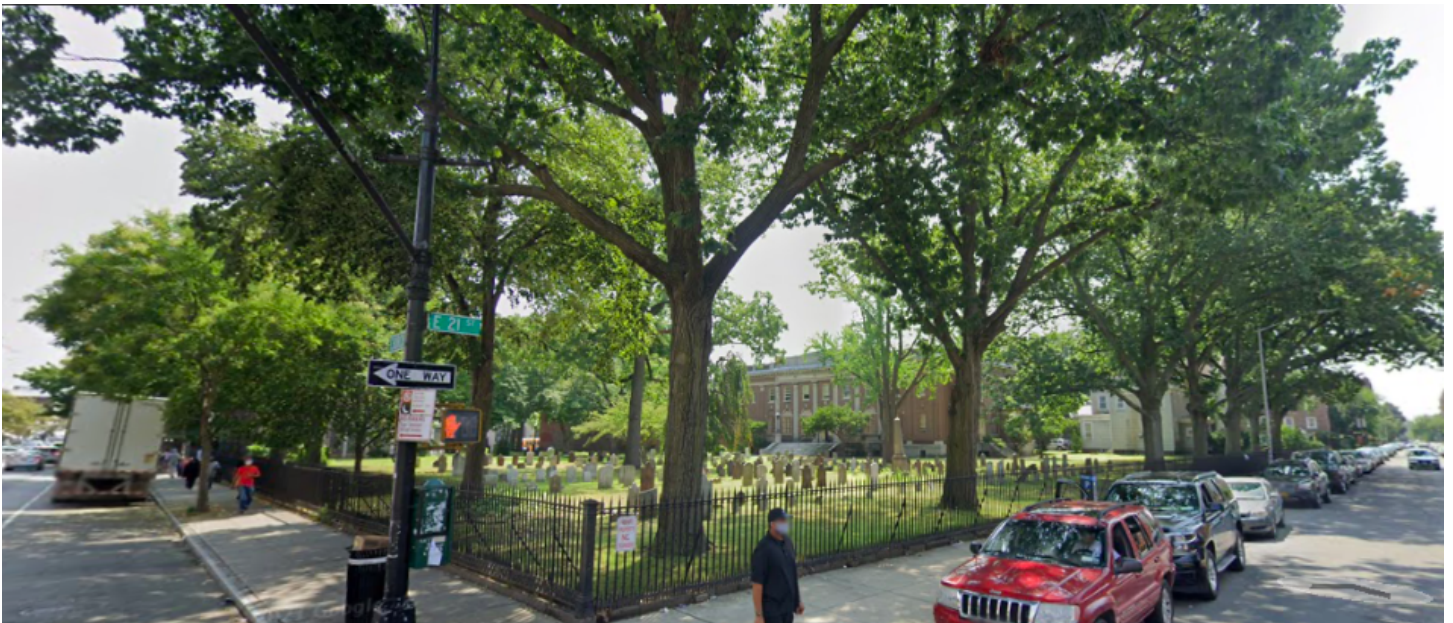
4th Stop



At the back of Erasmus, we discussed the few written records of people buried at FABG.

5

5th Stop



Lastly, we visit the Flatbush Dutch Reformed Church Cemetery and think through what it means to honor sacred ground.

Future

Looking to the future, we need to consider how to memorialize the Flatbush African Burial Ground site. We interviewed **Shanna Sabio**, cofounder of the FABG Coalition and GrowHouseNYC, and **Shelley Worrell**, founder of CaribBEING. Ideas for memorializing the burial ground were discussed

in both interviews and among them we found a common theme-
incorporating the community into the memorial.

- **Shanna** wanted a potential memorial to be interactive and include teaching moments, possibly including AR or VR to take visitors on an “audio journey”. She also wanted the site to stay green for the community. Her vision for the memorial was catering more towards the descendent community.
- **Shelley**, in regards to a potential memorial, wanted the community to be of service to the enslaved buried at the site who were wronged and make sure that their honor and legacies are preserved. Her vision for the memorial was catering more towards the buried enslaved.

Making the memorial clear, keeping it green, and creating a teaching space are **essential**.



Connecting it All

A way forward: towards a humane and just society

Means understanding why and how cultural institutions such as; Museums, Academia, and Memorials have functioned to construct, commodify and fetishize blackness and indigeneity both in life and in death.

As Vine Deloria states in their article titled “Anthropologists and Other Friends”: Being an anthropologist means “you either publish or perish”. More often than not you either produce the knowledge that authorizes exploitation and reaffirms hegemony or you die. And as Kwame Anthony Appiah highlights in their piece titled “Whose Culture is it Anyway”, archeologists and colonists have continuously used the loot they've obtained from the global south to finance their expeditions and livelihoods. All of this is to say that colonialism was and is a highly lucrative enterprise backed by force that has

produced the resources necessary for all of its beneficiaries (including the aforementioned institutions) to survive, thrive and flourish, to essentially reproduce themselves. The violent enclosure of the land that followed the end of feudalism in Europe, the manufactured scarcity and privatization of resources needed to sustain human life that this violent enclosure necessitated, alongside the cultural revolution known as the enlightenment that naturalized this violence, all served as incentives for participation in the colonial project.

Dr. Blakey's articles, "Archeology under the Blinding Eye of Race" and "Understanding Racism in Physical (Biological) Anthropology", help to illustrate how the enlightenment and the knowledge it produced provided a rational justification for the subjugation of the earth and everything it produces including the vast majority of its inhabitants. The same metaphysical arguments that we see come out of religion (namely Christianity) that provided supernatural justification for the hitherto expansion and preservation of empire, were rebranded and posited as natural, abstract first principles that could be uncovered and reproduced through "scientific inquiry". This epistemological approach which has gone on to inform every subsequent western scientific discipline precipitated by colonialism and the enlightenment(most notably anthropology) has also served as the foundation and guiding light for the exhibitionary complex as it continues to construct and represent blackness and indigeneity as preordained, intrinsic values that can be righteously exploited because they are paradoxical valueless. It isn't violent theft or exploitation if the value you are extracting is deemed valueless by an authoritative "scientific" stamp of approval.

Building a more humane world means understanding the role that the presence or absence of a memorial has played in sanitizing and legitimizing colonialism by systematizing the dehumanization and

commodification of black and indigenous people of color

What is said and what isn't said by the presence or absence of a memorial serves as an example of the hegemonic discourse needed to produce and reproduce the racialized other as a subhuman commodity that is eternally condemned to exploitation , servitude and premature death

This discourse of affirmation and negation that we saw materialize during the walking tour of the Flatbush African Burial Ground through the contrast between the cemetery dedicated to actual human beings that is right down the block from the perpetually denigrated burial ground reserved for those relegated to the category of subhuman, is of paramount importance when it comes to naturalizing and rationalizing the de facto segregation and routine dispossession that governs this society. it is part of the tautological repetitive process whereby we find value in and of it self and it is necessary to naturalize something that is idealistic and clearly unnatural



Photo by Corazón Valiente, courtesy of FABGC

It also means developing alternative institutions like the Flatbush African Burial Ground

The Flatbush African burial ground and the FABGC's commitment to its preservation as a community land trust epitomizes

some of the first steps towards rehumanization through the reclamation of a community's history and legacy. This is due to the fact that being able to publicly and collectively subsist off of the land is a profoundly human endeavor because without this ability, human life can not survive in the natural world or flourish in the social. the two are deeply intertwined as they share a dialectic relationship (the natural ability to subsist from the land determines and effects our ability to prosper and reproduce socially and our

social prosperity has material consequences for the natural world) which means that one can never fully become human or we can never fully self actualize without access to our legacies, without the ability to be collective stewards of the land or without economic democracy. the initial act of dehumanization was an economic endeavor, colonialism is an economic endeavor neither of which have supernatural origins of good vs evil souls, they cannot be rectified by entertaining such superstitious thinking nor are they solely matters of the mind, will or desire because without the ability to nurture the mind in its dependency on material resources it cannot will or desire anything; it ceases to exist. this means that these injustices cannot be undone without shifts that occur on a material basis which include taking back the legacies and histories that have been stolen from us. The way that The FABGC is going about teaching these histories is just as democratic and antithetical to hegemonic museum practices(and the society they reflect) as the notion of collective ownership and economic democracy. A move away from the didactic and dictatorial way of manufacturing consent for violence with the public toward an interactive dialectical learning process is yet another step towards building a more humane world

Important Sources

<https://www.brownstoner.com/development/flatbush-african-burial-ground-memorial-affordable-housing-city-council-eugene-support/>

FABG Coalition: <https://www.growhousenyc.org/flatbush-african-burial-ground>

FABG Taskforce: <https://fabgtaskforce.nyc>

Little Caribbean: <https://www.littlecaribbean.nyc/about>

Sabio, Shanna; Emily Beregovich/Trevor Jones; Zoom, 11 November, 2021.

Worrell, Shelley; Iqura Naheed/Angela Argüello; Zoom, 18 November, 2021.

Archeological study: http://s-media.nyc.gov/agencies/lpc/arch_reports/1914.pdf

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Shanna Sabio

Thank you for your willingness to take the time to interview with us and share your ideas as well as walk our class for a guided tour!

Shelley Worrell

Thank you for your willingness to take the time to interview with us and share your ideas!