

The dead speak for themselves through appropriate and equal representation within the sciences of bioarchaeology, archaeology, anthropology, historic preservation and many other related disciplines. Lack of appropriate cultural property stewardship and barriers to equity in historic preservation often leads to irretrievable loss of important bioarchaeological and archaeological resources for African American communities. Archaeological erasure due to lack of parity in historic preservation leads to skewed scientific data regarding populations of early trafficked Africans and African Americans, not to mention the loss of irreplaceable genealogical resources for the African diasporic communities in the United States. The dead primarily speak for themselves through their own deposition and existence in archaeological strata, therefore the living must ensure that archaeology and historic preservation is conducted with respect to the interred as well as advocate for the preservation of important bioarchaeological/archaeological information that the interred preserve in perpetuity for their respective Descendant Communities. The living defenders must include the primary Descendant Community, the Afrodescendant Community, and their approved allies and specialists. In most cases, early trafficked/enslaved African populations were not permitted or had the luxury of maintaining family archives tracing their arrival from other continents. African/African American burial grounds and cemeteries and their carefully preserved and stewarded archaeological strata are a repository of information that cannot be destroyed at the peril of the public health of current African/African American populations. This important resource is under constant predation in the United States and, hence, the subject of this complaint. This is a victims' rights issue historically and in the modern era.

Actions or inactions, as the case may be, have caused irreparable harm to African American burial grounds and cemeteries in Maryland, their descendants, and caused loss of African American cultural resources, both archaeological and bioarchaeological, as well as to the overall integrity of an important historic site that has not yet been professionally and methodically evaluated but exists within the realm of inclusion on the National Historic Registry. This harm is obvious in that the archaeological settings and significance of these burial grounds have been directly destroyed, systemically preyed upon and consistently denuded of integrity while remaining under threat of archaeological erasure.

While it may seem upon first inspection unclear to the public why the state has given corporations special treatment over the Cemeteries, upon further review of the problem the reason for the current endangered status of the Cemeteries is complex and, consequently, can only sufficiently be studied through extensive research as it is the topic of many scholarly publications addressing structural and systemic racism, an unfortunate outcome of our imperfect history and ongoing topic of discussions related to our developing national identity. However, it is clear that the Cemeteries and its occupants were left to the mercy of corporations, aided by the action or inaction of local, state and federal governing authorities, resulting in an absence of discrimination in regard to the Cemeteries and with clear intent to continue construction regardless of the consequences to the occupants, the Descendant Community, their allies, and the greater public health and moral welfare.

Many old cemeteries are in danger of being destroyed by encroaching economic development projects; however, it is more common that African American cemeteries are removed and erased from history and their communities.^[1] The removal of African American cemeteries and burial grounds has become such a problem that new legislation has been introduced to protect these cemeteries and burial grounds.^[2]

The African American Burial Grounds Network Act, also known as HR 1179, was created by Rep. Alma S. Adams (D-NC) and Rep. A. Donald McEachin (D-VA) to preserve and protect African American cemeteries and burial grounds and African American history.^[3] ^[4]

It should be unnecessary to state that equal rights apply not only to living African Americans, but also in terms of treatment of the burials of their ancestors. The approach of respect is a true embrace of a more perfect union and should be the minimum for compliance. If any government should so choose to consider the ancestral bioarchaeological resources of any population irrelevant or disposable, then we should consider how the living descendants are being treated by that same government. This essential disrespect is the basis for the persistence of the cultural property crime of African and African American burial ground and cemetery desecration in the United States in conjunction with the perpetual state of historically trafficked victims within an archaeological matrix of monetization.^[5] The monetization of the historically trafficked individual even in perpetuity, through the malicious use of zoning, and through suspension within a societal matrix of inequity in historic preservation schema, in tandem with suspect contract/compliance-based archaeological and historic preservation practices parading under the guise of ‘compliance’ or other such constructs of an historically divided nation can not be tolerated by a civilized society or be it to their internal and infernal detriment.

Under no circumstance should the bioarchaeological resources of any race be subjected to perpetual trafficking and an unending state of enslavement. These interred people should be afforded the same equality in archaeological representation as any other race. Any disparities will be reflected in the fabric of our very nation and the current disparities in the treatment of living descendants. This is the lesson of the importance of ancestors in the community of the living and why we must learn to pay attention to the treatment of the dead, entrusting their care to the appropriate Descendant Community, their approved specialists and allies, and not to the exploitation of the descendants of their traffickers. They deserve this justice. We deserve this chance to heal as a nation.

Zoning, along with quit claim deeds and predatory lending, has been used historically against living African Americans to deprive them of real property and land use privileges, therefore, it is not surprising that use of zoning still occurs in a manner that would deprive African Americans of important bioarchaeological resources and cultural properties such as historic cemeteries. In essence, zoning is used to ‘redline’ historic African/African American burial grounds/cemeteries and as a mechanism of predation upon historic African American burial grounds and cemeteries. This mechanism of hatred is amplified and becomes perpetually harmful to African American public health when African/African American burial grounds/cemeteries have been impacted by past racist use of zoning to leverage their communities out of properties to perpetuate gentrification, thereby perpetuating the brutal actions committed by historic traffickers against the historic victims of trafficking and causing a brutal forced separation of the survivor diasporic community from ancestral burial grounds. Many African American burial grounds and cemeteries have been subjected to absolute erasure above ground, such as the case with Macedonia Baptist Moses Cemetery in Bethesda, Maryland and the long erased African American community once present on River road.^[6] Historically, there is a strong coincidence of displacement of living African American communities and subsequent forced dissociation of an African American Descendant Community from their ancestral burial grounds. In the absence of the appropriate stewardship of their Descendant Community, the African/African American burial ground/cemetery then exists as an open target for exploitative zoning violations and continual ‘erosion’ due to predation of corporate developers and other

entities with no interest in the proper stewardship of the bioarchaeological resources of the displaced African American descendant community other than to egregiously ‘flip’ the property, summarily dispose of any bioarchaeological/archaeological strata, and finalize the erasure with a parking lot or other structure, a rather dysfunctional and insipid *iad uroboros* symbolizing the final solution as the erasure and absolute definitive extraction of the monetary ‘investment’ of the historic trafficker, the extraction of every last profit from the exploitation of a trafficked people as ‘agricultural product’ and a final injustice of erasure from the very archaeological record of the trafficked Africans who continue to be monetized as property even in their sacred graves.

In many cases, a feature of the archaeological stratigraphic composition of a desecrated African/African American burial ground/cemetery is a ‘*stratigraphy of hatred*’ evident in so-called ‘fill dirt’ or ‘trash’ stratigraphy, i.e. the bulldozed architectural remnants and cultural material of an historically displaced African American community, in many cases summarily destroyed after redlining, bulldozed and then deposited upon an ancestral African/African American burial ground or cemetery earlier in the 20th century, paved over, and then sealed off for future exploitation by predatory developers who will simply state that the strata consists simply of trash and backfill soils and therefore not worthy of proper archaeological mitigation and Descendant Community involvement. ^[7]

These graves were bought and sold as chattel with the land, a possibly modern criminal activity and an opportunity for the morally reprehensible reiteration and perpetuation of an insipid bureaucratic insistence that the historically interred population would remain enslaved within the historic criminal scheme, remaining firmly in the modern era within the sphere of influence and clutches of the historic trans-national human trafficker. In the end, the burials of these survivors, slated through zoning to be redlined, and dissociated from the whole of the Cemeteries and the burial grounds, laundered through absolute final archaeological erasure, rendered inaccessible as a bioarchaeological resource for their descendant communities, and extracted for the last monetary ‘value’ of the primary criminal investment of that historic trans-national trafficker of humans whose criminal brutality reaches almost from beyond the grave through an infernal machine of bureaucracy that has no time for the preservation of the burials of historically trafficked souls, only working to promote the final ‘extraction’ of value, an earthly extension of a hateful and criminal United States history. All of this so, that, in the end, the real property could be laundered of the burials of the interred population and ‘flipped’ to extort the final proceeds of historic trans-national human trafficking, a wretched grasping at the last illicit gain, the payout of a long arc of criminal activity that spans the entire timeline of our national history, a cold extraction of any value from the burials of these individuals, survivors of trans-national human trafficking, with little regard for their descendants. No, they would not be spared from the clutches of their traffickers even in their eternal resting places. This is a victims’ rights issue historically and in the present era.

In other words: no justice, no peace.

Please consider the amendments suggested by the Bethesda African Cemetery Coalition and listen to their African American leadership. Much can be learned and we can conduct ourselves with more diplomacy as regards establishing that African Americans should have primary authority over Black history in Maryland.

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Tammy Hilburn written testimony hb1099 support with amendments

[1] “Gentrification is erasing black cemeteries and, with it, black history” by Christopher Petrella, The Guardian, April 29, 2019,

https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/apr/27/gentrification-is-erasing-black-cemeteries-and-with-it-black-history?CMP=share_btn_fb&fbclid=IwAR3MpQ3gVHK0h1BuGPhZ81qkcFD3nyu6OtzYqEcjYCS2PDIGCOq618V-tk

[2] “New Legislation Seeks To Protect Lost African-American Burial Grounds”, by David Anderson, Forbes, Feb 13, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidanderson/2019/02/13/new-legislation-seeks-to-protect-lost-african-american-burial-grounds/?fbclid=IwAR1ZFLlfhyBgFE57zELkkh8iGqTwxFFs7R8BwlMGaQvBs11RpAWeEqhKAfw#362306685dd8>

[3] “Lawmakers Introduce African-American Burial Grounds Network Act”, By George Kevin Jordan, The Afro, March 9, 2019, <https://www.afro.com/lawmakers-introduce-african-american-burial-grounds-network-act/?fbclid=IwAR3kAbSfnJZRjFyJQVeF4YjqMlme7PORb8AEfy20...>

[4] The African American Burial Grounds Network Act, HR 1179, https://mceachin.house.gov/sites/mceachin.house.gov/files/documents/2019-02-11%20Adams_McEachin%20African%20American%20Burial%20Ground%20Network%20Act_0.pdf

[5] [Black Gold White Coma TRHilburn 10-2020.pdf](#)

[6] [Ottery Draft Report Historical Cemetery Assessment of Parcel ...](#)

[7] [The Grim History Hidden Under a Baltimore Parking Lot - Atlas ...](#)