

Testimony of Dr. Jill M. Humphries
2186 Fifth Avenue, Apt. 2D
New York, NY 10037
Protecting Harlem's Heritage Public Hearing:
African Burial Ground
March 19, 2010

Senators William Perkins and Jose Serrano, Council member Melissa Mark-Viverito, and Manhattan Borough President, Scott M. Stringer, representatives from the New York City Department of Transportation, (DOT), and Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), the New York State Historic Preservation and Harlem residents. Thank you for convening this public hearing on Protecting Harlem's Heritage of the African Burial Ground. I come before you today as a Harlem resident but more importantly as a faculty member in the City University of New York's higher education system. My profession and academic training as a public administrator has taught me the importance of the role of government in ensuring and protecting the public trust. It is this special role and relationship between federal, state, and city agencies with the wider public that is crucial to maintaining public trust and establishing a vibrant democracy.

The Department of Transportation and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority have an exceptional opportunity to demonstrate their commitment and fiduciary responsibility to serve their constituents and the greater good of society by recognizing, preserving, and protecting the Harlem African Burial Ground. As an educator, I would like to address the importance and significance of the Harlem African Burial Ground in United States social history and transatlantic settlements; and as a potential successful model of government-public partnerships that ensure the preservation of our nation's history.

As an educator, I am tasked with the responsibility of teaching both young and older adults about the social history of the United States as being part of a wider global history of the transmigration of people and communities into the reconfiguration of new identities, societies, and nationhood. Whether we know it as Mannahatta, New Amsterdam or New York City, this region has been pivotal to the socio, cultural, political and economic development of not only to the Americas but to the transatlantic world—of which African descendant people have contributed and played a substantial role in this process.

By recognizing, preserving, and protecting the Harlem African Burial Ground, the Department of Transportation and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority in collaboration with the Harlem African Burial Ground Task Force continues New York City's tradition as a world leader in cultural historical sites. To accomplish this tremendous feat requires the Department of Transportation and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority to uphold our fundamental democratic principles by having an open, transparent and inclusive decision-making process regarding the development of the Harlem African Burial Ground.

In conclusion, thank you for providing this opportunity for the wider community to express their feelings, thoughts, and suggestions about how we can make the Harlem African Burial Ground an historic preservation site.

Respectfully Yours,
Jill M. Humphries, PhD