



DESIGN TRUST
FOR PUBLIC SPACE

For Immediate Release:

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Van Cortlandt Park to Reimagine Enslaved African Burial Ground

Public programming in Summer 2025 and a Fall Design Ideas Competition will honor the past, present, and future through a permanent memorial

The Bronx, NY (March 31st, 2025) – The Van Cortlandt Park Alliance (VCPA) today announced a groundbreaking partnership with the Design Trust for Public Space to reimagine the Enslaved African Burial Ground at Van Cortlandt Park. The initiative, **"Reimagining the Enslaved African Burial Ground at Van Cortlandt Park,"** will engage the community in shaping a memorial space dedicated to long-term healing, remembrance, and cultural reflection.

The Enslaved People Project at Van Cortlandt Park uncovered [historical evidence](#) suggesting that enslaved individuals were likely interred along the eastern edge of the Kingsbridge Burial Ground. This site is believed to be the final resting place of the enslaved Africans and Indigenous peoples who lived, worked, and died on the Van Cortlandt family plantation, which relied on their labor for over a century.

While NYC Parks officially recognized the Enslaved African Burial Ground in 2021 with signage and fencing, the space remains largely unmarked. Community advocates have long called for greater recognition and meaningful commemoration of the site's complex history.

"This project represents Van Cortlandt Park Alliance's commitment to listening deeply to community voices and preserving histories that have been overlooked for generations," said **Stephanie Ehrlich, Executive Director of the Van Cortlandt Park Alliance.**

"When we honor those who shaped this land through their labor and lives, we make Van Cortlandt Park truly inclusive and welcoming for all New Yorkers. This memorial will

stand as testament to our shared belief that everyone's story matters in the ongoing narrative of our beloved park."

Through a dynamic series of public programs in Summer 2025 and a design competition in the fall, the **Reimagining the Enslaved African Burial Ground at Van Cortlandt Park** project will transform the site into a place of remembrance, reflection, education, and cultural engagement—honoring those who shaped the park while fostering collective healing.

"African burial grounds, cemeteries, and sites of memory have rightfully gained greater public awareness," said **Matthew Clarke, Executive Director of the Design Trust for Public Space**. "Community-driven memorials and programming can serve as powerful tools for healing and resilience. Every community deserves public spaces that reflect, honor, and tell the truth of our shared history."

In 2024, Van Cortlandt Park Alliance received a \$310,000 two-year grant from the Mellon Foundation to develop a design plan. The Design Trust for Public Space was selected as the project partner, responsible for community engagement and project management.

From May to September 2025, VCPA and the Design Trust in partnership with [Liminal sp](#) will host a festival season of inclusive cultural, historical, and social programming for the Bronx, culminating in a citywide panel discussion on African Burial Grounds across New York. In Fall 2025, the partners will launch a **Design Ideas Competition** to generate conceptual visions for the site, build public excitement, and propel the project toward a permanent memorial. The project will be guided by a [Legacy Council](#) of Bronx organizations, thought leaders, and artists.

"African Burial grounds were one of the few places that enslaved African-Americans and Indigenous communities were allowed to freely gather and revive suppressed cultural practices native to their homeland," said **Immanuel Oni, Co-Director and Co-Founder of Liminal sp**. "We look forward to reviving ancestral narratives to engage community members in shaping and reimagining possible futures for Van Cortlandt burial ground and beyond."

"Our city's public spaces play a critical role in amplifying important and overlooked stories of our past, and this community-led initiative will educate and engage the public while inspiring reflection on those buried at the Enslaved African Burial Ground," said **NYC Parks Commissioner Sue Donoghue**. "Providing community members with a

role in the process will ensure that plans for this space are crafted in a meaningful and respectful way that allows future generations to connect with its legacy."

"This initiative is a profound and necessary step toward honoring the history of the enslaved Africans and Indigenous peoples whose lives and labor shaped Van Cortlandt Park," said **Bronx Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz**. "Engaging the community in reimagining this sacred site ensures that their stories are acknowledged and serve as a foundation for education, remembrance, and healing. I commend the Van Cortlandt Park Alliance and the Design Trust for Public Space for their dedication to preserving this history and fostering a more inclusive future for all Bronxites."

"This groundbreaking partnership with the Van Cortlandt Park Alliance and the Design Trust for Public Space marks a crucial step in honoring the legacy of the enslaved Africans and Indigenous peoples who lived and worked on the Van Cortlandt family plantation," said **Bronx Borough President Vanessa L. Gibson**. "As we reimagine the Enslaved African Burial Ground, we are not only acknowledging the painful history that has long been overlooked but also creating a space for long-term healing, remembrance, and cultural reflection. This initiative will empower the community to shape a memorial that reflects the dignity and resilience of those who were once forgotten. It's a testament to our collective commitment to ensuring that their stories are told, their lives remembered, and their contributions to our shared history never erased."

"The Burial Ground is first a sacred space for people of African descent before it is anything else," said **Alice Michelle Augustine, Legacy Council Member and Founding Director of Campus Honors and Scholar Engagement at Lehman College**. "The space should be open and accessible to all people of African Descent as a place of rest for their loved ones, where they can visit and put flowers or other spiritual artifacts in honor of those who lie there and where those who are buried can continue to rest in peace with the love of their descendants."

Learn more about the project and legacy council [here](#).

About Van Cortlandt Park Alliance

[Van Cortlandt Park Alliance](#) is a non-profit organization that preserves, supports, and promotes the recreation, ecology, cultural arts, and history of Van Cortlandt Park. In partnership with NYC Parks, Van Cortlandt Park Alliance spearheads educational programming, cultural events, advocacy, and restoration projects.

About the Design Trust for Public Space

The [Design Trust for Public Space](#) is a non-profit organization that unlocks the potential of New York's public spaces. Our unique model catalyzes design ideas into action for a

more just and equitable city. Founded in 1995 by Andrea Woodner on the tenet that New York City's cultural and democratic life depends on viable public space, today, the Design Trust is a nationally recognized incubator and thought leader that transforms New York City's shared civic spaces—streets, plazas, parks, public buildings, transportation, and housing developments—to create a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable city.

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