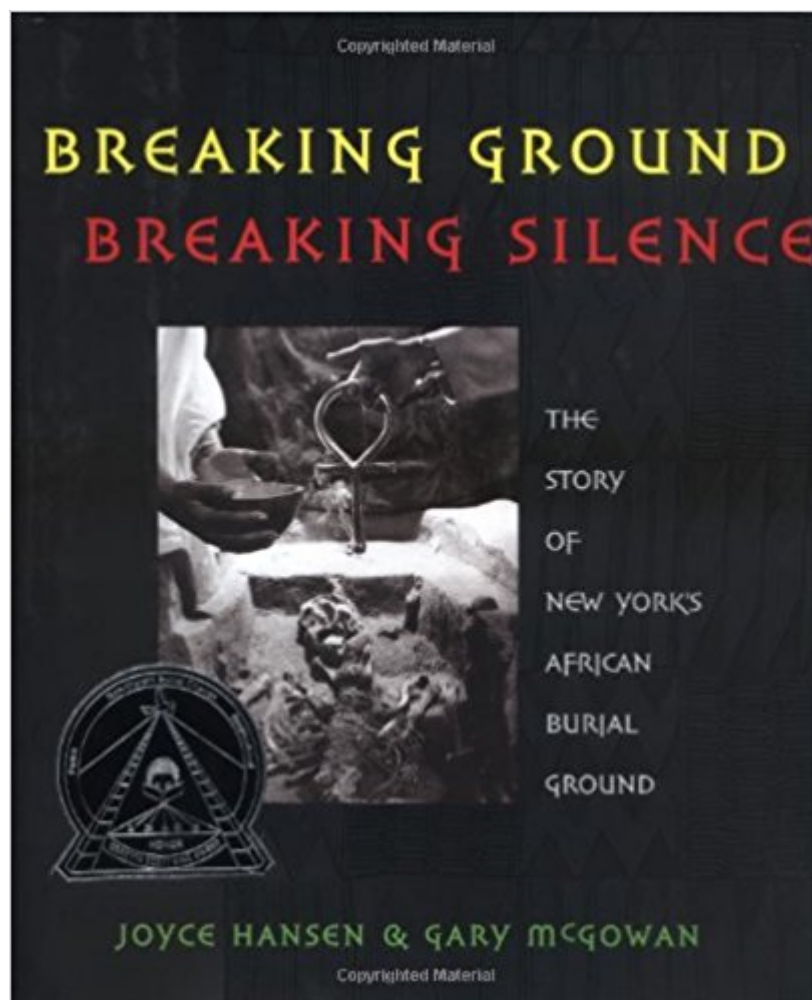




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# Breaking Ground, Breaking Silence: The Story Of New York's African Burial Ground (Coretta Scott King Author Honor Books)



## Synopsis

How can we learn about the lives of African slaves in Colonial America? Often forbidden to read or write, they left few written records. But in 1991 scientists rediscovered New York's long-ignored African Burial Ground, which opened an exciting new window into the past. A woman with filed teeth buried with a girdle of beads; a black soldier buried with his British Navy uniform, his face pointing east; a mother and child, laid to rest side by side: to scientists, each of these burials has much to tell us about African slaves in America. *Breaking Ground, Breaking Silence* shows how archaeologists and anthropologists have learned to read life stories in shattered bones, tiny beads, and the faint traces left by coffin lids in ancient soil. At the same time, by blending together the insights found buried in the soil and the results of historians' careful studies, it gives us a moving, inspiring portrait of the lives Africans created in Colonial New York.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Grade 5 Up  
The painstaking care with which archaeologists unearthed graves from a rediscovered cemetery in 1991 is reflected in the detailed research that frames this account of the African Burial Ground that has become a National Historic Landmark in New York City. Men, women, and children of African descent, both enslaved and free, have been a part of the city's history since the arrival of the Dutch in 1623. Drawing on a variety of scholarly resources and primary-source documents, Hansen and McGowan relate what is known about the experiences of the earliest members of the

black community in Manhattan. Through black-and-white photographs of uncovered artifacts and reproductions of archival records and maps, a fascinating picture emerges. As the narrative states, analysis of skeletal remains have shown the signs of trauma caused by lives of hard labor, and in some cases perhaps, the effects of punishment for resisting slavery. An excellent portrayal of how archaeology helps to re-create and affirm the past. A Janet Woodward, Garfield High School, Seattle, WA Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Gr. 8<sup>+</sup>-12. The monumental 1991 discovery of the mid-eighteenth-century African Burial Ground under the streets of Manhattan has uncovered the skeletal remains and artifacts of more than 400 graves as well as the history of the enslaved people whose voices had been lost. McGowan is head conservator of the team studying the burial ground; Hansen is a Coretta Scott King Award winner. They weave together the main strands of the inquiry. First, there is the painstaking analysis of the archaeologists, who can tell us much about the daily lives of the people buried there and also how the burials reflect African memories and culture. Then there is the physical anthropologists' analysis of how the buried bones reveal the causes of death and the harsh ways of life of the enslaved people. Finally, there is the work of the historians, who are piecing together how black New Yorkers lived and labored. The facts are riveting, and the book design is handsome, with lots of small black-and-white photographs, but the book is not easy reading. The narrative is disjointed, heavy, and repetitive, maybe because there are so many jumps from one kind of inquiry to the next and back again. Still, the technology will excite students as much as the history that breaks the silence. Hazel Rochman

This book exposed a lot about slavery in New York that I had no knowledge of. this period of slavery needs more exposure to show northern slavery was as bad as the south. Neither section of the country has anything to feel superior about. I was disappointed not to read more about the struggle to preserve this heritage and the struggle to allow African-americans the right to make decisions about their ancestors!

I am so interested in what they are discovering in the African Burial Ground in New York City. This book does a good job explaining how long the cemetery was in use, why it was located in that area, and the different eras of burials. It also gives very brief information about the excavation process. This book is a good first volume; I hope there is a much larger body of information to be published regarding ongoing excavations and forensic discoveries. I recently read "Written in Bone" about the

Jamestown excavations (WRITTEN IN BONE) Buried Lives of Jamestown and Colonial Maryland by Walker, Sally M. (Author) Hardcover on 01-Feb-2009; compared to that book, this book ventures too often into an unscientific tone, offering opinionated pronouncements and outrage instead of conclusions. For example, (About "ground truth") "When a people and their culture have been written about and distorted by those who oppress them, ... it is as though people who have been written out of history have found a way to tell us about themselves through the objects buried with them" p. 9-10. -- Isn't learning new things about old cultures the entire POINT of archaeology, regardless of how people were treated?" "This statement, though reflecting the ignorance and prejudice of the writer, ..." p. 37 -- referring to a non-controversial description. Negroes WERE a proscribed and detested race, and the first generation slaves DID retain their native superstitions and burial customs, as the information about the beads discovered in Burial 340 seems to confirm. "Then, as now, children cannot prosper and grow when the adults who care for them are not thriving." p. 76 -- really? Human history does not bear this out. Hopefully, further forensic work will be published to round out some of the "probables" and "possibles" in this book. It would be good to have high-quality archaeological work done about this important and interesting historical site. This book is a good first step. Your 5th grader can manage the vocabulary and technical details -- there are good sidebars of information detailing the processes of exhuming and examining the burials.

Breaking Ground, Breaking Silence was perhaps not one of the most interesting books I have ever read, but it is definitely one of the most haunting. When the book first starts out, the reader has no idea that what is beneath centuries of asphalt are people long ago and long forgotten. The most wonderful thing about the book was the way researchers were able to construct the lives of those found. I thought going back in the past and intricately constructing their journeys and lives was incredible. I also enjoyed, for lack of a better word, the photographs. Perhaps the most haunting was the one of mother and child. I felt sorrow and pity for those who had to endure such hardships, but who willed something better for themselves and those who followed. Their lives should be recorded and the place where they were buried should be sacred. I don't know how many students will enjoy this as pleasure reading, unless they enjoy finding artifacts, but I am positive no media center should be without this resource. Kids should have at least exposure with this book to know it is out there. It would be a fantastic reference and addition to any collection. These lives should be celebrated and honored. They, I feel, deserve at least that as a payment for a price so dearly paid by many ancestors.

This book wonderfully encompasses a vast wealth of knowledge. Archaeology, history, current events, and modern day issues are just a few things. This book is extremely well written from the introduction, to the archeological dig, to an epilogue that summarized the issues behind the dig. I found it very informative about the history of African Americans during colonial times. I also thought that it was informative on the procedures followed for archeological digs. I really got a feel for the climate, attitudes, and living of African Americans during their first years in America. I would definitely use this book in a classroom study of the early Americans. It presents an alternate view than the pioneering white male view commonly seen during these times. The many pictures are graphic, well-taken and very interesting.

Don't let the fact that this is a kids book keep you from reading it. It's a well-written history of lower Manhattan that goes beyond facts and dates and connects the people of today with the people of 300 years ago so well that they seem like they could live in your neighborhood. Yet, it doesn't just portray the people, but also the politics and the society in a very understandable way. The farther we get from the days of slavery, the harder it is for us to understand. How could people own people and people submit to being owned? What was life like for slaves and owners? How did racial discrimination start? This book helps us understand. Very well done!

Great book! Yes, archaeology in NYC! Although this book is listed as a young readers book, I found it a fascinating read for adults interested in this subject area of archaeology and black history. I have never found such a great book that combines both the history of a people that few books are written on with a modern day archaeological dig. Great resource for teachers, black history month and just for those of us out there who are fascinated with archaeology.

This was a great book. If you have not ordered it yet, Order it! When I started reading this book I was not interested in archaeology. It is still not my favorite thing. It was a fascinating story. That's why I liked it. It taught me stuff about the revolutionary war and slavery. READ IT!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

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