**Supplemental Text 1**

**Ethical and Theoretical Framing of the Anson Street African Burial Ground Project**

The passing of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act in 1990 established the ethical guidelines and responsibilities for work with Indigenous descendant communities, particularly those whose histories have been stolen and misappropriated. This federal law acknowledged that human remains and artifacts belong to descendants and that remains should be treated with “dignity and respect” (Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act 1990). However, the legislation determined that Native American descendants had to be recognized by the federal government as having documented, lineal descent, which can be difficult to establish (McDavid 2020).

Currently, there is no federal law for the protection of human remains of African descent. However, the ‘United States African American Burial Grounds Preservation Program’ was passed in December 2022 and will eventually provide federal assistance to preserve and maintain African American burial sites (Coalition for American Heritage, 2022; Jones, 2021). This legislation follows a growing movement to document and protect African American burial sites in the United States, as exemplified by the African American Burial Ground & Remembering Project in Florida (<https://aae.lib.usf.edu/aabgp/>).

As described in the paper, in an effort to apply relational ethics to this project (as described in (Zuckerman et al. 2014) we ensured that we listened to community concerns as representatives of the Ancestors, obtained consent, and we provided benefits for the community on multiple levels. We felt that this was especially important considering the documented racial disparities in Charleston County. In 2017, College of Charleston’s Race and Social Justice Initiative presented the city with an impactful report entitled, “*The State of Racial Disparities in Charleston County, South Carolina 2000-2015*.” The report showed that much work is necessary to address racial inequities related to education, employment, policing and housing in the county (Patton 2017). It showed that the percentage of African Americans unemployed in Charleston is double that of their white counterparts (Patton 2017). There are also greater levels of poverty amongst the Black population, with 56% having low or no access to healthy food. In addition, during the 2014-15 academic year, suspensions for K-12 students in Charleston County School District totaled 8018. A total of 6636 of these individuals were Black students (83% of suspensions), with African Americans making up 40% of the student population (Patton 2017).

Since the publication of this report, in additional to the racial awakening that has occurred in response to acts of structural and physical violence in the city and nation, other organizations have been working to address these disparities. For example, the College of Charleston joined the consortium of Universities Studying Slavery and has been focusing on uncovering its institutional history related to enslavement. As a result, the Center for the Study of Slavery in Charleston was created in 2018 and the Committee for Commemoration and Landscapes was established in 2021 (Lutz 2021; Menchaca 2018).

Opened in 2023, Charleston’s International African American Museum (IAAM) further marks the culmination of 20 years of planning for a dedicated space that will interpret the lives of African Americans. Building this museum in Charleston, the place Ibram X. Kendi [2017] describes as “the belly of the beast,” is critical to our understanding of African descendant lives transformed by the Middle Passage and in confronting the legacies of slavery today. The ASABG project team contributed to its Sacred Spaces exhibit in the Center for Family History.

As a team, Fleskes, Gilmore, Ofuniyin, Oubré and Schurr completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative in Social and Behavioral Sciences and received University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for conducting DNA studies with human participants. This project was also approved by the College of Charleston IRB. During enrollment in DNA research, community participants signed informed consent forms and completed genealogy forms. In addition to receiving IRB approval for our research with human subjects, we recognized our responsibility for transparency as mediators regarding the use of DNA data and comparative datasets, as well as the inherent constraints in our ability to provide cultural identities or precise geographic origins for individuals based on DNA evidence (Abel & Sandoval-Velasco, 2016; Blakey, 2001).

Community-based historical research and bioarchaeology can be powerful, especially when descendant communities who have been oppressed and historically excluded are brought into the process. We, as authors, recognize that the outcome of our efforts to memorialize and honor these 36 people was and is unique – because of who we are and due to our relationships with the Charleston community. Thus, while being passionate about the way that we worked together, we also understand that we could never replicate the sequence of events of the past few years.

Hence, there is no single ‘successful’ approach to community archaeology. The fact that our engagement with the community was led by Ofunniyin, who was both a cultural anthropologist working in the academy and a well-known voice in the local community, meant that community trust was easier to establish from the start. The multidisciplinary approach combined with leadership by a grassroots organization also firmly situated this research and community engagement in Charleston. Nevertheless, we believe that the methods described here can be applied in other contexts, while recognizing that local social and political dynamics may influence research and community outreach efforts.

In 2021, as a direct result of work by the Gullah Society and the ASABG Project, the city passed a burial ground ordinance to protect cemeteries from destruction during development (City of Charleston 2021). This is important given that the Charleston peninsula contains over 60 known African American burial sites, many of which are now built over by subsequent construction during the growth of the city over the past 225 years (Grant Mishoe 2019, personal communication). The memorialization of the Ancestors is thus a symbolic act honoring the lives of many thousands of African Americans who are interred in these spaces and who remain unknown to history.

In this regard, we look forward to the implementation of the ‘United States African American Burial Grounds Preservation Program’ that was passed in December 2022. This act is designed to support federal, state and local-level efforts for legal protections for African human remains, artifacts and historical sites, and the ethical involvement of African American descendant communities in future research and repatriation efforts (Dunnavant et al. 2021).

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