

# The Slave Galleries Restoration Project Case Study: St. Augustine's Episcopal Church and the Lower East Side Tenement Museum

## PREFACE BY ANIMATING DEMOCRACY

The *Slave Galleries Restoration Project* points to the power of history—and particularly the historic site—as a catalyst for exploring contemporary issues. The ethnically diverse neighborhood of the Lower East Side of Manhattan has been created by the shifts and tensions of generations of immigrants living alongside American-born racial minorities. Oppression, domination of others, and efforts toward self-determination have alternated over time, as various groups have been used and exploited by other groups—some gaining a central role in the neighborhood, with others remaining at the margins. Conflicts today on the Lower East Side continue over material resources like housing and schools as well as how groups are represented in the neighborhood's history.

The *Slave Galleries Project* was a collaboration between St. Augustine's Episcopal Church and the Lower East Side Tenement Museum to restore and interpret the two slave galleries located in the church, cramped rooms where African American congregants were segregated during the nineteenth century. The project brought together community preservationists—leaders representing African American, Asian, Latino, Jewish, and other ethnic and religious groups—with scholars and preservationists to help restore and interpret the slave galleries as a catalyst for dialogue within the community. Over a year's time, guided by two dialogue professionals experienced in intergroup relations, community preservationists talked first among themselves about issues of marginalization on the Lower East Side. They explored the meaning and use of the slave galleries, a powerful artifact of the history of segregation, as a space for dialogue for the larger Lower East Side community. Finally, after receiving training in dialogue facilitation, they engaged people within their own communities in dialogue about the slave galleries and current issues they face.



St. Augustine's Church

The *Slave Galleries Project* illuminates issues of ownership of history: Who controls the course and terms of projects like this one that are at once a link to specific histories, but that also have broader civic intent? How do we honor the history of a particular group and retain the focus on that specific group's history, while also drawing upon its relevance to other groups' experiences? The case study explores issues of authority in decision making, as well as control of resource allocation through the multiple relationships in the project—in the partnership between St. Augustine's Church and the Lower East Side Tenement Museum; in the priority of the *Slave Galleries*

*Project* in relation to other Lower East Side community preservation efforts; and in the relationship of the project to external entities like Animating Democracy. Beyond the single

project focus of the slave galleries, the *Slave Galleries Project* is also an excellent example of building and sustaining the community's capacity for civic dialogue through the creation of a cadre of community preservationists skilled in civic dialogue facilitation—community leaders who could imagine and apply their skill and understanding to other sites and issues on the Lower East Side.

Though the slave galleries reflect the past, they exist in the present as well. The project, by telling the story of the slave galleries, demonstrates the flow of history, the impermanence of established functions and meanings of historic sites—pointing toward a future that is open to still more change.

# The Slave Galleries Restoration Project

LIZ ŠEVČENKO, REVEREND DEACON EDGAR W. HOPPER, AND LISA CHICE

## BACKGROUND

The Lower East Side is one of the most ethnically diverse neighborhoods in the country. In addition to being home to significant African American and Puerto Rican populations, it continues to serve as an immigrant portal for the United States. In the last twenty years, it has become home to substantial numbers of immigrants from the Dominican Republic, China, the Philippines, Poland, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Japan, Korea, and India. For the neighborhood's immigrant residents, as well as many of its American-born racial minorities, their attempts to gain access to the centers of American life and power have been defined by constant struggles over boundaries of inclusion and exclusion.

These struggles have left their marks on the urban landscape. St. Augustine's Episcopal Church was built in 1828 for the city's patrician elite. Today, it houses the largest African American congregation of any denomination on the Lower East Side. The congregation worships in the shadow of two "slave galleries": haunting, boxlike rooms hidden above the balcony and to which African American worshippers were restricted. This rare artifact of racial segregation in New York stands as a stark, physical reminder of how and why boundaries of marginalization are drawn and contested.

By the 1990s, leaders of St. Augustine's Church had become concerned that, as a result of gentrification, the African American population of the Lower East Side was shrinking and that African American presence in the neighborhood could disappear. In response, St. Augustine's rector, the Reverend Dr. Errol A. Harvey, formed a committee to preserve and interpret the slave galleries, and named the Reverend Deacon Edgar W. Hopper as its chair. "We wanted to show that we were here," explained Father Harvey. He and the Slave Galleries Committee wanted to offer evidence that African Americans were present in the neighborhood as early as the 1820s and to create a testament to African American struggles and contributions for the future at a time when, after more than two centuries, African Americans could be pushed out of the Lower East Side altogether. "... The time is *now* to look at this project," echoed Deacon Hopper. The question of being marginalized yet again is at issue."

In 1999 the Committee asked the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, with whom they had a long relationship, to bring its experience with research, preservation, and interpretation to the project. The museum agreed to conduct fund raising, to develop and direct a team of preservation architects, consulting historians, and researchers, and to commit its own interpretive staff.

The Lower East Side Tenement Museum's mission is to promote tolerance and historical perspective by presenting and interpreting immigrant and migrant experiences on Manhattan's Lower East Side. The heart of the museum



View of one of the slave galleries from the church balcony

is a tenement building at 97 Orchard Street, home to nearly 7,000 immigrants from 20 different nations between 1863 and 1935, when it was closed to tenants. By restoring the homes and telling the stories of the families who lived in them, the museum has been attempting to use the past to raise larger questions and community issues. During every tour, visitors are reminded that crowded living spaces, sweatshop labor, access to public benefits, discrimination, language difficulties, and tough immigration laws are ongoing issues, as is the resilience and determination of the immigrants affected by them.

After years of successful educational programming, the museum began to realize that historic sites had special power to move people to consider some of the most pressing issues of our day from new perspectives. The museum recognized that if we could harness that power effectively, and help other historic sites to do the same, we had the potential to create whole new forums for democracy in action in communities around the world. We set out to explore what role our historic site could play in addressing issues in our community.

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When a new boundary was drawn around a section of the neighborhood, including the Tenement Museum and excluding St. Augustine's, several communities erupted in furor. The new Lower East Side Historic District was designated to highlight nationally renowned Jewish landmarks. Within days of the announcement, a Puerto Rican born city councilwoman denounced the district on Spanish-language television as "excluding Hispanics"; St. Augustine's Church protested to the state assemblyman that the boundaries marginalized African American historic sites and as such were openly racist; and an editorial in the *Daily News* fumed that "the result is really a Jewish Lower East Side historic district . . . as a stand-in for the history of the whole neighborhood . . . it looks more like a gerrymandered voting district than a coherent neighborhood."<sup>1</sup>

These battles over cultural representation are intimately connected to battles over material resources like housing and schools. The Jewish community council behind the district nomination and several Asian and Puerto Rican advocacy groups have been deadlocked in a conflict over a four-acre plot of land, an invaluable resource left barren for more than 30 years, because they cannot agree on how and for whom to develop it. Recently, pressures on resources for working-class families have become increasingly intense as the neighborhood rapidly gentrifies. To claim access to scarce resources, whether housing or cultural representation, residents have traditionally organized into what Deacon Hopper, who serves as the on-site coordinator for the slave galleries, calls "islands of ethnicity." Recent immigrants

*At the heart of the conflict lies the question: Whose neighborhood is it?*

"become American" by adopting existing racial prejudices against African Americans, while African Americans resent foreigners who seem to advance out of poverty before them; generations-old Orthodox communities have waged intense turf battles with their neighbors of color, while being maligned for their clothing and religious practices. At the heart of the conflict lies the question: Whose neighborhood is it? Who will be the centers of this neighborhood, winning the right to speak for its peoples, and who will be relegated to the margins?

The controversy confirmed our belief that the historic places in the neighborhood—in addition to representing different people—need to be catalysts for ongoing dialogue about the issues that divide us. Recognizing the deep divisions that existed among different ethnic groups in our

<sup>1</sup> Max Page, "Historic District Skews Story of Lower E. Side," *Daily News*, April 26, 2001

neighborhood, the museum invited area residents representing over 20 nationalities and 10 community organizations to visit its immigrant homestead and share their own experiences of settling in New York. African American congregants of St. Augustine’s Episcopal Church talked about migration and discrimination with immigrants who now live in the neighborhood. During these community dialogues, called Kitchen Conversations, community leaders discovered that experiences of marginalization and exclusion were common to almost everyone on the Lower East Side and, when properly framed, could bring our neighborhood together.

Inspired by this experience, the museum founded the Lower East Side Community Preservation Project (LESCPP), intended to bring together a coalition of diverse community leaders, to be called *community preservationists* (CP), who would work to identify, restore, and interpret local historic sites as foundations for dialogue on common community experiences and issues. St. Augustine’s Church volunteered to make the restoration and interpretation of the slave galleries—the *Slave Galleries Project*—LESCPP’S first project.

The slave galleries were sacred sites in African American history. What meaning might they have for other Lower East Siders today? We began by inviting community leaders to the slave galleries one at a time and listening to their reactions. We soon discovered that the space served as an important metaphor for many different people’s histories and experiences with marginalization and exclusion. Florence Li-Maldonado of the Chinese American Planning Council drew parallels to the history of segregation in Chinatown. Melissa Nieves of University Settlement remarked that it reminded her of the experience of illegal immigrants, who are part of this nation but excluded from full membership and participation. Not only did these visitors feel a deep connection to the space, they also offered ideas for how its preservation could have an impact on their own constituencies, as well as on the entire community. These leaders agreed that the project could promote education about slavery and intolerance, empower people who are facing adversity, and act as a catalyst for dialogue.

*In October 2001, I received an invitation from the Reverend Deacon Edgar W. Hopper to participate in the Lower East Side Community Preservation Project. I had never visited St. Augustine’s Church before, even though the church that I attended in college and where I later served as an associate pastor was located on the same street at 97 Madison. This invitation from an African American community was my first experience of the Chinese community being invited into [a particular group].*

—Reverend Bayer Lee, Pastor  
Trust in God Baptist Church

*I think that’s the essence of why we’re here today, building community. I think that learning history is painful, and we should really rethink how we teach history sometimes. Because it is painful. I think also the word segregation is a word that many people think is something of the past. But I think many people in our community still live with segregation inside their souls. What I’m hoping is that this space might become a place where people can talk. Where young people can come and talk about history, talk about themselves, and connect it to the present problems that we have in our community.*

—Melissa Nieves, Director  
Family Literacy Program University Settlement

The *Slave Galleries Project* at St. Augustine’s Church was launched in February 2000. The event revealed the power of this unique space to inspire dialogue about urgent issues facing the neighborhood. Over 250 community supporters from varied cultural and professional

backgrounds came to the church and, in small groups of ten, spent a few minutes in silent contemplation in the spaces. Reconvening in the sanctuary, they related how the space spoke to each community's experiences. The event, by chance, took place on the day after an Albany jury acquitted four officers involved in the shooting of Amadou Diallo. On that day the slave galleries served a critical function: it became a place for many different communities in our neighborhood to come together and address this wrenching, painful event. As people took the microphone and spoke, they tried to use the lessons of the slave galleries to make sense of what had happened, expressing a range of views. A spontaneous, urgent exchange about racial violence developed in the room. The slave galleries offered a deeply wounded community a new tool—a living history of slavery, and of the racism that supported it—to confront the destructiveness of contemporary prejudice. The need for a community forum was undeniable. We realized that the “slave galleries” should be opened and used for this purpose.

## PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND APPROACHES

At the start of the project, Deacon Hopper, Tenement Museum vice president of programs Liz Ševčenko, and program associate Lisa Chice met to establish clear project goals and outcomes. By identifying specific goals and objectives and measurable outcomes early on, we have been able to evaluate our progress throughout the process.

**Goal:** Restore, preserve, and interpret the slave galleries as a testament to the kind and quality of African American contributions to lower Manhattan.

**Objective:** Utilize genealogical and architectural research to complete: docent source book, tour script, final preservation report, evaluation.

Traditional historic preservation projects seek to uncover new information about the past. From the start, this project was guided by an additional goal: to use the story of the slave galleries to raise issues facing the community today, transforming a site of racism and exclusion into a catalyst for positive dialogue among ethnic groups. The intent to stimulate dialogue fundamentally shaped the *Slave Galleries Project's* development, clearly distinguishing it from other preservation projects and establishing a new model for the preservation and interpretation of historic sites. Dialogue was not tacked on but shaped the project from its foundations, laying the groundwork for a permanent resource for ongoing exchange.

### Documentary Research

The Tenement Museum hired graduate students in three areas: 1) the architecture of segregation in nineteenth-century New York Episcopal churches; 2) African American social history and genealogy; and 3) slavery and race relations in Episcopal Church history. Our researchers looked at census records, descriptions in African American newspapers, baptismal records, vestry minutes, slave narratives, and other sources. Once we had completed our first round of research, we invited leading scholars in African American history, architecture, and Church history to review the information uncovered and asked them to suggest additional points of inquiry and sources. The following historians served as advisors: Dr. Andrew Dolkart, School of Architecture, Planning, Historic Preservation, Columbia University; Dr. Martia Goodson, Department of Black and Hispanic Studies, Baruch College; Dr. Graham Hodges, Department of History, Colgate University; and Dr. Robert Bruce Mullin, professor of Church History, General Theological Seminary.

The scholars suggested that we research specific individuals and churches and identified new archival sources for the following areas: further tracing of individual congregants listed in sacramental records, census roles and city directories through the 1830s and 1840s; examining manuscript collections of church officials and prominent laypersons; placing All Saints within the context of other churches in the neighborhood and those built at the same time; identifying the origin of the use of the term “slave gallery”; exploring the attitudes of the vestrymen at All Saints toward the issue of race relations and slavery.

From the beginning, our intent to stimulate dialogue determined three priorities: to humanize the experience of the space; to raise difficult and enduring questions; and to incorporate multiple perspectives.

### **Humanize the experience**

We believed that the powerful experience of sitting in the slave galleries could move people to a different emotional place, dislodging or disorienting rigid beliefs and opening them to dialogue on difficult issues. We sought to help people imagine themselves in the shoes of those who sat in the slave galleries. This goal led us to focus on the individual human experience of the space in both our research and preservation efforts. As we had in the Tenement Museum, we worked to identify real people who sat in the space and introduce visitors to them.

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It was extremely difficult to put a human face on these questions, since African Americans were rarely given names in any documents of the period. Census records only identified heads of household, who were primarily white men; slaves and domestics were marked only with a line. We had few secondary sources to guide us: the subject of African Americans in New York City in this period has received little scholarly attention. Finally, painstaking research revealed the identities of some of the slave galleries’ ghosts, including Henry Nichols, a free black saddler who was baptized in the church with his family in 1829, and John Rooke, a white congregant who brought two unnamed black servants with him to church in the 1830s. From here, we could begin to imagine real interactions, relationships, and experiences.

### **Raise difficult, enduring questions**

Traditional research is designed to find answers, not to raise questions. Our priorities were reversed: we sought to use the story of the slave galleries to raise questions that are as pressing and unresolved now as they were a century ago. To pursue that goal, we focused our research around points of conflict, exploring the debates that took place around them. For instance, a debate arose among members of the Slave Galleries Committee, community preservationists, and the scholars consulting on the project about the use of the term “slave galleries” to describe the spaces hidden in the church. At the heart of the debate lay the fact that slavery in New York was officially abolished in 1827, one year before the church was constructed. Newspaper accounts from 1916 referred to the spaces as slave galleries. But would they have been called slave galleries when they were first built, a century earlier? The more critical question was: Were there slaves sitting in the space? The arguments between historians and committee members were intense, with one historian suggesting that referring to the space as “slave galleries” was irresponsible and inaccurate, while some members of the committee feeling that to *not* do so was tantamount to racism and to denying the continuation of slavery after manumission. While we worked to uncover accurate information about who sat in the galleries

(people with a mix of legal statuses) and how segregation flourished after the abolition of slavery (almost all churches in Lower Manhattan had “negro pews” through the mid-nineteenth century), we recognized that the story was more complex than a single truth. Instead, we tried to raise questions that underlie the debate: What difference did it make when slavery was abolished? What difference do legal rights or legal changes make? What is the difference between legal and social freedom? What did “freedom” mean then? What does it mean today?

We also examined conflicts that took place around the slave galleries in the past. What were some of the questions Henry Nichols would have asked himself? He would have heard a number of different arguments among African American New Yorkers about segregation. Some said blacks should go to white churches and refuse to sit in the “negro pews.” Others said they should establish their own churches. What would Henry Nichols and the people he sat here with have thought? What was his vision for the future of the Lower East Side? Ultimately, these issues were integrated into dialogue questions and into the ways we introduced visitors to the space.

### ***Incorporate multiple perspectives***

It was very important to the congregation to preserve the slave galleries as a sacred site of African American people. The Slave Galleries Committee sought to make the slave galleries at St. Augustine’s a center for an African American Museum in Lower Manhattan. Most “ethnic museums” focus their attention on visitors perceived to be direct descendants of the historical actors. But while focusing on the slave galleries as an African American site, St. Augustine’s and the Tenement Museum believed that there were multiple heirs to the galleries’ difficult legacy. In order to inspire dialogue about how marginalization and exclusion are a collective problem and responsibility, we needed to identify and exchange views about how everyone in the neighborhood has experienced it. This commitment shaped our research process significantly. All along the way, we invited our diverse team of community preservationists to comment on the latest research and make suggestions about how the story we told to visitors could be made relevant to their constituencies. As we shared our latest findings about how racial segregation functioned within the church, or how slavery continued to operate after abolition, we asked community preservationists to tell their personal histories and the histories of their communities and how they related to this story. Their input suggested that in some cases research would include what was distinctive about different communities’ experiences of marginalization on the Lower East Side (e.g., the coolie trade), and in other cases would help us to highlight the shared aspects of the experiences of the slave galleries.

*One cannot underestimate the importance of cross-cultural dialogue. Even if, when we look at or attempt such a process, we find inherent flaws, we shouldn't shirk from this. Because tentativeness, variability, being gun-shy are always part of this sometimes gut wrenching process. What is really significant about such efforts is that they are even attempted. The effort expended, in and of itself, is an important avenue to building the bridges, and closing the cultural gaps, that divide our communities today.*

—Steve Yip, Director of Operations  
Chinese American Planning Council

This dual approach—to preserve the slave galleries as both a sacred site of African Americans and as a symbol of diverse experiences of marginalization and exclusion— raised challenges and tensions, as well as opportunities. From the start, the committee was eager to invite diverse community leaders into the space, but it was equally concerned about defining and limiting these leaders’ role. To open up the project to others so early in the process was a testament to the



church's commitment to including the entire community, and was the only way to ensure genuine support. But to do so also posed a great risk for the church: since members of the Slave Galleries Committee could not yet know themselves exactly how they wanted the space to be interpreted, they risked being taken over by the opinions of those whose advice they sought.

Despite these reservations, the church set a generous tone and created a context for open collaboration and exchange. As a result, many community preservationists began to feel a deep connection to and ownership of the space. In meetings a preservationist might say, "When we start bringing people to the space, we should. . ." or "When we restore the space, we should. . ." The fact that these community leaders—none of whom were African American or historians or official historic site preservationists—could feel such a stake in the project, was a sign of the project's strength and future success. But the use of the term "we" also felt threatening to the Slave Galleries Committee's sense of primary ownership and control.

In March 2002, all completed documentary research was compiled for a docent source book for tours of the slave galleries space. Researcher Allen Ingraham consulted with Roz Li to ensure that key documentary and genealogical findings would be incorporated into her final report, giving the Slave Galleries Committee the supporting materials and knowledge to conduct the restoration and interpretation.

### Preservation

It was difficult to piece together the story of the use of the slave galleries since there were so few sources to guide us. Because of this lack of documentary evidence, the galleries themselves were our most powerful witnesses to the lives of African Americans here. As we did in our research, we focused our preservation efforts on uncovering the human experience of the space: What was it like to sit in the galleries? Could people see? Could they be seen? Could they hear? Were they locked in? Did they have pews to sit on?

*"The emotional response elicited by this project is of an intensity I have not encountered in any of my preservation projects."*

—Roz Li  
Li/Saltzman Architects

The Tenement Museum referred its preservation architect, Roz Li of Li/Saltzman Architects, to work with the *Slave Galleries Project*. Through her work on the museum, she had gained rich experience in uncovering the histories of marginalized peoples. In addition, perhaps most significantly, she understood the power of these "modest" spaces and had learned a great deal about making tiny spaces accessible to the public. She advocated for this project to transcend conventional preservation approaches. Li told us, "The emotional response elicited by this project is of an intensity I have not encountered in any of my preservation projects. I encountered not only excitement and pride, but also denial, guilt, anger, and hostility. This is why the preservation of the slave galleries is exciting—it offers the potential to be a vehicle for healing."

The layers of denial are intricate. One neighboring church in Chinatown, the First Chinese Presbyterian Church (formerly the Market Street Reformed Church), built in 1818, also had hidden galleries. When Li attempted to visit the church and talk with people about the *Slave Galleries Project*, she had a difficult confrontation and was not allowed on the church premises. Subsequent attempts to contact the church were also unsuccessful. When Pastor Bayer Lee of Trust in God Baptist Church (another church serving the Chinatown community) learned about our difficulties, he inquired of various members of the First Chinese Presbyterian. He, too, sensed their resistance to acknowledging their church's history. He also suggested that this

might stem from the Chinese community's reluctance to become involved with the broader community.

Even within St. Augustine's congregation, committee members found that there were congregants who refused to confront the history of slavery and the implications of the hidden spaces in their church. In the course of the Slave Galleries Project, we learned that even some active participants had not been in the galleries until very recently.

Li studied the wood, paint, and nails of the slave galleries rooms. Her work focused on discovering what the people who constructed the galleries intended, uncovering its use and any changes made to it over time. Last year, along with Cynthia Hinson, a color chromatologist who analyzes paint samples, and Russell Powell, a historic woodwork contractor, Li performed an analysis on the floors, walls, and window to find out what changes had been made since the building was erected in 1827—1829. Li focused on the platforms and underlying steps, window areas, pews, and comparisons between the east and west galleries. She discovered that the window frames were installed after the original design of the galleries, suggesting that originally they would have been open, allowing people to see. Through paint analysis, she also discovered the outline, or “ghost” of a pew in the east gallery, suggesting that people might have sat there. What would it have been like to see but not be seen? What did it feel like to have formal church seats, but be sitting up there?



Slave gallery bleachers

Li met with the Slave Galleries Committee and first presented her draft existing conditions report in October 2001. She outlined issues and decisions for the committee to consider as they planned the restoration and attempted to define exactly how the slave galleries could be used. This meeting was an opportunity for Li to gain an understanding of the committee's intentions for the space and resolve any conflict between their expectations and her findings and recommendations. After Li's presentation, the committee was expected to review the full document and voice any questions or concerns. In January, Li prepared a summary memo to guide them in their internal decision-making process. The committee was asked to consider programmatic and logistical uses of the space, public facilities for visitors, safety and code requirements, and interpretive needs.

Once the committee had reviewed the report and considered her recommendations, Li met with them again in the spring of 2002. She accompanied core committee members on a physical walk-through of the space to determine what the proposed visitor experience would be and what new construction would be needed to accommodate and help visitors to experience the space in a meaningful way. At the Tenement Museum, new research findings are continually incorporated into interpretive materials. Thus, the committee agreed with Li's recommendation that the program should be conceived in a way that is open, flexible, and can readily reflect new discoveries; and that the space should be presented to reflect the “process” of preservation, rather than as a static exhibit.

The committee's vision for future programs will utilize both east and west galleries for public viewing. The key features of the proposed visitor experience are: an orientation in the church sanctuary, a platform for viewing the east gallery installed just outside the windows, historic

features in the east gallery will have numbered labels keyed to a printed brochure, which will explain the feature (the paint ghost of a pew).

**Goal:** Build community support for the Slave Galleries Project and create opportunity for cross-fertilization among diverse groups.

**Objectives:** Host three facilitated LESCPP meetings; identify ways the slave galleries might address common community concerns.

More than anything else, what set the Slave Galleries Project apart from other historic preservation projects was the involvement of community members every step of the way. “We could have just done this alone,” Deacon Hopper said. But to create a catalyst for positive dialogue about and among different ethnic groups today, St. Augustine’s and the Tenement Museum made a commitment to involve their community in the preservation process from the ground up. Each institution drew on its body of community contacts to identify and recruit other community preservationists who would serve as the community advisory group for the *Slave Galleries Project*. Involving community leaders in the process right from the start forged relationships between them, secured their continued contributions to LESCPP, and created an interest in working on future public history projects in our community. Furthermore, learning about these communities’ contemporary concerns helped us to use the slave galleries and their history to engage people in dialogue about issues that matter to them.

*Our involvement [in LESCPP] offered us a unique opportunity to achieve certain of our preservation goals. Namely, it offered us the opportunity to get the kind of “cross-cultural” participation that we always wanted to have reflected in our preservation process. We did not want to restore and preserve this important site without input from others in our community as to what the process meant, and would mean to their various constituencies.*

—The Reverend Deacon Edgar W. Hopper  
St. Augustine’s Episcopal Church

### **LESCPP Meetings**

Project staff reached out to community leaders from dozens of neighborhood religious institutions, settlement houses, social services and cultural organizations, and civic associations. The first meeting of the LESCPP introduced the power of history and preservation to generate excitement about the *Slave Galleries Project*—and how it could impact the community as a whole, enhancing the work of preservation, community, and neighborhood. Community leaders were to be invited to make commitments to participate.

On November 30, 2000, 34 community leaders had the opportunity to view the slave galleries, learn about the progress of the documentary and architectural research, and share their reactions to the space. The meeting began with a visit to the galleries and airing of personal responses, such as these:

It hits you. It puts you in their shoes. I wouldn’t like it done to me. You think you know what they felt. . . .

—Nicoletta Azure  
New York City Housing Authority /  
Smith Houses Resident Association

The immigrant community doesn't always have an understanding or appreciation of the struggles of their activist forbearers. How can we relate [to the history of their efforts and use this to inform our work]?

—Miguel Hernandez  
Office of Congresswoman Nydia Velazquez

It's very important for kids to learn about neighborhood history. The kids that live here in the Lower East Side don't necessarily know the community very well. They need to be aware of it. The tour helps them realize the resources they have surrounding. . . . They feel a pride in the place they live, they . . . see it's not just a ghetto, but that it has historical significance.

—Florence Li-Maldonado, PAVE program  
Chinese American Planning Council

Building from these personal responses, we began to imagine ways the space could move people to achieve positive, shared, community goals. We asked, "How could the slave galleries enrich the work you do? What programs are you currently running that could be enhanced and advanced by participating in the *Slave Galleries Project*?"

Though early community preservationist meetings yielded promising results, we realized that a more deliberate dialogue structure would be critical for bringing communities together to address the issues that divided them. Animating Democracy advisor Wayne Winborne recommended facilitators Tammy Bormann and David Campt, a team with extensive experience at training dialogue facilitators around racial issues. Bormann and Campt were hired to work with project staff to design dialogues that would 1) generate reactions to the slave galleries and ideas on how it could be used as a community resource; 2) address issues of racism and marginalization through a historic site; and 3) utilize this process as a community-building tool. In the project's first phase, Bormann and Campt engaged the community preservationists in a series of dialogues around the process of interpreting the slave galleries. We asked them to design three dialogues to take place over the year that would move community preservationists from reflecting on personal reactions, to sharing community concerns, to identifying how to work together in the future.

*One does not visit an historical space with the power of the Slave Galleries without learning something about himself and the world around him. A historical site such as the Slave Galleries breaks through the boundary of subjective interpretation with the sheer force of its physical presence. A visitor can feel, smell, touch, and taste the historical reality represented by the existence of the space.*

—Tammy Bormann, dialogue consultant

The first task was to introduce the Committee to the use of dialogue in the restoration and interpretation process. Museum staff and Deacon Hopper, as St. Augustine's liaison, vetted all information with the Slave Galleries Committee to support their stakeholder role as a decision-making body and review information with them, before it was presented to the larger community. This meeting served as an introduction to the community-wide LESCOP meetings. It familiarized the Committee members, who would be "hosting" the larger community throughout the project, with the intent and methodology behind the dialogue process. Bormann and Campt introduced the concept of dialogue and its potential as a community-building tool. Each meeting participant received written materials restating key points about the dialogue process. With this information, they identified a set of ground rules to guide the dialogues.

The first LESCOP meeting to be led by our professional facilitators introduced community preservationists to the dialogue process as a mechanism for generating insights and perspectives for collaborative learning. Project staff shared the latest research findings about who sat in the slave galleries and beliefs that shaped the practice of segregation. We employed dialogic processes to move from relating personal reactions to exploring the implications of these findings for the community today. As we discussed our latest findings about how racial segregation functioned within the church, or how slavery continued to operate after abolition, we asked participants to tell their personal histories and the histories of their communities and how they related to this story. Throughout the discussion, it was clear that the Slave Galleries were not only a powerful vehicle for education about African American history but ideal catalysts between communities, about parallel experiences of racism and exclusion.

*Pastor Lee talked about the parallels between the history of the Slave Galleries and Coolie trade, recalling that many Chinese laborers were forcibly brought to work in the Americas on the same ships that had been used for Africans.*

Pastor Lee talked about the parallels between the history of the Slave Galleries and Coolie trade, recalling that many Chinese laborers were forcibly brought to work in the Americas on the same ships that had been used for Africans. “The connection is there for anyone, since we have all experienced the pain of being denied rights for any reason whether it’s gender, race, nationality, or religion,” said Cenen, a Puerto Rican artist and activist. These stories established new ground among participants and inspired thinking about how to interpret the space. “People feel like they’re the only ones who have experienced pain or suffered,” Onika Abraham, a member of the Slave Galleries Committee agreed. “With children, this [exposure] could help prevent prejudices from forming.” Participants agreed that they would like to learn more about parallels such as the Coolie experience. Deacon Hopper and the committee members encouraged this direction, because they felt a responsibility to serve as role models for other communities’ efforts to uncover their histories.

Dialogue revealed compelling reasons for the project staff to look at history in richer, more multi-faceted ways. These discussions changed the way Lower East Side history was defined. Project staff made a conscious effort to involve people on both sides of the sensitive debate over the boundaries of the Lower East Side Historic District and the neighborhood identity the district promoted. For instance, the Lower East Side Business Improvement District (BID), one of the two institutions responsible for the historic district nomination, consistently sent a representative to LESCOP meetings. At each meeting, director Andrew Flamm witnessed the dozens of Asian, Latino, and African American Lower East Siders who cared passionately about their history, their neighborhood, and the powerful site of the slave galleries. He explored

*“I can’t wait for the first student to make the connection between the use of the segregated spaces at Eldridge Street [Synagogue] and the use of the slave galleries...”*

*—Lucien Sonder  
education coordinator  
Eldridge Street Synagogue*

points of connection and synergy between sites within and outside the boundaries of the district—between histories it promoted and ones it had excluded. For instance, Lucien Sonder, education coordinator from the Eldridge Street Synagogue, a featured site in the historic district, expressed eagerness to bring students from her educational programs to the slave galleries. The Eldridge Street Synagogue also has segregated galleries where women sat during services. Acknowledging the complex differences in experiences of segregation, she nonetheless saw the galleries as a critical departure point for building bridges and dialogue between two Lower East Side communities: “I can’t wait for the first student to make the connection between the use of the segregated spaces at Eldridge Street [Synagogue] and the use of the slave galleries, she said. Recognizing these

convergences as beneficial to the neighborhood’s identity and growth, Flamm declared, “The space offers an additional resource for promoting our historic district to visitors from outside the community.” BID added the slave galleries to their tourist brochure about the neighborhood, significantly changing the portrait of the Lower East Side they convey to the public.

The third LESCOP meeting asked community preservationists to confront potential barriers to productive dialogue, and to identify ways the committee could address them in their interpretation of the space. Terry Sheehan, adult literacy program director and NYPL librarian, suggested that for white people, there may be resistance to or denial of this history, or that resistance comes from across groups. “Visitors may experience conflicting feelings—they might want to know but may be afraid. Some people are not aware or do not acknowledge the history of slavery in the North.” The group suggested that a visit to the slave galleries should always include opportunities for open reflection, dialogue, and debriefing—that it be a space for people to come to terms with difficult emotions. Pastor Lee thought that the Chinese community would be surprised that we are doing this. “At first the Chinatown community might think, ‘What does this have to do with me? Why am I here?’ We could ask them if they find something parallel to their own experiences. Because a lot of Chinese residents don’t know anything about the Coolie trade, they may be missing a way of connecting with the story of the slave galleries.”

The fourth LESCOP meeting took place in October 2002. It was the last meeting formally hosted by St. Augustine’s, and it was an opportunity to present an overview of the many achievements of the *Slave Galleries Project* and embark on a dialogue about the future of LESCOP. We reflected on what we learned about using historic sites to stimulate community dialogue and how we could imagine using dialogue in our own lives and work in the community.

Finally, we invited community preservationists to consider how each of them might replicate the slave galleries model, how they might interpret similar sites in their own communities and use those to support community building and collaboration. We brainstormed lists of additional neighborhood places or sites to be developed and discussed why it would be important to recognize these sites and how they could contribute to community dialogue. The lists were remarkable in the types of structures and places that were identified, the layered histories of how the spaces functioned, what groups they served, and the social issues that were enmeshed in the stories of each site. Of this list, several themes and sites were adopted and developed in the next phase of LESCOP and served as the base of our collaboration on other public history projects.

What places in the neighborhood should have their stories told? What would telling their stories do for the neighborhood?

#### LESCOP MEETING NOTES OCTOBER 7, 2002

- **Jewish Forward Building**, 149 Canal Street, owned by Chinese Hand Laundry Alliance
- **Vladeck Houses**, Madison and Jackson (also suggestion of public housing in general)
- namesakes, neighborhood before public housing, uncover the history
- **Ritualarium**, 313 East Broadway
- **Firehouse**, across from St. Augustine’s on Henry St.
- **Places w/o architectural typology** events have taken place but no architectural significance

- Spaces that have been **transformed from the secular to the sacred** and vice versa, transformation and reuse; why?
- **Networked neighborhood (temporal)** How do daily uses/patterns vary? How do these activities comprise the whole of life of the community?
- **Settlement houses** (ones that we have worked with include: University Settlement, Henry Street Settlement, Grand Street Settlement, Hamilton-Madison Settlement, and Education Alliance)
  - How they helped immigrants and responded to changing needs
  - Why? Finding hope in history for new immigrants
- **Bachelor Society experience in Chinatown**, history of fighting discrimination and segregation
- **Public murals** disappearing
- **blocks or intersections** particularly those resulting from implementation of the grid system—explore the implications on use and experience
- **Bialystoker Synagogue**, 7 Willett Street
- **movie theater** now a medical facility on Grand and Essex
- **Allen Street** (boulevard)
- **The First Chinese Presbyterian Church**, 61 Henry Street (also had “slave galleries”)
- **Jarmulowsky Bank Building**, Canal and Orchard
- **Kletzker Brothers Aid Association**, Canal and Ludlow
- **Buddhist Temple**, near Manhattan Bridge, was an old movie theater
- **Seward Park**, day labor markets
- **Others**: gathering places, bridges, movie theaters, barber shop, community centers, swimming pools

### Building Capacity

**Goal:** Inspire connection, deepen understanding of community issues, and increase the capacity for collaboration and sustained dialogue.

**Objectives:** Host three dialogue training sessions for members of the Slave Galleries Committee, Tenement Museum staff, and community preservationists; pairs of participants partner and hold dialogues with one another’s communities; community preservationists bring special groups into the slave galleries for dialogues.

At the first facilitated LESCOP meeting in November 2001, Steve Yip, vice president of operations at the Chinese American Planning Council, asked, “When you deal with these issues, how do you deal with confrontation? People have different value systems. When they come in, they clash. People harden their positions. How do you deal?”

The museum and the church realized that to make the slave galleries and other historic places in the neighborhood generate successful dialogue, we needed a cadre of diverse community leaders who could facilitate these exchanges. When we invited community leaders to take facilitation training with Bormann and Camp; six members of the Slave Galleries Committee, five community preservationists, and three Tenement Museum staff members elected to take the training.

The intended outcome of the training was to create a community of neighborhood leaders who are empowered and prepared to use dialogic processes of communication, learning, and

decision-making within and between their communities. We needed to promote dialogue as a tool, different from and more effective than the more common strategies of discussion, debate, and competition. Most importantly, we were training ourselves to use historic sites to facilitate dialogue about issues and to create new conversations across communities.

### Dialogue Training

Training took place at St. Augustine's Church in three Saturday sessions that ran from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Ševčenko, Chice, and Deacon Hopper consulted with Bormann and Campt on the general training work plan to ensure that it met project objectives. They continued to meet to



Dialogue training with Tammy Bormann

review progress and make adjustments as the trainings progressed. Bormann and Campt had created a curriculum and supporting materials that communicated the fundamental lessons of each session. However, the essence of the learning process was experiential. Active engagement in dialogue during each session was key to building competence in facilitation skills, as well as in building awareness of pitfalls.

Individually, we came to our training with a variety of personal and professional goals, largely uninitiated in formal dialogue. For this reason, it was invaluable to begin the first session identifying the functions,

characteristics, and competencies of a facilitator by sharing our past experiences and setting goals. At the end of each session, training participants received a booklet of readings that cover the uses, challenges, and possibilities of dialogue and dialogic learning.

The second training session focused on personal skill building and the developing competency in dialogic processes. Bormann and Campt used interactive activities and readings to provide training participants with concrete examples of the skills and competencies required for dialogue facilitation including listening, interpreting, synthesizing, probing, and framing issues. For example, trainees did a fishbowl dialogue exercise. We formed two circles. The inner circle did a dialogue, as those in the outer circle observed. This was designed to teach us the “Eyes and Ears of Facilitation” and how to be watchful of group process. By observing each other and reflecting on our own experiences, we were able to become more critical of the process. Bormann and Campt also highlighted the use of “ice breakers,” a warm-up question that can be answered in an open-ended way based on personal experience, and asked us to think about situations in which dialogues would be most useful to us as a learning and communication tool.

Project staff sought to use the process of dialogue training to build strong relationships among the community leaders who were participating. In the second session, each training participant selected a “learning partner” with whom he or she would work throughout the remaining training sessions. We challenged ourselves to pair across gender, ethnicity, and organizational affiliation. Over the course of the next three months, each team organized and co-facilitated two dialogues with members of their communities or organizations. Each dialogue was to take place at a different site, around a different question:

*Over the course of the next three months, each team organized and co-facilitated two dialogues with members of their communities or organizations.*



At the slave galleries: What kind of reaction do you think you might get from your community when visiting the slave galleries?

At other sites of significance: What historical sites in your neighborhood might inspire civic dialogue within your community and between your community and other communities?

After each session, the learning partners debriefed and provided feedback to one another about process, content, and facilitation. Learning partners were asked to come to the next training session prepared to share their insights and learning experiences with other training participants. In three months, trainees conducted nine dialogues at various locations including the slave galleries with groups of all ages and backgrounds, such as Chinatown teen volunteers, New York Public Library branch staff, public school fifth graders, a Boys' Club, City Lore Poetry Project teens, University Settlement staff, seniors from the community, and church youth.

### **Dialogues**

One facilitator training team, Philip Cohen (Tenement Museum program director) and Minnie Curry (Committee member), invited 12-year-olds from the local boys club to the Tenement Museum. For these first-time visitors to the museum, it was an opportunity to discover that the everyday experiences of immigrants are worthy of commemoration. When asked what places in the neighborhood should be remembered, they identified places that were important to them, such as the boys club and the local pizza parlor. They talked about places in their neighborhood that would help others understand or have insight into their lives and experiences. The discussion seemed to help them recognize how stories could be told through historic spaces and how these spaces could be used to raise awareness around broader themes and issues. The boys even asked whether African Americans lived in our tenement, once again demonstrating that history matters and that members of the Lower East Side want their stories to be told.

Perhaps most significantly, as a result of the facilitator training, Afiya Dawson and Lillian Rivera were able to design and conduct the dialogue for our April 9th LESCOP meeting. Tammy assisted them in planning the session, which they did through meetings with one another and conference calls with Tammy and Lisa (as LESCOP coordinator). The night of the actual meeting, both Tammy and David were present, but Afiya and Lillian were responsible for facilitating the meeting with the larger body of community preservationists. Here, the project stakeholders and the community were being empowered to guide the project internally and learning to facilitate new conversations on pressing issues, a lasting outcome beyond the formal existence of the *Slave Galleries Project*.

The third training session focused on reflecting on our experiences and refining our skills. Hands-on experiences as facilitators served as the starting point of our review of what skills are required of a facilitator and what community goals dialogue could help accomplish. We evaluated: what aspects of facilitation are most challenging; when we felt most competent; when we felt least competent; when dialogue is not an appropriate process to use; how to deal with conflict in the group.

In addition to helping with communication across organizations and communities, trainees shared and collaborated as they were grappling with issues within their own spheres. For instance, Lillian Rivera sought help in her frustrated attempts to mediate between parents and principals and other school board representatives over changing school policies. Other trainees offered Rivera their suggestions of how she could re-establish communication and trust and

serve as an advocate. Seitu Jemel-Hart said that the training had given him a new perspective on the use of dialogue techniques that he already employed in his job coordinating arts programs for settlement houses and that he had been inspired to share these techniques with his colleagues.

Trainees were unanimous in their desire for more practice dialogues and feedback. In response, Tammy and David agree to return for a fourth and final session of training. This final training session was offered as a time to deal with specific questions about facilitating, to recognize successes, and consider specific challenges or problems. Challenges included: resisting being drawn into the conversation; difficulty getting people to respond; need for facilitators to know the “facts” (background of the discussion theme); gauging when participants are and are not ready to participate; being able to distinguish between facts, perspective, and opinion.

The session was framed by the following questions:

What are the two most important things you've learned about facilitation? What are the challenges and ways you need to grow?

What is dialogue? How does it differ from other forms of communication? What is a special moment you've experienced with dialogue that illustrates what it is?

How do you get people to engage in/agree to dialogue on difficult issues? How do you bring people together?

Rodger Taylor reflected on challenges he faced in his practice dialogue. “The problem was it felt more like a conversation than a dialogue. I pushed the conversation but ended up sometimes putting out opinions and being asked questions and answering them instead of pushing them on to someone else. I realize now what I should have been doing.”

Finally, we created lists of valuable suggestions by brainstorming what dialogue around historic sites could do for our community.

**Goal:** Create a model for other American communities to preserve their own history as a tool for establishing a sense of commonality and shared purpose.

**Objectives:** Assist community preservationists to identify their own special places worth preserving or interpreting; support the development of the Animating Democracy case study; support the development and dissemination of reports and work products from the dialogue training; encourage LESCPP participants to attend conferences.

At our final community preservationist dialogue training, we asked participants to say how they felt they could use dialogue around neighborhood places in their own work on the Lower East Side. We intentionally wanted to encourage participants to apply what they had experienced in the *Slave Galleries Project* to their own projects and issues. Participants imagined a host of ways to use their new skills to address civic issues. Many spoke about general ways they hoped to use dialogue to promote healing and understanding across boundaries such as building bridges between broken communities, showing groups what they can personally learn from other people's histories, or teaching long-time community members about the experience of groups who lived in the area before them.

Others identified specific issues and places around which they wanted to generate dialogue. Afiya Dawson of the Slave Galleries Committee described, for example, a historic high school building that was being converted into market-rate housing that raised questions in the

community about who was making decisions as well as what it meant to lose this historic building to contemporary purposes.

Over the course of the project, LESCPP began to earn a reputation as a vibrant, diverse force for identifying and interpreting community histories as starting points for dialogue. *Place Matters*, an initiative of the Municipal Art Society and the nonprofit City Lore, approached LESCPP to



Deacon Hopper with a group in the slave gallery

help with their project, developing innovative markers for neighborhood places that are valued for their historic connection and their traditional use, as well as their importance in the lives of people today. They selected two artists to work with community preservationists to identify places and issues that should be marked.

In November 2002, artists met with community preservationists to collect ideas for stories and places that should be commemorated. In dialogues that included break-out groups and brainstorming, participants talked about why these stories should be

told and how telling these stories can help raise issues their communities are facing today, including challenges of immigration, struggles over housing, and interethnic relations. Based on these discussions, the artists returned with a presentation on four places and related themes that they selected as sites that represent ways in which places have “moved within the currents” of the Lower East Side. The community preservationists provided feedback on the designs and observations on whether these designs addressed the relevant neighborhood themes.

The artists met with the LESCPP group three times from November 2002 to March 2003, continually refining their design. The exhibition of eight design-team, site-marker proposals was held in March and April 2003 at the Municipal Art Society. As part of the exhibition, community preservationists presented their experience to over 50 people at a public panel presentation about the dialogue-based approach to developing public art and history projects. Members of the Slave Galleries Committee and Tenement Museum Project staff have established themselves as a resource to those in the field who want to learn from the grassroots preservation model and dialogue approach. We have presented the model at professional conferences and exchanges:

October 2001	Animating Democracy Learning Exchange, Chicago
November 2001	National Trust for Historic Preservation, National Preservation Conference, Providence
December 2001	New York City Museum Educators Roundtable, New York
March 2002	Southeast Regional African American Preservation Alliance, St. Helena Island, South Carolina
September 2002	American Association for State and Local History, Portland, Oregon
November 2002	Animating Democracy Learning Exchange, Los Angeles
April 2003	Animating Democracy Learning Exchange, New York City
April 2003	Baltimore Diversity Summit, Baltimore
Ongoing	Archivist group started in the Episcopal Diocese
October 2003	Animating Democracy Learning Exchange, Flint
October 2003	Mid-Atlantic Association of Museums, Newark
March 2004	National Park Service, New York City
April 2004	Organization of American Historians, Boston
September 2004	American Association for State and Local History, St. Louis

## IMPACTS OF ARTS-BASED CIVIC DIALOGUE WORK ON PARTNERS AND THE NEIGHBORHOOD

The Tenement Museum viewed the *Slave Galleries Project* as an opportunity to test and explore how historic sites could serve as new sites for dialogue on pressing contemporary issues and as vital resources for community needs. The *Slave Galleries Project* established a new model for preservation, dialogue, and the role of a historic site in its community that the Tenement Museum could learn from and replicate at historic sites around the world.

### At the Museum and the Church

The Tenement Museum had a long commitment to serving as a center for dialogue, but this commitment evolved after the museum was established. The *Slave Galleries Project* showed how an intent to stimulate dialogue could be integrated into the development of a preservation project from its inception and could become a permanent part of the historic space. The museum was able to apply this experience to the development of its latest exhibit, “Piecing It Together: Immigrants in the Garment Industry,” a re-creation of an 1890s sweatshop. When research was just in the preliminary stages, and before any work had been done to the space, project staff invited community preservationists and people working in different areas of the garment industry today to visit the 325-square-foot apartment that had served as Harris and Jennie Levine’s home and dressmaking shop and discuss the issues it raised for the garment industry today. In the end, the museum actually built these conversations into the exhibit itself by editing participants’ perspectives on the garment industry into an audio program that introduces the exhibit to all visitors and establishes the exhibit as a dialogic space.

*The Slave Galleries Project showed how an intent to stimulate dialogue could be integrated into the development of a preservation project from its inception and could become a permanent part of the historic space.*

The *Slave Galleries Project* helped the Tenement Museum to create a permanent public dialogue program around its exhibits. After receiving training in dialogue design and facilitation, project staff developed a public program available to group tour visitors that uses the museum’s restored apartments as the starting point for dialogue about immigration, public assistance, labor, and cultural identity.

For St. Augustine’s, the project laid the groundwork for the church to establish a cultural organization around the slave galleries. Deacon Hopper undertook considerable training in the field of historic preservation. The National Trust nominated him as an Emerging Preservation Leader for Historic Preservation and invited him to its annual conference with special training sessions two years in a row. He has been involved in the development of a Northeast Regional African American Preservation Alliance and a network of African American sites in New York City.

The Project also trained almost half of the committee as dialogue facilitators. This ensured that the slave galleries would continue to generate effective dialogue. As an unintended, but vitally important, consequence, the training helped the Slave Galleries Committee to recognize, reflect on, and address many of the internal issues that thwarted its own work on the project. These included resolving internal disagreements about how the project should be administered and addressing the concerns of the congregation about whether the space should be preserved and interpreted.

The national attention that Animating Democracy brought to the project had a significant impact on how the slave galleries were viewed within the church community. Everyone in the congregation knew what those spaces were. But many were not ready or willing to face the horror they represented, and either did nothing to support, or actively opposed, the committee's work to interpret them. Although they came to church every Sunday, many congregants had never set foot in the space. But at each of the events held around the space—the anniversary celebrations organized by St. Augustine's, the LESCPP meetings that brought people from across the neighborhood, and especially the dialogue held in April 2003 as part of the Animating Democracy national convening—it became clear that this space, and the work of the committee, had tremendous meaning for people far beyond the church. At these events, several congregants were inspired to climb the stairs for the first time. Thus the national attention helped the Slave Galleries Committee to secure stronger support within its own community. Deacon Hopper summarized:

The dialogic process afforded us an important opportunity to learn new skills that proved to be very helpful in ways that actually went beyond our work with the Slave Galleries Committee into our interactions in the church and with the community at large. We fully expect the training to have a lasting impact on our lives and our work. Importantly, the learned dialogue techniques allowed us to develop some very useful, actionable data from the dialogue participants. Additionally, having participated in an Animating Democracy Exchange as well as being the subject in a subsequent ADI case study, offered me and the Slave Galleries Committee a splendid opportunity to experience other preservation projects and to develop contacts with other ADI program participants. In summary, participation in the ADI Program has offered me and other members of the Slave Galleries Committee an important opportunity to grow and learn in ways that have and will continue to benefit our restoration and preservation project.

### **In the Neighborhood**

The *Slave Galleries Project* established the Lower East Side Community Preservation Project as an ongoing, organized, and recognized forum for developing community history initiatives that address shared neighborhood concerns. Led by example of the slave galleries, the museum has already begun fund-raising to make LESCPP a permanent resident in the neighborhood. LESCPP's next project will be a walking tour, led by community preservationists, that links many of the historic sites identified through their work on the *Slave Galleries Project* and the place-marking project, in collaboration with Place Matters. The tour will explore diverse sites and stories that raise issues community preservationists identified through their work with LESCPP, and will end with a tour and dialogue at the slave galleries. It will offer a very different portrait of the neighborhood than current walking tours do, a badly needed corrective to the historic district.

The project also prompted a marked shift in neighborhood support for the role of history and historic preservation in community development. In the winter of 2002, the museum became involved in a controversial dispute with the owner of an adjacent property who had damaged the historic integrity of 97 Orchard Street, the museum's National Historic Site. At a public hearing about the dispute, several community preservationists spoke publicly, at political risk, in favor of preserving the places that help us to remember the neighborhood's diverse heritage. Their testimonies serve as an example of how an arts-based community dialogue process can inspire new grass-roots commitment to the arts and humanities.

## QUESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

We took our role as social scientists in the Animating Democracy Laboratory very seriously. We were conscious that we should watch this experiment closely in order to develop new knowledge and test new practices for ourselves and for historic sites around the world. At the outset, we established specific goals. At the end, we evaluated ourselves against those goals. But at the end of the evaluation, we wondered: Did our indices for success fully test the potential role of dialogue as an instrument of effective, democratic change? We were left with many unanswered questions that should be discussed and addressed in order for this work to continue:

### ***What is the best way to structure a collaboration for arts- and humanities-based civic dialogue?***

While both the Tenement Museum and St. Augustine's had long histories of working with other organizations in the community, neither had entered into such a deep and long-term partnership; and neither had ever had so much at stake. Within the ranks of both organizations, suspicions arose about where and why money was being spent. Project leaders from both organizations struggled to mediate between the concerns of their respective organizations and the goals of the collaboration. The project required strong leadership and organizing within both organizations in order to build and maintain support for the project as it was structured.

The project took dialogue as an art and science very seriously, and was as committed to developing an effective design for dialogue as it was to creating an effective design for the preservation of the slave galleries. To that end, project leaders spent considerable time and funds perfecting dialogue designs and training community leaders to facilitate them. While the staff of both organizations supported in theory the idea of dialogue, both understood it primarily as a natural process that did not require significant time, and certainly not money, to develop. Although the amount of money spent on research and preservation was over twice what was spent on dialogue, project leaders from both institutions heard similar concerns from their colleagues: it sounds like you're spending more money on talk than you are on action.

For both organizations, the national attention brought to the project by Animating Democracy—the fact that the project was part of a highly publicized national laboratory that would influence the fields of arts, humanities, and community development—helped garner internal support for the more experimental aspects of the work. However, we recognize that the “soft” cost of dialogue will be extremely difficult to justify in any arts- and humanities-based dialogue project's work. The question of how much and what kind of professional consultation is needed, and what funds are required to support it, is a critical one to address, especially if we want to inspire smaller organizations to take on this work.

*Creating more equity between large- and small-budget organizations in order to establish more equitable collaborations is a challenge for future grass-roots cultural work.*

Reflecting on the collaboration, both project leaders felt that the partnership might have worked better if St. Augustine's had received the grant directly and contracted the Tenement Museum to perform specific services. Unfortunately, in addition to being a religious institution, St. Augustine's budget and infrastructure could not necessarily accommodate the administration of an \$80,000 grant. Part of the advantage of partnering with the museum was its ability to secure funds from a variety of sources that were not available to St. Augustine's. Creating more equity between large- and

small-budget organizations in order to establish more equitable collaborations is a challenge for future grass-roots cultural work.

### ***How much is dialogue worth?***

In introducing us to the concept of dialogue, consultant Tammy Bormann prepared us: “Dialogue,” she warned, “is a very artificial process.” Cross-cultural dialogue is even more artificial. Steve Yip, of the Chinese American Planning Council, told us he came to meeting after meeting because, although he might have some political differences with our approach, it was so rare to see cross-cultural dialogue actually taking place in any form. These dialogues only took place because of the tireless work by Lisa Chice to organize deliberately mixed groups of people to come together—sending them letters, calling them on the phone—and by Tammy Bormann to intentionally structure their interaction with one another once they came through the door.

There is no doubt that this kind of cross-cultural dialogue and collaboration is rich, rewarding, and critical to community organizing. But it must be recognized that it is incredibly time-consuming to orchestrate and is therefore incredibly expensive. Small organizations may not have the resources to make it happen. We noticed this when assigning our community preservationists the task of facilitating a practice dialogue in teams. All of them were excited to facilitate the dialogue and were willing to dedicate time to it, but were often challenged to recruit and organize mixed groups of people. Our community preservationists were supposedly the people with the closest ties to neighborhood groups, but even organized groups like after-school programs or tenants associations can be hard to corral around a specific schedule. Instead, most teams wound up facilitating one dialogue with one facilitators’ constituency and another with the other’s. Even within that structure, the most difficult work was in scheduling the groups. The only reason we were able to make LESCPP so successful is that we had dedicated staff people to help organize the logistics.

### ***How can you make the investment in dialogue pay off?***

Because dialogue is so resource intensive, it was important to us to make our training survive beyond the project and build capacity for new projects. As the proliferation of projects and the continued dedication of community preservationists shows, our training met our goal of creating a new cadre of community facilitators. What we did not realize at the outset was that the impact of training individuals can be limited if they are the only ones trained within their organizations. The individual has new capacities, but this individual has only so much time to exercise them; the impact would be much greater if the entire organization were introduced to dialogue. They could then use this new capacity to address the issues and challenges they face.

The slave galleries have only begun to realize their potential as powerful tools for civic dialogue. And while we focused on the specific issue of marginalization and exclusion, our project has shown us that the slave galleries will serve as a resource for people dealing with a whole range of different questions and challenges. We asked our visitors: If you could bring anyone to the slave galleries, who would you bring? What would you use the space to discuss with them? The answers speak for themselves:

*Pastors and ministers should come to learn: what it means to be spiritual; about ministering to a diverse population; what it feels like to be in an underserved group; how moral standards may change over generations . . .*

*Media should be shown that the level of invisibility for those who had to sit in the galleries echoes the status of minorities in the media today.*

*Supreme court justices who are reviewing affirmative action policy should come and experience in a visceral way the legacy of slavery.*

*Those involved in reparations should come and consider who was here and what they lost.*

*Those who write textbooks and curricula should come and see this history.*

*My Uncle Eddie who didn't have a good thing to say about anyone who wasn't Polish.*

*My future children.*

*As part of Animating Democracy's Critical Perspectives writing project, the Slave Galleries Restoration Project was the subject of four additional essays. Essays by public historian **John Kuo Wei Tchen** ("Freedom's Perch: The "Slave Galleries" and the Importance of Historical Dialogue"); storyteller and historical interpreter, **Lorraine Johnson-Coleman** ("The Colors of Soul"); Slave Galleries Committee member and St. Augustine's congregant, **Rodger Taylor** ("St. Augustine's Church Slave Galleries Project"); and former Lower East Side Tenement project coordinator, **Lisa Chice** ("Building upon a Strange and Startling Truth") may be found at: [www.AmericansForTheArts.org/AnimatingDemocracy/](http://www.AmericansForTheArts.org/AnimatingDemocracy/).*

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**Liz Ševčenko** is vice president of programs for the Lower East Side Tenement Museum. She is a candidate for a Ph.D. in American history at New York University, director of the Usable Past Project, and a teaching assistant in African American history at New York University. Ševčenko has pioneered ways to explore contemporary issues through a historic lens. In her program, *Whose Neighborhood Is This?*, she invited residents of the Lower East Side to create a collective map of neighborhood spaces from their memories as a tool to inspire dialogue between diverse residents about their claims to urban space. As director of the founding conference of Historic Site Museums of Conscience, Ševčenko has worked with the directors of historic sites around the world to strengthen their capacity to use the past as a tool for addressing contemporary concerns. The Lower East Side Tenement Museum and its programs have served as a laboratory and model for historic sites around the world that are striving to use their sites to stimulate civic dialogue.

**The Reverend Deacon Edgar W. Hopper** is chair of the St. Augustine's Slave Galleries Restoration and Preservation Committee and is its on-site coordinator. A graduate of Howard University in Washington, D.C., he is the president and owner of E. W. Hopper Associates, a personalized marketing consulting firm. His corporate experience includes a long term position at the Ziff-Davis Publishing Co. where he held the positions of Vice-President, Publishing Director, Electronics Division, and Corporate Vice-President, Marketing. An ordained Episcopal minister, Deacon Hopper's ministry includes, in addition to his liturgical duties at St. Augustine's, an annual missionary responsibility in Haiti working with the Salesian Sisters who care for the poorest of the poor children; membership in the Lower East Side AIDS Strategy Group and the teaching of Bible Study at Housing Works, one of Lower Manhattan's largest AIDS Service facilities. Deacon Hopper has been a guest lecturer in advertising and marketing at a number of Black colleges and universities in the South; has taught Entrepreneurship and Leadership Development at the Fashion Institute of Technology, the High School



For Fashion Industries, and community-based organizations in Manhattan and Brooklyn. Additionally, Deacon Hopper is an active community member focusing on school and other civic issues.

**Lisa Chice** is Director of Public Programs at the Brooklyn Historical Society. As Interpretation Associate at the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, she coordinated and performed outreach for the Lower East Side Community Preservation Project. Ms. Chice is a graduate of Tufts University and the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.