

J I M STUDIO /// The Enslaved Ancestors Memorial



The Design Ideas Lab is part of Van Cortlandt Park Alliance's REIMAGINING initiative, in partnership with the Design Trust for Public Space and Immanuel Oni, Liminal Sp, the Legacy Council, and NYC Parks. This initiative invites the community to reimagine the park's Enslaved African Burial Ground site as a memorial space that fosters long-term healing and restoration. This project is supported by a generous grant from the Mellon Foundation. Today, and every day, we acknowledge that this land is the traditional territory of the Lenape and Algonquian peoples. We honor and thank them for their stewardship of this land and recognize their continued presence.



Reimagining the
Enslaved African
Burial Ground



NYC Parks



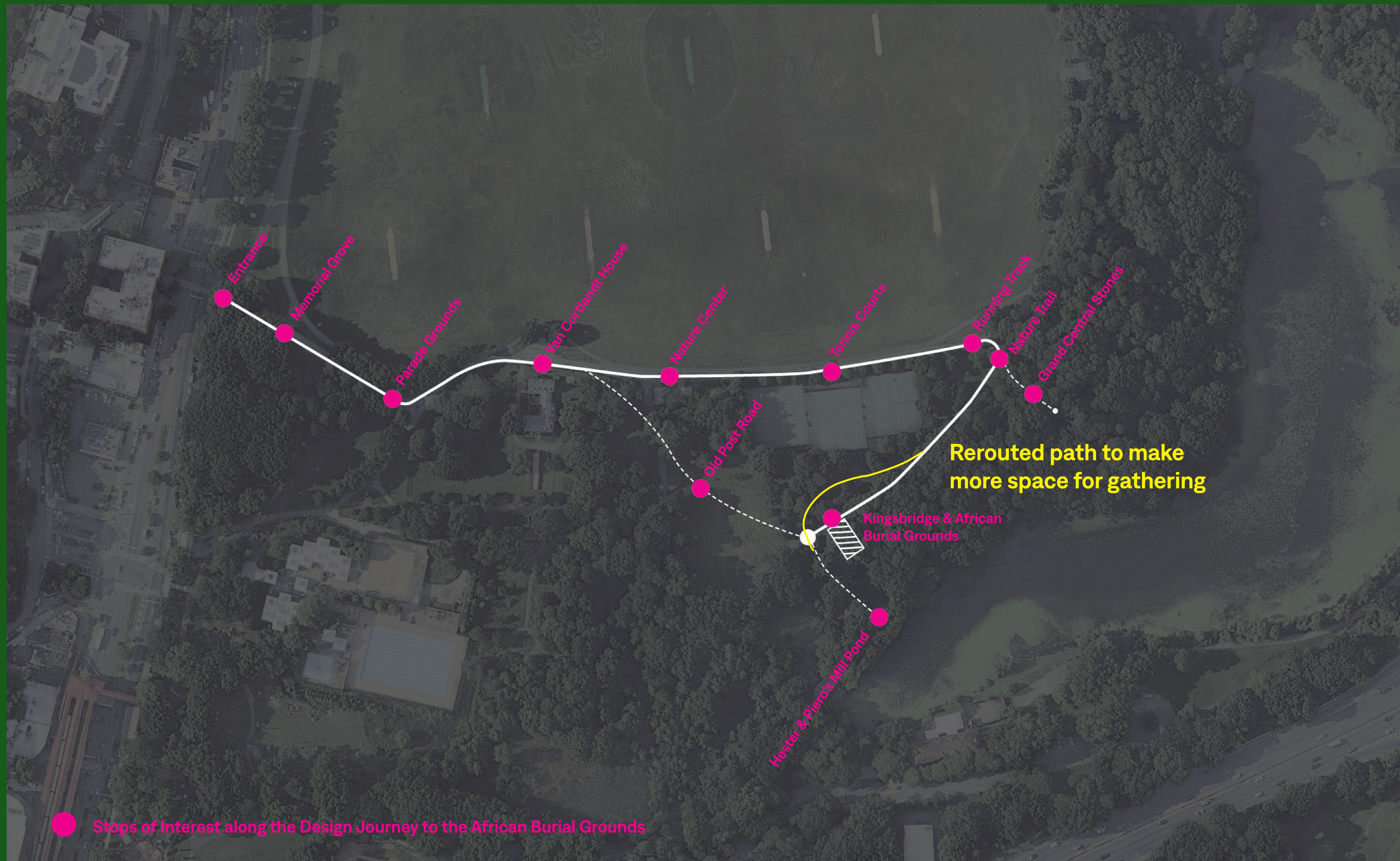
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The Beaded Canopy projects light, color and names representative of the names and life of the enslaved people on the Van Cortlandt Plantation.



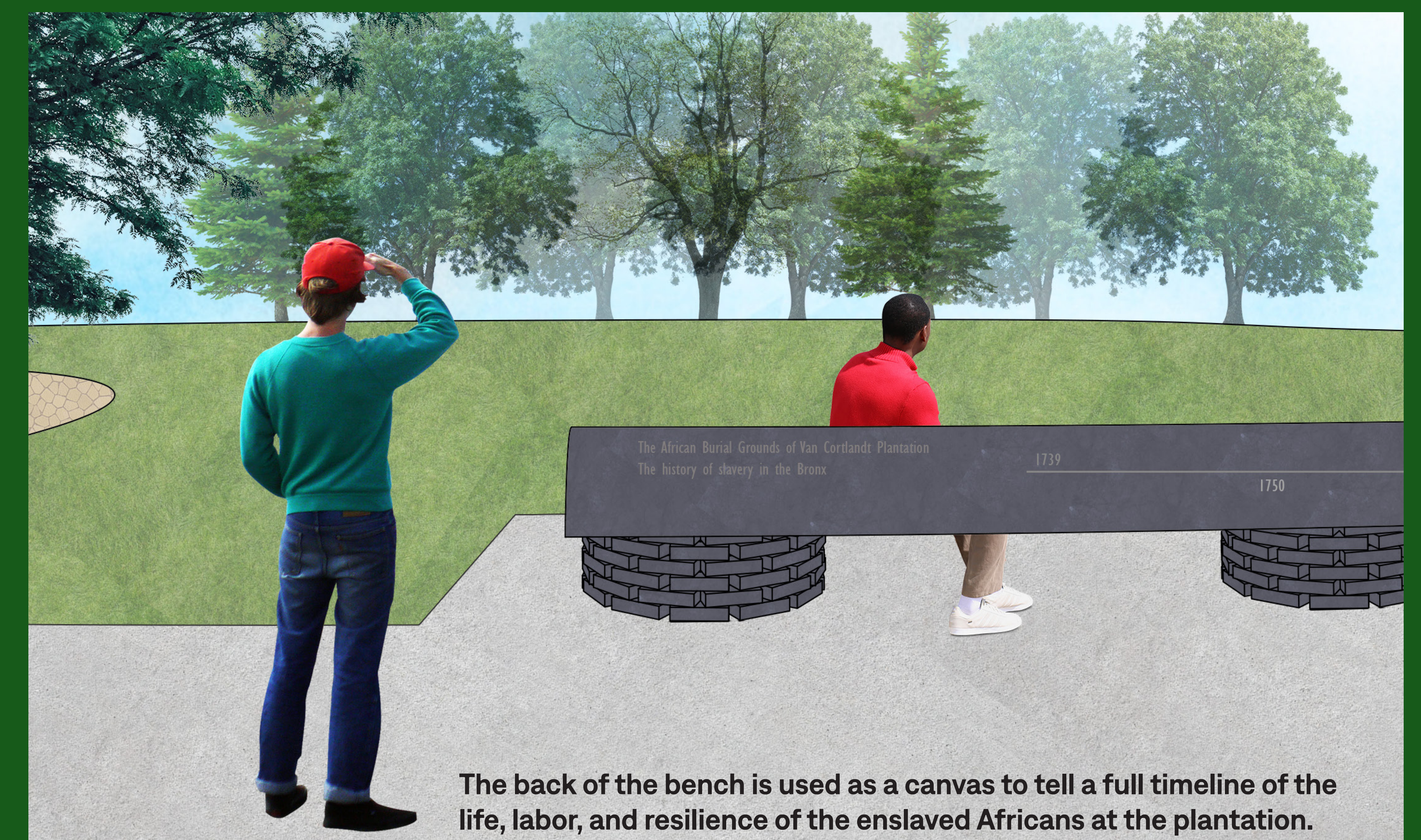
The stone bench represents both the labor and the craft of the enslaved people who built the Van Cortlandt Plantation and other sites throughout New York City.



Stonework on the plantation reflects a long heritage of craft and decoration that should be acknowledged in the site materials.



Beads and other glass artifacts can be observed inside the Van Cortlandt house; these remnants were the source of inspiration to elevate the brief moments of joy and beauty in the life of a laborer.



The back of the bench is used as a canvas to tell a full timeline of the life, labor, and resilience of the enslaved Africans at the plantation.

About this Design Idea: The Enslaved Ancestors Memorial /// A place of layered engagement — where residents pause at the bench, a family gathers on the lawn, and a child stands beneath the beaded canopy watching light spell out a name they've never heard before. The memorial expands the commemorative space to welcome gathering, intimate reflection, and the telling of history. A sculptural beaded canopy, inspired by adornment objects kept by enslaved Africans, casts colored light and names across the site. A curved stone bench marks the threshold of the memorial and carries the history of the Van Cortlandt plantation along its back. Flowering groundcover offers beauty, seasonal renewal, and quiet dignity befitting a resting place.



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