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**Gary L. Ackerman**  
**Congress of the United States**

**5th District, New York**

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INSTITUTIONS AND CONSUMER CREDIT

February 9, 2012

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue Northwest  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama:

I write to request your help in recognizing the contribution of enslaved African-Americans who helped build the White House. In one of our history's tragic ironies, slaves helped build the capital of the free world. From the U.S. Capitol Building to the White House, our national symbols that represent freedom to so many of us, were built by people who were anything but free. While the larger injustice of slavery can never be adequately corrected, the continuing failure of properly informing visitors to Washington of the history of slaves building our national structures—including the White House—should be remedied.

In July, I was proud to join a bipartisan group of Members of Congress that dedicated plaques placed outside the House of Representatives' visitor galleries to properly inform visitors of the role slave labor played in constructing the Capitol building. I was also proud that a section of the Capitol Visitors Center was named Emancipation Hall to honor the contributions of slave labor. These injustices were first called to my attention by my constituent, Mandingo Tshaka. It is long past time that similar measure also be taken in the White House to inform its visitors of the role slaved labor played in constructing the Executive Mansion.

Slaves helped dig the foundation for the White House. They quarried stone that would be used for the walls, dug up clay for thousands of bricks, cut timber, sawed lumber, and performed carpentry inside the White House. Even after White House construction was completed, slaves continued to support White House operations. Slaves served in White House domestic staff from 1800 through the Civil War.

While slavery is no moment worthy of national pride, the American way has always been to acknowledge our wrongs and constantly strive for better. It is wrong not to acknowledge wrongs. An acknowledgment of the role of slave labor displayed in the White House would be an important symbol that the United States does not run from its history, but rather learns from it. That is something of which all Americans can be proud.

I urge you to take steps to have an appropriate representation acknowledging the role of slave labor in constructing the White House in an area of public viewing.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gary L. Ackerman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Gary L. Ackerman  
Member of Congress