

March 27, 2017

Students at Mount Sinai
1468 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10129

Mitchell J. Silver, Commissioner
New York City Department of Parks and Recreation
24 West 61st Street
New York, NY 10025

Dear Commissioner Silver,

As medical students at Mount Sinai, we must confront and acknowledge that many past and current practices of medicine are explicitly designed to take advantage of vulnerable communities. All too often people of color, women, immigrants, and LGBTQ individuals are targeted. In addition to recognizing this past and its continuation today, we have an obligation to work for a more just future.

Therefore, we write you in strong support of East Harlem Preservation's campaign to remove the statue of Dr. J. Marion Sims from its current location on Fifth Avenue and 103rd Street. While Dr. Sims is often called the "Father of Modern Gynecology," he is not a hero. He brutally practiced his surgeries on enslaved women without anesthesia or consent. As detailed in *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present* by Harriet A. Washington, Dr. Sims "bought black women slaves and addicted them to morphine in order to perform dozens of exquisitely painful, distressingly intimate vaginal surgeries. Not until he had experimented with his surgeries on Betsey and her fellow slaves for years did Sims essay to cure white women." Honoring Sims is therefore an endorsement of the torture of Black women.

As medical students, we reject Dr. Sims' legacy and believe it is neither right nor just to honor him. As residents of East Harlem, we do not want this symbol of racist medical experimentation present anywhere, much less in a predominantly Black and Latin@ neighborhood. The statue is an inaccurate representation of history. It is a cruel reminder to all those who pass by it of the brutality inflicted upon Black women by Dr. Sims and the dark history of medical experimentation on people of color in the United States.

It is not difficult to find any number of individuals who deserve to be recognized in place of Dr. Sims. In particular, there are many Black and Latin@ healthcare providers who deserve to be

recognized as historical leaders and present role models. For example, Dr. Rebecca Lee Crumpler was the first African American woman to earn an M.D. degree in the United States. She spent a large part of her career caring for freed slaves and wrote a book of medical advice for women and children. Also, we can mourn and honor the female slaves themselves, who endured years of brutal, forced experimentation. Is their incredible suffering not worth mentioning? We rightfully do not honor the Nazi doctors who engaged in forced medical experimentation on concentration camp prisoners. It is only reasonable that Dr. Sims be treated in the same manner.

It is our hope that New York City will listen to the people of East Harlem, remove Dr. Sims' statue, and replace it with one that more accurately represents the past while honoring Black and Latin@ leaders who have worked tirelessly for health equity.

Sincerely,

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