

**RE: Removing the statue of Dr. J. Marion Sims**

August 17, 2017

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

Dear Commissioner Silver,

I am writing to you today in 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. Although Dr. Sims is often called the "Father of Modern Gynecology," he is no hero. He brutally practiced his surgeries on enslaved women without anesthesia or consent. As described 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."

As a family medicine physician whose focus is reproductive health, I must confront and acknowledge that many past and current practices of medicine are explicitly designed to take advantage of vulnerable communities. This statue 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. 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. Honoring Sims is an endorsement of the torture of Black women.

I hope that New York City Department of Parks and Recreation will listen to the people of East Harlem Preservation and to Mayor DeBlasio who has called for a review and removal of "all symbols of hate" in New York City. Remove Dr. Sims' statue. It's past time.

Sincerely,

Susan Rubin, MD, MPH  
Associate Professor, Department of Family Medicine, Ichan School of Medicine at Mount Sinai  
Reproductive Health Research Director, Institute for Family Health  
New York, NY