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March 15, 2017

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

Re: Removal of Dr. J. Marion Sims statue

Dear Commissioner Silver,

I write to express my deep concern about the Dr. J. Marion Sims statue currently installed at Fifth Avenue and 103rd Street and to support efforts to remove it from this location. Local East Harlem activists launched this campaign after learning of Sim's horrific experiments detailed in the book "Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present."

Clearly, Dr. J. Marion Sims is not a hero. A white southern doctor, he carried out experimental and cruel surgeries on enslaved Black women without anesthesia or their informed consent, and left an ugly legacy that is racist, sexist, and inhumane. The Sims statue is an insult to the predominantly Black and Latinx community of East Harlem, but also to all women and men of conscience.

We live in challenging times when each of us, and our institutions, are being called to act, to take principled stands that inspire us to move beyond the political myopia in current discourse. It is time to reexamine the honors bestowed upon celebrated figures whose views and actions on race and the rights of women are abhorrent today. In fact, many institutions and local governments across the United States have recognized the importance of this review, and are reevaluating their complicity in perpetuating racist histories through statues and other symbols. As I'm sure you're aware, Yale, Harvard, and Princeton, among others, recently made changes to their walls and art collections, and cities in Louisiana, Virginia, and Kentucky have removed confederate symbols and statues from public spaces.

New York City faces a similar choice with the Sims statue. Will the City stand for justice against a history of racism and the brutalization of poor women of color? As a long time activist, Manhattan resident, and frequent visitor to Central Park, I urge you to remove the Sims statue. It's removal would make a clear statement and would be a proud moment for all New Yorkers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Iris Morales".

Iris Morales
Publisher & Editor