

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY  
IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

DAVID N. DINKINS

September 16, 2019

Signe Nielsen  
President  
Public Design Commission of the City of New York  
City Hall, Third Floor  
New York, NY 10007

The word 'representation' can be overly activated, but that does not diminish its truth and its importance. When the citizens of New York City elected me as their 106<sup>th</sup> Mayor in 1989, they changed history and we broke barriers. My election brought representation for African American men and women into City Hall and Gracie Mansion as a person who looked like them and rose up from meager means into the executive office of the most powerful city in the world.

It is important for children to see people that look like them - teaching in their classrooms, represented in their books, as CEOs leading companies, on their TV screens, in the theater, at the movies, etc this fact is widely known and accepted. And yet, I have learned that there is an active debate currently taking place around the value of dedicating a statue in Central Park that depicts three iconic women – all leaders in the battle for women's rights. The controversy centers around the inclusion of the African-American hero, Sojourner Truth among the three.

As I understand it, this monument was already approved by the City and the Department of NYC Parks years ago. That there are currently no statues of female historical figures installed within the vast acreage of Central Park, and fewer than ten (compared to the volumes of statues of men) throughout our city is a sad truth. Therefore, depicting Sojourner Truth among the monument proposed in Central Park seems a just cause in the long road to correcting not only the lacking depiction, but also the rightful place that African-American women held within the women's suffrage movement – a position that is often overlooked and under-weighted. The monument, as proposed, is a **just** beginning toward representational balance in every way. This installation has been a long time in coming, and both the Monumental Women Fund and the Girl Scouts Organization have fought valiantly for this statue.

Think of all the young girls who walk through that park every day and then think of all the girls and women of color who walk through that park every day. Why is this issue still under debate or considered controversial when it had already passed all tests of historical relevance and been given a green light?

With the centennial of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment ratification approaching its national celebration in New York City in less than one year, the window is closing for successful completion of this important project. New York City will attract large crowds of patriotic women, men, girls and boys from all over the country. The statue of the Women's Rights Pioneers should be approved as presented to you today in order to meet its timeline for completion in time for this celebration. It should not be held up any longer. There are generations of young women counting on this important project moving forward so that they may see themselves represented as they stroll through Central Park.

New York City has always been a leader among cities. I ask that you approve this historic, representational monument and maintain our leadership status on this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David N. Dinkins". The signature is written in a cursive style with some loops and is positioned above a horizontal line.

David N. Dinkins  
106<sup>th</sup> Mayor, City of New York  
Professor of Practice, Public Policy