



Commissioner Mitchell J. Silver
New York City Department of Parks and Recreation
The Arsenal, Central Park
830 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10065

August 19, 2017

Dear Commissioner Silver:

Total Equity Now echoes East Harlem Preservation's call to rid our community of the statue of Dr. J. Marion Sims, the infamous doctor who performed surgeries on enslaved Black women without anesthesia and without the women's consent.

Just as we must raise our voices and take action to rid both our neighborhood and the world of inhumanity in all its forms, wherever and whenever it rears its ugly head, we must also be clear and resolute in declaring who and what we *do* want to celebrate through monuments.

In place of the torturous doctor, we should install a statue in honor of Pura Belpré, the New York Public Library system's first Latina librarian, either at the soon-to-be vacated spot or in front of East Harlem's Aguilar Branch Library on 110th Street between 3rd and Lexington Avenues.

Over the course of her trailblazing career as a children's librarian, author, and puppeteer, Pura worked at four different Harlem libraries, from East Harlem's Aguilar Library, to Central Harlem's 115th Street Branch and 135th Street Library (now the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture), to West Harlem's Hamilton Grange Library. Pura made sure that Black and Latino/a children in Harlem had access to reading materials and programming that reflected the richness of their ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Unfortunately, few community members, young or old, are aware of her amazing legacy. Creating a statue in her honor, in the heart of East Harlem, where she lived for decades, would inspire the community and help promote reading.

Pura has received several national honors, including through the American Library Association's annual Pura Belpré Award (www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/belpremedal). NOW is the time to honor her in a big way locally!

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Joe Rogers, Jr.
Founder & Facilitator
Total Equity Now

cc: Melissa Mark-Viverito, New York City Council Speaker
Anthony W. Marx, President, New York Public Library