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WOMEN.NYC: DE BLASIO ADMINISTRATION ANNOUNCES FOUR NEW MONUMENTS HONORING
FEMALE LEADERS AS A PART OF SHE BUILT NYC INITIATIVE

With this announcement, there will be a She Built NYC monument in all five boroughs

NEW YORK—Today, First Lady Chirlane McCray and former Deputy Mayor Alicia Glen announced the next four monuments as a part of She Built NYC, an initiative to honor the trailblazing women who have helped shape New York City while addressing the absence of female statues in our public realm. These four women have made extraordinary contributions to society and were nominated by the public as part of an open call conducted last year. The monuments—which include Billie Holiday, Elizabeth Jennings Graham, Dr. Helen Rodríguez Trías, and Katherine Walker—mark a critical step towards creating a more dynamic, diverse, and inclusive collection of permanent public artwork across all five boroughs.

“We cannot tell the story of New York City without recognizing the invaluable contributions of the women who helped build and shape it,” said First Lady Chirlane McCray. “Public monuments should tell the full history and inspire us to realize our potential – not question our worth. In honoring these four trailblazers today, New Yorkers will have the opportunity to see powerful women who made history receive the recognition they deserve.”

“When we launched She Built NYC, we promised this would not be a ‘one and done,’” said former Deputy Mayor Alicia Glen. “Today’s announcement marks real action by the City of New York to ensure that our public realm exemplifies the diverse and accomplished women who make this city so great.”

The four new monuments will be placed throughout the five boroughs and will honor:

Billie Holiday near Queens Borough Hall (Queens)

Billie Holiday (born Eleanora Fagan Gough, 1915-1959) is one of the most celebrated jazz singers of all time. Her career helped to define the New York “swing sing” jazz scene and to challenge racial barriers. One of the first black women to sing with a white orchestra, she struck out on her own to win fame with Strange Fruit, a powerful protest song about lynching, named by Time Magazine “the song of the century” (1999). Her career was recognized by four posthumous Grammys and induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

A monument to Billie Holiday will be built in her home borough near Queens Borough Hall. Holiday lived in Addisleigh Park and later in Flushing.

Elizabeth Jennings Graham in the Vanderbilt Avenue Corridor near Grand Central Terminal (Manhattan)

Elizabeth Jennings Graham (1827–1901) challenged racial segregation a century before the modern Civil Rights movement. On July 16, 1854, the 27-year-old schoolteacher boarded a streetcar that did not accept African-Americans as passengers. When the conductor confronted her, she refused to leave until forcibly removed by the police. Graham used her education and connections in New York's middle-class black community to publish an account of the incident and sue the Third Avenue Railroad Company, the conductor, and the driver. The judge ruled in her favor, holding that "a colored person... had the same rights as others." In addition to winning \$225 in damages, Jennings's case took the first step toward ending transit segregation in New York. By 1860 all of the city's streetcar lines were open to African-Americans. In her later years, Jennings continued to teach, helping to found the first kindergarten in the city for black children.

A monument to Elizabeth Jennings Graham next to Grand Central Terminal, the city's most iconic transit hub, highlights the interconnected history of civil rights and transportation in New York as well as the historic role of this important activist.

Dr. Helen Rodríguez Trías at St. Mary's Park (Bronx)

Dr. Helen Rodríguez Trías (1929-2001) was a pioneer in pediatrics and public health. Over the course of her career, Dr. Rodríguez Trías focused on issues including reproductive rights and HIV/AIDS care and prevention; she did this work on behalf of women and children, especially those in poor and minority communities. She became the medical director of the New York State Department of Health's AIDS Institute and the first Latinx director of the American Public Health Association (APHA). Dr. Rodríguez Trías was a recipient of the Presidential Citizens Medal. Among her greatest legacies are shaping regulations that govern informed consent for sterilizations and empowering low-income and minority women through the women's health movement.

A monument to Dr. Rodriguez Trías in St. Mary's Park, which is near Lincoln Hospital (today known as NYC Health + Hospitals/Lincoln), is fitting; Dr. Rodríguez Trías was the head of the hospital's pediatrics department and advocated for better medical care for the communities of color that the institution served.

Katherine Walker at the Staten Island Ferry Landing (Staten Island)

Katherine Walker (1838-1941), the keeper of the Robbins Reef Lighthouse for nearly three decades, is credited with saving the lives of at least 50 people and maintaining the light that guided countless ships to safe passage through Kill Van Kull, the shipping channel between Staten Island and Bayonne, New Jersey. One of the few female lighthouse keepers in American history, she broke barriers in a male-dominated field and raised her two children at the lighthouse, rowing them back and forth to attend school on Staten Island. Walker's story sheds light on the largely untold history of women working in New York City's thriving marine ecosystem. Her efforts contributed to the infrastructure of the shipping industry, which was the lifeblood of the city's economy for centuries.

A monument to Katherine Walker at the Staten Island ferry landing celebrates her impact on the borough and on maritime life of the city.

"It's long past time we honor the great women who helped shape this city," said women.nyc Executive Director Faye Penn. "We are tremendously proud to be recognizing this diverse and dynamic set of women with monuments celebrating their accomplishments and thank the public for answering the call to help make us a fairer city for all women."

“The people and groups we celebrate in our public art should reflect the rich diversity and cultural history that has made New York City such an extraordinary place,” said Cultural Affairs Commissioner Tom Finkelpearl. “By honoring these four remarkable women New Yorkers, She Built NYC is taking important steps toward a fuller telling of our city’s dynamic story through public monuments. We look forward to the upcoming community engagement and artist selection processes, bringing New Yorkers together to help preserve these legacies and what they represent for generations to come.”

The four new monuments will be commissioned through the Department of Cultural Affairs’ Percent for Art process, which requires that one percent of the budget for eligible City-funded construction projects be spent on public artwork. This inclusive process builds community engagement and input into the artist selection and artwork design process. The construction of these monuments will be funded through the \$10 million the Department of Cultural Affairs has committed over the next four years to commissioning new permanent public monuments and commemorations.

Artist selection for each of these monuments will begin by the end of 2019, with artist selection concluding in the first half of 2020. The monuments will be built throughout 2021 and 2022.

The City will also work with the Museum of the City of New York to identify potential future monuments that honor groups of women. The Museum will use the recommendations of the She Built NYC selection committee, as well as the public nominations list, to research and comment on the appropriateness of various groupings of women from the list. The City will then use this research to inform future She Built NYC monuments.

“I’m thrilled to hear that four more remarkable women are being honored with monuments through the She Built NYC initiative, so that all five boroughs will have statues of women. It is critical that we continue to honor great women who were trail blazers, change makers, and contributed so much to our great city. I hope these monuments will remind young women of their limitless potential and will inspire all New Yorkers for many years to come,” said Representative Carolyn Maloney.

“She Built NYC is a wonderful initiative that frankly was long overdue. For too long, women’s contributions have gone without the proper recognition. I applaud First Lady McCray, Mayor de Blasio, and the entire team for moving forward with these monuments, which both reflect and celebrate the true nature of our city’s rich, diverse history,” said Representative Eliot Engel.

“To tell the story of New York City is to tell the story of an extraordinary legacy of strong and powerful women,” said Representative Hakeem Jeffries. “As we celebrate Women’s History Month, it is a powerful image to see Billie Holliday, Elizabeth Jennings Graham, Dr. Helen Rodríguez Trías and Katherine Walker join Shirley Chisholm to mark a She Built NYC monument in every borough. I thank the First Lady, former Deputy Mayor Glen and all involved for their critical efforts to ensure public artwork in New York City continues to reflect the diversity of the greatest city in the world.”

For too long, we have not done enough to honor the significant contributions of women in our city and our nation,” said Representative Jerrold Nadler. “Today’s announcement of a four new monuments in every borough honoring women who have made significant contributions is an important step in correcting that omission. It is wonderful that we will be erecting monuments to Billie Holiday, Elizabeth Jennings Graham, Dr. Helen Rodríguez Trías and Katherine Walker to honor their legacy and contributions to our city.”

"Honoring Katherine Walker with a statue at the Staten Island Ferry Landing is a fitting tribute to an incredible woman who had an immeasurable impact on Staten Island and the City as a whole. I'm excited to see the community's engagement in the planning and look forward to seeing this project come to fruition," said Representative Max Rose.

"Elizabeth Jennings Graham was a trailblazer—a Black woman whose case led to the desegregation of all New York City transportation," said Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer. "I am so proud that her statue will stand in Grand Central Station for all New Yorkers to visit and pay homage to the women who helped shape New York City into the city that we know and love today."

"It is an honor to have such a pioneer in transit celebrated in my district. Elizabeth Jennings Graham's courage on a streetcar in 1854 led to the desegregation of our city's entire transportation system. Her legacy and story will forever be a part of New York City history, and I thank the Mayor's office for recognizing such an icon," said Council Member Keith Powers.

"The Museum of the City of New York is honored to be tapped for such an important initiative, especially one that deeply aligns with our mission," said Whitney Donhauser, President and Ronay Menschel Director of the Museum of the City of New York. "The partnership with She Built NYC not only enables us to leverage our scholarship but also pay tribute to women who have made a difference in New York City's history for nearly four centuries."

"Planned Parenthood of New York City applauds Mayor de Blasio and his administration for continuing the She Built NYC initiative, honoring the women trailblazers who helped shape this great city and make New York City what it is today. With the inclusion of Dr. Helen Rodríguez Trías, the She Built NYC initiative rightly recognizes the incredible work of caring, passionate physicians who worked tirelessly to ensure access to high-quality health care. Dr. Rodríguez Trías fought for sexual and reproductive rights for all New Yorkers, and made history with her work to fight for abortion rights, abolish forced sterilization, and expand access to HIV prevention and treatment. We are thrilled that her work is being recognized for its life-changing impact on our city and beyond," Christina Chang, Chief External Affairs Officer, Planned Parenthood of New York City.

"It's exciting to be apart of today's announcement on the Cusp of Women's International Day. Brilliant women like Shirley Chisholm, Billie Holiday and Elizabeth Jennings Graham continue to make New York City and this country great," said Hazel N. Dukes, President of the NAACP New York State Conference.

"We salute these four incredible women," said Dr. Anthony Shih, President of United Hospital Fund, "especially Dr. Helen Rodríguez Trías - her selfless and tireless efforts to serve the health needs of our most vulnerable populations inspire those of us today who are working to improve our health care system."

"On behalf of New York State's County Health Officials and local health departments, congratulations to the City of New York for recognizing a true public health innovator in the "She Built NYC" initiative. Dr Helen Rodriguez-Trias led a storied career in public health, with many of her accomplishments setting the stage for greater focus on social equity and inclusion of underserved populations. This monument will be symbolic of the women of New York State and serve as a powerful reminder that inclusive public health prevention strategies are key to improving the health and well-being of communities," said Sarah Ravenhall, Executive Director for New York State Association of County Health Officials.

“We are extremely grateful for the contributions that Dr. Rodriguez Trías made to Lincoln and to the South Bronx community. This monument is a fitting tribute to her work,” said Milton Nunez, CEO Lincoln Hospital.

“Miss Billie Holiday is one of America's greatest treasures. I want to thank First Lady Chirlane McCray and Former Deputy Mayor Alicia Glen for honoring her. Musically she influenced almost every singer of jazz and popular music including Frank Sinatra. Ms. Holiday was not one to shy away from controversy, brilliantly singing Strange Fruit a song written about the horrific lynchings in the South. Lady Day will always be remembered for integrating white swing bands and taking a stand against racism in America. She deserves a place in history!” said Robin Bell-Steven, Director of Jazzmobile.

The announcement of these four monuments follows the City’s November 2018 announcement of Shirley Chisholm as the first She Built NYC commission. Chisholm, the first black woman to serve in Congress, will be honored with a monument at the Parkside entrance of Prospect Park in Brooklyn adjacent to the congressional district she proudly represented.

She Built NYC started with an open call asking the public to nominate women, groups of women, or events involving women that significantly impacted the history of New York City. Through the women.nyc website, the public submitted nearly 2,000 nominations. Ninety-eight percent of respondents said they would like to see a woman honored who was committed to social reform or justice. The most frequently used word in the submissions was “first,” followed by “leader” and then “advocate.” An advisory panel with individuals representing a broad range of expertise and backgrounds helped refine the public submissions list and provided recommendations to the City.

She Built NYC is an initiative of women.nyc, which was launched in May 2018 by First Lady Chirlane McCray and former Deputy Mayor Alicia Glen to ensure that New York remains the best city in the world for women to succeed.

The launch of She Built NYC followed a report issued by the Mayoral Advisory Commission on City Art, Monuments, and Markers in January 2018, which led Mayor de Blasio to order actions on a number of its recommendations. Most critically, the report called for adding more voices and broader representation to the City’s collection of public art to better reflect its diverse history.

Other efforts underway in response to the Monuments Commission report include “Beyond Sims,” which is commissioning new artwork for the former site of the J. Marion Sims statue along the edge of Central Park in East Harlem. The statue of Sims was removed in April 2018 following years of community advocacy.

About women.nyc

When women succeed, the Greatest City in the World becomes even greater. women.nyc is a groundbreaking initiative that not only inspires women to advance their careers, but also provides them with the real tools they need for success. From free, expert legal advice, to networking and mentorship, to financial assistance, women.nyc offers a growing portfolio of resources for working women. Join women across the five boroughs, and make your #NYCPowerMove with the help and support of women.nyc.

All biographical information provided by the Museum of the City of New York.

The Museum of the City of New York fosters understanding of the distinctive nature of urban life in

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