

Sculpting A Monumental Truth: A Search for Inclusive Equality

Catherine Emmanuelle and Barbara Kernan, PhD (Faculty Advisor) ❖ Women's Studies Program
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire



ABSTRACT

This project began during a trip to Washington, D.C. where the student researcher discovered the "Portrait Monument," a (1927) sculpture by Adelaide Johnson, depicting Stanton, Mott and Anthony--pioneers from the American women's movement. An unfinished piece of marble protruding from the sculpture alluded to a fourth figure not yet included. A docent at the Sewell-Belmont Women's History Museum shared lobbying efforts underway to include freed slave and activist Sojourner Truth to the monument. This information created an immediate intersection for the researcher who had studied Truth and racial divisions within the women's movement during a UWEC Women's Studies course. While efforts to include Truth in the unfinished marble were unsuccessful, Congress passed a resolution to display a new, separate statue of Sojourner Truth near the other monument in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda.

This project investigated the lingering divisions within American sisterhood. The researcher reviewed print sources including historical documents, Congressional resolutions, and feminist texts to better understand oppression and inclusion/exclusion within the women's movement. These works aided in an exploration of themes of political contentiousness and relationships among women of different ethnicities. The project raised speculation about the movement's ability to reconcile pervasive divisions among its proponents.



Photo credit: Student researcher, Catherine Emmanuelle, United States Capitol, Washington, DC January 2009



Photo credit: Student researcher, Catherine Emmanuelle, Sewell-Belmont House, Washington, DC January 2009

HISTORICAL TIMELINE

❖ Dates and events gathered from research literature review

YEAR	EVENT
1920	❖ Feminist activist Alice Paul commissioned an artistic effort to created to remember "the grand finale of the woman's suffrage journey of more than seventy years."
1921	❖ Political artist Adelaide Johnson sculpted <i>The Portrait Monument</i> , depicting white suffragists Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony and Lucretia Mott. The sculpture also includes a faceless woman, "meant to represent the unformed figure of women leaders of the future." ❖ The United States Congress accepted the gifted monument, but it was not displayed in a prominent location, rather a low-visibility location in the Crypt of the building.
1995	❖ 75 th anniversary of women's right to vote sparked an initiative to move the monument from Crypt to a prominent location—the rotunda of the US Capitol (where many statues of men of prominence are displayed). ❖ Organizers faced resistance to moving of the monument, including arguments citing the monument was "too heavy...not enough space...and that the three women were too old or too ugly to be in the Rotunda." ❖ Congress approved the <i>The Portrait Monument's</i> move to Rotunda, contingent upon private donations to pay for the move. Over \$75,000 was raised and the sculpture was moved. ❖ Monument organizers faced new criticism from groups such as the National Congress of Black Women (NCBW), citing that the statue should not be moved to the Rotunda because it lacked inclusivity in regards to women of color within the suffrage movement. ❖ The NCBW launched an unsuccessful campaign to transform the faceless woman in the sculpture to the face of Black suffragist Sojourner Truth.
1997	❖ The United States Congress passed HR-4510, which allows for accepting a sculpted bust of Sojourner Truth to be displayed in the rotunda of the Capitol. Part of the bill reads: "Sojourner Truth was a towering figure among the founders of the movement for women's suffrage in the United States, and no monument that does not include her can accurately represent this important development in our Nation's history."
2006	❖ A bronze bust of Sojourner Truth was displayed in the Capitol on April 28, 2009, paid for by private funds raised by the NCBW. Present at the unveiling of the monument were first lady Michelle Obama, Speaker the House Nancy Pelosi, Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee and Secretary Hilary Clinton—the latter two were main sponsors of the legislation to have the Sojourner Truth monument placed in the Capitol.
2009	❖ A bronze bust of Sojourner Truth was displayed in the Capitol on April 28, 2009, paid for by private funds raised by the NCBW. Present at the unveiling of the monument were first lady Michelle Obama, Speaker the House Nancy Pelosi, Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee and Secretary Hilary Clinton—the latter two were main sponsors of the legislation to have the Sojourner Truth monument placed in the Capitol.

Sources:

- ❖ Johnson Text." Raw data. Sewell-Belmont House, Washington, DC. 27 January 2009.
- ❖ United States Congress. The Joint Committee on the Library. 109th Congress. Congressional Bill H.R. 4510
- ❖ Frank Faragasso and Doug Slover. Cultural Resource Management. National Capitol Parks East. Adelaide Johnson A Marriage of Art and Politics. 3rd ed. Vol. 20. National Parks Service. 54-55

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- ❖ Examine the exclusion and resistance to include Sojourner Truth in a displayed monument in the United States Capitol
- ❖ Apply feminist texts and theory to gain a better understanding of the racial divisions within the history of the women's movement.

FEMINIST THEORISTS AND TEXTS: RACIAL DIVISIONS WITHIN FEMINISM

- ❖ "...seeing Truth as one rather than the nineteenth-century black feminist will open us to a range of political positions and strategies from women who constituted a varied and dynamic black woman's political culture preceding, contemporaneous with, and following Truth." —Teresa C. Zackodnik, "I Don't Know How You Will Feel When I Get Through": Racial Difference, Woman's Rights and Sojourner Truth," *Feminist Studies*.
- ❖ "Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface." —Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider*.
- ❖ "There are two reasons why the black woman writer is not taken as seriously as the black male writer. One is that she's a woman. Critics seem unusually ill-equipped to discuss and analyze the works of black women intelligently." —Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*.
- ❖ "And while the whole idea of sisterhood is nice, a sisterhood that's built on the idea that we're all oppressed in the same way tends to erase things like race, class and sexual orientation. Because, unfortunately, when feminism is talked about, it's still positioned from the experience of a white, middle-to-upper class, hetero gal. It just is." —Jessica Valenti, *Full Frontal Feminism*.
- ❖ "Black women and White women can no longer afford to waste time bickering among themselves. Now, more than ever, we must come together to fight racial inequality, preserve the ideals of affirmative action, and give children of all backgrounds the necessary education and financial tools to prosper and grow." —Midge Wilson and Kathy Russell, *Divided Sisters*.



Photo credit: National Congress of Black Women, Inc., Washington, DC April 2009
www.nationalcongressofblackwomen.org

DISCUSSION

- ❖ The attitude of compassionate questioning is crucial when attempting to understand historical and cultural contextualization of persistent racial tensions. This compassionate questioning must act as a guide in which the barriers of inclusion and continued exclusion can be illuminated for all women.
- ❖ Suggestions for long-term successes between White women and women of color must be rooted in intentional inclusion and alliances with organizations/systems, etc. with a clear understanding of the unique needs of each distinct population. This approach is reinforced by authors Wilson and Russell, authors of *Divided Sisters*.

FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

Future researchers may consider investigating the following:

- ❖ Exploring the existing controversy surrounding the authenticity of Truth's speeches and their White transcriber, Frances Gage.
- ❖ Interviewing and uncovering the route of the House Resolution bill, including direct research with key authors and opponents of the bill.
- ❖ Studying Adelaide Johnson, sculptor of *The Portrait Monument*, particularly looking to better understand her intentions with the sculpture and racial divisions, if any, that influenced this piece of art.

CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Catherine Emmanuelle emmanucl@uwec.edu

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

- ❖ Office of Research Sponsored Programs at University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.
- ❖ This research was funded from student differential tuition funds through the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire Faculty-Mentored Student RSCA Program and the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire Women's Studies Program
- ❖ Learning and Technology Services at University of Wisconsin Eau Claire.
- ❖ Sewell-Belmont House and Museum, Washington, DC



Photo credit: Student researcher, Catherine Emmanuelle, Sewell-Belmont House, Washington, DC January 2009