Crystal Zheng

On this beautiful bright warm sunny day in the big apple, what better way to spend it than to have a nice stroll through a park, eat some sushi, and get starbucks? There really isn’t! But this video is not a day in the life video. Today, we are definitely going to a park, not this one, but this one and we are going to visit the newly established Women’s Rights Pioneers Monument.

Unveiled in August of 2020, the monument is a more recent addition to the many located in the U.S, and is the first to be added to Central Park since the park became a landmark in 1965. Furthermore, it is called to attention for being the first monument depicting “real women.” The park is home to a collection of statues of generals who fought in wars, statues of great political figures, national heroes, and even statues of famous fictional characters like Alice in Wonderland, but for the first time, prominent female figures are being presented with honor alongside their male counterparts.

History has documented women’s struggle to assert themselves higher in the social ladder as a long and ongoing battle. Women were doubted, never given a chance, and always in the shadow of men. The year 1776, many of us remember it as the year the Declaration of Independence was signed, the document that claimed “all men are created equal,” but what about the women? The right to vote was restricted to property owners, many of whom were white male Protestants. New Jersey had granted women the right to vote, that is, if they had enough land, but the privilege was taken away from them in 1807. In 1840, Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton were banned from attending the World Anti-Slavery Convention. The Woman’s

4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
Suffrage Movement began in 1848 after the first Women’s Convention which was held at Seneca Falls, New York, but it would take a while before any progress was made. In 1853, Women delegates were prohibited from speaking at the World’s Temperance Convention. Women were also forced to pause their suffrage movement during the Civil war between 1861 and 1865 to join the war effort. So many injustices towards women and the list continues. After much resistance, women finally achieved their goal in gaining the right to vote in 1920. Yet, there is still a lot of work to be done.

The 14-foot-tall monument depicts Sojourner Truth, Susan B. Anthony, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton as they are considered to be the three most well-known women suffragists. It has been erected to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the ratification of the 19th Amendment, the law that gave women the right to vote. The monument was sculpted by Meredith Bergmann, who is known for her many notorious works including the Boston Women’s Memorial featuring Abigail Adams, Phillis Wheatley, and Lucy Stone. In a statement made by Bergmann about the monument, she says, “my design (also) departs from the other monuments in ways that are appropriate to the entry of women into a sphere from which they were previously excluded.”

Neither Truth, Anthony, nor Stanton lived to see the ratification of the 19th Amendment, but Bergmann believes that it is necessary for the viewers of the present to remember the important work that had been done before us.

The construction process of the monument did not escape from criticism. Originally, the proposed monument only highlighted Stanton and Anthony while other suffragists, including

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6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
9 “Women’s Rights Pioneers Monument.”
11 Ibid.
Truth were simply mentioned in the prop that was to be included, but critics had opposed the idea as it presented a quote unquote “lily-white version of history” and had completely disregarded the “work of black women who served at the vanguard of the fight for universal rights.”

Even after early modifications, the monument had depicted disparities between Whites and Blacks by putting Truth at a separate table apart from the other two. Many critics felt that because all three women shared similar platforms in fighting for women’s rights that it was necessary and reasonable to put them on the same pedestal. On the contrary, some historians recall the racist remarks made by the two white women and deemed it inappropriate to put the three together as it would make the substantial differences between white and black suffrage activists obscure.

It is important that we do not mask any part of our history, whether it is the good or the bad and if the monument was intended to showcase historical figures that played a role in the Civil Rights Movement, then the friendliness between the white and black women depicted in the monument would erase an essential part of our history. However, the monument is not created to commemorate that event, it is meant to celebrate the work of women in their fight for freedoms and Bergmann did just that. The ratification of the 19th amendment was not solely the work of white women, but the work of white and black women which gave all women a new platform to stand on. Bergmann hopes this monument will inspire the present to work together despite their differences in status, race, and background as social divergence remains a struggle in today’s society.

The final product, as we have seen, puts all three women together, emphasizing not only the hardworking attitude of women, but highlighting an equal playing field for both Black and

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12 McGreevy, Nora, "Why the First Monument of Real Women in Central Park Matters-and Why It's Controversial."
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
16 Bergmann, Meredith, "The Design of Our Women's Rights Pioneers Monument."
White individuals. The three women are sculpted as activists at work. Bergmann incorporates the essential elements of activism in her piece as Sojourner Truth is speaking, Susan B. Anthony is organizing, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton is writing. We can see the interaction between Stanton and Truth as they are looking directly at each other showing the inclusivity between Whites and Blacks. Together, they encircle one table, and together, they are collaborating. They represent sisterhood and promote empowerment.

What makes the Women’s Rights Pioneers Monument so successful is its ability to make everyone feel proud, not just women, but everyone. Millions of people pass by or visit Central Park yearly, and in the past year, there have been many who stop in front of the monument to take pictures, to admire the art, and more importantly, to embrace its message. Our country has endured a long and bumpy road to get to where it is today, and this monument is a testament to the steps that have been made and presents a goal that we strive to achieve tomorrow.

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17 Bergmann, Meredith, "The Design of Our Women’s Rights Pioneers Monument."