

City and County of San Francisco
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION



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November 16, 2017

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San Francisco Recreation and Park Commission
501 Stanyan Street
San Francisco, CA 94117

Dear Colleagues:

I write to urge you to support the renaming of Justin Herman Plaza.

Around the country, cities are reckoning with monuments, parks and statues that were named after individuals who carried out devastating policies and violence towards people of color. In San Francisco, as the executive director of the Redevelopment Agency, Justin Herman oversaw the destruction of Black owned businesses and homes, causing the displacement of 4,000 African American residents.

Our city is committed to healing from and addressing the impacts of racially discriminatory laws, decisions and actions of the past. Changing the plaza name would end a silent complicity in what Justin Herman stood for and ensure all people who visit the Embarcadero waterfront feel welcomed.

At its August 24, 2017 Commission meeting, the HRC asked for testimony from In San Francisco residents who lived through the redevelopment of the Western Addition and have committed their lives to rectifying its consequences meeting. They shared the following:

"Justin Herman should well be remembered, should well be talked about. But there's a difference between remembering and honoring. I do not want to whitewash history. I think it's important. I think it's absolutely essential for young folk coming after us to know the history and to know what Justin Herman did, but he should not be honored. And by naming that park after him down at the Embarcadero, it honors his memory and his legacy, which was one that was absolutely devastating to a people"
-Reverend Arnold Townsend

"As a kid I remember going on Fillmore Street selling my papers. It was a paper called the Sun Reporter. And, you know, I could hardly wait until I got of age so I could enjoy Fillmore Street and there were a lot more than barber shops and beauty parlors, in the Afro-American community in those days. And so to honor someone that did that to a whole community where it became the name across the United States, a lot of it came from right here in San Francisco, it stopped being called urban renewal; it became

negro removal. And that's what we have here in San Francisco. So to honor a person that would do something like that, like naming a plaza after him or whatever it is, I don't think is right." - **Wade Woods**

"Mr. Woods is my grandfather. And, you know, while I do take great joy in that, I do want to point something out. Because of the economic genocide that took place in the Fillmore, who's core architect was Justin Herman, you have the certificate of preference as a remedy of that. But the thing with what happened in the Fillmore was that wealth was taken away from the black community. Wealth that could have been passed down to the generations that we have now. Wealth that could have kept them here in the city. And you're seeing the residue of that oppression from that period continue today. That's the only thing that black families in the Fillmore have been able to pass down, is the residue of oppression.

And the thing about it is even with a certificate of preference, my grandfather, as sinister as this may sound, cannot pass that certificate to me. It's nontransferable, which is an additional slap in the face. And, you know, even though you can remove traces of the suspect, the pain of the crime still exists." - **DeAnthony Jones**

The HRC supports the Board of Supervisors' call for the plaza on the Embarcadero to be named for an honored resident, who embodies "San Francisco values of equity, inclusion and forward thinking."

Thank you for your consideration of this matter. If we or the HRC staff can be of any assistance to you moving forward, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Susan Belinda Christian
Chair
On Behalf of the San Francisco Human Rights Commission