

September 23, 2021

Road Map for Action Bulletin 5: Recognizing our Colleagues' Great Work and Exploring the History of Slavery in New York

Happy Thursday Mount Sinai Community –



We wanted to start today's Bulletin with some exciting news. This weekend, *Modern Healthcare* announced that our colleague **Ann-Gel Palermo, DrPH, MPH**, Senior Associate Dean for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai and Chief of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Education and Research for the Mount Sinai Health System, has been named to the

2021 class of Top Diversity Leaders. This is an immense honor for Mount Sinai, and we congratulate Ann-Gel on this much-deserved recognition. You can read more about her and her fellow Top Diversity Leaders [here](#).

This great news comes on the heels of two of our [diversity councils](#) receiving national recognition from the **Global ERG Network**. At the network's [Diversity Impact Awards](#) this month, **Mount Sinai Downtown's Diversity Council** received a Top 10 Diversity Action Award for their **LINC Mentorship Program**, which provides employees of color the opportunity to explore career opportunities and leadership, and which has been expanded system-wide. In addition, **Mount Sinai Morningside's Diversity Council** received a Top 10 Enterprise-Wide Award for its Voter Registration Drive, which was held in partnership with the Black Leaders Advocating for Change and Community ERG.

Our diversity councils competed against diversity councils and Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) from across the country and were selected for recognition using the **Impact Model**—a data-driven, scientifically validated model that shows how their work improved talent management, culture, and organizational vitality. **These awards are a major validation of their work**, and we congratulate everyone who helped make this success happen, especially Donnette Truss and Lena Chang, RN, at Mount Sinai Downtown and Ruby Guzman, Ronald Powers, and Amy Bush at Mount Sinai Morningside!

If you want to get involved—and maybe help win an award in the future—join us at an upcoming event (also see the attached diversity calendar):

Chats for Change: Mental Health x Racism—Join facilitators Alicia Hurtado, MD, and Ashley Michelle Fowler, MEd, on **Tuesday, September 28, at noon** as they explore the intersection of race and mental health, including the impacts of intergenerational trauma on BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) communities and how these show up in medicine today. Register [here](#).

Latinx Heritage Month: A Conversation With Leaders—Sponsored by the Corporate Services Center Diversity Council and Heritage of Latino Alliance Employee Resource Group in celebration of Latinx Heritage Month, these conversations feature leaders from around the Health System sharing their career journeys with employees. For more information email diversity@mountsinai.org.

- Join on **Monday, October 4, at 11 am** to hear from **Carlos Maceda, Chief Supply Chain Officer**. Register [here](#).
- Join on **Wednesday, October 6, at 12:30 pm** to hear from **Kelley Gonzalez, Training Instructor, Information Technology**. Register [here](#).

Today, we also want to explore part of our nation's history—and share a personal story from one of our Mount Sinai colleagues.

A few weeks ago, one of the largest remaining Confederate monuments—a statue of General Robert E. Lee in Richmond, Virginia—was [removed](#). While significant, this was just one of more than a hundred Confederate statues that have been removed in the last year and a half. These Confederate relics, along with the hard-fought battles to remove them, are a critical reminder that slavery in the United States is not some faraway historical story. While we do recognize that there may be conflicting ideologies about the removal of these statues, which have prompted fruitful conversations in forums including our “Chats for Change,” we ask that for a moment we look at these statues through the lens of the diverse groups who have been impacted and still experience the lasting symbolism of the oppression and intimidation these relics represent.

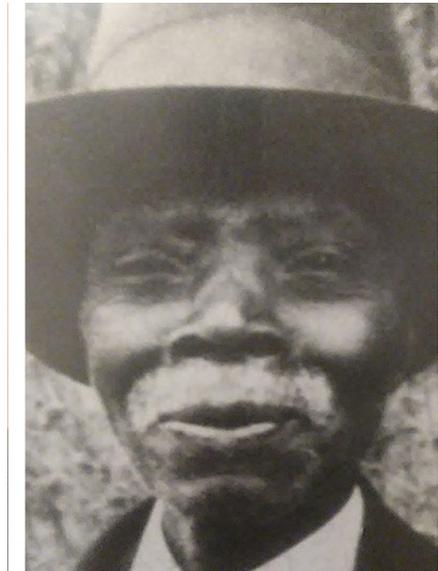
In fact, slavery's echoes can still be heard today—and it is that reality that drives our work to become an anti-racist institution.



Some of you may know Melissa Freeman, MD, as a beloved member of our Mount Sinai family. For more than five decades, Melissa helped lead the pioneering team that expanded methadone treatment across the city. What many at Mount Sinai might not know is that Melissa is the granddaughter of Albert B. Walker, who was enslaved from his birth in 1850s Virginia until the Emancipation Proclamation was signed in 1863. That's right—one of our current colleagues here at Mount Sinai is the **granddaughter of an enslaved person**, just two generations removed from bondage.



Melissa Freeman, MD, Howard University Medical School, 1955



Dr. Freeman's grandfather, Albert Walker, who was emancipated from slavery in 1863 at the age of 11.

While it may be convenient to think of slavery as something that happened a long time ago—something that exists in our history, not in our lives today—connections like Melissa’s highlight the fact that the history of slavery still touches our current reality. They also make clear why Mount Sinai’s efforts to become an anti-racist institution are so important. You can learn more about her family’s incredible and resilient story [here](#) and [here](#).

Similarly, it’s often easy to attribute the legacy of slavery to the Southern states, but reality is not so simple—slavery was a regular occurrence in the North as well, including in New York. Slavery began in New York State in 1626, and by 1703, more than 40 percent of homes in what was then called New Amsterdam included enslaved people, frequently domestic servants or laborers. At the time, Wall Street was a formal slave market and enslaved people were forced into farm work on Long Island and in the Hudson Valley.

New York was the second-to-last Northern state to abolish slavery (New Jersey was the last), with slavery in our state finally abolished in 1827.

Given this multi-century history, the enduring effects of slavery in New York have continued to reverberate. In 1991, a construction project at 290 Broadway in Lower Manhattan unearthed a six-acre burial ground for African Americans. Estimates suggest that more than 15,000 enslaved and free Blacks were buried there between 1635 and 1797. Since then, the site has been designated a National Historic Landmark and National Monument—which you can learn more about [here](#).

It is our nation’s racist roots in slavery that continue to permeate and reverberate through our society today, underlining both the blatant and subtle inequities impacting Black Americans today. Recognizing the legacy of slavery—and its relatively recent end, along with its impact beyond the Southern states—is one of the key steps to understanding our work to become an anti-racist institution.

All the best,

Angela and Shawn

[Road Map for Action Website](#)
