



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on August 15, 2019

To Honor Women, NYC First Lady Wants Statues of Drag Queens

Believing New York City had too many statues of men and too few of women, Mayor Bill de Blasio's wife, Chirlane McCray, wanted to erect statues of important New York women. She solicited input from both the public and an independent panel. In the end, she not only ignored most of that input but also selected a group of five women and — wait for it — two men who occasionally posed as women.



McCray, a black woman who wrote a 1979 *Essence* article entitled "I Am a Lesbian" but who had apparently changed her mind by the time she married de Blasio in 1994, launched the She Built NYC project in June 2018. According to [NBC News](#), McCray "had heard that of New York City's 150 public statues, only five are of historic women," and decided to do something about it.

"Growing up as an African-American woman, I didn't see anyone who represented me in media or popular culture, even though women make incredible contributions," McCray said. "Erecting statues of women is an easy way to correct that historical record."

She Built NYC asked New Yorkers to nominate women to be memorialized in stone. The [New York Post](#) reported that over 1,800 responses, nominating 320 women, were received.

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The top vote-getter was Francesca Xavier Cabrini, a nun who immigrated to the United States from Italy in 1889 to assist other Italian immigrants. According to the *Post*, she "founded an upstate orphanage, a school for girls in Washington Heights and 67 organizations for the needy." She was canonized in 1946 by Pope Pius XII and is regarded as the patron saint of immigrants, the people whose cause the Left claims to champion.

Cabrini was not among those McCray chose to honor with statues. Neither were other top picks such as Emily Warren Roebling, who led the completion of the Brooklyn Bridge when her ailing husband became bedridden, and Janet Schenck, who founded the Manhattan Music School. Even such progressive luminaries as Eleanor Roosevelt, Margaret Sanger, and Emma Lazarus were passed over, perhaps owing to their unfortunate lack of melanin.

She Built NYC's advisory committee, meanwhile, took an entirely different approach to their nominations. They wanted statues of groups rather than of individuals. Their recommendations were ignored, too.

"The whole process was a charade," committee member Harriet Senie told the website [Hyperallergic](#).

Ultimately, McCray and former deputy mayor Alicia Glen decided who would be honored with a statue. They chose five women: Billie Holiday, the influential jazz singer; Elizabeth Jennings Graham, a civil-rights activist and educator; Dr. Helen Rodriguez Trias, an abortion-rights activist; Shirley Chisholm, the first black woman elected to Congress; and Katherine Walker, a lighthouse keeper who saved at



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least 50 shipwrecked sailors. In their efforts to erect images of women, McCray and Glen also decided to create a statue depicting two men: homosexual drag queens Marsha Johnson (born Malcolm Michaels, Jr.) and Silvia Rivera (born Jose Rivera), both of whom participated in the 1969 Stonewall riots and co-founded the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries.

“Pardon my mirth,” quipped retired newsman [Don Surber](#), “but once again Democrats show that they think men are better at being women than women are.”

Only three of those chosen by McCray and Glen — Chisholm, Walker, and Johnson — were among the leaders in the public poll. (Holiday, for instance, got 16 votes to Cabrini’s 219.) Six of the seven were either black or Hispanic.

It would appear, then, that She Built NYC was far less about honoring notable women than about advancing a particular political agenda. That, however, was only to be expected.

“This program was all cast in terms of snide, dismissive characterizations of the way in which people in the past operated ... like they couldn’t be bothered to put up monuments of women,” Stony Brook University art-history professor Michele Bogart told the *Post*. “It wasn’t malicious. It was simply the way people thought.”

“One hundred years from now,” she cautioned, “who is to say our attitudes in the present day won’t be taken to task?” We can only hope that by then people will come to their senses and wonder why anyone trying to honor women would instead erect statues of men pretending to be women.

Photo of Chirlane McCray: [Muboshgu](#) via [Wikimedia](#)



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