

October 16, 2002

To the Columbia University community,

The construction of a new plaza in the space formerly occupied by Lion's Court presents the opportunity to name the space in honor of a worthy individual. The tradition of paying tribute to distinguished members of the Columbia community has a long history, as evidenced by such sites as the Van Amringe quadrangle and nearly every academic building on campus. However, it is clear to many in our community that certain groups have been excluded from this particularly visible form of recognition. The contributions made by people of color towards the evolution of Columbia to its current state appear to many to have gone unrecognized in just this way. Thus, naming the plaza after a person of color with Columbia affiliation is one of many progressive strides that Columbia must take.

A committee of student representatives considered many candidates for this honor and found one particularly deserving of recognition, The Rev. Dr. M. Moran Weston II. Dr. Weston was one of five African-American undergraduates when he enrolled in Columbia College in 1928. After receiving his B.A. in 1930, he proceeded to earn his M.Div. at Union Theological Seminary in 1934, and his Ph.D. in religion at Graduate School of Arts and Sciences in 1954. In 1969, he became the first African-American to serve as a trustee of the university, a position he held until he became a trustee emeritus in 1981. Dr. Weston's close association with Columbia stands alongside his untiring activist work. He was integral in establishing and directing the Carver Federal Savings Bank, intended to help prospective African-American homeowners obtain first mortgages unavailable to them from most banks. As a minister at St. Philip's Episcopal Church in Harlem, he spoke out vigorously against segregation and other unjust civil inequalities. Furthermore, he served on the boards of many activist groups such as the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund.

In order to gauge student opinion on the committee's recommendation of Dr. Weston for this honor, we consulted many student groups, focusing on those that represent students of color at Columbia. These particular groups were consulted because their perspectives were especially valuable in light of the goal, expressed above, to faithfully represent a part of Columbia history that has perhaps been neglected. These groups include the Activities Board at Columbia, the Asian American Alliance, the Black Students Organization, the Student Governing Board of Earl Hall, the Student Organization of Latinos, Students Promoting Empowerment and Knowledge, and the United Students of Color Council.

The undergraduate student councils encourage the administration to dedicate the plaza constructed on the site of the old Lion's Court building as "The Rev. Dr. M. Moran Weston II Plaza," to be known as "Weston Plaza" for short. Additionally, we propose that a plaque describing Dr. Weston's service to the university and community be placed at the site in order to honor his life and preserve its memory for future generations of Columbia students.

Respectfully submitted,

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