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May 6, 2026

Members of the

- Arts Commission
- Historic Preservation Commission
- Recreation and Park Commission

Re: U.S. Grant monument in the Music Concourse, Golden Gate Park

Dear Commissioners,

I'm writing about the U.S. Grant monument in the Music Concourse. The Music Concourse is San Francisco Landmark 249 and is part of Golden Gate Park Historic District, which is on the National Register of Historic Places as #04001137. I was a member of the Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board, the precursor to the HPC, when the Music Concourse was proposed and approved as a City Landmark.

I am writing specifically to encourage you to restore the bust of U.S. Grant to its plinth. That monument is called out specifically as a feature of the landmark. Grant did nothing to deserve what happened to that monument. You can find a brief treatment of his presidency in my *American Politics in the Gilded Age* (1997), but for a more recent, highly detailed, and, frankly, more perceptive treatment of Grant, see Ron Chernow, *Grant* (2017).

Grant was raised in an anti-slavery family; the only evidence of his personal involvement in slave-holding is that he *freed* an enslaved man, William Jones, in 1859. How Grant came to be responsible for Jones is not clear, perhaps through a gift from his father-in-law, but what is important is that Grant freed Jones (see Chernow, p. 106). As general of the Union armies, Grant waged unrelenting war to defeat the Confederacy, end slavery, and extend Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation into every place his armies went. As president, he used the Army, under the Ku Klux Klan Acts (1870-71) to defeat the Klan and similar organizations that were terrorizing the formerly enslaved Black people of the South—a commitment that ended when Grant left the presidency.

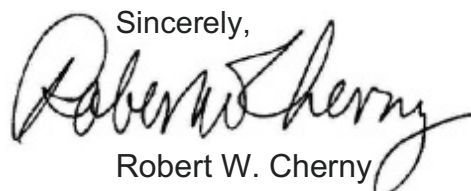
Chernow quotes and agrees with the prominent historian, Richard N. Current, who said that Grant "made a greater effort to secure the constitutional rights of blacks than did any other President between Lincoln and Lyndon B. Johnson" (p. 858).

When Grant died, Frederick Douglass, who was then widely acknowledged as the leading spokesman for Black Americans, said, "In him the Negro found a protector, the Indian a friend, the vanquished foe a brother, an imperiled nation a savior" (Chernow, p. 957).

So I encourage you to restore the bust of Grant, and perhaps to add an explanatory statement of Grant's significance. And perhaps also restore the cannon ball this is missing from the plinth. I'd be happy to discuss this further at your convenience.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert W. Cherny". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Robert W. Cherny