

Dear Michael and Raechel,

I hope this finds you both staying healthy and well.

I have been very busy with my City work in recent months, and as a result I have been less active with the Library Company than I would like. However, I am aware of the controversy over the Samuel Jennings painting, "Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences," which until recently hung in a prominent location in the Reading Room of the Library Company. I would like to briefly share my thoughts on the painting's future.

Though I am white, I consider myself to be a lifelong social progressive. Therefore, it didn't take long after I joined the Library Company as a shareholder to recognize the stereotypical way in which Mr. Jennings portrayed the Black persons in his painting. Frankly, the way they are depicted calls to mind supplicating savages greatly in need of the civilizing influence of the bountiful (and contrastingly beautiful) Lady Liberty. While these depictions may be said to reflect the prevailing attitudes of a long passed era towards persons of the Black race (most of whom at that time lived in the United States as slaves), fortunately, they do not reflect modern day thinking about the races.

Notwithstanding that times and attitudes have greatly changed for the better (although the current racist "white replacement" theories of a minority undermine that progress), as I felt from the beginning when I looked at that painting, it cannot help but be disturbing and offensive when viewed by Persons of Color, and in particular Blacks.

In recent years, the Library Company has proudly advanced historical programs and exhibits that focus on Africans' and other racial and ethnic minorities' contributions to American and Philadelphia history. As one would expect, these programs have drawn a more diverse community to the Library Company, both in terms of the general public, and those who access the Library Company's educational programs through fellowships and internships.

In deciding on the future of the Jennings' painting, I think that it is important to be sensitive to the experience of this diverse community when it is walking within the walls of our Library Company. Therefore, in my opinion, respectfully given, if the Jennings painting is to remain in an area of the Library Company that is visible to the public, and our fellows and interns, it must be accompanied by nearby text that acknowledges and apologizes for the disturbing images of Black persons that are portrayed in the painting. This text should conceptualize the painting to the era in which it was painted and distinguish attitudes of that era from the more progressive, equitable attitudes we strive to achieve in the present. I lack the expertise to recommend exactly what that text should say. But I think that historical experts do exist that are available to the Library Company for consultation on how to put the painting into a more thoughtful, less destructive context. Therefore, I would like to see the Library Company's Trustees earmark a portion of the Library's funds to be budgeted for this purpose. At bottom, my hope for the future of the Jennings painting is that it will provide viewers with an "aha"

moment that challenges implicit biases and stereotypical attitudes about others who at first glance appear different from us. Sincerely yours, Claudia

Claudia M. Becker