

Communication from Public

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Comments for Public Posting: On the morning of November 15th, 1918 the City Council of Los Angeles renamed Central Square to Pershing Square, after the overall commander of the American Expeditionary Forces, John J. Pershing. He was the hero who had led the "boys" that had tipped the balance of the World War to the Allies and was nearly canonized at the time. Talk of renaming several things after him was also discussed, but what stuck was the park. The LA Times recorded that at the same meeting, a committee was formed to place a monument in the park "in honor of Gen Pershing and the American soldiers and sailors who participated in the war." This piece of history, like many others regarding the park, has been largely forgotten. For many years, before and after the new name, Pershing Square was a place of historical reflection - especially for the military. A memorial to those lost in the 7th California Infantry, today's 160th Infantry Regiment, in the Spanish American War, what is widely considered to be the first piece of public art in the city, was erected there in 1900. The previous Thanksgiving, a captured cannon from the same conflict was set in the park (today it resides in the Maritime Museum of San Pedro). Another cannon that had briefly been on the USS Constitution was brought to the city in the 1930s and resides in Pershing Square. The park also served as places for two large outdoor funeral services for fallen soldiers from the war. Morris Lynchick's 1921 ceremonial rites stopped the city in its tracks. He was the first soldier buried in LA and all the stops were pulled out as Lynchick seemed to symbolize all the men from the city who died in the war. Thousands came to bow their heads and pay their respects. A couple of years later the son of the former Mayor was likewise venerated. Ross Snyder was a decorated officer who gave his life in July of 1918 in an action that earned him the Silver Star. Again, the city honored him with a huge martial display in Pershing Square. Snyder is still remembered by a park bearing his name in South Los Angeles. The World War memorial discussed back in 1918 did eventually come to fruition. There were tens of thousands of Angelenos that served in the First World War with over 450 perishing in the conflict and its pandemic fueled aftermath. Humberto Pedretti's DOUGHBOY, which will mark its centennial on the 4th of July this year, pays tribute to them. Its dedication was a massive deal and it is still, arguably, the most

impressive element in the park. One might contend this is as it should be given its WWI connection. DOUGHBOY towers roughly 25 feet from its base to the top of the flag that he strides to battle with. It's a heroic depiction that seeks to evoke respect. The sides of the pedestal all have inscriptions that add to the effect. Dedicated "To the Sons and Daughters of Los Angeles who Participated in the World War" it has fallen into some disrepair in the time since it was erected, but when one stands in front of it, it does not fail to move you. Certainly, the council could use some city funds to help restore this piece to its former glory. It's no surprise that given the large number of military tributes at Pershing Square, that during WWII, it was the city mecca for rallies, recruitment, and Liberty Bond drives. What is most interesting and depressing is how all of this has been forgotten. There were even large-scale Memorial Day services at the 7th California Infantry monument for decades at the Square, and annual events at DOUGHBOY on the 4th of July as well. Then on a Thanksgiving Day in 1970, Pershing Square took center stage to bring attention to the military. The park was specifically chosen to draw attention to Prisoners of War from the conflict in Vietnam. Thousands gathered around a bamboo cage in the center of the park. Inside, sat a bearded, ragged man, his ankles were shackled to the floor. He used chopsticks to slurp a sad holiday supper of pig fat, soupy rice and pumpkin. The 'stunt' garnered nationwide press at the time. Now the monuments and plaques are all ignored and largely hidden with low visibility. One, giving a rundown of Pershing's career was even stolen recently. Now, with this proposed name change they're all certain to be even more forgotten. Even though other memorials to the military exist in this city, Pershing Square houses several of the first. including its very name. Bidy Mason was a legendary figure in the early pioneer days as this former slave traveled west and built a life here. However, as worthy of praise as she is, Mason already has a park named after her. There was a reason that city officials renamed the park in the first place. It was to honor the man, and the amazing individuals under his command, that helped turn the tide of the largest struggle of history. Keep the name!