

CITY OF LAFAYETTE RESOLUTION 2023-47
SUPPORT LOCAL, STATE, AND FEDERAL EFFORTS TO EXONERATE THE PORT CHICAGO 50

WHEREAS, on July 17, 1944, the deadliest home front disaster of World War II took place when a tragic explosion occurred at the Port Chicago Naval Magazine killing 320 men (of whom 202 were African American) and wounding 390 (of whom 233 were African American); and

WHEREAS, Port Chicago Naval Magazine was racially segregated and all sailors loading munitions at the time of the explosion were African American; and

WHEREAS, the surviving sailors were entitled to standard survivors' leave but were denied leave and ordered to clean up after the disaster; and

WHEREAS, the surviving sailors were ordered back to handling high explosives before an investigation could determine the cause of the deadly explosion; and

WHEREAS, 258 ammunition handlers engaged in peaceful work stoppage rather than return under the same unsafe working conditions; and

WHEREAS, fifty of these men were unlawfully charged with mutiny, prosecuted as guilty and sentenced to prison; and

WHEREAS, three weeks after the work stoppage, a Naval Court of Inquiry report confirmed working conditions and practices enforced by Port Chicago leadership were in violation of Naval safety regulations and federal safety code; and

WHEREAS, the actions of the sailors, the public mutiny trial, and public advocacy from their champion Thurgood Marshall, initiated the desegregation of the Navy in February 1946; and

WHEREAS, there have been several attempts over the years to appeal the decision, but all have failed; and

WHEREAS, starting in the 1990s, Congressman George Miller worked to preserve the history of the Port Chicago 50 and worked towards their exoneration, and in 1992, his legislation designated the site of the Port Chicago Naval Magazine as a national memorial, which is managed by the National Park Service; and

WHEREAS, in 2009, President Obama signed legislation to incorporate Port Chicago Naval Magazine National Memorial as a full and permanent unit of our National Park System; and

WHEREAS, the East Bay Regional Park District received part of the Concord Naval Weapons Station through a Public Benefit Conveyance on July 19, 2019, and has named the park the Thurgood Marshall Regional Park – Home of the Port Chicago 50, which honors the courage and legacy of the Port Chicago 50 and all those who sacrificed their lives in our nation's ongoing struggle for social justice, racial equality, and workers' rights; and

WHEREAS, Naval historians now recognize the actions of the Port Chicago 50 potentially saved lives and changed the Navy for the better; and

WHEREAS, in 2022, the City of Concord, the City of Albany, the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors passed resolutions supporting local, state, and federal efforts to exonerate the sailors wrongfully convicted of mutiny following the Port Chicago disaster of 1944.

WHEREAS, in 2022, the State of California successfully passed SJR-15 urging the President of the United States and Congress to restore honor to the sailors unjustly blamed for, and the sailors convicted of mutiny following, the Port Chicago disaster, and to rectify any mistreatment by the military of those sailors, including the full exoneration of those who were convicted at court-martial; and

WHEREAS, in 2023, US Representative Mark DeSaulnier (CA-11), US Representative Barbara Lee (CA-12) and US Representative John Garamendi (CA-08) introduced a resolution recognizing the victims of the Port Chicago disaster and calling for the exoneration of the Port Chicago 50; and

WHEREAS, in June 2023, the Philadelphia 15 were exonerated by Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin Parker. This case serves as a an example and pathway to exonerate the Port Chicago 50.

NOW, THEREFORE, THE CITY OF LAFAYETTE DOES RESOLVE AS FOLLOWS:

Section 1. Supports these and all efforts to exonerate the Port Chicago 50 and recognize their service to our country.

Section 2. Recognizes the efforts that this case presents in our nation’s struggle for social justice, racial equity, and workers’ rights.

Section 3. Affirms support for all future efforts which urge the President, Congress of the United States, and Secretary of the Navy to take all necessary actions to restore honor to, and rectify the mistreatment by the United States Military of, any sailors who were unjustly blamed for and convicted of mutiny after the Port Chicago disaster, which occurred in the town of Port Chicago, California, in 1944.

Section 4. This resolution shall become effective immediately upon its passage and adoption.

PASSED AND ADOPTED by the City Council of the City of Lafayette at a regular meeting held on the 24th day of July 2023 by the following vote:

AYES:

NOES:

ABSTAIN:

ABSENT:

ATTEST:

APPROVED:

Joanne Robbins, City Clerk

Carl Anduri, Mayor