

Victims of the Port Chicago Trials

WHEREAS, on July 17, 1944 at Port Chicago Naval Ammunition Base in Northern California, the worst home-front disaster of World War II occurred; and

WHEREAS, over three hundred (300) American sailors were killed instantly in ammunitions explosions which destroyed two cargo ships at the loading pier, wrecked the base and damaged the small town of Port Chicago which was located one mile from the blast; and

WHEREAS, two hundred and two (202) of those killed were African-American ammunition loaders; and

WHEREAS, every serviceman handling ammunition at Port Chicago was African-American because of the segregated practices of the United States Navy at that time; and

WHEREAS, these servicemen were loyal Americans, who served their country, and who did not refuse to do their duty; but rather, took action to challenge the Navy's discriminatory and demoralizing treatment which forced them to work under the most dangerous circumstances; and

WHEREAS, many survivors of the Port Chicago explosion

were traumatized by the awful explosion in which many of their friends were instantaneously killed; and

WHEREAS, the San Francisco Branch President Joseph James investigated the matter and was so profoundly concerned about the appropriateness and fairness of the mutiny charges brought against young African American sailors who survived the Port Chicago explosion that he sought and obtained the good offices of NAACP General Counsel Thurgood Marshall to monitor the legal proceedings against the accused sailors; and

WHEREAS, NAACP General Counsel Thurgood Marshall concluded that the African American servicemen had not received a fair trial for a number of reasons including, but not limited to, the racially discriminatory Naval policy of limiting and segregating African Americans to laborer positions; the unsafe manner in which the Navy handled ammunitions at Port Chicago prior to the explosion and its failure to provide training or instruction on the safe handling of the explosives; the unfair manner in which fifty (50) accused servicemen were singled out for prosecution; the fact that no direct order to load ammunition was given to the accused; there was no mutiny; and that it appears that the African American sailors were made scapegoats in the aftermath of the explosion; and

WHEREAS, the NAACP, always believing that the accused of

Port Chicago did not receive a fair trial, pursued the legal appeal on their behalf and has always been of the view that the findings and convictions against them should be reversed.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the NAACP National Convention request that the President of the United States pardon the Port Chicago trial survivors, restore their benefits and make the survivors' benefits available to the widows of those convicted in the unfair trial of African American sailors in the aftermath of the Port.