



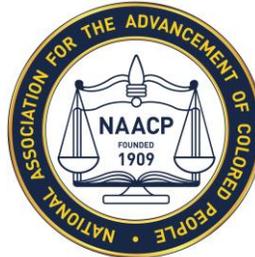
CITIZENS
FOR
HISTORICAL
EQUITY

PROPOSAL TO NAME
CONCORD HILLS REGIONAL PARK

THURGOOD MARSHALL REGIONAL PARK

HOME OF THE PORT CHICAGO 50





Board of Directors
East Bay Regional Park District
2950 Peralta Oaks Court
Oakland, CA 94605

February 3, 2021

**Re: Bay Area Black Community Naming Recommendation:
Thurgood Marshall Regional Park – Home of the Port Chicago 50**

Dear Esteemed EBRPD Board of Directors,

Thank you for your good work caring for our regional parklands. We know you are aware heroes define our ideals and aspirations and recognizing our nation's heroes, of all races, is key to building inclusive, equitable, and productive communities. Although the names on our regional public lands should reflect the values of society, they often just reflect the values of those who are in power. This perpetually leaves people of color without acknowledgement of their representative heroes and diminishes the significant sacrifices and contributions people of color have made to our region.

The East Bay Area is severely lacking in Black representation in regional park names. There are currently zero regional parks in Contra Costa County named to honor Black culture or history. This lack of representation has a detrimental effect on self-esteem and pride within our communities and results in many underserved citizens feeling uninvited and unwelcome in our public parklands.

Fortunately, there is now a unique opportunity to honor Black history on the land where so many Black Americans died serving our country at Port Chicago Naval Magazine. This former military base, located in Contra Costa County, is the site of the Port Chicago disaster, the World War II explosion that killed 320 sailors, officers, and civilians. In the aftermath, many of the surviving Black sailors were ordered to resume handling the same dangerous munitions that caused the explosion. Under the threat of a court martial, ultimately only fifty sailors stood in protest of an order that endangered their lives. NAACP's Thurgood Marshall tirelessly worked to defend the fifty servicemen – known as the Port Chicago 50 – and advocated to end the vicious policy of segregation that contributed to the deaths of the 320 men. Together these civil rights pioneers were instrumental in desegregating our U.S. Armed Forces, a pivotal step in the journey to national integration.

At this future park, we can pay tribute to these stories to cultivate pride and a sense of self-esteem in our underserved communities while providing a public space where everyone can feel at home in nature. The Park District's unique opportunity is perhaps summed up best by U.S. Congressman Mark DeSaulnier, who said:

"This [park] is a wonderful opportunity for the Bay Area to tell an amazing American story; both its tragedy and its failure but also of the liberating, forceful individuals who decided this wasn't good enough – that we had to reconcile our weaknesses and our prejudice with what we hope for in the future."

In the interest of honoring the national heroes and history of Port Chicago Naval Magazine, a coalition including Friends of Port Chicago National Memorial, NAACP East County, United Veterans Council, and Citizens for Historical Equity has united to unanimously recommend Concord Hills Regional Park be named:

Thurgood Marshall Regional Park - Home of the Port Chicago 50

This park name is supported by a petition of over 880 citizens and has been endorsed by regional organizations, churches, museums, veterans, and historians. The Black Employee Collective of the East Bay Regional Park District, AFSCME Local 2428, Black Cultural Zone, Native American Veterans Association, Martin Luther King Jr. Freedom Center, and authors Robert L. Allen (*The Port Chicago Mutiny*) and Steve Sheinkin (*The Port Chicago 50*) are just a few of the many supporters of this proposed park name.

The Port Chicago 50 – whose civil rights protest pre-dates Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott – should be revered for courageously standing up for equality. Honoring the Port Chicago 50 will give voice to the patriots who lost their lives in the explosion and bring renewed context to enhance and serve their legacy. The explosion that cost these men their lives was a catalyst for a regional civil rights movement that echoed throughout the halls of the White House and forever changed this country for the better. That's a momentous legacy we cannot allow to be forgotten.

Supreme Court Justice and NAACP Chief Counsel Thurgood Marshall represents the highest ideals of our country and is a shining symbol of equality and justice. As a champion of civil rights, he advocated for environmental, racial, and social justice including Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination. These themes resonate throughout the many stories that will be interpreted at the future visitor center. Marshall is a hero and inspiration for future generations.

The enthusiasm and support for this naming recommendation continues to grow. As recently-retired Park District GM Robert Doyle said, "This story is not a Contra Costa story, it is a national story [and] I don't know anywhere in the District where we've had an issue of a national scale... This is probably one of the most important decisions in the Park District's history."

Recognizing the sacrifices and contributions of people of color in this park name, by naming the park after Black patriots, will serve as a beacon to the Bay Area and the entire country that the East Bay Regional Park District values and welcomes Black

visitors and honors our veterans and the cultural stories of the lands.

For these reasons, we respectfully ask the East Bay Regional Park District to declare Concord Hills Regional Park be named:

Thurgood Marshall Regional Park - Home of the Port Chicago 50.

Signed,

Citizens for Historical Equity

United Veterans Council of Pittsburgh, CA

Friends of Port Chicago
National Memorial

National Association for the Advancement
of Colored People (NAACP) East County



Cc:

NPS Superintendent of Port Chicago Naval Magazine National Memorial
EBRPD General Manager
EBRPD Deputy General Manager
EBRPD AGM of Acquisition & Stewardship Division
EBRPD Planning Department
EBRPD Black Employee Collective

**THURGOOD MARSHALL REGIONAL PARK
HOME OF THE PORT CHICAGO 50
is Endorsed By:**

AFSCME Local 2428

Black Employee Collective
of the East Bay Regional Park District

Black Historical Society
of Chatham-Kent, Ontario, Canada

Black Mecca Museum

Cece Valencia
Radio and Television Personality - KDAY-FM Los Angeles

Citizens for Historical Equity

D.E. Interprise Ministries (Stockton, CA)

Delta Veterans Group

Disabled American Veterans - Department of California

Don Hausler
Co-Founder Emeryville Historical Society

Dr. Dawn Nwamuo, MD

Dr. Roy Wilson Ed.D
Executive Director - Institute for Community Leadership

East Oakland Black Cultural Zone

East Oakland Youth Development Center

Friends of Port Chicago National Memorial

Kelly W Barrington
EBRPD Chief of Maintenance and Skilled Trades

Marcus Shelby
Award-Winning Jazz Musician / San Francisco Arts Commission

Martin Luther King Jr. Freedom Center

**THURGOOD MARSHALL REGIONAL PARK
HOME OF THE PORT CHICAGO 50
is Endorsed By:**

NAACP Alameda

NAACP California Hawaii

NAACP East County

NAACP El Cerrito

NAACP Oakland

NAACP Richmond

NAACP San Jose

NAACP Stockton

Native American Veterans Association

Parental African American Achievement Collaborative Team

Richmond Historical Society

Robert L. Allen, Ph.D.

Award-Winning Author of "The Port Chicago Mutiny"

Royl L. Roberts, JD, MBA

Commissioner, Democratic Central Committee

Showing Up For Racial Justice (SURJ) Contra Costa

Showing Up For Racial Justice (SURJ) San Francisco

Steve Sheinkin

Award-Winning Author of "The Port Chicago 50"

United Veterans Council

The Village Keepers

Washington Township Museum of Local History (Fremont, CA)

Workforce Diversity Committee of AFSCME Local 2428

**THURGOOD MARSHALL REGIONAL PARK
HOME OF THE PORT CHICAGO 50
is Endorsed By Elected Officials:**

Andy Li

President

Contra Costa Community College District Governing Board

Antonio Hernandez

Unified School District Trustee - Area 1

City of Antioch, CA

Carl Anduri

Councilmember

City of Lafayette, CA

Carol Dutra-Vernaci

Mayor

City of Union City, CA

Demnlus Johnson III

Councilmember

City of Richmond, CA

Dennisha Marsh

Board Member

Los Medanos Community Health District

Ellie Householder

President

Antioch Unified School District

Ge'Nell Gary, MBA

Mayor

City of Albany, CA

John J. Bauters

Councilmember

City of Emeryville, CA

**THURGOOD MARSHALL REGIONAL PARK
HOME OF THE PORT CHICAGO 50**

is Endorsed By Elected Officials:

Jovita Mendoza

**Councilmember
City of Brentwood, CA**

Kevin Wilk

**Mayor
City of Walnut Creek, CA**

Lamar A Thorpe

**Mayor
City of Antioch, CA**

Marie Arce

**Chair
Antioch Parks & Recreation Commission**

Mark DeSaulnier

**U.S. Representative
California's 11th Congressional District**

Merl Craft

**Mayor
City of Pittsburg, CA**

Monica E Wilson

**Mayor Pro Tem/Vice Mayor
City of Antioch, CA**

Newell Arnerich

**Vice Mayor
City of Danville, CA**

Patt Young

**President
Los Medanos Community Health District**

**THURGOOD MARSHALL REGIONAL PARK
HOME OF THE PORT CHICAGO 50**

is Endorsed By Elected Officials:

Peggy McQuaid

**Councilmember
City of Albany, CA**

Preston Jordan

**Vice Mayor
City of Albany, CA**

Rochelle Nason

**Councilmember
City of Albany, CA**

Steve Glazer

**Senator
California Senate District 7**

Susan Candell

**Mayor
City of Lafayette, CA**

Susannah Meyer

**Councilmember
City of Brentwood, CA**

Teresa Gerring

**Vice Mayor
City of Lafayette, CA**

Timothy Grayson

**Assemblymember
California's 14th Assembly District**

Valerie Arkin

**Councilmember
City of Pleasanton, CA**

HISTORY OF PORT CHICAGO

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941, many Americans enlisted to fight overseas to defend our nation from tyranny, and Black Americans were no exception. A total of 1.2 million Black patriots enlisted and served in the U.S. military during World War II, and they all faced the same familiar discrimination they faced in American society.

Black servicemen at the segregated **Port Chicago Naval Magazine** in Port Chicago, California, enlisted to fight overseas to preserve America's freedom, but were denied their request. Instead, they were assigned to load dangerous explosive munitions onto cargo vessels without proper training and under unsafe working conditions.

On July 17, 1944, in the largest home front disaster of WWII, a deadly explosion occurred at Port Chicago Naval Magazine that killed 320 sailors and civilians, 202 of whom were Black American patriots. This tragic event became known as the **Port Chicago disaster**.



Following the explosion, 258 of the surviving Black servicemen refused to load munitions until there were safer working conditions. The Navy labeled this an act of mutiny – punishable by death by firing squad – and the majority of the servicemen reluctantly returned to duty. Fifty men, known as the **Port Chicago 50**, held out in protest and were found guilty of mutiny in the largest naval mutiny trial in U.S. history. All fifty Black servicemen were sentenced to 15 years of incarceration and hard labor.

NAACP Chief Counsel **Thurgood Marshall**'s national advocacy work, during and following the trial, along with his federal appeal campaign, was instrumental in the freeing of the Port Chicago 50 and the desegregation of the United States Navy.

THURGOOD MARSHALL'S ROLE AND INFLUENCE

Prior to the Port Chicago disaster, the NAACP, under Walter White and Chief Counsel Thurgood Marshall, were working to desegregate the military. In 1940, Marshall sent a message to President Roosevelt stating, "the NAACP is opposed to the separate units existing in the armed forces at the present time." Marshall was against discrimination in all military assignments and was opposed to Black men performing dangerous duties unless White men were also performing those same dangerous duties in the same unit.



For the trial of the **Port Chicago 50** in September 1944, the Navy invited the national press to cover the trial, hoping the national coverage would serve as a lesson to all Black servicemen to follow orders without question. The Navy didn't count on the presence of **Thurgood Marshall**, who acted as defender of the Port Chicago 50 in the court of public opinion.

Over 12 days, Marshall personally interviewed every one of the fifty servicemen to relay their story to the national press. He spoke directly to all Americans in saying:

"I want to know why, at the time of the explosion, every man loading ammunition was a Negro... This is not fifty men on trial for mutiny. This is the Navy on trial for its whole vicious policy toward Negroes."

Immediately following the guilty verdict on October 24, 1944, Marshall and the NAACP persisted by printing and circulating "Mutiny" pamphlets that told of the injustices at Port Chicago. When Black enlisted men around the country heard of the true events of Port Chicago, it disrupted morale in the segregated ranks.

The threat of further mass action and civil disobedience in the military was a breakthrough in the growing movement towards military desegregation. Marshall stressed this point in his correspondence with Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal. Marshall forwarded signed petitions and offered to meet with Forrestal personally on behalf of the Port Chicago 50. With Black Americans making up nearly 10% of the military, the injustices of segregation in the Navy needed to be addressed for the sake of the country.

On April 3, 1945, Marshall **officially appealed** the guilty verdict of the Port Chicago 50 and made a personal appearance at the Navy's Judge Advocate General's Office in Washington D.C. to present his argument. Later that same month, **Eleanor Roosevelt**, in support of Marshall's appeal campaign, sent James Forrestal a copy of the NAACP's "Mutiny" pamphlet with a note that read: "I hope in the case of these boys special care will be taken."

Although the convictions of the Port Chicago 50 were upheld on June 12th, 1945, Marshall persisted. The public was now aware of the injustices of Port Chicago and the NAACP continued to forward petitions with thousands of signatures condemning the unjust policies of the Navy and requesting the immediate release of the Port Chicago 50. Even members of Congress were making noise about opening an investigation.

James Forrestal wasn't going to publicly admit the Navy made a mistake, but in the first week of January 1946, just 205 days after the appeal was denied, **the Port Chicago 50 were quietly released** and placed on active sea duty.

One month later, in February 1946, the Navy became the first branch of the U.S. military to **officially integrate**. The Navy's Circular Letter 48-46 read:

"All restrictions governing types of assignments for which Negro personnel are eligible are hereby lifted. Henceforth they shall be eligible for all types of assignments in all ratings in all activities and all ships of the naval service."

**WITH THE HELP OF MARSHALL AND
OTHER ADVOCATES, THE PROTEST OF
THE PORT CHICAGO 50 RESULTED IN
ACTUAL SYSTEMIC CHANGE.**



In July 1948, impressed by the progress being made in the integrated Navy, President Truman officially signed Executive Order 9981 which declared the remaining branches of the military would integrate.

After the desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces, Thurgood Marshall continued his fight against racial inequality and, using many of the same Constitutional arguments from the Port Chicago case, was instrumental in successfully ending segregation in our country. The Port Chicago 50 eventually returned to civilian life, but many of them lived with shame for being accused of cowardice and mutiny during war time.

Although the events of Port Chicago were seldom discussed among the servicemen, one particular letter written to Thurgood Marshall sums up the collective feelings they had for the man who fought tirelessly for their honor and freedom:

"In appreciation for your time and efforts in our behalf, it is my privilege to thank you for the boys as well as myself. I can truthfully say that our morale was lifted much higher by your encouraging words than any other source of information... The boys thank you from their hearts."

-Edward Saunders, Port Chicago 50 - June 8, 1945

The brave patriots who died in the explosion at Port Chicago were the catalyst for a **national civil rights movement** that would be the first major step towards national integration. This event was a pivotal milestone in our nation's ongoing struggle towards racial equality and justice.

The Port Chicago 50 protest, initially termed a "mutiny" of Black servicemen, was perhaps the first meaningful and productive civil rights protest in United States history – pre-dating Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott by more than a decade... and it happened right here in the East Bay Area.

EDUCATION AT “THURGOOD MARSHALL PARK”

The future park will be an annual destination for middle and high school classrooms to learn about the history of Port Chicago Naval Magazine and the patriotism and bravery exhibited by the servicemen and those who protested and advocated on their behalf. Youth leadership groups can facilitate dialogue about social justice and how the servicemen of Port Chicago exemplified leadership. Park visitors of all ages will learn of the national civil rights history that was made through the sacrifices and persistence of the Black and Indigenous people of our region.



As stated in the Land Use Plan, the future visitor center will focus primarily on the **Port Chicago disaster** and its aftermath. National Park Service has done outstanding work in telling the story of Port Chicago at the Naval Magazine National Memorial, and that story can be expanded to give greater context to the role of the Black servicemen as pioneers in our national civil rights history.

The stories interpreted at the visitor center should represent the highest ideals of this country, and we will learn of how our government and military can play a positive role in reaching these ideals. The park will also interpret the many stories of the Indigenous people of the land and through the lens of civil rights and justice, we can learn of the Indigenous struggle for sovereignty and how leaders of the Red Power movement, along with allies like Thurgood Marshall, advocated for Indigenous self-determination.

NAACP Chief Counsel Thurgood Marshall is the **common thread** that connects the stories of the Port Chicago disaster to the national story of desegregation and the Indigenous history of our region. The name on the park should represent what people will see and learn when they visit the park. **Thurgood Marshall represents that for this park.**

REPRESENTATION MATTERS

Thurgood Marshall's name will serve as a beacon to the Bay Area and the entire country that the East Bay Regional Park District invites and welcomes Black visitors and honors the cultural stories of the land. As a shining example of American excellence and a symbol for justice, Marshall is a hero whom future generations can aspire to be; a person who was rewarded, not punished, for standing up for what was right.

Representation of our national heroes, of all races, is extremely important, and **our region lacks representation of Black heroes in regional park names**. Naming the park to honor Thurgood Marshall and the Port Chicago 50 will go a long way towards correcting that omission. Children of all races and cultures, particularly Black children, can look up to Marshall and the patriots of Port Chicago and feel a sense of **pride and self-esteem**, which is of vital importance for our community.



PROPOSAL

In the interest of honoring the Black and Indigenous history in the Port Chicago/Concord, CA area, we propose Concord Hills Regional Park be named:

Thurgood Marshall Regional Park - Home of the Port Chicago 50

Citizens For Historical Equity

October 19, 2020



**CITIZENS
FOR
HISTORICAL
EQUITY**

To Whom It May Concern

The movement to honor the national Black history in Contra Costa County by naming Concord Hills Regional Park "**Thurgood Marshall Regional Park**" is supported via petition by over 680 citizens.

Please join us in ensuring the national Black history at Port Chicago is honored with a park name. Representation matters!

Signed,

Citizens For Historical Equity


Lewis Thrower


Jonathan Shelton


Fatima Call


Alexander Wills

Phone Number: 925-322-0970
Email: info@HistoricalEquity.org



East Bay Regional Park District
2950 Peralta Oaks Court
Oakland, CA 94605

February 19, 2021

Black Employee Collective - Naming Recommendation for Concord Hills

Dear Board of Directors,

Greetings. The Black Employee Collective (BEC) thanks you for your ongoing efforts to preserve our parklands. As employees of the Park District, we ask the Park District to work in a manner that will best support and respect all Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC). As a leader in the environmental community, the Park District must create equal opportunities for *all* communities.

The story of the Port Chicago disaster was at the forefront of the Park District's annual invitations, public announcements, and communications to local politicians regarding the District's stewardship of this land. In letters sent to President Barack Obama and his administration, including Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell, between 2015 and 2016 the Park District committed to "...ensure the story of Port Chicago is permanently protected." These District events and land conveyances, where Contra Costa communities gathered in ceremony to commemorate the fallen servicemen, were held on the anniversary of the explosion that left the ashes of our brave national patriots buried on this sacred ground. Since the explosion, our country has continually attempted to dismiss the story of the unexonerated Port Chicago 50 whose voices bring life to the 320 men, 202 of them Black, who died on July 17, 1944.

Concord Hills is the only land in the Park District's stewardship with Black American history of regional and national significance, of record. It is the only appropriate place to name in honor of that history. As stated at the November 6, 2020 Board Meeting, the BEC supports naming Concord Hills to honor the national history of the land.

Despite the initial exclusion of the Black community and its leading Black organizations in the naming process, we applaud the Park District for reaching out to our Indigenous brothers and sisters. The process of outreach should continue in an attempt to be more inclusive in our park naming practices. The BEC supports naming and renaming parks, lakes, and trails to honor our Indigenous brothers and sisters while including Indigenous stories in all our interpretive sectors.

As you know, heroic acts and significant events in our history can be lost over the generations if we don't take steps to preserve them. Our country's earnest attempts to honor Martin Luther King Jr., Harriet Tubman, and Rosa Parks were all met with forceful and impassioned attempts to block that history from being honored. Even recently, attempts to remove the name of a noted KKK leader from a bridge in Selma, Alabama to honor civil rights icon John Lewis was met with fierce opposition. Likewise, those who have worked tirelessly to permanently recognize the patriotic servicemen of Port Chicago have been met with opposition.

The Park District's public pledge to permanently protect the national Black history of Port Chicago requires naming the park purposefully and emphatically to honor that history. To that end, BEC has united with NAACP, Friends of Port Chicago National Memorial, United Veterans Council, Citizens for Historical Equity, Martin Luther King Jr. Freedom Center, Black Cultural Zone, Black Mecca Museum, Richmond and Emeryville Historical Societies, author Steve Sheinkin*, jazz musician Marcus Shelby, and over 700 survey respondents in requesting the Park District honor the national Black history at Concord Hills by naming the future park:

Thurgood Marshall Regional Park - Home of the Port Chicago 50



The East Bay community has reached the kind of public consensus that could not be achieved in Selma. The enthusiastic community support for this park name has reached a magnitude that exceeds anything in recorded Park District history and, remarkably, was achieved with minimal District resources. We see this as an opportunity to represent the diverse, tax-paying citizens we have pledged to serve.

This singular park site is the appropriate place to name in honor of our national Black history and we are fortunate to have so many regional parklands that can honor Indigenous culture. We sincerely look forward to your future efforts to acknowledge and recognize Indigenous peoples and the many diverse communities we serve.

We thank you for understanding how important this land is to our Black/African-American history and hope this overwhelming public support will make this naming process a celebration of our mutual regional history.

Sincerely,
Black Employee Collective

Yulie Padmore
Sabrina Pinell
Yolande Barial Knight
Precious Shelton
Eva Rose Leavitt
Marcus Phinnessee
Ruth Middleton

Melissa Fowlks
Terisa Jackson
Deontá Allen
Wanda Bolden-Ross
Ron Jordan
Virginia Delgado-Martinez
Dimitrius McFadden

Monique Bigbee
Kenneth Miller
Anthony Clark
Renee Robinson
Ali Haynes
Dawn Stevenson
Andrew Jone

* [Steve Shienkin, Author - The Port Chicago 50: Disaster, Mutiny, and The Fight for Civil Rights](#)

February 24, 2021

Board of Directors
East Bay Regional Park District
2950 Peralta Oaks Court
Oakland, CA 94605

Dear EBRPD Board of Directors

It is very fitting for the new park to be named for Thurgood Marshall. An officer with the NAACP Legal Defense Fund in New York, Marshall volunteered his assistance to the accused African American sailors. Although not their legal representative -- who were lawyers appointed by the Navy -- Marshall met with the sailors to assure them of his help. He also met with their appointed defense attorneys. As a civilian, Marshall could speak freely to the press and the public on behalf of the sailors.

After their convictions it was Thurgood Marshall who took their appeal all the way to the Secretary of the Navy, and ultimately to President Franklin Roosevelt. In the end, as a result of Marshall's efforts, the sailors were granted early release from prison. Ironically, they were put on Navy ships as sailors in newly integrated crews for a term of sea duty, before finally being released back into civilian life.

The outcome of the struggle for desegregation of the U.S. Navy was the beginning of the integration of the entire U.S. military. Thurgood Marshall played a key role in this democratic sea change in the American military and American society in general.

Robert L. Allen, Ph.D.
Author, *The Port Chicago Mutiny*
Board Member
Friends of Port Chicago National Memorial
email: friendsofportchicago@gmail.com



March 29, 2021

East Bay Regional Park District Board of Directors
East Bay Regional Park District
2950 Peralta Oaks Court
Oakland, CA 94605

Dear Board of Directors:

This letter is to state that AFSCME Local 2428 supports the Black Employees Collective effort to rename Concord Hills Regional Park to **Thurgood Marshall Regional Park - Home of the Port Chicago 50**.

On July 17, 1944, a huge explosion at Port Chicago Naval Magazine killed 320 civilians and soldiers, 202 of whom were African American, the largest homefront disaster of WWII. This segregated military base was where many enlisted Black men, who had been denied their request to fight overseas, were assigned to load explosives onto ships under unsafe working conditions and without adequate training. Part of the lax safety precautions came from the White officers making bets regarding which groups could load munitions fastest; additionally, servicemen were told that munitions were not active and would be armed later. After the disaster, Port Chicago servicemen were ordered to return to work loading munitions under the same conditions at Mare Island. 258 Black servicemen initially refused to return citing safety concerns but were threatened with a charge of mutiny, which in wartime can lead to death by firing squad. In the end, 50 servicemen held out in their refusal and were found guilty of mutiny and sentenced to 12-15 years of hard labor and incarceration. Thurgood Marshall, then the Chief Counsel of the NAACP, spearheaded an advocacy program that captured the attention of the nation during and after the trial, and was integral to eventually freeing the Port Chicago 50 and paving the way for desegregation of the US Navy. However, the Port Chicago 50 never received an official exoneration. The fight to exonerate the Port Chicago 50 continues, and the proposed name pays tribute to those who put themselves on the line to demand an end to discrimination in all military assignments.

The National Park Service Port Chicago Naval Magazine National Memorial has begun to make the story of the Port Chicago disaster more visible, but there is very limited public access even without COVID restrictions. The East Bay Regional Park District can further amplify the significance not only through increased public access to the land, but also by naming the park after the very individuals involved in changing American history after the Port Chicago disaster.

In working toward more equitable practices in regards to whose stories are made visible, what we name areas matters. Though the East Bay has a rich history of Black culture and achievement, only one of the District's 73 parks is currently named after an African American. Honoring Thurgood Marshall and the Port Chicago 50 in the park name will double that number, make this important piece of national and local history more visible, and work to further the District's stated mission to stand in solidarity with Black Americans.

Additionally, the renaming of Concord Hills Regional Park to **Thurgood Marshall Regional Park - Home of the Port Chicago 50**, will act as a beacon to anyone who looks at a map. Even if they are unfamiliar with the park, the name alone will illuminate exactly what took place and point to the seismic effect it had on national policies and racial justice.

AFSCME Local 2428 adds our name to the long list of community organizations and over 700 individuals who support this renaming, such as NAACP East County, Citizens for Historical Equity, the Friends of Port Chicago National Memorial, and the United Veterans Council of Pittsburg, CA. We look forward to seeing the story of Thurgood Marshall and the Port Chicago 50 visible on the map of both our cultural and physical landscapes.

Best,

AFSCME Local 2428

Cc:

Board of Directors:

Dee Rosario
Colin Coffey
Elizabeth Echols
Dennis Waespi
Ellen Corbett
Ayn Wieskamp
Beverly Lane

Park Advisory Committee:

Linda Best
Olivia Sanwong
Annie Burke
Igor Skaredoff
Andrew Cary
Neil Tsutsui
James Chang
Roland Williams
Kathleen 'Susie' Claxton
Sharon Corkin

Lynda Deschambault
Dev Mahadevan
Irene Dieter
Michael Gregory
Adele Ho
Michelle Lacy
Rochelle Nason
Carlyn Obringer
Rick Rickard
Elissa Robinson

Board of Directors

East Bay Regional Park District

2950 Peralta Oaks Court

Oakland, CA 94605

Dear EBRPD Board of Directors:

I am writing to express my enthusiastic support for the idea of naming a new East Bay park in honor of Thurgood Marshall and the sailors who served at the Port Chicago naval base during World War II.

I am convinced that the young Black men who became known as the Port Chicago 50 should be seen as civil rights heroes alongside such figures as Rosa Parks and Jackie Robinson. They quite literally put their lives on the line to stand up against racism and segregation. These men may have been convicted of mutiny, but with the benefit of hindsight, it's easy to see that it was our government that was in the wrong for its racist treatment of Black sailors. Thurgood Marshall made this point eloquently in his legal arguments on behalf of the sailors, and I would argue that President Truman as much as conceded the point with his order to desegregate the military in 1948.

Ultimately, in different ways, both Thurgood Marshall and the young sailors of Port Chicago pushed our country to be better, to move closer to fulfilling the ideals in our beautiful founding documents. It would be entirely fitting to honor these American heroes by naming this new park in their honor.

Steve Sheinkin

Author, *The Port Chicago 50: Disaster, Mutiny, the Fight for Civil Rights*



*"Small Town Atmosphere
Outstanding Quality of Life"*

May 20, 2021

Board of Directors East Bay Regional Park District
2950 Peralta Oaks Court
Oakland, CA 94605

Re: Naming Recommendation: **Thurgood Marshall Regional Park - Home of the Port Chicago 50**

Dear Esteemed EBRPD Board of Directors,

Thank you for your dedicated work caring for our regional parklands. We know you are aware heroes define our ideals and aspirations and recognizing our nation's heroes, of all races, is key to building inclusive, equitable, and productive communities. Although the names on our regional public lands should reflect the values of society, they often just reflect the values of those who are in power. This perpetually leaves people of color without acknowledgement of their representative heroes and diminishes the significant sacrifices and contributions people of color have made to our region. The East Bay Area is severely lacking in Black representation in regional park names. There are currently zero regional parks in Contra Costa County named to honor Black culture or history. This lack of representation has a detrimental effect on self-esteem and pride within our communities and results in many underserved citizens feeling uninvited and unwelcome in our public parklands.

Fortunately, there is now a unique opportunity to honor Black history on the land where so many Black Americans died serving our country at Port Chicago Naval Magazine. This former military base, located in Contra Costa County, is the site of the Port Chicago disaster, the World War II explosion that killed 320 sailors, officers, and civilians. In the aftermath, many of the surviving Black sailors were ordered to resume handling the same dangerous munitions that caused the explosion. Under the threat of a court martial, ultimately only fifty sailors stood in protest of an order that endangered their lives. NAACP's Thurgood Marshall tirelessly worked to defend the fifty servicemen – known as the Port Chicago 50 – and advocated to end the vicious policy of segregation that contributed to the deaths of the 320 men. Together these civil rights pioneers were instrumental in desegregating our U.S. Armed Forces, a pivotal step in the journey to national integration.

In the interest of honoring the national heroes and history of Port Chicago Naval Magazine, a coalition including Friends of Port Chicago National Memorial, NAACP East County, United Veterans Council, and Citizens for Historical Equity has united to unanimously recommend Concord Hills Regional Park be named:

Thurgood Marshall Regional Park - Home of the Port Chicago 50

The Port Chicago 50 – whose civil rights protest pre-dates Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott – should be revered for courageously standing up for equality. Honoring the Port Chicago 50 will give voice to the patriots who lost their lives in the explosion and bring renewed context to enhance and serve their legacy. The explosion that cost these men their lives was a catalyst for a regional civil rights movement that echoed throughout the halls of the White House and forever changed this country for the better. That's a momentous legacy we cannot allow to be forgotten.

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May 21, 2021

Naming Recommendation: **Thurgood Marshall Regional Park - Home of the Port Chicago 50**

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Supreme Court Justice and NAACP Chief Counsel Thurgood Marshall represents the highest ideals of our country and is a shining symbol of equality and justice. As a champion of civil rights, he advocated for environmental, racial, and social justice including Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination. These themes resonate throughout the many stories that will be interpreted at the future visitor center. Marshall is a hero and inspiration for future generations.

Recognizing the sacrifices and contributions of people of color in this park name, by naming the park after Black patriots, will serve as a beacon to the Bay Area and the entire country that the East Bay Regional Park District values and welcomes Black visitors and honors our veterans and the cultural stories of the lands.

For these reasons, I respectfully ask the East Bay Regional Park District to declare Concord Hills Regional Park be named:

Thurgood Marshall Regional Park - Home of the Port Chicago 50.

Thank you for consideration of my nomination and support!

Very truly yours,



Newell Arnerich

Vice Mayor of Danville

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FROM THE DESK OF
MARK DESAULNIER

May 31, 2021

East Bay Regional Park District
Board of Directors
2950 Peralta Oaks Court
P.O. Box 5381
Oakland, CA 94605-0381

Dear Board Members:

I write to express my strong support to name the future regional park at the former Concord Naval Weapons Station: Concord Regional Park as “Thurgood Marshall Regional Park – Home of the Port Chicago 50.”

Adopting this name would have both historical and representational significance. As a defender of the Port Chicago 50 in their historic fight against discrimination and wrongful convictions, Thurgood Marshall played an important role in their story. This trial, and Marshall’s role in it, helped to play a role in the desegregation of the Armed Forces. As the first African American Supreme Court justice, Marshall is more than deserving of this honor.

According to the Mercury News, this would be the first regional park in Contra Costa County named for an African American person. With almost 10% of all Contra Costa residents being African American, it is important to honor and represent an African American hero.

To both recognize the significance of Marshall’s contributions to our region and pay tribute to the important work African Americans like Marshall and the Port Chicago 50 have made throughout history, I strongly support the name “Thurgood Marshall Regional Park – Home of the Port Chicago 50.” I appreciate you taking the time to consider my views on this matter and trust they will be given the fair and thorough review they deserve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark DeSaulnier', written in a cursive style.

Congressman Mark DeSaulnier

“This [park] is a wonderful opportunity for the Bay Area to tell an amazing American story; both its tragedy and its failure but also of the liberating, forceful individuals who decided this wasn’t enough - that we had to reconcile our weaknesses and prejudice with what we hope for in the future.”

- U.S. Rep. Mark DeSaulnier

SOURCES

Thurgood Marshall message to President Roosevelt:

Source: "The Integration of the Armed Forces (1940-1965)" by Morris MacGregor Jr., p. 15

Link: https://history.army.mil/html/books/050/50-1-1/cmhPub_50-1-1.pdf

Thurgood Marshall's correspondence with James Forrestal:

Source: Thurgood Marshall Institute

Link: <https://tminstituteldf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Letter-to-Sec-of-Navy.pdf>

Quote from Eleanor Roosevelt about Port Chicago 50:

Source: "The Port Chicago 50" by Steve Sheinkin, p. 153

Link: <https://books.google.com/books?id=EcTeAQAAQBAJ&pg=PA153#v=onepage&q&f=false>

Letter from Port Chicago Sailor Edward Saunders:

Source: Thurgood Marshall Institute

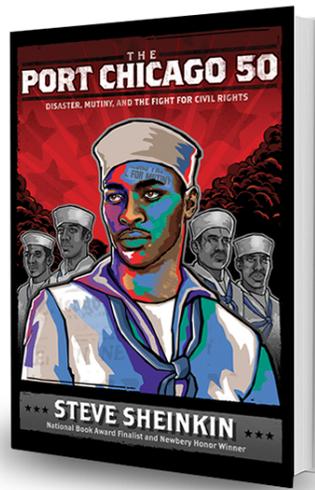
Link: <https://tminstituteldf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Port-Chicago-Thank-You-Letter-Eric-Saunders.pdf>

“It is very fitting for the new park to be named for THURGOOD MARSHALL.” - **Robert L. Allen**

“When Black servicemen needed help, THURGOOD MARSHALL was the man they turned to.” - **Steve Sheinkin**

“As you know, THURGOOD MARSHALL came out to defend THE PORT CHICAGO 50... [and] to defend the words and aspirations in our sacred creed, meaning the Constitution and Declaration of Independence. It gives me goosebumps.”

- U.S. Rep. Mark DeSaulnier



THURGOOD MARSHALL REGIONAL PARK

was sent **HOME OF THE PORT CHICAGO 50** the gates of a naval base about thirty miles northeast of San Francisco. The buses climbed a series of tall hills covered with dry grass. From the top of the last hill, the men looked out at a flat stretch of land along the banks of the mile-wide Suisun Bay. There were a few wooden buildings scattered around the mostly empty space and a pier at the waterfront.

This was their new home, the Port Chicago Naval Magazine.

“Strange thing, to look at all this vast space,” Robert Routh remembered of his first view of Port Chicago. “And very few trees. Coming from a farm area, this was really hard on me, to see so little foliage. Really, it was a sad place to look at.”

“Big open place, and a dock,” recalled Percy Robinson. “That’s about all there was there.”