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November 2020

## Acknowledging Our Past to Heal Our Future



Dear Friends,

The process of recognizing past and present inequities is not easy. Sometimes these inequities are so baked into the fabric of our life that it is difficult to see the patterns and policies that create unearned advantaged for few at the expense of many. Additionally, this process requires the admission of wrongdoing and the acknowledgment that people have been harmed — sometimes intentionally.

To advance racial equity, we must name past and present injustices — from mass exploitation of Native Americans to the enslavement of Black Americans to systemic state violence against Black and Brown lives. When we recognize and name inequities, we can begin healing the generations of pain, suffering, and oppression; we can admit when we need to change. This is essential for us — as a nation, a community, and as the Port — to not only heal but also to fully realize a future where racial equity is possible.

### Georgetown's Troubled Past

Through the [Opportunity Youth Initiative](#), the Port partnered with community-based organizations to provide career development and internship opportunities in Port-related industries to low-income youth and youth of color adversely impacted by the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Avery Brown and Jake Bookwalter are two youths who interned with Friends of Georgetown History and Industry (FoGHI), and during their internship, they learned about the history of displacement, gentrification, and industrialization in the Georgetown neighborhood of Seattle. Avery and Jake then created a short video about how this history has marginalized the members of this community, especially in terms of disparities in health outcomes and access to the Duwamish River. For instance, due to industrialization and pollution, the life expectancy of Georgetown residents is seven years less than other Seattle residents.

Additionally, despite the importance of the Duwamish River to the culture and people, Georgetown only has only one, small river access point — Gateway Park North. The Port is currently working on a project to clean up this park and provide greater access to the river.



At the end of this [video](#), Avery and Jake ask the Port, “can [the Port] assure us that the timeline for the [Gateway Park North] will be completed on time?” Thank you, Avery and Jake, for highlighting this important history and the Port’s responsibility in addressing it. Thank you for asking us to be accountable to your community. We look forward to finishing this project in a way that is both transparent and collaborative with the community.

## Commemorating Juneteenth

On Tuesday, November 17, the Port of Seattle Commission voted to make [Juneteenth a Port-paid holiday](#) and [passed a proclamation](#) to commemorate the event.

**Juneteenth**, otherwise known as Black Independence Day, is a celebration of June 19, 1865 when enslaved people in Galveston, Texas heard the news of their freedom, two years after President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. Juneteenth is a day to honor the influence and the history of African Americans and to recognize the resilience, intellect, and many contributions the African American community has made to the state and country. Juneteenth is a day to reflect upon how we can create a better, more equitable future for all members of our community, one where African Americans everywhere can realize the freedom and equality first promised by the Emancipation Proclamation over 150 years ago.

The addition of Juneteenth as an official Port holiday is one way the Port is celebrating the achievements and culture of African Americans, acknowledging that Black Lives Matter, and reaffirming our commitment to addressing the harmful legacy of slavery and generational inequities of systemic racism.



## Native American Heritage Month

Next week, many of us will take time away from work to be with our families for the Thanksgiving holiday. While it is commonly taught that Thanksgiving commemorates a time in the 1621 when English Pilgrims broke bread with members of the Wampanoag tribe to celebrate a successful harvest, [this history is not accurate](#).

Not only is this idyllic story of the white colonists and Natives feasting together untrue, but it also fails to recognize the years of massacre, colonization, and oppression of the first people of this nation at the hands of the British and Europeans. This legacy of genocide is baked into the foundation of our country, and something that we cannot ignore. Although Thanksgiving is commonly thought of as a time to be with loved ones and celebrate all that we are grateful for, the lack of recognition of the impact of colonization on Native communities [erases history](#).

This year, I challenge all of us non-Native people to celebrate **Native American Heritage Month and Day** (November 27). This is a time to honor Native Americans as the first people and stewards of the land we call our home, celebrate Native history and culture, and recognize the resiliency and strength of Indigenous communities. If you do not know what Indigenous land you live on, [look it up](#), and [use this resource](#) to acknowledge the Indigenous people who stewarded that land for centuries. Please consider starting your holiday meal by honoring the land you are living on, because naming the truth is one of the first steps to healing and creating meaningful, lasting change.

In Unity,

**Boodka Gheisar**

Senior Director, Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

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## Centering Equity and Taking Action

- Port employees recount the history of Juneteenth celebrations at the Port and [share their thoughts and feelings](#) about the Port's **adoption of Juneteenth** as its eleventh paid holiday.
- The work of the Port's **[Task Force on Port Policing and Civil Rights](#)** is well underway. On November 17, the Commission received an update on the progress of the report. [Watch the recording of the presentation](#) and view the [memo](#), [presentation](#), and [progress report](#).
- It's **[Transgender Awareness Week](#)** ! This is a week when transgender people and their allies educate the community about who transgender people are and advocate against the prejudice, discrimination, and violence that affect the transgender community. We acknowledge the tremendous ongoing pressure of intersectional oppression and violence that disproportionately targets trans communities. We honor the lives lost to racist and transphobic violence, and we commit to creating an inclusive space for all of us, where trans, gender non-conforming, and gender nonbinary people survive and thrive. In the coming weeks, the Port is instituting a new Gender Identity Policy, which sets forth guidelines to address the needs of transgender, gender non-conforming, and other gender diverse employees. We'll update you once the policy is finalized and in place.

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**Port of Seattle  
Commission**Stephanie Bowman  
Ryan Calkins  
Sam Cho  
Fred Felleman  
Peter Steinbrueck**Port of Seattle  
Executive Director**

Stephen P. Metruck



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