

VOLUNTEER PARK MEMORIAL TASK FORCE

August 22, 2021

Jesús Aguirre
Department of Parks and Recreation
City of Seattle
100 Dexter Ave N
Seattle, WA 98109

Dear Mr. Aguirre –

We are writing to urge you to address the memorial to the volunteer soldiers of the Wars of 1898 located near the water tower in Volunteer Park. The current plaque is problematic for several reasons:

- It is factually incorrect. The United States did not “liberate” the people of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and The Philippines in the Wars of 1898.
- Its tone is patronizing and offensive, a veritable “slap in the face” to park visitors, particularly those from BIPOC communities.
- Its presence in the park reinforces the “invisible barrier” felt by many BIPOC community members when visiting parks in affluent white neighborhoods.
- The text of the plaque is not in keeping with SPR’s “Pathway to Equity,” the “roadmap for SPR to play our part to end institutional and structural racism and achieve racial equity in Seattle.”
- This issue has been brought to SPR by community members.

For these reasons, we ask that you remove the plaque from Volunteer Park. Any memorial in a public park should be respectful of all Seattle residents and if, in the future, a new memorial is placed to honor the veterans for whom the park is named, it should be developed in collaboration with all of the communities who were involved with, and have been affected by, the wars.

To that end, if Seattle Parks and Recreation begins a process to replace the plaque, the members of our task force would like to be involved in the planning. We believe that a new memorial could go far in helping the community understand why the soldiers volunteered, what impact the wars had on the nations involved, and how the wars shaped Seattle’s history and cultural geography.

A new memorial could also provide numerous opportunities for public programming in collaboration with local heritage organizations. Public engagement is an important element of reexamining public

memorials and an opportunity to illuminate important aspects of Seattle's history that are not well-known.

We are aware that the issue with the plaque was raised with SPR by a community member in 2020 and are hopeful that efforts may already be underway to remove the plaque. If that is not the case, we ask that you share the reasons for the delay. **If no process for removal is underway, on August 27th we will be asking the Board of Park Commissioners for time at their September 9th meeting to discuss its removal.**

Sincerely,

Jennifer Ott

Chair

Volunteer Park Trust

Estela Ortega

Executive Director

El Centro de la Raza

Dr. Dorothy Laigo Cordova

Executive Director

Filipino American National Historical Society

Dr. Otilia Baraboi

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Vicente Rafael, PhD

Christoph Giebel, PhD

Diane Morrison, PhD

Philip L. Bereano, JD

cc: Board of Park Commissioners