Black Hands, Blue Seas Exhibit making a Splash at Mystic Seaport Museum of America and the Sea

A new exhibit at the Mystic Seaport Museum of America and the Seas chronicles the significant contributions of African Americans to maritime history. Black Hands, Blue Seas: The Maritime Heritage of African Americans tells the story of how seafaring has long been central to the economic survival and civil-rights struggles of African Americans.

The exhibit opened on October 29, 2005, and will close in March 2007.

For 400 years, Americans of African descent have been involved in the nation’s maritime history, whether building and repairing vessels, catching fish and shellfish, or aboard merchant ships delivering cargo around the world. They also have a long tradition of service in our Navy and Coast Guard, defending a democracy that frequently treated them as second-class citizens.

In many ways, African Americans’ maritime experiences of travel, work, and adventure closely resembled the experiences of other seafarers, regardless of color. Black mariners sometimes faced greater challenges and limitations, however. In return for their hard work, they hoped seafaring would give them greater freedom and equality than was available on shore. Seafaring African Americans also worked to improve conditions for those who stayed on land by speaking out against slavery, helping fugitives escape by sea, and proving that black Americans were just as capable as any others.

Mystic Seaport – The Museum of America and the Sea – is the nation’s leading maritime museum presenting the American experience from a maritime perspective. Located along the banks of the historic Mystic River in Mystic, Connecticut, the Museum houses extensive collections representing the material culture of maritime America and offers educational programs from preschool to post-graduate. For more information, call 888.973.2767 or visit www.mystic-seaport.org.

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“Let the black man have a fair chance...if he wants to work in your shipyards, let him work. If he wants to go to Congress, let him go to Congress. Let him find his level and take the place to which he is fitted.”

—Frederick Douglass, ship’s caulker, abolitionist, and statesman, spoken in Mystic, Connecticut, in 1868.