While still a slave, Frederick Douglass worked as a ship caulker at Fell’s Point in Baltimore, Md. Ralph Ellison, arguably one of the greatest writers in American history, sailed as a United States merchant mariner during World War II. James Forten, a prominent abolitionist who owned a successful sail-making company, became one of the wealthiest blacks in post-Colonial America.

For African-Americans who worked waterlogged docks in long-ago autumns, and those who today sail the ocean on sleek, high-tech sloops, the call of the sea reverberates across generations and time.

In recognition of African-American contributions to the nation’s maritime heritage, NOAA’s Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, Murrain Associates, Inc., and the National Association of Black Scuba Divers present “Voyage to Discovery,” a multimedia education initiative. This initiative aims to inspire more African-Americans to pursue marine career opportunities by highlighting their maritime heritage through education, archaeology, science, and underwater exploration!
Journey with NOAA’s Office of National Marine Sanctuaries’ Maritime Heritage Program as scuba divers embark on the program’s core mission: To explore the ocean depths in an effort to identify a sunken shipwreck that best illustrates African-American maritime experience and underscores notable seafaring achievements of the past and present.

Voyage to Discovery represents an unprecedented opportunity to educate the public about African-American participation in U.S. maritime affairs from the period of pre-Civil War slavery to today.

According to historian W. Jeffrey Bolster, author of “Black Jacks: African-American Seamen in the Age of Sail,” African-American seafarers were an important sector of the country’s maritime labor force from the 1740s to the 1860s.

Blacks shaped mariner culture and the identity of free black communities. Both free blacks and slaves found opportunity, dignity, and freedom as seamen despite harsh working conditions.

African-Americans worked as skippers and captains as well as whalers, lobstermen, fishermen and cooks. They also managed lighthouses, steered paddleboats and warships, and owned seaside businesses.

Voyage to Discovery aspires to bring the stories of these largely unheralded pioneers to the public’s attention, with additional outreach directed toward African-American communities and students. In collaboration with our partners, we hope these stories will become a source of community pride and inspiration; foster increased participation in marine science education and careers; and help encourage greater ocean conservation awareness among African-Americans.

Voyage to Discovery honors African-Americans’ deep connection to the sea and celebrates the optimism of the human spirit. Your participation in Voyage to Discovery is critical to the project’s success, and we invite you to join us in our quest at http://voyagetodiscovery.org.

Remembering the Henrietta Marie

In 1699, the Henrietta Marie sailed from London to West Africa with a cargo of pewter, beads, and other English goods, which were to be exchanged for ivory and enslaved Africans. The next stop was Jamaica, where the captain sold the cargo of Africans to plantation owners. On the journey home in July 1700, a storm sank the ship off the coast of Key West, Fla. Treasure salvagers found the Henrietta Marie in 1972, the only slave ship ever found in U.S. waters.

Shackles, cannon balls, and the ship's bell were among the artifacts recovered from the vessel. In 1993, members of the National Association of Black Scuba Divers placed a memorial plaque and monument on the wreck site to commemorate the people who died aboard the Henrietta Marie and those lost during the Middle Passage.

Take a Voyage to Discovery and Join Us on the Journey!

For additional information on Voyage to Discovery, contact us at:
Email: info@voyagetodiscovery.org  Web: http://voyagetodiscovery.org