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## Woods Hole Black History Month 2015 Activities Focus on Theme of Black Life, History and Culture

"A Century of Black Life, History and Culture" is the national theme for 2015 Black History Month activities. In Woods Hole, events will be held February 23 and February 26. All events are free and open to the public and will be held at the Marine Biological Laboratory (MBL) in Woods Hole.

On Monday, February 23, Gerald Downes, Associate Professor of Biology at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, will present "Genetic Analysis of Seizure Disorders in Zebrafish: The Sweet Smell of New Disease Models?" at noon in the Meigs Room at the MBL's Swope Center.

Downes received his B.S. degree in biology in 1992 from Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte, North Carolina, and his Ph.D. in neuroscience in 1999 from Washington University in St. Louis School of Medicine. He was a postdoctoral fellow in developmental neuroscience at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine from 1999 to 2005, when he joined the faculty at the University of Massachusetts Amherst as an assistant professor. He was named an associate professor in 2012. During the summers of 2009 and 2010 Downes was an instructor in the neuroscience and behavior course at the MBL. His research focuses on the development and function of spinal cord networks, using the zebrafish embryo as the model system.

"Groups or neurons within the spinal cord coordinate the precise movements of locomotive behavior, such as walking or swimming. Our laboratory is interested in the development, organization, and function of these neuronal networks and we use the zebrafish embryo as our model system," Downes said. "The zebrafish embryo has several characteristics that make it particularly well-suited to study spinal cord networks. The embryos demonstrate robust swimming behavior, their spinal cords are relatively simple compared to mammalian spinal cords, the embryos are transparent so spinal cord development can be easily observed, and a large array of genetic resources are available."

"These features allow us to take an integrated genetic, molecular, cellular, and behavioral approach to study the spinal cord networks that orchestrate locomotive behavior. Since spinal cord organization is broadly conserved among vertebrates, our work holds promise to provide insight into mammalian spinal cords."

Fishery biologist Dionne Hoskins will discuss "Tales of Landings and Legacies: African Americans in Georgia's Coastal Fisheries" on Thursday, Feb. 26, at 3:00 p.m. in the Meigs

Room at MBL's Swope Center. Director of NOAA Sponsored Programs at Savannah State University, Hoskins received her B.S. degree in marine biology from Savannah State College in 1992 and her doctorate in marine sciences from the University of South Carolina in 1999. She was tasked in 2000 by the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) of NOAA Fisheries to develop a Cooperative Marine Education and Research (CMER) program at the university, the first of its kind at a historically black university. Since then, Hoskins has worked as a fishery biologist through the Galveston Laboratory of NOAA Fisheries and as an Associate Graduate Professor in the Marine Science program at Savannah State University.

Based in Savannah, Hoskins works with undergraduate and graduate students on a variety of ecological research topics. As a benthic ecologist, she works primarily on the ecology of deposit feeding organisms in marine sediments and on essential habitat in soft sediment areas. Current research in her lab includes monitoring of natural and restored intertidal oyster reefs; effect of black gill on the Georgia shrimp fishery; survey of brittlestar species in Wassaw Sound, Georgia; assessment of microbial extracellular polymers on subtidal mudflats in coastal Georgia; the disappearance of African Americans from commercial fishing in Georgia; and traditional ecological knowledge in the African American community of Harris Neck, Georgia. Her expertise also includes diversity issues in stakeholder processes and K12 and higher education.

"Marine science is an interdisciplinary field that touches our lives in a myriad of ways," Hoskins said. "It is impossible for us to study, manage, and protect marine species and habitats without considering the human element. Black History Month is a fitting time for us to talk about the long history of African Americans on the coast and to examine fishing among the Gullah Geechee people."

Dionne Hoskins' presentation will be followed by Harambee, an annual ethnic potluck feast celebrating everyone of every race. Multicultural arts, food and live music will take place 4:00 to 7:30 p.m. at MBL's Swope Center.

Woods Hole Black History Month events are sponsored by the Marine Biological Laboratory, National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA's Northeast Fisheries Science Center), U.S. Geological Survey Woods Hole Field Center, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, Woods Hole Research Center, and Sea Education Association.

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Related links:

Woods Hole Black History Month Activities: 2015_bhm_flyer.pdf

Association for the Study of African American Life and History: http://asalh100.org/