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Woods Hole Juneteenth Celebration Features Lecture on Ernest Everett Just, the First African American Marine Biologist

The 2015 Woods Hole Juneteenth celebration, sponsored by the Woods Hole Black History Month Committee and the Woods Hole Diversity Initiative, continues the 2015 national black history month theme, “a century of Black life, history and culture,” with a lecture on the life of Ernest Everett Just, the first African American marine biologist.

Fishery biologist Dionne Hoskins will discuss “Ernest Everett Just: An African-American Life in Science” on Friday, June 19, at noon in the Speck Auditorium of Rowe Laboratory at the Marine Biological Laboratory (MBL). The event is free and open to the public. A book display, sale and signing of “Metamorphosis in Black” by James Robert Butler will also be available in the Laboratory foyer.

Just was known for his studies of fertilization, the biology of the cell surface, and early development in marine invertebrates. He began working summers at the Marine Biological Laboratory in Woods Hole in 1909 and published more than 50 scientific papers based on his 20 years of summer research at the MBL. His book, “The Biology of the Cell Surface,” was published in 1939.

Hoskins presented a talk on the long history of African Americans on the coast and fishing among the Gullah Geechee people as part of Woods Hole Black History Month activities in February 2015. Ernest Everett Just, an exemplar of American biological research, was born in the heart of the Gullah Geechee Corridor in Charleston, South Carolina. His research and publications as an embryologist yielded many firsts in the discipline.

Hoskins will present Just’s life as a chronology of a highly productive international life in science and will discuss the challenges of the time period 1883-1941. “While some challenges are universal to persons pursuing careers in the research sciences and will be familiar to the audience, other issues faced by Dr. Just were unique to him as a man of color and unfortunately represent barriers that still exist,” Hoskins said.

Dionne Hoskins is Director of NOAA Sponsored Programs at Savannah State University. She 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.

Juneteenth is the oldest known celebration commemorating the ending of slavery in the United States, dating back to its origin in Galveston, Texas, when Union soldiers enforced the Emancipation Proclamation and freed all remaining slaves in Texas on June 19, 1865. Celebrations today focus on African American freedom and emphasize education and achievement.

The Woods Hole Black History Month Committee comprises members from the six scientific institutions in Woods Hole: Marine Biological Laboratory, NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service, Sea Education Association, Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, Woods Hole Research Center, and USGS Science Center for Coastal and Marine Geology. The committee organizes special events during February for Black History Month and throughout the year to promote diversity in the institutions and in the local community.

The Juneteenth celebration is also supported by the Woods Hole Diversity Initiative. In 2004 the leaders of six Woods Hole science institutions signed a memorandum committing their institutions to work together to attract and retain a more diverse workforce. That memorandum established the Woods Hole Scientific Community Diversity Initiative. The Diversity Initiative in turn established an advisory committee to make recommendations as to how the institutions can make the village a more diverse, more inclusive community.

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Related links:

Ernest Everett Just: <http://www.asbmb.org/asbmbtoday/asbmbtoday.aspx?id=5878>
Woods Hole Black History Month Committee: <http://woodshole.er.usgs.gov/outreach/WHBHMC/>
Woods Hole Diversity Initiative: <http://www.woodsholediversity.org/Memorandum.html>
History of Juneteenth: <http://www.juneteenth.com/history.htm>
Metamorphosis in Black: <http://www.metamorphosisinblack.net>
2015 Juneteenth flyer: [juneteenth.flyer.2015](#) (pdf)

