

## Maine Historical Society

### Black Salts: Black sailors in Maine and New England

<https://www.mainehistory.org/events/black-salts-black-sailors/>

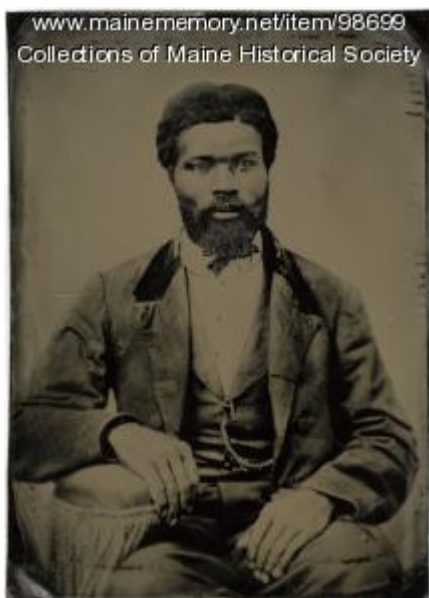
<https://youtu.be/D3XVSHHXj78> Direct presentation link

Black people and people of African heritage have lived in Maine for more than 400 years, playing a vital role in the shaping of the economy and the history of the state. In the 1800s, many of these individuals worked as farmers, homemakers, drivers, hotel owners, and restaurant keepers, and even more worked in the maritime trades as shipbuilders, fishermen, lobstermen, and sailors. In this talk, Cushing's Point Museum director Seth Goldstein discussed the fundamental role of African heritage sailors in regional history and examined why the jobs of mariners and shore-related occupations such as longshoremen were important for individuals of African heritage. Seth also addressed how Black mariners participated in the Underground Railroad.

**About the presenter: Seth Goldstein** grew up on Cape Cod where he developed his passion for maritime history. He has taught at the University of New England, Southern Maine Community College and the Maine College of Art and Design. He is currently the Director of the Cushing's Point Museum at Bug Light Park and Director of Development for the South Portland Historical Society.

## Lesson Plans

### Black History and the History of Slavery in Maine



[John Nichols, Lewiston, ca. 1873](#)

Author: Kathleen Neumann, Maine Historical Society, Cumberland County

Year created: 2021

Suggested Grade Levels: 6-8, 9-12, Postsecondary

Content Areas and Strands:

- Social Studies -- History

Duration: 1-5 days

Time Periods:

- 1500-1774
- 1775-1850
- 1851-1920
- 1921-today

Theme:

- The People/Peopling of Maine

Description:

This lesson presents an overview of the history of the Black community in Maine and the U.S., including Black people who were enslaved in Maine, Maine's connections to slavery and the slave trade, a look into the racism and discrimination many Black people in Maine have experienced, and highlights selected histories of Black people, demonstrating the longevity of their experiences and contributions to the community and culture in Maine.

Intended Outcomes:

- Students understand what the slave trade entailed: the buying and selling of people (mainly Black Africans) into servitude for their entire life for the benefit of (mostly White) businesses. Students will be able to identify and describe Maine's connections to slavery. Students will be able to define racism and discrimination and the impact it had and continues to have on Black people in Maine and the U.S. Students will be able to identify and describe ways the Black community in Maine responded to racism and discrimination and worked for equality. Students will be able to identify and describe the ways in which Black Mainers have contributed to community life and culture in Maine. Students will answer questions about information from secondary and primary sources through close looking and hypothesizing. Students will examine and analyze primary source documents, art, and objects, and use the sources provided to draw informed conclusions and ask informed questions about the Black community in Maine and the United States.

Additional Information: none

Additional Resources:

- [MMN Black History and the History of Slavery in Maine slide show](#)

## Maine and the Atlantic World Slave Economy



### [Sugar cane harvesting in Cuba, 1873](#)

*A story by Seth Goldstein from 1800-1900*

The average life span of an enslaved African, once they arrived in Cuba was seven years. These individuals were literally worked to death. In the 1800s, Cuba produced much of the world's sugar. This matters to Maine history because Cuba was Portland's primary trade partner. The profits from this trade were so lucrative that Cuba's forests were cut down and the fields grew almost exclusively sugar cane.

Maine provided the lumber that built the plantations and the food that fed the enslaved Africans. One 20th Century maritime historian described how whole houses, broken down, were shipped to Cuba along with parsnips, beets, potatoes, salt cod, board lumber and oxen to work the sugar presses. Maine also shipped broken-down wooden boxes and casks to be assembled once they reached Cuba. Coopers from Portland would travel to Cu-ba to assemble these casks and boxes so they could then be filled with sugar, molasses and rum.

These products, in turn, were shipped to Maine where the tallest building on the Portland waterfront was the J.B. Brown sugar refinery. The refined sugar graced dining tables throughout the region and this luxury product was exhibited in ornate sugar bowls.

In 1860 Portland was processing twenty percent of all the molasses that was imported into the US, more than any other city in the country. Some of the molasses would then go to one of the seven rum distilleries that dotted the Portland waterfront. Some of this rum was then shipped to West Africa to be used to purchase enslaved Africans.

Recent scholarship demonstrates that many of the ships involved in transporting enslaved Africans across the Atlantic were Maine-built ships, captained and crewed by Mainers. This is true both before and after the slave trade is declared a "piratical" act in 1820, punishable by death. It is notable that the only individual ever punished to the letter of the law was Captain Nathaniel Gordon who hailed from Portland. He was hung in 1862 after being convicted for carrying 897 enslaved people aboard the merchant ship Erie. Half of the enslaved people on the ship were children.

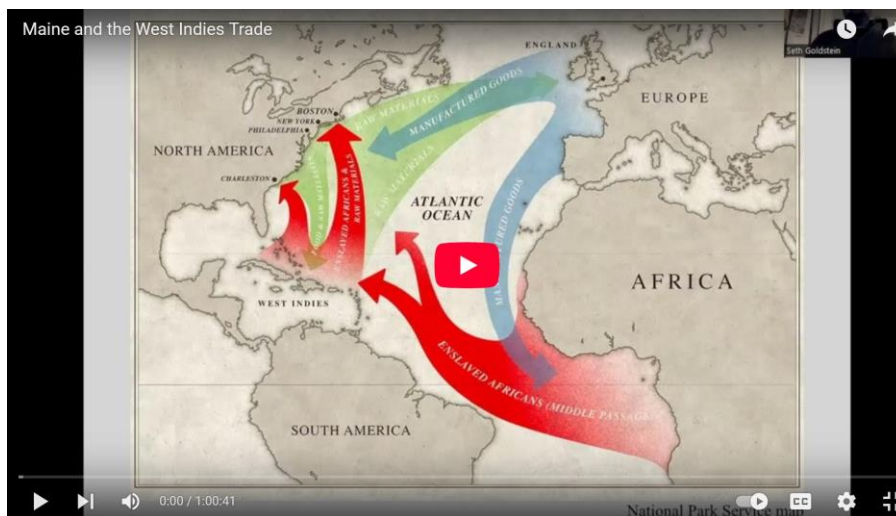


Seth Goldstein

**Friendly URL:** [https://www.mainememory.net/mymainestory/slavery\\_Maine\\_industri](https://www.mainememory.net/mymainestory/slavery_Maine_industri)

## Maine and the West Indies Trade

<https://youtu.be/VNtXiv-r3Y> Direct presentation link



Historian Seth Goldstein discussed the economic ties between Maine and the luxury-producing plantations of the West Indies and explored the various commodities, such as lumber, draft animals, and salt cod, that Maine supplied to West Indian plantations. Concurrently, enslaved Africans in the Caribbean labored in horrific conditions to produce sugar, molasses, rum, and other goods that were consumed in Maine. Seth explained how the West Indies Trade was significant to the forced migration of enslaved Africans to Northern New England and how the West Indies Trade left a lasting mark on the city of Portland and the state of Maine.