

For Immediate Release

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**In Motion: The African American Migration Experience
At the National Heritage Museum, Lexington, MA
October 14, 2006 through February 25, 2007**

The transatlantic slave trade has created an enduring image of black men and women as transported commodities, and is usually considered the most defining element in the construction of the African Diaspora. It is, however, the centuries of additional movements that have given shape to the nation we know today. "In Motion: The African-American Migration Experience" explores the journeys of people of African descent who have not before been considered part of America's migratory tradition. The exhibition tells the story of the men and women forced out of Africa; of enslaved people moved to the Deep South; of fugitives walking to freedom across the country; of southerners migrating west and north, and of immigrants arriving from the Caribbean, South America and Africa. "In Motion" is on view at the National Heritage Museum from October 14, 2006 through February 25, 2007.

"In Motion" presents a new interpretation of African-American history, one that focuses on the self-motivated activities of peoples of African descent to remake themselves and their worlds. Of the thirteen defining migrations that formed and transformed African America, only the transatlantic slave trade and the domestic slave trades were coerced—the eleven others were voluntary movements of resourceful and creative men and women, risk-takers in an exploitative and hostile environment. Their survival skills, efficient networks, and dynamic culture enabled them to thrive and spread, and to be at the very core of the settlement and development of the Americas. Their hopeful journeys changed not only their world and the fabric of the African Diaspora but also the Western Hemisphere.

These journeys did not originate in the east with the 1619 arrival of Africans in Jamestown, Virginia, as is commonly believed, but almost a century earlier, further south. Indeed, African-American history starts in the 1500s with the first Africans coming from Mexico and the Caribbean to the Spanish territories of Florida, Texas, and other parts of the South. And as early as 1526, Africans rebelled and ran away in South Carolina.

These precursors were followed by successive generations of runaways who did not confine themselves to running North and to Canada on the Underground Railroad as traditional history teaches us. With pragmatism and efficiency, they also moved south to Mexico, or to the Bahamas. They left the plantations and settled, secretly, in the urban centers of the South, or found refuge in the swamps and among Native populations.

Migration has been central in the making of African-American history and culture. The transatlantic slave trade was fundamental to the development of the colonial economy; and after the Revolution, the domestic slave trade was the engine that enabled the expansion of the cotton economy. In the twentieth century, black migrations from the South were crucial to America's urban industrial development. They transformed a southern, rural population into a national, urban one, and the black presence throughout the country has influenced American legal systems as well as social and cultural policies and practices.

Today's 35 million African Americans are heirs to all the migrations that have formed and transformed African America, the United States, and the Western Hemisphere. They represent the most diverse population in the United States, a population that has embraced its varied heritages created by millions of men and women constantly on the move, looking for better opportunities, starting over, paving the way, and making sacrifices for future generations.

"In Motion: The African-American Migration Experience" exhibition is organized by the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library and sponsored by the National Heritage Museum.

The National Heritage Museum is dedicated to presenting exhibitions on a wide variety of topics in American history and popular culture. The Museum is supported by the Scottish Rite Freemasons in the Northern Masonic Jurisdiction of the United States. The Museum is located at 33 Marrett Road in Lexington, at the corner of Route 2A and Massachusetts Avenue. Hours are Monday through Saturday from 10 am–5 pm, and Sunday, noon–5 pm. Admission and parking are free. Heritage Shop and Courtyard Café on site. For further information contact the Museum at (781) 861-6559. For more information, visit our web site at www.nationalheritagemuseum.org.

Images and captions are available at <ftp://ftp.monh.org/Guest/InMotion/>. Please contact Linda Patch at 781-862-6541, Lpatch@sprynet.com.