

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

March 24, 1986

I am honored to take part in the American Merchant Marine Museum Foundation Tribute commemorating the 100th anniversary of the birth of Captain Hugh N. Mulzac, the first Black American to earn a master's license for the command of merchant ships.

In 1918, Hugh Mulzac, a native of Union Island in the Caribbean, became an American citizen and completed the examination for a captain's license in record time with a near perfect score. In spite of his outstanding abilities and many proven talents, he was repeatedly denied his right to captaincy for most of the rest of his life.

But Hugh Mulzac never gave up his struggle to secure equal opportunity for himself and for every qualified seaman. Through sheer determination and strength of character, he finally secured a berth as skipper of the Liberty Ship BOOKER T. WASHINGTON during World War II. At his insistence, and in the teeth of centuries of entrenched prejudice, the crew was fully integrated.

From 1942 to 1948, Captain Mulzac commanded the ship with great distinction and not a single mishap. In fact, to this day, the vessel is remembered as one of the most well run in the entire program. Captain Mulzac never again secured a command, but he had proved his own merit, and he continued to work vigorously for equal employment opportunities in the Merchant Marine.

In honoring Captain Mulzac, we pay tribute to a magnificent American who never allowed the unjust barriers set up against him to diminish his loyalty to his country, his devotion to freedom or his love of the sea. His lifetime of perseverance is an inspiring example and has earned him an unquestioned place of honor in the hearts of the American people and mariners everywhere.

Nancy and I join in proudly saluting Captain Hugh N. Mulzac.

Ronald Reagan