A Slave Ship Speaks:
The Wreck of the Henrietta Marie

A Prospectus for the Exhibition Tour

Organized by The Mel Fisher Maritime Heritage Society
Key West, Florida
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EXHIBITION SUMMARY

The Mel Fisher Maritime Heritage Society has organized *A Slave Ship Speaks: The Wreck of the Henrietta Marie*, the first major traveling exhibition devoted to the transatlantic slave trade. The exhibition focuses on the *Henrietta Marie*, the most complete slave ship ever discovered in the Western Hemisphere and the only one to be fully identified, recorded, archaeologically examined, and preserved.

*A Slave Ship Speaks: The Wreck of the *Henrietta Marie* examines the economic and social forces that drove the slave trade and provides insight into its impact on the material life and culture of Europe, Africa, and the Americas — an impact that continues to resonate to this day. The exhibition uses the artifacts and the ship’s records as touchstones for entering the daily lives of the Africans on board the ship as they made the journey to the New World as slaves; the seamen who manned the ship and managed its human cargo; and the traders who ran this notorious enterprise and integrated it into the economy of England.

The exhibition uses the "Triangular Route," the trade route between London, the Western Coast of Africa, and the Americas as a vehicle for presenting and interpreting the societal and economic structures at each point of the trade route during the late 17th and early 18th centuries.

The exhibition premiered at the Mel Fisher Maritime Heritage Society in May 1995 and began its international tour in December 1995.
A Slave Ship Speaks: The Wreck of the *Henrietta Marie* focuses on the English merchant-slaver the *Henrietta Marie* which wrecked off of Key West, Florida in 1700. This highly interactive display explores the early history of the transatlantic slave trade and the shared impact of the trade on the material life and culture of the peoples of Europe, West Africa, and the New World. Highlights from the superb collection of cultural artifacts recovered from the wrecksite are shown in an innovative exhibit format appealing to visitors of all ages.

The *Henrietta Marie* is the only identified merchant-slave ship found in the Americas to have sunk in the course of the slave trade. The extraordinary nature of this discovery has provided a unique opportunity for original research into the experiences and operations surrounding the transatlantic slave trade. Historians, archaeologists, and curators have collaborated with designers to produce an engaging exhibition that does not dilute the troubling historical evidence, but which prompts the visitor to analyze the realities of what occurred. In this exhibition, rare artifacts achieve a new life, offering a profound appeal to audiences of all backgrounds and to African-Americans in particular. Interactive modules give insight into related themes from history, science, and the arts. The exhibition presents a comprehensive picture of the life and times of the ship and refers in detail to the cultures whose history she touched. Artifacts from the Middle Passage, and indeed any aspect of the maritime slave trade, are extremely rare. *A Slave Ship Speaks: The Wreck of the Henrietta Marie* offers museums the opportunity to exhibit some of the very few tangible objects that were at the center of this too often ignored period of American history. It provides an ideal focus for general audience programming, for school groups of all ages, and for outreach to non-traditional audiences.
THE DISCOVERY

In 1972, while searching for the Spanish Galleon, *Nuestra Señora de Atocha*, Mel Fisher's team of divers and archaeologists uncovered the *Henrietta Marie* on New Ground Reef, located 35 miles off Key West. Since its discovery archaeologists have led six major field sessions to excavate the site. Initial recovery operations were performed under the auspices of the Florida Division of Archives, History and Records Management in 1972 and 1973. Recovery operations were resumed in the summer of 1983 and extensive on-site archaeological data retrieval continued through field seasons of 1984 and 1985. In 1991, additional charting and excavation were carried out by the archaeological team of the Mel Fisher Maritime Heritage Society. Today, much of the hull remains on living coral reef and will continue to rest in its ocean grave so as not to disturb the marine environment.

In 1993, Mr. Fisher donated his claim to the *Henrietta Marie* site to the Society, and with that, all the artifacts that he had previously retrieved from it. Identification, cataloguing, conservation, and restoration have since been carried out by the staff and consulting scholars of the Society, where the *Henrietta Marie* artifacts reside in the Society's Permanent Collection.
The Henrietta Marie is a typical example of the numerous small merchant ships and West Indian traders active in the transatlantic trade under the reign of William III (1694-1702). These ships traditionally set out on the so-called "triangular route" — from the ports of London, Bristol, or Liverpool — loaded with cargoes of brass and pewter metal wares; woolens; East India textiles; arms and ordnance; glass and coral beads; iron currency bars; cowrie shells; and spirits. Upon their arrival along the West African littoral between Gambia and the Bight of Biafra, these wares were plied in an elaborate system of barter for enslaved Africans, elephant ivory, gold, pepper, and other spices. They then set sail on the leg of the voyage known as the Middle Passage, from Africa to colonial Jamaica, Barbados, South Carolina, or Virginia. In the New World they traded for cargoes of sugar, tobacco, hardwoods, cotton, indigo, and ginger bound for domestic English and European markets.

Research indicates that the London-registered Henrietta Marie was a three-masted, square-stern vessel, with a keel length of approximately 60 feet. Stepped-deck in configuration, she possessed a cargo capacity adaptable to the specific requirements of the transatlantic trade. Her first known voyage as a merchant-slaver was to West Africa and Barbados in 1697, where she unloaded 188 enslaved Africans. Refitted in London in 1699, she once again set out on the triangular route in September of that year, captained by Thomas Chamberlain and manned by a crew of about twenty. She went first to West Africa where she traded metal wares, firearms, textiles, and spirits for enslaved Africans and ivory. She stopped next at Barbados for trade purposes and fresh provisions, and continued on to make port in Jamaica. In July of 1700, the Henrietta Marie embarked on the return leg of her journey, laden with a cargo of sugar, logwood, cotton, indigo, and a surplus of remaindered goods. The Henrietta Marie met her demise on New Ground Reef near Key West.
EXHIBITION OVERVIEW

The discovery of the remains of the *Henrietta Marie* was a remarkable historical find. The conservation, cataloguing, and scholarly analysis of the large group of late-17th and early-18th century artifacts recovered from the *Henrietta Marie* site has provided new material evidence of the history of the transatlantic trade. This research continues to shed new light on trading patterns in the Atlantic basin, the demography and conditions of the Middle Passage, and the nature of cross-cultural contact in the modern Western world.

Through displays drawing on scientific technique and historical research, the exhibition examines the life and times of this late 17th century English merchant-slaver within the broad historical context of trade to and from the New World between 1650 and 1750. The exhibit highlights the social and physical settings from which those aboard the *Henrietta Marie* came, and the character of their experience of daily life on land and at sea. Museum-goers explore the impact of the transatlantic passage in trade on the material life and culture of the people of Europe, West Africa, and the Americas. The material culture of European, West African, and Circum-Caribbean societies are compared through the interpretation of a broad range of artifacts and the context in which they were made and employed.

In an exciting "underwater" simulation, visitors learn about the scientific techniques involved with the archaeological excavation of the site. This includes the fascinating story of the recovery of artifacts from the *Henrietta Marie*, and the identification and conservation of encrusted artifacts recovered from a salt water environment.

Supporting programs consider the evolution of the Atlantic merchant and slave trades between 1650 and 1750, Afro-European relations in the Circum-Caribbean at the turn of the century, and the 18th century ascendancy of the English in command of the transatlantic trade. Additional programs focus on the acculturation of the rich native West African artistic, musical, and oral traditions, and their influence on the evolution of modern America.
EXHIBITION WALK-THROUGH

The exhibition is modular and can be configured to fit in a variety of different spaces. It requires approximately 3,000 square feet in total. The overall design follows the direct merchant routes taken by the *Henrietta Marie*.

London: The Port And Its Commerce

During the 18th century, England came to dominate the transatlantic slave trade, and from 1699 to 1730 London was the primary port involved. The casting of the *Henrietta Marie*’s bell coincided with the beginning of this period, and the ship carried with it elements of the motivating factors of this trade. The ship and its contents indicate that the transatlantic trade can be seen as one of the driving forces of the English Industrial Revolution. Manufactured goods, not money, were exchanged for gold, ivory and enslaved persons. Africans were traded for bullion and raw materials, and much of the latter could be sold for hard currency upon arrival in Europe. The enormous amount of capital that was poured into the British economy had swift and long-lasting effects. The slave trade, together with the related colonial expansion, resulted in investments in ship building and design, munitions and navigational technology. The increased demand for British manufactured goods became a driving factor in the transformation from artisanship and cottage industries to the factory systems of the late 18th and 19th centuries.

As visitors enter the exhibition space, they encounter a single artifact, the well-preserved bronze watch bell bearing the ship’s name and the date 1699. This is contrasted with a large photomural showing the archaeological site. A brief introduction invites the visitor to take a step back in time to unveil the life and times of this historic merchant-slaver, and to learn about the people, the material culture and the rich maritime history associated with her past. The slave trade is placed in its context of European and African slavery, with particular emphasis on the development of the transatlantic trade.
It is 1698: Visitors find themselves in the busy port of London where sea chanteys are heard almost unrecognizably behind the bustling noises of the city. Here, visitors discover ship's fittings and analysis of the European trade in slaves at this time. They may also open crates to investigate the provisions made for the first leg of the voyage.

They next enter the office of Anthony Tournay, one of the major investors in the *Henrietta Marie*. Visitors learn of the actual ships embarking on voyages at the turn of the century, and of the upcoming plans for the new ship, the *Henrietta Marie* to set sail for trade with Africa and the West Indies. An interactive map introduces the overseas routes of the Atlantic trade, providing an overview of European commerce with West Africa and the Americas. A scale design of a slave ship's features allows visitors to gain a rudimentary appreciation of the design and configuration of this typical merchant vessel. In the office, visitors investigate ship's records and historic accounts of these voyages located on or around Tournay's desk.

Adjacent to the Trader's Office is a Pewterer's Shop. Visitors may examine the raw materials and replica tools used by craftsmen and their apprentices to create the pewter pieces for trade and daily use aboard the *Henrietta Marie*. Visitors learn how researchers used maker's marks to trace the origins of pewter wares discovered at the bottom of the sea 300 years after their manufacture. An interactive stamp exhibit explains the basics behind deciphering the *maker's mark*. Original artifacts from the *Henrietta Marie* are exhibited here, including selections from one of the most significant single collections of rare William III and Continental trade pewter uncovered in recent times. Pewter found at the wreck site includes tankards, basins, cast portrait spoons, bottles, flagons, and plates.
The Ship Sails For Africa

Leaving the Port of London, visitors enter a scaled down version of the *Henrietta Marie*’s gun deck, complete with arms and ordnance and a full size replica cannon. The ship is divided into distinct but complimentary areas. The largest highlights the collection of arms and ordnance gathered from the wrecksite, including muskets, blunderbusses, lead shot, cutlasses, and other edged weapons, providing evidence of both the volatile nature of the trade and the European introduction of firearms in barter to West Africa. A smaller section also provides information about the captain and crew. Here, visitors may learn of life in London and of the dreary economic conditions that lured men to the seas, risking their lives in a trade which was ethically questionable even at the time and is so abhorrent today. A hammock is slung between the timbers of the ship and beneath it a replica seaman’s chest holds the clothes and everyday items representative of the typical mariner aboard the *Henrietta Marie*. Young visitors are encouraged to try on these clothes.

Two officer’s cabins are constructed as listening booths. The first is that of the captain and shows artifacts associated with him, ranging from the ship’s compass to the officer’s toilet. Visitors may press a button to hear of the captain’s previous experience in Africa and his concerns about the voyage. This material is drawn from the journals of Jean Barbot, a French Hugenot serving on English slaving vessels around the time of the *Henrietta Marie*. In the second cabin is the account of first mate William May who survived a severe storm in the West Indies. His adventures may be heard while visitors examine the personal effects of the crew, including buckles, a small knife, a few coins, and a Bellarmine Jar. A tiny rat bone is displayed as testimony to the presence of these ubiquitous pests aboard the *Henrietta Marie* and to the disasters that could befall the food supply.

This section of the exhibition provides a remarkably complete picture of the dangers and brutalities of life under sail at the turn of the 18th century. The everyday life of the *Henrietta Marie*’s varied and cosmopolitan crew is illuminated.
The European relationship with West Africa centered on an exchange in barter of imported goods for enslaved Africans, gold, elephant ivory, and spices. As in England, demand for specific exports drove the economy — from 1650 onwards the expanding plantations of the New World placed an increasing demand on the African market. Slave exports from the western coast, Gulf of Guinea, and West Central Africa almost doubled between 1500 and 1600, but then quadrupled during the 17th century. The resulting rise in prices further encouraged Africans not only to sell their own slaves, but also to embark on warring conflicts and slaving raids that would produce captives to sell.

As visitors exit the stern area of the *Henrietta Marie*, they find themselves at a re-creation of a West African chieftain’s house. The reconstruction is based on archaeological sites in the region of Calabar, where the *Henrietta Marie* is thought to have purchased many enslaved Africans. Trade is discussed in terms of artifacts such as ivory tusks and tusk fragments, trade beads, and English weights and scales.

Panels examine the rich culture of Africa during this period. This is complemented by a video demonstrating the survival of African influences in the music of the Americas and the Caribbean. Visitors are invited to follow basic rhythms by beating on a drum. The cross-influences of European and African cultures are documented in a case containing replicas of bronze artifacts from Benin and Kongo, a twentieth century weaving that is very close in style to those exported by the Kongo at the time of the *Henrietta Marie*, and a modern Igbo mask. Research has indicated strongly that many of the enslaved Africans taken to the Americas by the *Henrietta Marie* would have been of Igbo origin.

Visitors leave Africa through the gates of the *barracoon*, or slave holding pen. Once inside they may try on replica shackles and feel the discomfort and weight of these restraints for themselves.
Additionally, visitors may opt to take part in the planning process for the long voyage ahead to the New World. A computer component allows museum-goers to choose types and quantities of foods and drink for the journey. Through a thought-provoking procedure, they learn about the differences in the diets of the crew and human cargo and the effects of dehydration at sea. Their ability to assemble the components of a successful voyage is evaluated by the computer.

The Middle Passage: West Africa To Jamaica

Continuing on their voyage, visitors leave the docks of Africa and re-enter the *Henrietta Marie* through the cargo hold of the ship. This dimly lit area is fitted with a re-creation of the temporary half-decks on which the slaves were required to live. The human congestion of these quarters is suggested by cast figures lying in these spaces. An ambient recording with ship sounds and sailors’ cries features the description of the Middle Passage experience in the words of Ouladah Equiano, an Igbo who was kidnapped and sold into slavery in Africa and later sent to the Americas. His story is related in Igbo by a native speaker, and then in English by the same speaker. On the same loop are the words of Alexander Falconbridge, ship’s surgeon aboard the slave ship *Brookes*, who eventually became an ardent abolitionist.
**The New World**

Visitors exit the cargo hold of the ship and find themselves in the West Indies. This area addresses the early history of slavery in the Caribbean, including a brief discussion of the decimation of the Native Caribbean inhabitants and the dictates of the Spanish crown regarding the treatment of Native populations. The latter is contrasted with the attitudes and legalities which made it possible to employ enslaved Africans. Sugar plantations of the Caribbean are discussed through contemporary accounts and illustrations. This segment of the exhibition outlines the evolution of supply and demand in the transatlantic trade and the European embrace of stimulants and narcotics in the form of sugar, coffee, chocolate, and tobacco. Through lift panels, visitors realize how common these luxury items of the early 17th century are to their lives today. A one-third size model of a sugar mill, a replica cart for carrying the cane, and other tools of the plantation are exhibited. Visitors learn of various forms and uses of sugar and other West Indian products that were commonly traded with Europe and the New World.

Crates with removable lids and "scent boxes" for olfactory investigation allow museum-goers to learn about the multitude of spices that ships such as the *Henrietta Marie* sought for trade.

A computer interactive allows visitors to select discussions of resistance and rebellion in the New World, illustrated by dramatic engravings of the historic encounters.

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**The Final Leg: Jamaica To England**

Entering a room immersed in deep blue and aqua hues with light reflections swimming on the walls, visitors find themselves at the bottom of the sea with the remains of the ill-fated vessel. They walk through the underwater diorama of the wreck site, gridded and tagged for excavation purposes and explore the anatomy of a marine archaeological site. Reproduction timbers, cannons, shackles, pewter and other encrusted artifacts, contrast sharply with the conserved artifacts seen here and previously in the display. Conserved objects are contrasted with unconserved ones and modern methodology and practice in marine archaeology are described. The role of the archaeologist as investigator and researcher are affirmed through x-rays of encrusted artifacts and sample “mystery” objects.
Against All Odds

As visitors leave the site of the wreck they are faced with a large photomural of two members of the National Association of Black Scuba Divers Association cleaning the monument to those who died on the Middle Passage. This monument was placed on the site of the Henrietta Marie in 1993 by members of the Association in cooperation with the Mel Fisher Maritime Heritage Society.

Panels describe the end of the slave trade and talk about its lingering effects in our heritage. A ten-minute video shows interviews with Cornell West Ph.D., who talks about the legacy of slavery. With him, describing their own experiences with this heritage are Mohammed Athie, of the Anti-Slavery Society, and Oswald and Marion Sykes, of the National Association of Black Scuba Divers.

Can we, as a people and as individuals, muster the vision and courage to grapple honestly with this ignoble paradox of American democracy before we become as shipwrecked as the Henrietta Marie, overcome by lashing winds and rain in the deadly Florida straits, caught between the Dry Tortugas and the Marquesas Keys?

— Cornel West, Professor of Religion and Afro-American Studies at Harvard University in his foreward to Spirits of the Passage
PUBLICATIONS AND PROGRAMS

Exhibition Publications

A fully-illustrated catalog accompanies the exhibition, with essays by Dr. Linda Heywood, Dr. Colin Palmer, and David Moore.

_Spirits of the Passage_, a heavily-illustrated, family-oriented, commercial publication was published in late 1996 by Simon and Schuster. This book sets the _Henrietta Marie_ into the context of the early transatlantic slave trade. The book is written by Dr. Madeleine Burnside, director of the Society and co-curator of the exhibition, and edited by Rosemary Robotham, editor at large of Essence Magazine with a foreward by scholar Cornel West. Students’ and Teachers’ workbooks are available from Prentice Hall.

Special Public Programs

A series of lectures were developed by the consultant scholars to accompany the exhibition, and these scholars are available to take part in venue programming upon request. The video, _Souls of Passage_, directed by Steven Crump for Charlotte PBS may be shown as part of the exhibition.

“In arresting prose, the author discusses the social and economic factors that lay behind the three-sided slave-trade network. . . . A book deserving a place in U.S. History Collections.”

—Booklist
Educational Outreach on Our Website: www.melfisher.org

The exhibition, *A Slave Ship Speaks: The Wreck of the Henrietta Marie*, appeals to a broad audience. Educational packages (teachers' kits) directed at grades 4-12 are designed for use by school groups and accompany the exhibition. The packages take a multi-disciplinary approach, with components based on social history, art history, literature, creative writing, archaeology, and general sciences. These programs, developed by the Society's teaching staff and educational consultants, offer learning experiences of a different nature than that of the typical classroom. The program also provides teachers with curriculum materials, including catalogues and audiovisual aids for pre- and post-visit classroom activities.

Additionally, a series of eight posters is available free of charge for use by schools and community organizations. The posters are based on the exhibition and outline its major themes.

These outreach programs facilitate a method of learning exposure for a broad range of ethnic backgrounds and socio-economic groups.

Marketing

The Mel Fisher Maritime Heritage Society has produced a comprehensive media package to be made available to the participating institutions. This package includes press releases, exhibition checklist, biographies of curatorial and scientific staff, background information, and visual materials.
TOUR INFORMATION

Exhibition Requirements and Fee

The exhibition can be installed within a 3,000 square foot space. The components of the exhibition are modular so that components can be re-configured to suit individual venue requirements. The staff of the MFMHS is available to discuss specific environmental, security and staffing needs.

The exhibition is available to historical, scientific and educational institutions for an exhibition fee of $50,000, plus one-way pro-rated shipping for a three-month installation period. A deposit is required to confirm the booking.

Slave Ship Speaks: The Wreck of the Henrietta Marie has received major grants from the National endowment for the Humanities and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. It has received support from the Newman’s Own Foundation and Florida’s Department of State through the Division of Cultural Resources.
Prior Venues

Mel Fisher Maritime Heritage Society, Key West, FL
Museum of African American History, Detroit, IL
DuSable Museum, Chicago, IL
Watts Labor Community Action Committee Center, Los Angeles, CA
Spirit Square Center for the Arts, Charlotte, NC
The Historical Association of Southern Florida, Miami, FL
Florida State Museum, Tallahassee, FL
The Fort Worth Museum of Science and History, TX
Pink Palace Museum, Memphis, TN
Midway Village, Rockford, IL
National Maritime Center — Nauticus, Norfolk, VA
Cape Fear Museum, NC
America’s Black Holocaust Museum, Milwaukee, WI
Palm Beach Seaport Museum, Palm Beach, FL
West Virginia State Museum, Charleston, VA
Museum of Arts and Sciences, Macon, GA
African American Historical & Cultural Museum, Fresno, CA
Kura Hulanda Museum, Curacao, Lower Antilles
Arkansas Territorial Restoration Museum, Little Rock, AR
State Museum of History, Albany, NY
Karpeles Manuscript Library Museum, Santa Barbara, CA
Manhattan Sites, Federal Hall, New York, NY
Nassau County Museum, Long Island, NY
LaVilla Museum, Jacksonville, FL
Museum of Arts and Sciences, Daytona Beach, FL
Pompey Museum of Slavery and Emancipation, Nassau, Bahamas
Augusta Museum of History, Augusta GA
Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture, Baltimore, MD
Texas State History Museum, Austin, TX
University of Texas-Pan American, Edinburg, TX
University of Richmond Museums, Richmond, VA
National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, Cincinnati, OH
The Frazier International History Museum, Louisville, KY
Exhibition Organization

The exhibition was organized by the Mel Fisher Maritime Heritage Society (MFMHS). MFMHS was founded in 1982 as an independent, research and scientific not-for-profit organization dedicated to the exhibition, education, preservation and research of Spanish and Colonial maritime activity in the New World. The curatorial and contributing scholars team includes:

Dr. Russell Adams, Chairman, Department of Afro-American Studies Howard University; pioneer of "slavery" curriculum for schools;

Dr. Linda Heywood, professor of History at Howard University, specializing in the history of the African Diaspora;

Mr. Angus Konstam, Maritime Archaeologist and Curator of Weapons, Royal Armouries in London, specialist in European arms and ordnance;

Dr. Jane Landers, Professor, Vanderbilt University and leading authority on Afro-Hispanic History;

Mr. David D. Moore, Historian and Principal Archaeologist Henrietta Marie Field Operations;

Dr. Colin Palmer, Professor of History, University of North Carolina, author of Human Cargo;

Dr. James Rawley, Professor Emeritus, History Department, University of Nebraska, leading authority on the transatlantic slave trade;

Oswald Sykes, shipwreck coordinator, the National Association of Black Scuba Divers;

Nigel Tattersfield, author of The Forgotten Trade;

Dr. John Thornton, professor of History at Millersville University, specializing in the history of Africa and Africans in the Atlantic.
To obtain further information, including booking of the *Henrietta Marie*, please contact:

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