

Contact Information

Michael L. Brennan

James P. Delgado

Deborah E. Marx

mike.brennan@searchinc.com

SEARCH, Inc.

Office: 904-379-8338

Willing to Attend Workshop?

Yes

Target Name/Area of Interest

Shipwrecks of the Slave Trade

Geographic Area of Interest

Southeast, South Central, Southwest

Relevant Subject Areas

Marine Archaeology

Biology

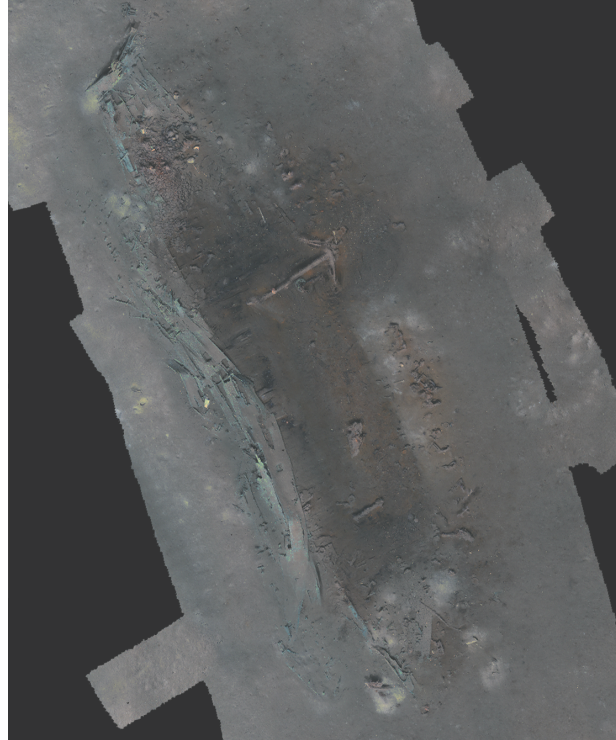


Figure 1. BOEM site Monterrey C may be connected to the Trans-Atlantic slave trade (BOEM).

Description of Topic Recommended for Exploration

In recent years, archaeologies of internment have viewed places of people in confinement as archaeological sites and documented the ways in which people modify space to make it habitable, even when imprisoned (Moshenska and Myers, 2011). While concentration camps from World War II and prisons have received attention, an area lacking in investigation are the slave ships that brought people from Africa to the Americas, largely due to the scarcity of sites. Between 1501 and 1867, an estimated 12.5 million Africans were captured, sold into slavery and forcibly transported to the New World (Eltis et al., 2010). During their passage (in total, more than 35,000 voyages) an estimated 1.8 million people died as a result of illness, suicide and in some cases, were murdered by throwing sick or rebellious persons overboard, at times chained together.

The oceanic route navigated by the slavers is relatively well known as an infamous highway marked on the maps as the “Middle Passage.” In the physical world, this route may be discerned by what lies underwater, either in the form of shipwrecks associated with the slave trade, or by the material that may survive from what was cast over from ships engaged in the trade. Other than shipwrecks, what may exist in the depths would be evidence of the throwing overboard of dead or dying slaves. One other possibility for maritime remains also exists on the routes of the transatlantic slavers. It reflects the practice of murdering slaves, in particular in the nineteenth century in order to evade prosecution as a slaver during the period when the slave trade (but not slavery) was banned and anti-slavery naval patrols were in effect on the route. In short, a physical record of this most infamous trade likely exists in the South Atlantic’s

depths, discernible at its faintest traces perhaps as a section of anchor chain with shackles attached, in and by itself a chilling thought.

The Slave Wrecks Project (SWP) identifies over 590 vessels involved in the African slave trade that were lost between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. Archaeological evidence of these sites is minimal and only consist of six known sites: *Sao Jose Paquete d’Africa* off South Africa, *Henrietta Marie* in the Florida Keys, *Wydah* off Massachusetts, *Fredensbourg* off Denmark, *James Matthews* off Australia, and *Queen Anne’s Revenge* off North Carolina. Only one of these, *Sao Jose Paquete d’Africa*, was carrying slaves when lost. One hypothesis for the identity of the Monterrey C site (pictured above) in the Gulf of Mexico, is having been involved in the slave trade, as no other cargo is visible, and warrants further investigation after its initial assessment in 2013 with E/V *Nautilus*. Current efforts are underway to located the pirate slave ship *Guerrero* in the Florida Keys and the *Clotilda* near Mobile, Alabama, the last vessel to import slaves into the United States.

Support from the ASPIRE campaign can assist in deep-water mutibeam mapping and ROV operations to locate sites linked to the slave trade. The trade’s shipping routes, known as the Triangle Trade, connected Africa with the Caribbean and New England through the Straits of Florida. These are the high probability places where slave ships might have sunk. More specifically, surveys between Senegal and Cape Verde Islands, along the Gold Coast, and South America’s northeastern coast might also yield potential targets and could be areas where initial mapping operations are undertaken. Archaeological evidence of the slave trade might consist of an entire shipwreck site with a hull and evidence of human cargo or hard to detect manacles or shackles on the seafloor. While un-pleasant to consider, such archaeological evidence of these crimes would not only verify them, but bring the physical reality to light.

Relevant Partnerships

Bureau of Ocean Energy Management
(BOEM)

Slave Wrecks Project

Smithsonian Institution’s National
Museum of African American History
and Culture

National Park Service

National Geographic Society

NOAA (ONMS, OER)

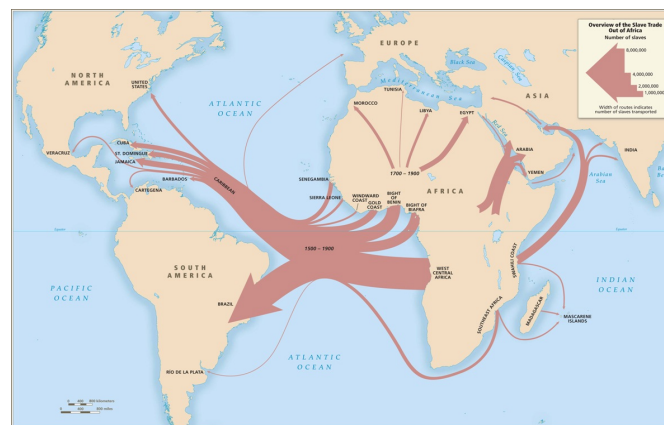


Figure 2. African Slave Trade Routes 1500-1900
(Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database)

Eltis, D., D. Richardson, D. Blight, and D.B. Davis (2010) *Atlas of the Transatlantic Slave Trade*, Yale University Press, New Haven.

Moshenska, G. and A. Myers (2011) An Introduction to Archaeologies of Internment, in *Archaeologies of Internment*, Springer, New York, pp. 1-19.