

Captain Bill Pinkney



Sailor-adventurer Bill Pinkney continues to carve out his role in history. In 1992, this Chicago native became the first African-American to sail solo around the world, taking the southern route around the five great capes, through waters considered to be the most dangerous on the globe. In November 1998, he embarked on a second trip, setting sail from the Caribbean on an historic voyage to retrace the "Middle Passage" slave trade routes used during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A charismatic, naturally gifted speaker and storyteller, Pinkney is now inspiring audiences nationwide with the story of his two remarkable voyages.

Pinkney's Middle Passage journey was a journey of personal discovery, as was his 1992 trip. At the core of his quest was to visit those African countries from where his slave ancestors left in chains, most never to return. "I'm a descendant of those who came in the hold . . . now having ascended to the wheel," says Pinkney. "I think . . . getting on an airplane and flying to Senegal, flying to Ghana, it's not the same as taking an ocean voyage knowing that the waters over which you pass contain the bodies of those who refused to leave the continent, and found the only way out was to go overboard."

The trip has been captured in a national prime-time PBS documentary with the working title *Voyages of No Return: A Captain's Logbook from the Middle Passage*, scheduled to be completed in fall 1999. The preparations for the voyage, as well as a profile of Pinkney himself, were featured in a PBS documentary that aired on public television during the spring of 1999. These PBS programs are companions to an innovative multimedia Middle Passage educational initiative, the highlight of which were the teams of teachers that accompanied Pinkney on each leg of the voyage. Their job was to help create curriculum materials for distribution to classrooms all across the country. Among the other educational projects were videos that were shot during the trip for use by teachers and students; student interaction with Pinkney via telephone and e-mail; live Internet broadcasts; an interactive Web site; teacher guidebooks; and an exhibit on Pinkney created and hosted by Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry called "Winds of Change: Africa, The Americas, and the Sea." The principal sponsors of the educational projects associated with Pinkney's voyage were Ford Motor Company, IBM, Abbott Laboratories, and the U.S. Postal Service, Great Lakes Area.