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THE  
**AMISTAD  
REVOLT:**

*An  
Historical Legacy  
of  
Sierra Leone  
and  
The United States*

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*By  
Arthur Abraham*



## INTRODUCTION

In 1839, slaves aboard a ship called the *Amistad* revolted to secure their freedom while being transported from one Cuban port to another. Their leader was Sengbe Pieh, a young Mende man, but popularly known in United States history as Joseph Cinque. The slaves had been kidnapped mostly from the neighborhood of the Colony of Sierra Leone and sold to Spanish slavers. They eventually received their freedom in 1841, after two years' internment in the United States awaiting the verdict of the courts regarding their "revolt." This was the celebrated Amistad Case, an episode far better known in the United States than on the other side of the Atlantic. But the incident had a far-reaching impact on both sides, influencing the course of American history and especially the development of Afro-American culture, while, in Sierra Leone, leading to the inauguration of American missionary activity that trained many of the elite group that led the nationalist movement to achieve independence from colonial rule.



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## CAPTURE AND ENSLAVEMENT

**S**engbe Pieh, the hero in this episode, was born about 1813 in the town of Mani in Upper Mende country, a distance of ten days' march from the Vai or Gallinas coast. Said to have been the son of a local chief, he was married with a son and two daughters. Sengbe, a farmer, was going to his field one day in late January 1839 when he was captured in a surprise attack by four men, his right hand tied to his neck. He was taken to a nearby village where he passed three days with a man called Mayagilalo, apparently the boss of his captors. Indebted to the son of the Vai King Manna Siaka, Mayagilalo gave over Sengbe to him in settlement. After staying in Siaka's town for a month, Sengbe was marched to Lomboko, a notorious slave-trading island near Sulima on the Gallinas coast, and sold to the richest slaver there, the Spaniard Pedro Blanco, whose activities had helped to make King Siaka wealthy as well.

At Lomboko, Sengbe was imprisoned with other slaves, while fresh ones joined them for the two months they were there, waiting to be transported across the Atlantic. Most of the captives came from Mende country, but others were Kono, Sherbro, Temne, Kissi, Gbandi (in present-day Liberia), and Loma (in present-day Liberia and in Guinea, where they are known as Guerze). Some, who did not speak Mende, learned the language during their forced journey through Mende country to the coast. Most were farmers, but it is said that others were hunters and blacksmiths. This is surprising, because all over West Africa

blacksmiths held a sacred place in society and could neither be enslaved nor killed even in war.

All these people were shipped from Lomboko in March aboard the schooner *Tecora*, which arrived at Havana in the Spanish colony of Cuba in June. At a slave auction following advertisement, Jose Ruiz, a Spanish plantation owner, bought Sengbe and forty-eight others for \$450 each to work on his sugar plantation at Puerto Principe, another Cuban port three hundred miles from Havana. Pedro Montez, another Spaniard bound for the same port, bought four children, three girls and a boy. On June 26, the fifty-three Africans were herded on board an American-built schooner, originally called *Friendship*, but changed to the Spanish *La Amistad* when the vessel changed ownership and registration to a Spanish subject. Although Spain had prohibited the importation of new slaves into her territories since 1820, the two Spanish planters were able to obtain official permits to transport their slaves. They chartered the *Amistad* from Ramon Ferrer, who was both owner and captain. Apart from the fifty-three Africans and their Spanish owners, the schooner carried a crew comprising the master, Ferrer; his two black slaves, Antonio (the cabin boy) and Celestino (the cook); and two white seamen. The ship also carried a cargo of dishes, cloth, jewelry, and various luxury items and staples. The cargo was insured for \$40,000. Ruiz insured his forty-nine slaves for \$20,000, while Montez insured the four children for \$1,300.



## THE REVOLT

The trip to Puerto Principe usually took three days, but the winds were adverse. Three days out at sea, on June 30, Sengbe used a loose spike he had removed from the deck to unshackle himself and his fellow slaves. They had been whipped and maltreated and, at one point, made to believe that they would be killed for supper on arrival. Sengbe armed himself and the others with cane knives found in the cargo hold. He then led them on deck, where they killed Captain Ferrer and the cook Celestino and wounded the Spaniard Montez. But Sengbe spared Montez' life together with those of Ruiz and Antonio, the cabin boy. The mutineers lost two of their own party, killed by Captain Ferrer. The two white seamen managed to escape from the *Amistad* in a small boat.

Sengbe then ordered the Spaniards to sail in the direction of the rising of the sun, or eastward towards Africa. At night, however, Montez, who had some experience as a sailor, navigated by the stars and sailed westward, hoping to remain in Cuban waters. But a gale drove the ship northeast along the United States coastline. The schooner followed a zigzag course for two months, during which eight more slaves died of thirst and exposure. Sengbe held command the whole time, forcing the others to conserve food and water, and allotting a full ration only to the four children. He took the smallest portion for himself.

## RECAPTURE

The *Amistad* drifted off Long Island, New York, in late August 1839. Sengbe and others went ashore to trade for food and supplies and to negotiate with local seamen to take them back to Africa. News soon got around about a mysterious ship in the neighborhood with her "sails nearly all blown to pieces." It was the "long, low, black schooner," the story of which had been appearing in newspapers in previous weeks as the ship cruised northeast along the U.S. coastline. Reports said that Cuban slaves had revolted and killed the crew of a Spanish ship and were roaming the Atlantic as buccaneers.

On August 26, the United States survey brig *Washington*, under command of Lt. Commander Thomas R. Gedney, sighted the battered schooner near Culloden Point on the eastern tip of Long Island. The United States Navy and the Customs Service had previously issued orders for the capture of the ship; and Commander Gedney seized the *Amistad* and took her in tow to New London, Connecticut, arriving there the following day. Gedney sent a message at once to the United States Marshall at New Haven who, in turn, notified United States District Judge Andrew Judson. The latter was certainly no friend of the black man, for in 1833 he had prosecuted a Miss Prudence Crandall for admitting Negroes into her school in Canterbury, Connecticut.

Judge Judson held court on board the *Washington* on August 29, in New London harbor, examining the ship's documents and hearing the testimony of Ruiz and Montez, as well as their urgent request that the ship and all its cargo, including the Africans, be sur-



rendered to the Spanish Consul in Boston. Judson immediately released Ruiz and Montez and ordered that Sengbe and the others be tried for murder and piracy at the next session of the

be dragged back onto the ship: he urged his fellow slaves to fight against hopeless odds, and was taken away to the American vessel and separated from his men; he made such vio-



*Senge Pieh and the "Amistads" at the time of their capture in 1839. The Africans had been kidnapped mostly from the area of the Colony of Sierra Leone and sold to Spanish slavers.*

Circuit Court, due to open on September 17 at Hartford, Connecticut. The Africans were consigned to the county jail in New Haven.

Meanwhile, Ruiz had renamed Sengbe Pieh "Jose Cinque" in order to show that Sengbe was not a recent importee and that he, Ruiz, was therefore not guilty of violating the prohibition law of 1820. Cinque, being a Spanish approximation of Sengbe, soon found further distortion in the press as "Cinquez," "Sinko," "Jinqua," etc. When the *Amistad* was captured off Long Island, a reporter from the *New York Sun* witnessed Sengbe's defiance of his captors and repeated attempts to escape. Sengbe jumped overboard and had to

lent protest that the naval officers allowed him to remain on the *Washington's* deck, where he stood and stared fixedly at the *Amistad* throughout the night. The *New York Sun* reported:

*He evinces no emotion...and had he lived in the days of Greece or Rome, his name would have been handed down to posterity as one who had practiced those most sublime of all virtues — disinterested patriotism and unshrinking courage.*



## THE ABOLITIONISTS STEP IN

**A**t this time, the U.S. anti-slavery movement was in disarray, with divergent views on several issues — political action, women’s rights, American churches and slavery, and the basic nature of American government. The Amistad Case provided a focal point for rallying the dispersed ranks of the abolitionists, as they all came out in defense of the captives, fully convinced of their innocence. This was put forth in the *Herald of Freedom*:

*Cinques is no pirate, no murderer, no felon. His homicide is justifiable. Had a white man done it, it would have been glorious. It would have immortalized him. Joseph Cinques ought not to be tried. Everybody knows he is innocent. He could not be guilty.*

The paper added that Lt. Commander Gedney had no authority to capture the *Amistad*, she being “the lawful prize of Commandant Joseph Cinques.... That she was ‘suspicious’ looking, is no warrant.”

This strong conviction was, however, not enough. The abolitionists had to get the Africans’ version of events and to obtain counsel to prove their innocence before the Circuit Court. They held no illusions about the difficulties. The day following Judge Judson’s orders, the abolitionists of New Haven met and wrote to fellow abolitionists in New York to check on the validity of the ship’s documents, find an African who could speak the language of the captives and record their own version, and, finally, obtain qualified counsel.

A committee formed to defend the

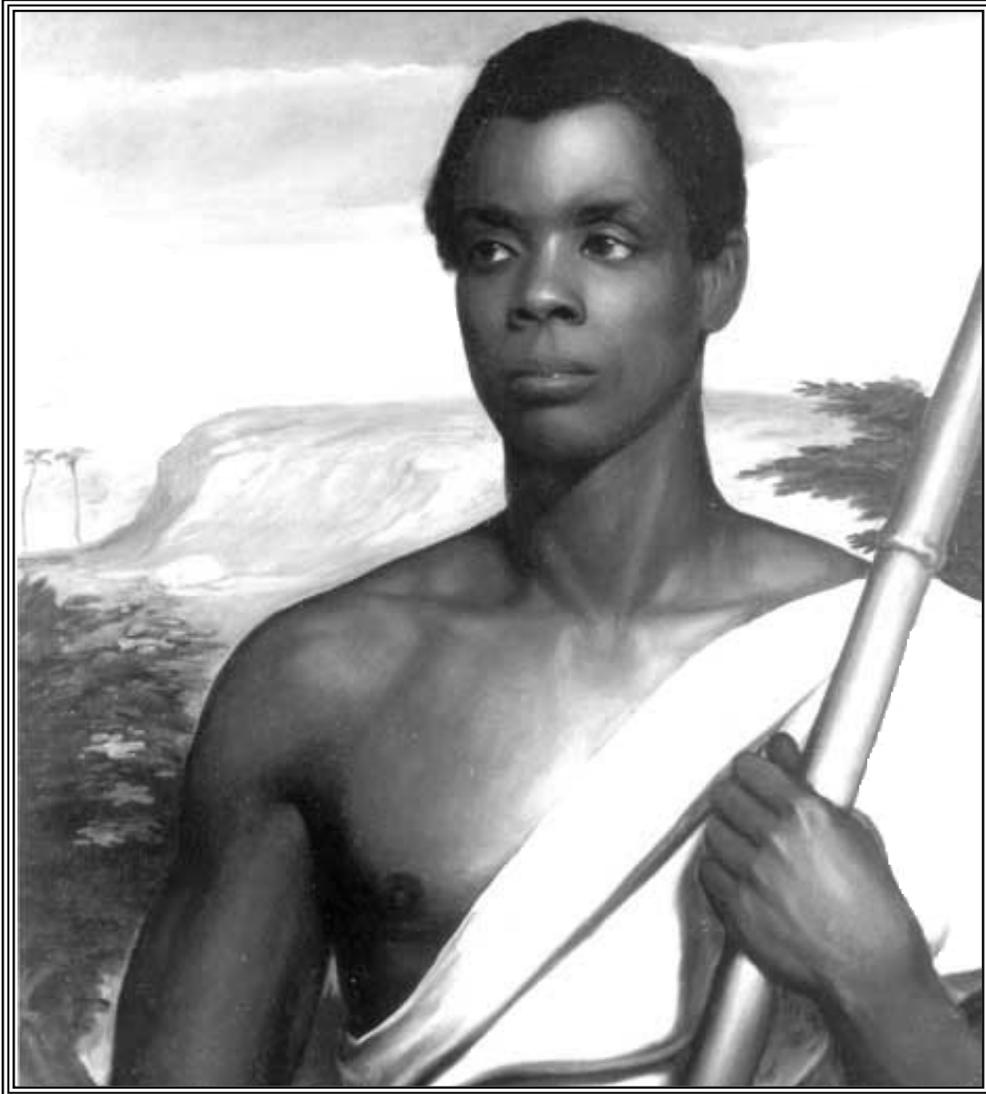
hapless Africans formally became the “Amistad Committee” on September 4, comprised, inter alia, of Joshua Leavitt, editor of the *Emancipator*, the official organ of the American Anti-Slavery Society; Rev. Simeon S. Jocelyn, a white pastor of a black church in New York; and Lewis Tappan, a wealthy New York merchant and prominent abolitionist. Tappan launched the campaign for the defense of the Amistad Africans and issued an “Appeal to the Friends of Liberty”:

*Thirty-eight fellow men from Africa, having been piratically kidnapped from their native land, transported across the seas, and subjected to atrocious cruelties, have been thrown upon our shores, and are now incarcerated in jail to await their trial for crimes alleged to have been committed by them. They are ignorant of our language, of the usages of civilized society, and the obligations of Christianity. Under these circumstances, several friends of human rights have met to consult upon the case of these unfortunate men, and have appointed the undersigned a Committee to employ interpreters and able counsel and take all the necessary means to secure the rights of the accused. It is intended to employ three legal gentlemen of distinguished abilities, and to incur other needful expenses. The poor prisoners being destitute of clothing, and several having scarcely a rag to cover them, immediate steps will be taken to provide what may be necessary. The undersigned therefore make this appeal to the friends of*



*humanity to contribute for the above objects. Donations may be sent to either of the Committee, who will acknowledge the same and make a public report of all their*

*disbursement.*  
SIMEON S. JOCELYN, 34, WALL STREET.  
JOSHUA LEAVITT, 143, NASSAU STREET.  
LEWIS TAPPAN, 122, PEARL STREET.



*Senge Pieh, or "Joseph Cinque" as he is known in the United States. This painting, by Nathaniel Jocelyn, was made while Senge was awaiting trial in New Haven, Connecticut.*



Defense counsel comprised the formidable team of Roger Baldwin, Seth Staple, and Theodore Sedgwick, among the best legal minds of the day. But the lawyers recognized a serious limitation to any case they might present if an interpreter were not found to tell the story of the captives. A desperate search began that was only partially successful before the trial. Lewis Tappan brought from New York three Africans, one of whom was a Kissi (a neighboring ethnic group of the Mende) who could converse very limitedly with some of the captives. But the interpreter was able to corroborate the opinion of the abolitionists that the Amistad captives had been kidnapped in Africa and sold illegally into slavery.

The issue before the Amistad Committee was a delicate and sensitive one. The abolitionist movement had been deeply divided before the Amistad incident, and this incident restored unity to the movement. But there were some people who sympathized with the captives, but were in no sense abolitionists. To have pegged the Amistad Case to a general campaign for the abolition of slavery would have alienated their sympathy, thus weakening the financial and moral base of the Committee. One respondent to the "Appeal," for instance, stated clearly that he was "a friend of human rights, but not an abolitionist."

## FIRST TRIAL

On September 14, all the prisoners, except one who was too ill to travel, were removed from New Haven to Hartford, the capital of Connecticut, where the trial opened on September 17, with Judge Smith Thompson presiding. After three days of legal battling, the judge rendered his opinion: the Circuit Court had no jurisdiction over the charges of murder and piracy, since the alleged crimes were committed on a Spanish ship and in Spanish waters; the various property claims, including Ruiz' and Montez' claims to the African "slaves," should be decided in a District Court; and the writ of habeas corpus for the release of the small girls was rejected.

As soon as the Circuit Court adjourned, Judge Judson convened a District Court in the same room. He decreed that the property claims needed more investigation, but that the captives could be released on bail, based on their appraised value as slaves on the Cuban market. The defense lawyers rejected this bail formula, which implied that the Amistad Africans were slaves, and the captives were returned to prison.

The interpreter had not been effective during the trial, and the Amistad Committee intensified the search for another who could speak Mende fluently. J.W. Gibbs, Professor of Theology and Sacred Literature at Yale Divinity School, took a great interest in the Amistad captives. He learned to count from one to ten in Mende and, armed with this new knowledge, proceeded to the New York docks, counting to every African sailor he met. His efforts paid dividends when, in early October, he found James Covey, a seaman on the



British warship *Buzzard*, who could understand him. Covey, a Mende, had been captured and sold as a child, but was recaptured by British squadrons and brought to Freetown where he was released. He learned to speak English fluently and joined the British Navy. Professor Gibbs took Covey to see the Amistad captives in the New Haven jail, and the Africans shouted for joy when they heard Covey speak in Mende. They could now relate their version of the events.

Meanwhile, the Amistad Committee was not happy with treatment of the captives, and began efforts to provide for their physical well-being and their intellectual and religious instruction. Rev. George Day, a former professor at the New York Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, was employed to supervise the instruction of the Mende captives by Yale Divinity School students. The teachers began their instruction with simple pictures and sign language. By this time, several captives had already died in custody from the lingering effects of exposure, hunger, and dehydration suffered aboard the *Amistad*.

## DEMANDS OF THE SPANISH GOVERNMENT

The Spanish government had put forward certain demands to the United States even before the Hartford trial. The Spanish Minister, de la Barca, wrote to the Secretary of State, John Forsyth, a former Minister to Spain and a known defender of Negro slavery, that when the *Amistad* was “rescued,” she should have been set free to return to Cuba so that the Africans on board could have been “tried by the proper tribunal, and by the violated laws of the country of which they are subjects.” This had not been done, and so he put forward a further set of demands. He claimed the vessel and cargo, including the Africans, in the name of the Spanish Monarch, demanding that they be sent back to Havana for adjudication, since “no tribunal in the United States has the right to institute proceedings against, or to impose penalties upon, the subjects of Spain, for crimes committed on board a Spanish vessel, and in waters of the Spanish territory.” He cited articles of existing treaties between the United States and Spain to buttress his case.

The U.S. President, Martin Van Buren, had no strong views on the slavery question, but he depended on the support of the Southern pro-slavery Democrats, whose goodwill he wished to maintain for the upcoming presidential election in 1840. He, therefore, told Forsyth on September 11 to instruct District Attorney William S. Holabird to “take care that no proceedings of your Circuit Court, or any other judicial tribunal, place the vessel, cargo, or slaves beyond the control of the Federal Executive.” The President hoped that the courts would order the Amistad



captives returned to Cuba, thus relieving him of political pressure from both the Southern Democrats and the Spanish government; but he was prepared to return the captives on his own authority, if necessary. To bolster support for such a potential move and to placate the Spanish, he requested an opinion from U.S. Attorney General Felix Grundy, who declared that the Africans were to be considered the property of those for whom the Spanish Minister was claiming them, and that the ship should be returned with all its contents to Cuba. The Cabinet endorsed this view.

## DEFENSE STRATEGY OF THE ABOLITIONISTS

The Amistad Committee was painfully aware that the President's policy aimed at condemning the African captives to permanent slavery, or possibly death, and the abolitionists worked out a defense strategy to ensure that the verdict did not go against them. They built up a case around the argument that the Africans were not legally slaves, as they had been brought to Havana and sold there contrary to the Anglo-Spanish Treaty of 1820, which prohibited the transatlantic slave trade. This treaty had been re-affirmed in 1835 and followed by a Royal Order from the Queen of Spain in 1838 directing the Captain-General of Cuba to enforce the law with "the strongest zeal."

This line of defense was strengthened by a deposition made by Dr. R.R. Madden, a native of Ireland, who had served the British government in the Gold Coast (Ghana) and in Havana, Cuba, as a Commissioner on the Court of Mixed Commission for suppressing the slave trade. Dr. Madden revealed that flagrant violations of treaty stipulations regarding the slave trade were openly sanctioned by the Spanish Captain-General and other government officials in Cuba, and that the American Consul there, Nicholas Trist, was a collaborator who reaped huge financial benefits from the slave trade. Dr. Madden came to New York in November and met with Lewis Tappan. He went to see the captives at New Haven and proceeded to Hartford to give evidence at the trial. Since the trial had been deferred, he had to give testimony to Judge Judson in chambers.

Dr. Madden argued that the Amistad captives were recent importees. On the



licenses for transporting them from Havana to Puerto Principe, they had been entered as *Ladinos*, i.e., slaves brought to Cuba before 1820. But Madden pointed out that this type of forgery was common practice in Cuba and that Ruiz' and Montez' papers of ownership were not legally valid.

About this time, Ruiz and Montez were arrested in New York on charges of assault, kidnapping, and false imprisonment, brought against them on behalf of two of the Africans. Lewis Tappan, the real leader of the Amistad Committee, was blamed for this action, which horrified political conservatives. Bail was fixed at \$1,000 each. Montez paid immediately and departed for Cuba. Ruiz chose to enlist sympathy by staying in jail. The Spanish Minister immediately protested to the State Department that for alleged offenses committed in Cuba, the U.S. Courts had no jurisdiction. The Secretary of State, Forsyth, instructed the District Attorney to render every possible assistance to the Spaniards. The abolitionists were accused of "making sport of the law..." It was a tactical error on the part of the abolitionists, and it cost them some support from moderates. But Ruiz finally got tired of confinement, paid the bail, and returned to Cuba. Ruiz and Montez were both absent at the final hearing.

## SECOND TRIAL

The U.S. District Court opened at Hartford, Connecticut, on November 19, 1839, to hear the case, but it adjourned to January because of the absence of certain cardinal witnesses. In the interim, the Spanish Minister pressed his claims once again, and Forsyth promised that he would get a ship ready to transport the captives to Cuba, should the verdict go against them, so that the abolitionists would have no time to appeal. When the Court resumed hearings on January 8, the U.S. Navy schooner *Grampus* was in the New Haven harbor on instructions of the President, who, many felt, "went to disgraceful extremes in his persistent attempts to thwart justice as promulgated by the courts." The three defense counsels urged the President not to have the case decided outside the courts "in the recesses of Cabinet, where these unfriended men can have no counsel and can produce no proof..." The abolitionists stood watch in shifts over the New Haven jail. They were afraid that the President might send men to seize the Amistad Africans even before the trial had concluded, and they were prepared to hide the captives, if necessary.

On January 13, 1840, Judge Judson finally rendered his verdict: the Amistad captives had been kidnapped and sold into slavery in violation of Spanish law; they were legally free and should, therefore, be transported back to Africa, whence they had been taken against their will. During the trial, Sengbe had made a favorable impression by giving detailed testimony through the interpreter, showing how he and his fellow Africans were kidnapped, bound, and mistreated. Emotion overcame him at



one point, and Sengbe rose and shouted in English: "Give us free! Give us free!" But many people were against this freedom verdict, among them President Van Buren. He ordered District Attorney Holabird to appeal immediately against the decision.

Meanwhile, the Amistad captives were continuing with their classes in reading and writing and in the doctrines of Christianity. Despite their bitter disappointment at remaining in custody even after a favorable court decision, they still approached their studies with enthusiasm. The days began with James Covey translating Christian prayers into Mende, followed by a short sermon, and then instruction in the English language. The best pupil was eleven-year-old Kali, one of the four Amistad children, who learned to read and write with surprising speed. But all of the Amistad captives were keen to learn, and at times they grasped their Yale Divinity School teachers at the end of the day, pleading with them to stay just a bit longer. During this period little Kali wrote:

*We talk American language a little, not very good. We write everyday; we write plenty letters; we read most all time; we read all Matthew and Mark and Luke and John, and plenty of little books. We love books very much.*

## EX-PRESIDENT ADAMS AND THE THIRD TRIAL

The Amistad Committee recognized the need for a public figure of the highest standing to plead the cause of the African captives before the United States Supreme Court. The abolitionists persuaded



*John Quincy Adams, at age 73 and then a former President of the United States, came out of retirement to speak on behalf of the "Amistads" before the U.S. Supreme Court.*



## THE RETURN HOME

former President John Quincy Adams to lead the defense. At seventy-three, and thirty years out of legal practice, the ex-President was reluctant to accept the case, lest he should jeopardize the lives of the Africans by failing to win. He wrote in his diary:

*The world, the flesh, and all the devils in hell are arrayed against any man who now in this North American Union shall dare to join the standard of Almighty God to put down the African slave trade; and what can I, upon the verge of my 74th birthday, with a shaken hand, a darkening eye, a drowsy brain, and with my faculties dropping from me one by one as the teeth are dropping from my head — what can I do for the cause of God and man, for the progress of human emancipation, for the suppression of the African slave-trade? Yet my conscience presses me on; let me but die upon the breach.*

Thus, Adams accepted the sensational case that came to be called “the trial of one President by another.” Attorney Baldwin prepared an elaborate defense and opened the case, but on February 24, “Old Man Eloquent,” as Adams came to be called thereafter, addressed the Court for a total of four and a half hours. On March 9, 1841, the United States Supreme Court issued its final verdict in the Amistad Case — the captives were free! Adams sent word at once to Lewis Tappan, the principal leader of the Amistad Committee: “Thanks — Thanks in the name of humanity and of justice, to YOU.”

The Africans were released from custody and taken to Farmington, an early abolitionist town in Connecticut, where they received more formal education for the rest of 1841. As President Van Buren refused to provide a ship to repatriate them, the Amistad Committee assumed complete responsibility for the Africans. To raise funds to charter a ship, the abolitionists organized a speaking tour in the Northern states, and the “Amistads” went from town to town, appearing before sympathetic audiences, telling the story of their ordeal, and displaying their knowledge of written and spoken English. By this time Sengbe Pieh, or Joseph Cinque, had become a public figure in the United States, and many were anxious to see the man whom Northern newspapers compared to the heroes of ancient Greece and Rome.

Towards the end of the year enough funds had been raised, and the barque *Gentleman* was chartered for \$1,840. The thirty-five surviving Africans would travel to the Colony of Sierra Leone, accompanied by five American missionaries. Among the five were two black Americans, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Wilson, who had taught at Farmington, and three whites, Rev. and Mrs. William Raymond and Rev. James Steele. The Amistad Committee instructed the Americans to start a “Mendi Mission” in Sierra Leone. Before the ship left, Lewis Tappan addressed the passengers, and Sengbe replied on behalf of his fellow Africans. The newspapers reported a deeply moving scene in which many of those present openly wept.

As the *Gentleman* left, the plan of



the passengers was “for all to keep together and somewhere in the vicinity of Cinque’s town to settle down and commence a new town and then persuade their friends to come and join them, and then to adopt the American dress and manners.” The ship arrived in Freetown in mid-January 1842 amid great excitement. Many of the new arrivals were able to find friends and, in

to their homes and their families, they drifted away, leaving only ten adults and the four children. Sengbe, himself, procured an investment of goods with which he proceeded to Sherbro country to purchase produce for the Freetown market.



some cases, family members. Sengbe soon learned from Mende Recaptives that his own home had been ravaged by war and most of his family wiped out. Thus, the hope to locate the Mendi Mission near Sengbe’s town never materialized. Having unrestricted association with many of their countrymen in the Colony, some of the Amistad Africans lost the desire to remain with their American patrons. Anxious to get

*The “Amistads” return to Sierra Leone in 1842. In this painting, by Hale Woodruff, Sengbe Pieh appears in the foreground with three American missionaries. The barque Gentleman is in the background.*



## THE MENDI MISSION

It was not easy to find a location for establishing a mission station, as the original hope of building one near Sengbe's town was not feasible. After several attempts, Rev. Raymond finally secured a place at Komende in the Sherbro region in 1844. Raymond attributed his success partly to Sengbe's influence; and he interpreted the dispersal of the former captives as an advantage, because they would spread news of the Mission far and wide. The establishment of the Mendi Mission was, in fact, due in no small measure to the efforts of Rev. Raymond, to whom every credit should be given. In the course of time, the Mission opened stations in several places, one of which was named "Mo Tappan" in gratitude for the selfless assistance of Lewis Tappan. In 1846, the Amistad Committee evolved into the American Missionary Association, and in that year the Association took over full financial responsibility for the Mendi Mission.

## IMPACT IN SIERRA LEONE

The Amistad Case gave rise to American missionary activity in Sierra Leone, with all its positive consequences. The American Missionary Association ultimately turned over its mission stations in Sierra Leone to the United Brethren in Christ (UBC). Apart from evangelization work, the UBC was responsible for establishing an expansive system of mission schools in the southern part of the country, especially among the Mende and Sherbro peoples. Many schools were established and many new technological skills introduced as part of vocational training. The most celebrated of these schools are the Harford School for Girls at Moyamba and Albert Academy in Freetown. It should be remembered that Albert Academy, founded in 1904, was the first secondary school for upcountry boys (pre-dating the government Bo School in that capacity by many years), and that many of the early students were promising boys on scholarship. The long-term impact of these developments was to help create an elite group that excelled not only in Sierra Leone, but in the United States as well.

Some of the students who had their early education in American mission schools in Sierra Leone proceeded to the United States for further studies, and left a mark in America. Two important examples are Barnabas Root and Thomas Tucker. Root and Tucker attended the original Mendi Mission school and, after completing further studies in the United States, were employed by the American Missionary Association — Tucker in 1862 as a



teacher in a school for freedmen in Virginia, and Root in 1873 as pastor for a Congregational Mission Church for freedmen in Alabama. While Root later returned to Sierra Leone, Tucker stayed on in America and founded the State Normal College (for blacks) at Tallahassee, Florida, together with Thomas Van Gibbs, in 1887. Tucker was the first President of the College, which grew into the present-day Florida A&M University.

In the 20th century, American missionary activity helped give rise to a nationalist elite which pressed for independence. Significantly, the first Prime Minister of Sierra Leone, Dr. (later Sir) Milton Margai, and the first Executive President of Sierra Leone, Siaka Stevens, were both products of American mission primary schools in the Southern part of the country and, later, graduates of Albert Academy.

## IMPACT IN THE UNITED STATES

By the time the Amistad Case came to an end, it had so embittered feelings between the anti-slavery North and the slave-holding South that it must be counted as one of the events leading to the outbreak of the American Civil War in 1860. Although the Supreme Court's decision in the Amistad Case was not an attack on slavery, it drew the abolitionists together and prevented their movement from breaking up. Moreover, the missionary work that began with the freedom of the Amistad Africans led to the foundation of the American Missionary Association in 1846, which was the largest and best organized abolitionist society in the United States before the outbreak of the Civil War. After the War, the Association established more than five hundred schools and colleges in the South and in the border states for the education of newly liberated blacks. These schools evolved into Atlanta, Howard, Fisk, and Dillard Universities; Hampton University; Talladega College; etc, to which countless black Americans owe their higher education. The Amistad Case, thus, gave rise to this tremendous network of institutions in the South that educated the leaders of the modern-day Civil Rights Movement, including the venerable Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



## CONCLUSION

The Amistad Rebellion, which began with the determination of Sengbe Pieh and fifty-two other Sierra Leoneans not to accept enforced slavery, has had far reaching consequences on two continents. Although the origins are mostly forgotten today, the processes set in motion by this revolt will continue to influence the course of historical development in both the United States and Sierra Leone — thanks, in large measure, to the courage of Sengbe Pieh.

### Addendum: A Letter from Little Kali to John Quincy Adams

Kali was one of the four Mende children, and the only little boy, among the Amistad captives. He had been kidnapped from the streets of his own village, taken to the slave-trading base at Lomboko, and then sent across the Atlantic to Havana, Cuba. Later, aboard the *Amistad*, ten-year-old Kali was of some help to Sengbe Pieh. He sat with the three little girls and kept them quiet while Sengbe and the others, armed and unshackled, waited for their opportunity to climb up to the deck and surprise their captors. In the United States, little Kali, at his young and adaptable age, was able to learn to speak and read English much faster than the Amistad adults. In 1840, while awaiting the final decision of the United States Supreme Court on the issue of his freedom, young Kali wrote this thoughtful letter to former President John Quincy Adams, his lawyer. Kali's feelings come through clearly — he is angry at his arrest and imprisonment;

thankful to those who, like Mr. Adams, have helped him and his fellow captives; and deeply homesick.

When the Amistad captives gained their freedom and went on a speaking tour to raise money for their return passage to Sierra Leone, Kali was a star performer. He impressed audiences with his ability, after less than two years of instruction, to write correctly any sentence read to him from the Christian gospels. Kali returned with the others to Sierra Leone in 1842. He stayed with the American missionaries and was ultimately employed by the Mendi Mission. Kali married, but, while still young, contracted a disease that crippled him for the remaining years of his life.

*Dear Friend Mr. Adams:*

*I want to write a letter to you because you love Mendi people, and you talk to the grand court. We want to tell you one thing. Jose Ruiz say we born in Havana, he tell lie... We all born in Mendi....*

*We want you to ask the Court what we have done wrong. What for Americans keep us in prison? Some people say Mendi people crazy; Mendi people dolt; because we no talk American language. Merica people no talk Mendi language; Merica people dolt?*

*They tell bad things about Mendi people, and we no understand. Some men say Mendi people very happy because they laugh and have plenty to eat. Mr. Pendleton come, and Mendi people all look sorry because they think about Mendi land and friends we no see now. Mr. Pendleton say Mendi people angry; white men afraid of Mendi people. The Mendi people no look sorry*



again — that why we laugh. But Mendi people feel sorry; O, we can't tell how sorry. Some people say Mendi people no got souls. Why we feel bad, [if] we no got souls...?

Dear friend Mr. Adams, you have children, you have friends, you love them, you feel sorry if Mendi people come and carry them all to Africa. We feel bad for our friends, and our friends all feel bad for us. If American people give us free we glad, if they no give us free we sorry — we sorry for Mendi people little, we sorry for American people great deal, because God punish liars. We want you to tell court that Mendi people no want to go back to Havana, we no want to be killed. Dear Friend, we want you to know how we feel. Mendi people think, think, think. Nobody know what we think, the teacher he know, we tell him some. Mendi people have got souls....All we want is make us free.

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