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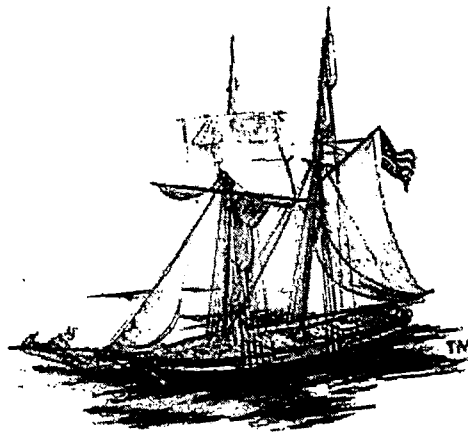
ABSTRACT

Teaching about the Amistad case provides correlations to the National Standards for History, and Civics and Government. An overview of the events of 1839 is given in this lesson plan. Seven student activities include reading and using primary source documents, writing journal articles, viewing the movie "Amistad," and giving presentations. Each of the five primary source documents provided contains an explanation of the historical context.  
 (BT)

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# The *Amistad* Case



## Lesson Plan

from the

National Archives and Records Administration

URL: <http://www.nara.gov/education/teaching/amistad/teach.html>

SO 029 178

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# The *Amistad* Case

## Teaching Activities

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### Standards Correlations

The following teaching activities correlate to the National Standards for History.

- Era 4 - Expansion and Reform (1801-1861)
  - Standard 2D - Demonstrate understanding of the rapid growth of "the peculiar institution" [slavery] after 1800 and the varied experiences of African Americans under slavery.
  - Standard 3B - Demonstrate understanding of how the debates over slavery influenced politics and sectionalism.
  - Standard 4A - Demonstrate understanding of the abolitionist movement.

The teaching activities also correlate to the National Standards for Civics and Government.

- Standard II. B. 1. - Explain how certain characteristics, including a history of slavery, tend to distinguish American society from most other societies.
- Standard III. B. 1.- Evaluate, take, and defend positions on issues regarding the purposes, organization, and functions of the institutions of the national government.
- Standard III. D. 1.- Evaluate, take, and defend positions on the role and importance of law in the American political system.
- Standard V. B. 1.- Evaluate, take, and defend positions on issues regarding personal rights.

### Cross-curricular Connections

Share these exercises with your history, government, language arts, and drama colleagues.

### Teaching Activities

1. Review with students the meanings of the following terms: schooner, brig, writ of habeas corpus, proctor, and libel. Terms are defined in the text of the online headnotes.
2. Divide students into five groups. Print out the the featured documents and the Written Document Analysis Worksheet, and provide one document and a copy of the worksheet for each group. Ask each group to analyze their document. Using the jigsaw method, regroup

the students to share the information. Lead the class in oral responses to the worksheet questions, and discuss how the documents relate to one another.

3. Ask students to complete a chart similar to the one below comparing the individuals involved in the *Amistad* case. Documents #1 and #2 provide adequate information to compare Thomas R. Gedney and the Africans. Additional research will provide information on President Van Buren, the Spanish Government, the Abolitionists, and the Spanish planters.

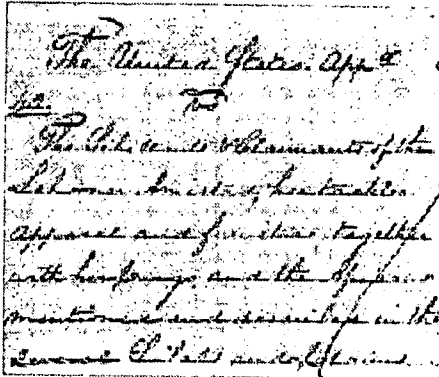
Comparison Chart						
Who?	Africans	Gedney	Van Buren	The Spanish Government	Abolitionists	Spanish Planters
What role did they play in the trial?	(defendants)	.	.	.	(financial & moral support for Africans)	.
What was their motivation?	.	(economic gain)	(political gain)	.	.	.
What were their arguments?	.	.	.	.	.	(property rights)
What was the basis for their arguments?	.	.	.	(Pinckney's Treaty)	.	.

4. Ask students to write an article for an 1841 newspaper describing the decision of the Supreme Court in the *Amistad* case. Encourage them to research the provisions of the Congressional Act of March 19, 1819, for background information. To insure that students recognize the differences in sectional reactions to the case, assign students particular newspapers, some in the North and some in the South.

5. Encourage students to write a review of the *Amistad* movie, comparing the film version to the actual events as described in the documents. Ask for student volunteers to share their reviews with the class. Lead a class discussion about the value of preserving the historical integrity of the story and the value of changing that story for a screenplay.

6. Following analysis of the documents, divide students into groups of five. Instruct student groups to write and stage a one-act play about the events and personalities involved in the case. The acts might focus on the formation of the *Amistad* Committee by abolitionists Lewis Tappan, Joshua Levitt, and Symeon Jocelyn; the decision by John Quincy Adams to represent the Africans; the challenges of securing translators for the Africans; and Van Buren's concerns about the election of 1840. Encourage students to quote directly from the documents. Schedule a media specialist to videotape the final productions.

7. Ask student volunteers to research and make an oral presentation to the class comparing the *Amistad* case to other significant incidents related to slavery prior to the Civil War, including Nat Turner's rebellion (1831), the *Creole* revolt (1841), and the Dred Scott decision (1857). Use the following questions to prompt comparisons: To what extent did these incidents involve violence? What were their outcomes? How did they influence



## The Amistad Case

"... each of them are natives of Africa and were born free, and ever since have been and still of right are and ought to be free and not slaves ..."

-- S. Staples, R. Baldwin, and T. Sedgewick,  
Proctors for the Amistad Africans,  
January 7, 1840

### Background

In February of 1839, Portuguese slave hunters abducted a large group of Africans from Sierra Leone and shipped them to Havana, Cuba, a center for the slave trade. This abduction violated all of the treaties then in existence. Fifty-three Africans were purchased by two Spanish planters and put aboard the Cuban schooner *Amistad* for shipment to a Caribbean plantation. On July 1, 1839, the Africans seized the ship, killed the captain and the cook, and ordered the planters to sail to Africa. On August 24, 1839, the *Amistad* was seized off Long Island, NY, by the U.S. brig *Washington*. The planters were freed and the Africans were imprisoned in New Haven, CT, on charges of murder. Although the murder charges were dismissed, the Africans continued to be held in confinement as the focus of the case turned to salvage claims and property rights. President Van Buren was in favor of extraditing the Africans to Cuba. However, abolitionists in the North opposed extradition and raised money to defend the Africans. Claims to the Africans by the planters, the government of Spain, and the captain of the brig led the case to trial in the Federal District Court in Connecticut. The court ruled that the case fell within Federal jurisdiction and that the claims to the Africans as property were not legitimate because they were illegally held as slaves. The case went to the Supreme Court in January 1841, and former President John Quincy Adams argued the defendants' case. Adams defended the right of the accused to fight to regain their freedom. The Supreme Court decided in favor of the Africans, and 35 of them were returned to their homeland. The others died at sea or in prison while awaiting trial.

### The Documents

Libel of Thomas R. Gedney, Lieutenant, U.S. Brig *Washington*, August 29, 1839

Answer of the Proctors for the Amistad Africans, January 7, 1840

John Quincy Adams' request for papers relating to the lower court trials of the Amistad Africans, January 23, 1841

Opinion of the Supreme Court in *United States v. The Amistad*, March 9, 1841

Statement of the Supreme Court to Circuit Court, March 9, 1841

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sectional differences?

**For Further Reading:**

Jones, Howard. *Mutiny on the Amistad: The Saga of a Slave Revolt and its Impact on American Abolition, Law, and Diplomacy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.

The Legal Information Institute at Cornell University has created a web site devoted to the legal issues surrounding the *Amistad* case.



*National Archives and Records Administration*

URL: <http://www.nara.gov/education/teaching/amistad/teach.html>

[webmaster@nara.gov](mailto:webmaster@nara.gov)

Last updated: January 29, 1998



## Written Document Analysis Worksheet

1. TYPE OF DOCUMENT (Check one):

- |                                     |  |   |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Newspaper  | <input type="checkbox"/> Map           | <input type="checkbox"/> Advertisement        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Letter     | <input type="checkbox"/> Telegram      | <input type="checkbox"/> Congressional record |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Patent     | <input type="checkbox"/> Press release | <input type="checkbox"/> Census report        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Memorandum | <input type="checkbox"/> Report        | <input type="checkbox"/> Other                |

2. UNIQUE PHYSICAL QUALITIES OF THE DOCUMENT (Check one or more):

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Interesting letterhead | <input type="checkbox"/> Notations        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Handwritten            | <input type="checkbox"/> "RECEIVED" stamp |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Typed                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Other            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Seals                  |   |

3. DATE(S) OF DOCUMENT: \_\_\_\_\_

4. AUTHOR (OR CREATOR) OF THE DOCUMENT: \_\_\_\_\_

POSITION (TITLE): \_\_\_\_\_

5. FOR WHAT AUDIENCE WAS THE DOCUMENT WRITTEN? \_\_\_\_\_

6. DOCUMENT INFORMATION (There are many possible ways to answer A-E.)

A. List three things the author said that you think are important:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

B. Why do you think this document was written?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

C. What evidence in the document helps you know why it was written? Quote from the document.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

D. List two things the document tells you about life in the United States at the time it was written:

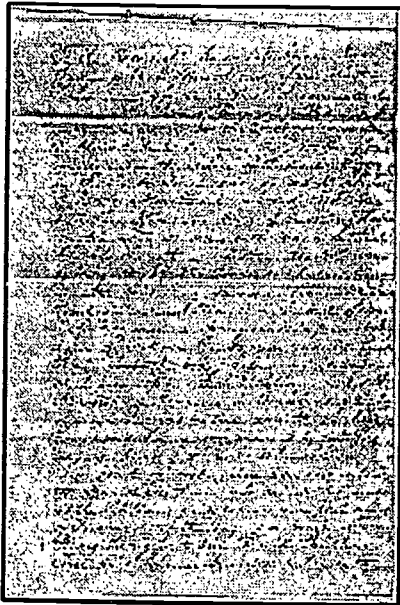
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

E. Write a question to the author that is left unanswered by the document:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## Document #1



**Libel of Lieutenant Thomas R. Gedney,  
on behalf of himself and the officers and crew of the U.S.  
Brig *Washington*,  
August 29, 1839**

National Archives and Records Administration-Northeast Region,  
Waltham, MA,  
Records of the District Courts of the United States, RG 21

The *Washington* was the brig that seized the *Amistad* off the coast of Long Island. Its commander was Lt. Thomas R. Gedney. In his libel, or written statement, to Judge Andrew T. Judson of the district court, he described the encounter with the *Amistad*. Because he sought salvage of the schooner and its cargo, he was very detailed in his account and itemized all of its cargo, estimating its value at \$40,000 and the value of the Africans as slaves at \$25,000. In maritime law, compensation is allowed to persons whose assistance saves a ship or its cargo from impending loss. The libelants claimed that with great difficulty and danger to themselves they recaptured the *Amistad* from the Africans. They claimed that had they not seized the vessel, it would have been a total loss to its "rightful" owners. Therefore, Gedney and his crew believed they were entitled to salvage rights. At that time in U.S. history, even individuals acting in their official capacity as officials of the government were entitled to salvage rights.

In addition, Gedney relayed that the Africans could speak only native African tongues and that one of the two Spaniards, Jose Ruiz, spoke English. Gedney included in his libel the account of the mutiny as told by Ruiz.

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District of Columbia. p.

The President of the  
United States of America to the  
Marshal of the District of Columbia  
Greeting -

Whereas a bill is filed in  
the District Court of the United States for  
said District in behalf of Thomas R.  
Graham for himself and others against the  
Scholar American and other articles of  
personal property, the bill is in the  
words following, to wit,

To the Honorable Andrew Dudson Esq  
Judge of the District Court of the United  
States in and for the District of Connecticut

The Libel of Thomas R Gedney Lieut-  
enant in the United States Navy commanding  
the United States Surveying Brig Washington  
employed in the Service of the United States  
in the Coast Survey. and on behalf of Richard  
W Mead a Lieutenant on board said Brig  
and the officers and Crew of said Brig Wash-  
ington and all others interested or entitled  
humbly sheweth — That on the 20<sup>th</sup> day  
of August A<sup>D</sup> 1839 the said libellant being  
in with said Brig Surveying between Montauk  
Point & Gardiners Island in the State of New  
York discovered a strange and suspicious looking  
Vessel off Culloden Point near said Montauk  
Point. that they took possession of said Vessel  
which proved to be a Spanish Schooner called the  
Armistad of Havana in the Island of Cuba  
of about 120 tons burthen. and the said libellants  
found said Schooner was manned by forty five  
negroes. Some of whom had landed near  
said point for water & there were also on board  
two Spanish Gentlemen who represented and  
as the Libellants mainly believe were part owners  
of the Cargo of the Negroes on board who were  
Slaves belonging to said Spanish Gentlemen.  
That said Schooner Armistad sailed on the

28<sup>th</sup> Day of June A.D. 1839 from the Port of Havana  
 bound to a port in the Province of Principe  
 both in said Island of Cuba under the Command  
 of Raymen Ferrer as master thereof, that said  
 Schooner had on board and was laden with  
 a large & valuable Cargo Consisting of an Amounting  
 as the libellant believe to be 1 box with 4 folding  
 pieces 1 Crate 11 boxes Croquet of Flapwau. 200 Boxes  
 Vermicelli. 15 ps linen Stuff. 1 Case Sugar. 25 Bags  
 Beans. 25 Bags Raisins. 50 Horse equipments. 10 doz  
 Morocco Skins. 5 Doz Calf Skins. 5 Saddles. 2 doz Kitts  
 200 feet Ropes. 20 Vides Sole Leather. 6 Iron Drums for  
 warehouse. 8 Crowns 1 Box with 200 Meags. 3 Iron  
 Kettles. 14 packages Common Linen. 4 packages Holland  
 linen. 4 doz parasols or umbrellas 30 pieces Muslin 10  
 yds each. 2 doz /p Nose 3 doz Ovens 21 Ingots 90 /ps  
 Lilecia 2 /ps Victoria 9 /ps Drilling 34 /ps Long lawn  
 54 /ps Calicoes 5 /ps Laces 14 /ps Muslins 6 /ps Stripes  
 24 /ps Stripes 148 /ps Ribbons 10 /ps Linen Cambric 45 /ps  
 Glazed Linen 4 /ps Roman Cassimere 1 Doz Shawly  
 Frans. Gloves. Shirts. Tapes thread. Towels umbrellas  
 29 Muslin Dress patterns 10 woolen Shawly & Silk  
 15 Rings Buttons Saddles 75 /ps Stripes 48 /ps Lilecia  
 30 /ps Long lawn 1 /ps Black HKffs 7 /ps French Linens  
 8 Doz Linen Cambric HKffs umbrellas 42 /ps Stripes  
 Robbins 2 /ps Ribbons 5 Coloured Mantles 20 /ps  
 linen Cambric 800 yds Stained linen 2 /ps of Merino  
 30 Dress patterns 6 Musquito netts 6 /ps Satin 18  
 Blankets 1 box Hardware 12 Doz HKffs 18 /ps Coarse  
 linen 60 vols Books. 2 Boxes Books. 70 sheets

of Colours Hardware 50 Demijohns Olive Oil 20 Boxes  
Avermelli 20 Quintals Jerked Beef 15 Dides Sole Leather  
5 Kegs Olives 2 Quintals Hams 190 ps Muslins 26 ps  
Stripes 3 ps Brown Drilling 4 ps Linens 21 ps Colours of fine  
linens 11 doz Ladies Hose 2 Doz Belts 10 doz Linen  
Cambic Ndkuffs 12 Common L and a large quantity  
of Silks Linens Hardware & provisions to the amount  
in all of \$40,000 Dollars - And also fifty four  
Slaves to wit fifty one male Slaves and three young  
female Slaves who were worth Twenty five thousand  
Dollars. and while on said voyage from Havana  
to Principe the said Slaves rose upon the Captain  
& Crew of said Schooner & killed & murdered the  
Captain & one of said Crew & two more of said Crew  
escaped & got away from said Schooner. that the  
two Spaniards on board to wit Pedro Montes and  
Jose Ruiz - remained alive on board said Schooner  
after the murder of the Captain and after the said  
Negroes had taken possession of said vessel & Cargo  
that their lives were spared to assist in the sailing  
of said vessel & it was directed by said Negroes  
that said Schooner should be navigated for the  
the South of Africa of said Pedro Montes & Jose Ruiz  
and accordingly steered and thus directed & compassed  
by said Negroes at the point of their being in the  
day time of the night attack their Course of Steer  
for the Dominian Shores but after more than ten  
months in the Ocean they succeeded in coming round  
Moroccan point. that they were discovered and

be aided by the libellants and the said two Spanish  
Gentlemen begged for and claimed the aid and  
protection of the libellants, that said Schooner  
was accordingly taken possession of & recaptured from  
the hands & possession of said Negroes who had taken  
the same as aforesaid that said Schooner was brought  
into port of New London in the District aforesaid  
where she now is and said Schooner would with great  
difficulty exposure and danger have been taken  
by the Libellants but for the surprise upon the said  
Blacks she had possessed thereof a part of whom were  
on Shore and but for the aid assistance and services  
of the Libellants the said vessel and said Cargo would  
have been wholly lost to the respective owners thereof  
That said Cargo belongs to divers Spanish Merchants  
& others resident in said Island of Cuba & to the  
said Pedro Montes & Jose Ruiz the latter owning  
most of said Slaves -

Now inasmuch as the said  
Thomas R Gedney & said officers & Crew have with  
so much difficulty & danger saved said Schooner  
Armadad and said Cargo and said Slaves  
which would otherwise in all human probability  
have been totally lost to the owners thereof respectively  
Will your Honor please to order the said vessel  
to be attached and taken by the process of this Hon-  
-orable Court and that a monition issue to all  
persons concerned to show cause if any they have  
why a reasonable Salvage should not be decreed  
thereon to the Libellants & all others entitled

And that such further and other steps shall be  
taken as the Course of this Honorable Court  
shall direct —

This R. Gedney Esq. Comr. M. D. P.  
Washington  
R. W. Meade Esq. by J. Isham his atty  
Genl. U. S.

District of Connecticut  
District Court at New London Aug 20<sup>th</sup> 1839

Personally appeared Richard W. Meade  
and made oath to the truth of the foregoing libel  
according to his best knowledge and belief —

attest  
Chas. F. Ingusoll  
Clerk

And James said, that he has been  
advised by said District Court, and the best  
thing, desired to be had, at a Sheriff's  
District Court of the United States, for said  
District to be held at Westford, in said  
District on the 19<sup>th</sup> day of September A.D.  
1839, at 10 o'clock A.M. and the Clerk  
of said District Court is desired to issue  
all necessary and proper process thereon — that  
you are requested to take the said  
Sheriff's Writ, and the articles of Personal  
Liberty mentioned in said Libel into your  
possession and custody and there, return a report

t the well of rain water being fast set  
 but made an unnecessary return. With  
 the Hon. Andrew J. Brown United States  
 of the District of Columbia at Washington  
 the 29<sup>th</sup> day of August A. D. 1839.

Chas. A. Purcell

District of Columbia

New London / Harbor / Sept 30<sup>th</sup> 1839

Then by Virtue of this warrant at said New London / 2 Miles  
 down the Harbor I took into my custody & keeping the aforesaid  
 described Schooner Armed with her tackle, apparel & furniture  
 together with her cargo & intended as aforesaid & those that I subject  
 to the order of this court to which this warrant is returnable  
 And the said cargo being found to be in a damaged state & ready  
 receiving more damage I have discharged the same & found  
 the cargo to Inventory as follows to wit

- 2 Pieces Pickering 2 Pieces ea 4 (Hus. 68 Pieces Cotton Sticks and
- Checks 190 (Hus. 2 pieces Cotton Sticks Birmingham 3 3/4 Hus 1. Ditto
- 8 Hus. 1 ditto 4 Hus 3 pieces Pickering 5 1/2 Hus. 1 Piece Pink Muslin
- Fig. 17 1/2 Hus. 4 Mosquito Nets, 3 Cotton Hanks, 12 Blue Cotton Shirts
- 20 Cotton Hanks, 3 pieces dark calico 4 Hus 1 Piece blk. Musine 2 Hus
- 1 Piece Green Water gauge 22 Hus 10 Pcs. Cotton do. do. 1 do. do.
- 6 yds, 1 Box artificial flowers, 5 Pieces Massape Hanks, 1 Piece
- dark Birmingham 8 Muslin scraps, 3 Pieces Cotton Laces
- 3 Pieces Green Cambrie 3 Pieces book Muslin, 3 Pieces blue
- Cotton Laces 1 piece each Laces 1 piece white Cotton Laces
- 1 Piece Water gauge Layweb 8 Hus 1 ditto black 11 Hus, 1 ditto
- stripes 20 Hus 2 pieces white cotton lace 5 pieces checked gauze
- 70 Hus 4 Pieces Pickering 3 3/4 Hus 9 pieces tabling 8 1/2 Hus
- 10 pieces checked cotton 180 Hus 5 pieces striped Laces 9 5/8 Hus

4 pieces check? (Singham)

9 pieces Light striped Singham 2 3/4 yds, 1 Bale striped ticking 2 ft  
 1 ditto 7 ft. 1 Box dry goods P.M. 1 Box Madras <sup>white</sup> ~~black~~ P.M. 1 Bale Cotton stripes  
 4 checks 2 ft. 1 Box linen 41 ft. 12 Collins handkerchiefs. 11 Shirts. 1 ft Enchant  
 Muslin 1 1/2 yds. 9 ft Singham (each 15 yds) 135 yds. 3 ft ditto. one dress in cash  
 1 ft Black Marino full pt. 1 ft ditto. 4 1/2 ft, 6 ft Linen 4 2/4 yds 3 ft  
 Shirts Straps 40 yds. 1 ft Salin gauge 11 yds. 5 ft Black Marino 11 yds. 5 ft Brass plate  
 for Bonnetts. End of ft light duck. 46 ft stripes & checks 123 ft yds. 25 ft Singham  
 2 7/8 yds. 6 ft Ticking 2 3/4 yds 1 ft Calico 11 yds. 1 Bale dry goods R.B. No 14. 1 Bale  
 ditto R.B. No 16. 1 Bale ditto R.B. No 12. 1 Bale ditto R.B. No 13. 1 Bale ditto  
 A & L No torn off. 1 Box Umbrellas R.B. No 18. 1 Box containing 34 coils wire. 4 packages  
 and 61 loose glass knobs. 1 Box dry goods R.B. No 4. 1 Box ditto R.B. No 5. 1 Box ditto  
 I No 4. 1 trunk sewing apparatus No 10. (supposed to be the Capt's) 1 Box 25 ft galon.  
 6 ft Ribbons. 10 ft Symp. 6 ft pipes. 1 Box thread & lace. 26 fans. 1 lot silk tatters  
 1 Box needles. 1 Box Ribbons & 3 Bunches quills. 1 Box **IX**. 40 ft Muslins. 1 Bundle  
 skins 56 skins. 5 Bundle Umbrellas. 26. 22 pair Buttons. 6 Rocks. 11 Britch pins  
 7 Shirts. 3 Coats. 3 bests. 2. Clocks. 10 Black bags. 5 Empty trunks. 35 linijohn  
 olive oil. 196 Box w Vermaselli **SC**. 2 Boxes ditto partly filled **SC**. 7 Boxes Raisins  
**SC**. 1 Box Glass **R.B** No 16. 1 Box ditto **R.B** No 8. 1 Part box charts **IX**. 12 Boxes  
 Castile Soap **SC**. 2 ditto part full **SC**. 1 Box dry goods **I**. 1 Box ditto **R.B**  
 No 16. 1 Box ditto. **A & L** No 4. 1 Box ditto **I** No 3. 1 Box ditto **I** No 5. 1 Box  
 ditto **P.M.**. 1 Box ditto **R.B** No 6. 1 Box Soap **R** (part full). 1 Box books **A & L**  
 1 Box part full of books **R.B** No 15. 5 Muskets (see last order) 1 Box crockery  
**R.B** No 7. 1 Box leather **A & C**. 1 Box short Copper **C.M.S.** No 8. 1 Looking glass  
 in trunk. 1 Box crockery **R.B** No 11. 1 ditto **R.B** No 9. 1 Bale Calf skins **J.V.** No 2.  
 1 ditto No 3. 1 Box crockery **R.B** No 4. part full. 1 Box horse equipments **J.V.** No 1  
 1 Box dry goods **A & L** No 11. 1 Box crockery **R.B** No 6. 1 ditto No 3. 1 ditto No 5  
 1 Empty key. 1 Empty linijohn. 1 Box pitch **P & C**. 1 Bag snuff **C & C**. 1 Small  
 oak window blinds. 1 Mariners compass (loose) 1 spy glass. 5 papers of paper  
 (loose). 2 Horse pistols, and one pocket ditto. 7 1/2 doz plate loose. Blue & green  
 edged. 22 Tumblers. and one deserted. 8 glass dishes (loose). 4 tinplate (loose) 2 long





bottles (contents unknown). 1 Box dry goods A. L. No. 9. 1 ditto A. L. No. 2. 1 ditto A. L.  
 1 ditto A. L. No. 8. 1 ditto A. L. No. 4. 1 ditto A. L. No. 1. 1 ditto A. L. No. 10. 1 ditto  
 A. L. No. 5. 6 pictures. 1 Box dry goods R. B. No. 1. 1 ditto A. L. No. 3. 3 skins  
 sets S. C. 1 Bundle twine 46 Skins. 2 Bundles. 21 Sticks carriage tops. 1 Key of  
 iron wedges. 1 Saddle. Bridle. & Holters. 1 Roll Morocco skins D. C. 2 Tins. and part  
 13th piece. 12 bags ditto (with in box also) 1 Box Machetes E. F. (Case Knives) 1 Key  
 bruff E. R. O. 1 Box Screws. 6 Saw Augers. 1 Spike gimlet. 1 Box containing 48  
 packages of fancy articles comb. R. B. 1 Roll sole Leather C. B. 4 Rolls of  
 sole leather J. V. Nos. 4. 5. 6. 7. and also a quantity jerked beef.

Attest Morris Willcox U.S. Marshal  
 for Court District of Columbia

District of Columbia

New London August 30th 1859

When I took into my custody, & keeping by virtue of the foregoing  
 Warrant of Seizure forty three out of the fifty four slaves within  
 Maryland to-wit forty slaves & three females having all been able  
 to find within my precinct, whose names are as follows viz  
 Cinquay, Antonic, Dorothea, Co. boy, Dorothea, Fournie, 1st. Dorothea  
 Malwah, Dorothea, Bonamah, Choolay, Annah 2d. (Baah, Gabbah, Poomah,  
 Kimbo, Poo, Wangyeah, Saah, Carlee, Parah, Mörrah, Yahowie  
 Narguoi, Quarta Hope, Cor, Fournie, 2d. Kimmah, Larromana  
 Pahnah, Baah, Calboy, Duhgnamash, Dorothea, Fournie, Chackmanaw  
 Galtow, Corne, Fern, Nene, Mahgra Nana + these children subject  
 to the order of this Court to which the warrant is returnable.

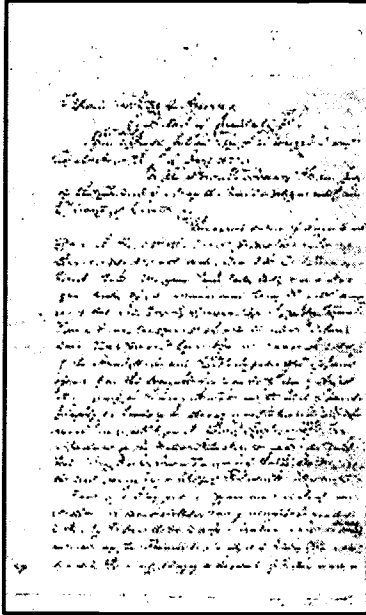
Attest Morris Willcox U.S. Marshal  
 for District of Columbia

Name: R. Gedney  
 Salomon Amato S.  
 Warrant i. s. m.





## Document #2



**Answer of S. Staples, R. Baldwin, and T. Sedgewick,  
Proctors for the *Amistad* Africans,  
to the several libels of Lt. Gedney, et. al. and Pedro  
Montes and Jose Ruiz,  
January 7, 1840**

**National Archives and Records Administration-Northeast Region,  
Waltham, MA,  
Records of the District Courts of the United States, RG 21**

After the *Amistad* was seized, the schooner, its cargo, and all on board were taken to New London, CT. Had it not been for the actions of abolitionists in the United States, the issues related to the *Amistad* might have ended quietly in an admiralty court. But they used the incident as a way to expose the evils of slavery and generate significant opposition to the practice. Abolitionists asked Roger S. Baldwin, a lawyer from New Haven, and two New York attorneys, Seth Staples and Theodore Sedgewick, to serve as proctors for, or represent, the Africans. The answer to the libels of Lt. Gedney, et. al. and Pedro Montes and Jose Ruiz that the proctors submitted to the district court conveyed the position of the Africans.

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United States of America  
District of Connecticut  
Special Court holden at New Haven in said  
District on the 7<sup>th</sup> of Jan<sup>y</sup> 1840.

To the Honorable Andrew T. Judson Judge  
of the District Court of the United States in and for the  
District of Connecticut

The several names of Singas, Bernaldi,  
Dammah, Fournier<sup>1<sup>st</sup></sup> otherwise called Fournier, Herrera, Gomez,  
otherwise called, Estrada, Charley, Bernaldi<sup>2<sup>d</sup></sup>, Bernaldi,  
Kumbor, Peah, Bangyashi, Saah, Barle, Parli, Mornah, Stach,  
giver Quato, Sepu, Com otherwise called Kwoong, Fournier<sup>2<sup>d</sup></sup> otherwise  
called Pauli, in in Kennah, Lamance, Fajamahi, padley, Fajamahi,  
Berno, Fournier, Choctoman, Gubba, otherwise called Gulabara,  
Carr, Tami, Nemi & Mahyur Africans, now in the custody  
of the Marshall of said District under color of process  
issued from this Honorable Court on the 29<sup>th</sup> day of August  
1839 against the Schooner Amistad and the articles of personal  
property on board of her then lying in the harbor of New Lon-  
don in said District on the libel of Lieutenant W. R. Geary  
a Lieutenant in the United States Navy commanding the United  
States Brig Washington in the service of the United States on  
the coast survey, and on behalf of Richard M. Meade a Lieut-  
enant on board said Brig, and the Officers and crew thereof and  
all others interested or entitled, claiming salvage to be awarded  
to them by this Honorable Court as for a meritorious service, in ~~the~~<sup>the</sup>  
and securing the Respondents severally and holding them as slaves  
to certain Spaniards belonging to the islands of Cuba, named in

said libels - and also under process of this Honorable Court issued and served, at Hartford on the 13<sup>th</sup> day of September 1839 while the Respondents were in custody of the Marshall of said District as aforesaid, in at Hartford within the body of the State and District of Connecticut, on the libel and claim of William P. Hollister Esq. United States District Attorney for said District of Connecticut and the libels respectively of Pedro Monte & Jose Maria, and also under process of this Honorable Court issued at Hartford aforesaid on the 19<sup>th</sup> day of November 1839 on the claim and representation of the said District Attorney then and there made and filed.

The said respondents severally by protestations not admitting or acknowledging that the Government of the United States, or any department, Court, or officer thereof hath jurisdiction over the persons of these Respondents or any of them, by reason of any of the allegations & proceedings aforesaid, & not confessing or acknowledging any of the matters & things in the libels & said several libels & claims to be true in manner and form as the same are therein and thereby alleged, appear before this Honorable Court, and for answer to the several libels, claims & representations aforesaid severally say

That they and each of them are nations of Africa and were born free, and ever since have been and still of right are and ought to be free and not slaves, as is in said several libels or claims pretended or surmised - that they were never domiciled on the Island of Cuba, or in the dominions of the Queen of Spain, or subject to the laws thereof - that on or about the 15<sup>th</sup> day of April 1839 they and each of them were in the

Lands of their nativity unlawfully kidnaped and forcibly  
and wrongfully by certain persons to their indignation, who were  
then and there unlawfully and perniciouly engaged in the slave  
trade, between the Coast of Africa and the island of Cuba  
contrary to the will of their Respondents unlawfully, and under  
circumstances of great Cruelty, transported to the s<sup>d</sup> island of  
Cuba, for the unlaful purpose of being sold as slaves,  
and were there illegally landed for the purpose aforesaid.

That Don Juan one of the said Seballants well knowing all  
the premises, and confederating with the persons by whom the  
Respondents were unlawfully taken and hidden as aforesaid,  
and intending to deprive the Respondents severally of their  
liberty, made a pretended purchase of the said Respondents  
except the said Carr, Bern, and Mahyon, and that the  
said Pedro Monte also well knowing all the premises and  
confederating with the said persons for the purpose aforesaid  
made a pretended purchase of the said Carr, Bern, and  
Mahyon, That said pretended purchase was made from  
persons who had no right whatever to the Respondents, or any of them  
and that the same were null and void, and conferred no  
right, or title on the said Juan or Monte or right of control  
over the Respondents, or either of them. That afterwards on  
or about the 25<sup>th</sup> day of June 1839 the said Juan & Monte  
confederating with each other and with one Ramon Ferrer now  
deceased, Capt. of said Schooner Amistad & others of the crew  
thereof caused the Respondents severally without law or right and  
color of certain false and fraudulent papers by them procured &  
fraudently used for that purpose to be placed by force on  
board said Schooner to be transported with said Juan

and a Monitor to some place unknown to the Respondents and  
 those enslaved for life. — That the Respondents, being treated  
 on board said Vessel by said Ruiz and Monitor, and their  
 confederates with great cruelty and oppression, and being of  
 rights free as aforesaid were incited by the love of liberty nat-  
 = ural to all men, and by the desire of returning to their families  
 and kindred, to take possession of said Vessel, while navigat-  
 ing the high seas, as they had right to do with the intent to  
 return them to their native Country, or to send an apprentice in  
 some free state where slavery did not exist, in order that they  
 might enjoy their liberty under the protection of its Government  
 — that the Schooner on or about the 26<sup>th</sup> of August 1839 arrived  
 in the possession of the Respondents at Bullhead Point near New  
 York and was then anchored near the shore of Long Island and  
 within hauling distance thereof and within the waters and territory  
 of the State of New York — that the respondents, Tanguay, Corley,  
 Dammah, Raab, Mount, Stuyvesant Quate, Coon, Faganah, Berner,  
 Gabor, Foulke, Numbo, Fagunah, bonoma, others called Ndraa,  
 Sen, 14 above Tammah, Calhoun, Fawcett, Paul, Part, Judd, while  
 said Schooner lay at anchor as aforesaid went on shore within  
 the State of New York to procure provisions and other necessaries  
 and while there in a State where slavery is unlawful and does not exist  
 under the protection of the Government, and having said Vessel by which  
 they were all free, whether on board of said Schooner, or on shore the  
 Respondents were severally seized, as well those who were on shore  
 as aforesaid as those who were on board of said Schooner by the said Lieut. Gedney, his officers and crew of said  
 United States Brig Washington, without any lawful warrant or authority  
 whatever, at the instance of said Spaniards, Ruiz and Monitor, with

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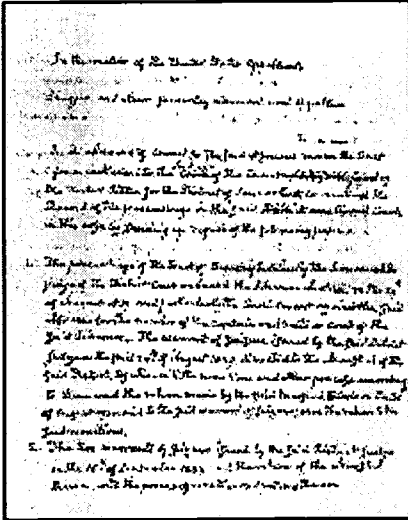
the intent to keep and secure them as slaves, to the said Rice and  
Moulter respectively, and to obtain an award of salvage therefor from the  
Honorable Court as for a meritorious act. That for that purpose the  
Respondents were by the said Secy. Sedgwick, his officers and crew  
aforesaid forcibly and unlawfully withdrawn from the jurisdictional  
limits of the State of New York and brought to the port of New Haven  
aforesaid and while there and afterwards under the subsequent  
proceedings in this Hon. Court taken into the Custody of the Marshal  
of said District of Connecticut and confined and held in the  
goal in the Cities of New Haven and Hartford respectively as aforesaid.  
Wherefore the Respondents severally pray that they and each of  
them may be set free, as they of right are and ought to be, and  
that they be released from the custody of the Marshal under the  
process of this Hon. Court under which or under color of which they  
are held as aforesaid.

S. P. Staples, R. S. Baldwin }  
T. J. Sedgwick } Proctors

And at said District Court holden  
at New Haven in said City on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of  
January A.D. 1840, here in open Court, came  
said Antonio Tulliver and the Sons of Asa &  
Lucas, subjects of the Queen of Spain, and by  
assent of the Court file their claim in the  
under following to wit-



### Document #3



**John Quincy Adams' request for papers relating to the lower court trials of the *Amistad* Africans, January 23, 1841**

National Archives and Records Administration, Records of the Supreme Court of the United States, RG 267

After the Federal District Court ruled in favor of the Africans, the U.S. District Attorney filed an appeal to the Supreme Court. In the trial before the Supreme Court, the Africans were represented by John Quincy Adams, a former U.S. President and descendant of American revolutionaries. Preparing for his appearance before the Court, Adams requested papers from the lower courts one month before the proceedings opened. For 8 ½ hours, the 73-year-old Adams passionately and eloquently defended the Africans' right to freedom on both legal and moral grounds, referring to treaties prohibiting the slave trade and to the Declaration of Independence.

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In the matter of the United States Appellants

King and others generally claimants and appellants

I, A Adams, of Counsel for the said Africans, moves the Court for a certiorari to the <sup>Judge</sup> Clerk of the Circuit and District Court of the United States for the District of Connecticut, to annul the Record of the proceedings in the said District and Circuit Courts in this case, by sending up copies of the following papers:

1. The proceedings of the Court of Enquiry held by the Honourable Judge of the District Court on board the Schooner ~~administered~~ on the 29<sup>th</sup> of August 1839, and particularly the Indictment against the said Africans for the murder of the captain and mate or cook of the said Schooner. The warrant of seizure issued by the said District Judge on the said 29<sup>th</sup> of August 1839, directed to the Marshal of the said District, together with the motions and other procees according to Law and the return made by the said Marshal ~~to~~ on the 30<sup>th</sup> of August aforesaid to the said warrant of seizure; and the return to the said motions.
2. The two warrants of seizure issued by the said District Judge on the 10<sup>th</sup> of September 1839, and the returns of the Marshal thereon with the procees of motion and return thereon.

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3. The warrant of seizure issued by the said District Court on the 19<sup>th</sup> of September 1859 and the return of the Marshal thereon.

4. The instructions of the Judge of the Circuit Court to the Grand Jury on the

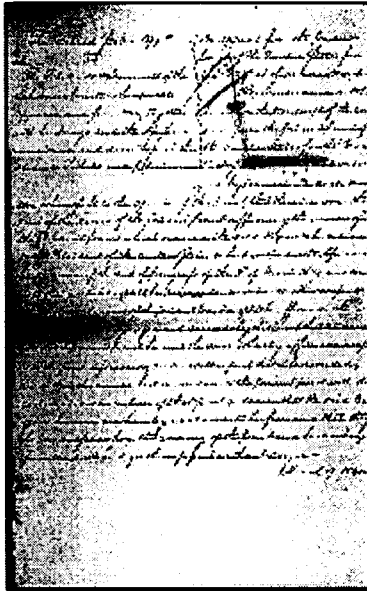
4. The Bill of Indictment filed by the District Attorney against the said Africans for the murder of the Captain and Cook of the Amistad, and also for piracy; and the proceedings of the Grand Jury, and the Instructions of the Circuit Court to the said Grand Jury thereon.

5. The writ of Habeas Corpus in behalf of the said Africans on the said 10<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> of Sept. 1859, the return, and the decision of the said Circuit Court thereon.

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## Document #4



### Opinion of the Supreme Court in *United States v. The Amistad*, March 9, 1841

National Archives and Records Administration,  
Records of the Supreme Court of the United States, RG 267

Senior Justice Joseph Story wrote and read the decision of the Supreme Court. The Court ruled that the Africans on board the *Amistad* were free individuals. Kidnapped and transported illegally, they had never been slaves.

Although Justice Story had written earlier that ". . . it was the ultimate right of all human beings in extreme cases to resist oppression, and to apply force against ruinous injustice," the opinion in this case more narrowly asserted the Africans right to resist "unlawful" slavery.

The Court ordered the immediate release of the *Amistad* Africans.

The United States. App 5. On appeal from the Circuit Court of the United States for the District of Connecticut.

The Libellants & Claimants of the Schooner Amistad, her tackle, apparel and furniture, together with her cargo and the African mentioned and described in the several Libels and Pleas.

This Cause came on to be heard on the transcript of the record from the Circuit Court of the District of Connecticut and was argued by counsel on consideration whereof it is the opinion of the Court that there is error in that part of the decree of the Circuit Court affirming the decree of the District Court which orders the said Negroes to be delivered to the President of the United States to be transported to Africa in pursuance of the Act of Congress of the 3<sup>d</sup> of March 1819; and that as to that part it ought to be reversed; and in all other respects that the said decree of the Circuit Court ought to be affirmed. It is therefore ordered by this Court that the decree of the District Court be and the same is hereby affirmed except as to the part aforesaid, and as to that part that it be reversed; and that the cause be remanded to the Circuit Court with directions to enter in lieu of that part a decree that the said Negroes be and are hereby decreed to be free and that they be dismissed from the custody of the Court and be discharged from the suit and go thereof quit without day.

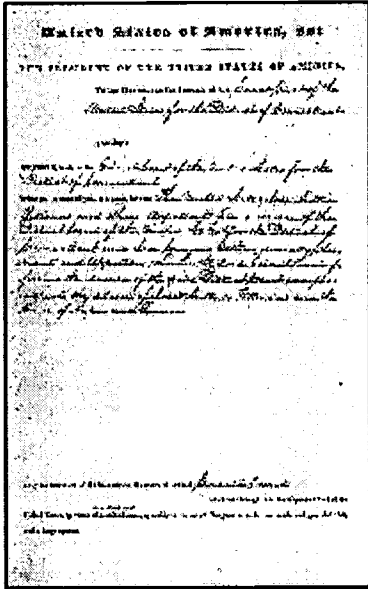
March 9. 1841.

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# Document #5



## Statement of the Supreme Court to Circuit Court, March 9, 1841

National Archives and Records Administration,  
Records of the Supreme Court of the United States, RG 267

Following its decision, the Supreme Court submitted this statement to the lower court where the case originated. The statement indicated that the decision of the circuit court was in part upheld and in part reversed. The part that was upheld related to the freedom of the Africans. The part that was reversed related to Judge Andrew T. Judson's application of the Congressional Act of March 3, 1819. Judson's decision authorized the President to return the Africans to Africa. Ultimately, the abolitionists arranged for their return in early 1842.

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United States of America, vs:

THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

To the Honorable the Judges of the Circuit Court of the United States for the District of Connecticut

greeting:

WHEREAS, lately, in the Circuit Court of the United States for the District of Connecticut before you, or some of you, in a case, between The United States, Los Antonio Tillman and others Appellants from a decree of the District Court of the United States for the District of Connecticut and Jose Pringues Brothers, several Plaintiffs and Appellants, wherein the said Circuit Court affirmed the decree of the said District Court in so far as respects the claims of Los Antonio Tillman and the House of Lopez and Co.

as by the inspection of the transcript of the record of the said Circuit Court which was brought into the Supreme Court of the United States, by virtue of a writ of error agreeably to the act of Congress in such case made and provided, fully and at large appears.

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And whereas, in the present term of *January* in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and *forty one* the said cause came on to be heard before the said Supreme Court, on the said transcript of the record, and was argued by counsel; *It is the opinion of this Court that there is error in that part of the decree of the Circuit Court affirming the decree of the District Court which ordered the said Negroes to be delivered to the President of the United States to be transported to Africa in pursuance of the Act of Congress of the 3<sup>d</sup> of March 1819, and that as to that part it ought to be reversed, and in all other respects that the decree of the Circuit Court ought to be affirmed.* It is therefore ordered, adjudged, and decreed by this Court that the decree of the said Circuit Court be and the same is hereby affirmed except as to the part aforesaid, and as to that part, that it be reversed, and that the cause be remanded to the Circuit Court with directions to enter in lieu of that part a decree that the said Negroes be and are hereby declared to be free, and that they be dismissed from the custody of the Court and be discharged from the suit and go thereof quit without day.

*March 9<sup>th</sup>*

You, therefore, are hereby commanded that such *further* proceedings be had in said cause, *in conformity to the opinion and decree of this Court* as according to right and justice, and the laws of the United States ought to be had, the said *Appeal* notwithstanding.

WITNESS the Honorable *Roger B. Taney* Chief Justice of said Supreme Court, the *second Monday of January* in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and *forty one*.

Clerk of the Supreme Court of the United States.



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