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Trial of the Century: La Amistad

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.

District of Connecticut
In the S^d Circuit of the U. States

Be The President of the United
States of America -
The Marshall of
the District of Connecticut
Writing

We command you that you have before
our Circuit Court now in session at
Hartford in and for said District of
Connecticut at the opening of the Court

the bodies of the thirty ~~white~~ Africans
called by the names

Burnah	Carfon	Forn	Shannah
Conowah	Choolay	Carla	Cabbah
Bangyah	Tah	Yahonah	Yongnam
Nichob	Dannah	Burnah ^d	Boah
Pornah	Peah	Beah	Alorrah
Nahquai	Quah	Lee	Can
Fivira	Fahjinal	Tah	Yahbi
Fahannah	Bern	Tavon	Corhamah
Yahbow	Kannah	Carla ^d	Antonio

of Siqua
or by whatever names they are
called now in your custody & keeping
whether in Prison or elsewhere in and under
your charge & care together with the
cases of their capture and detention & to
decide and do what said Court may
order and adjudge in the premises & have
you there this writ with you return
thereon - Writing to His Honor B. Taney Esq
Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the U. States
at Hartford the 21st day of Sept. 1839.

Wm. Marshall
Clerk

In the matter of
Cinqué & the Africans,
for a Habeas Corpus.

Warrant of
Habeas Corpus.

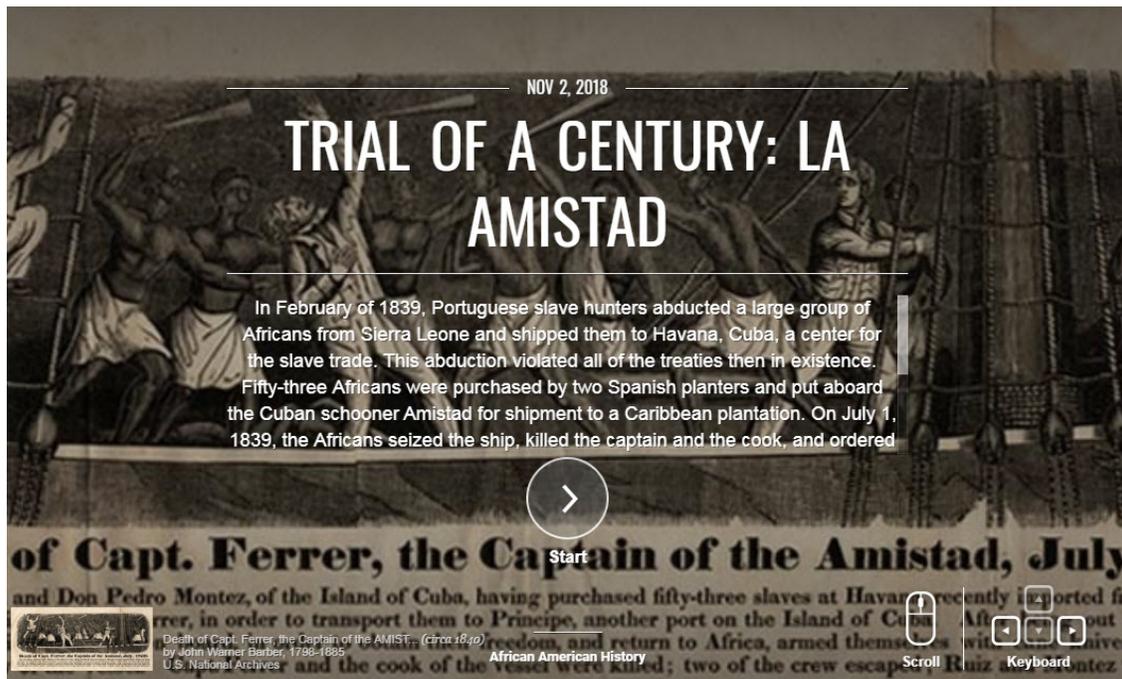
United States v. Cinque and the Africans, Warrant for Habeas Corpus, 11/19/1839. [National Archives Identifier 2641484](https://www.archives.gov/federal-court-records/1839-1841).

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 district 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 U.S. District Attorney filed an appeal to the Supreme Court.

This [case file contains the records filed in the "Amistad" case](https://www.archives.gov/federal-court-records/1839-1841). In the trial before the Supreme Court in January 1841, the Africans were represented by former U.S. President John Quincy Adams. 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.

Opinion of the Supreme Court in *United States v. the Amistad*, 3/9/1841. [National Archives Identifier 301672](#)

You can learn more about this case, and find teaching activities and related primary sources for educators on our [website](#). And see our latest [Google Arts & Culture exhibit](#) about the Amistad case:



Want to help make these records more discoverable? Help us transcribe records from the Amistad case in our newest mission on the [Citizen Archivist dashboard](#)! Every word you transcribe improves search functionality in our Catalog and helps to unlock history.

Get Started Transcribing!

Archives Cookie Exchange

We love being surrounded by delicious and decadent treats this time of year, but we suspect this [200 Year Old Pound Cake Recipe](#) might tip the holiday scale with all the butter, sugar, eggs, and flour it calls for!

200 Year-old Pound-cake Recipe

1-lb. of sugar
1-lb. of flour
1-lb. of butter: (scant)
9 large eggs



Mix sugar and butter, add well-beaten egg-yolks. Add flour gradually and last, add stiffly beaten egg-whites. Flavor with lemon extract. Bake in flue cake-pan, slowly, for at least one hour. Ice and then cover with English walnut-halves.

Nelle Tilford Noland

This cake recipe was passed down through the Truman family, and shared with Bess Truman by Mary Ethel and Nellie Noland, cousins of Harry S. Truman.

Want to see more recipes from the archives? For more delicious and historic recipes this holiday season, be sure to follow #ArchivesCookieExchange on the [@USNatArchives Instagram account](#). Recipes and stories will be shared each week in December.

Have you tried this pound cake recipe, or any others from our holdings? Let us know how they turn out! Happy vintage baking!

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