

THE BEGINNINGS OF OUR GLOBAL AGE: EUROPE AND THE AMERICAS

Biography

Captured and sold as a slave in his native Africa, Joseph Cinque faced many hardships on the Middle Passage, one leg of the slave transport network, from Africa to the Americas. It was during a journey from one port in Cuba to another aboard the slave ship *Amistad* that Cinque made history. ♦ *As you read, note how Cinque's hardships aboard the *Técora* may have influenced his actions on the *Amistad*. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

Joseph Cinque (about 1810–about 1879)

Joseph Cinque, whose name at birth was believed to have been Sengbe Pieh, lived in West Africa at a time when the slave trade was active. While he was in his twenties, Cinque, who was married with children, was captured and sold to Spanish slave traders.

Once captured, Cinque was forced to walk for days before he reached the African coast. Then, he was taken on board the Portuguese slave ship *Técora*, headed for Cuba. During the voyage, Cinque and other slaves faced numerous hardships, including overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, and lack of food. Many prisoners died during the voyage to Cuba.

Because it was illegal to import slaves into the Spanish colony of Cuba, the slavers smuggled the captives in during the night. To pass the slaves off as Cuban-born, their captors gave them Spanish names. Sengbe Pieh's name was changed to Joseph Cinque. Soon he was on board the *Amistad*, bound for a Cuban plantation.

Although the slaves on board the *Amistad* were to be sold to plantation owners, the ship's cook told Cinque and other slaves that they

would be killed and eaten when they reached land. Convincing the other prisoners that they had nothing to lose by trying to break free, Cinque became the leader of a mutiny. During the night, Cinque managed to break free of his chains. He then freed his fellow prisoners. Armed with knives they had found on board, the slaves killed the ship's captain, the cook, and most of the crew. Cinque ordered the remaining slave traders to sail toward Africa.

Unbeknownst to Cinque, the Spanish headed the ship north toward the United States. The U.S. Coast Guard captured the ship.

Cinque and the other surviving Africans were charged with murder and mutiny. After a historic trial in 1841, during which Cinque was defended by former president John Quincy Adams and testified himself, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Africans had, indeed, been illegally kidnapped and sold, and their mutiny had been an act of self-defense.

Private and missionary society donations helped fund the voyage for the surviving Africans' return home. In late 1841, Cinque and the others returned to Africa as free men.



Joseph Cinque, 1839

Questions to Think About

1. Why was Sengbe Pieh's name changed to Joseph Cinque?
2. Why were Cinque and the other slaves not found guilty of murder by the U.S. Supreme Court?
3. **Draw Inferences** How do you think the hardships Cinque faced during the Middle Passage to the Americas influenced his actions on the *Amistad*?