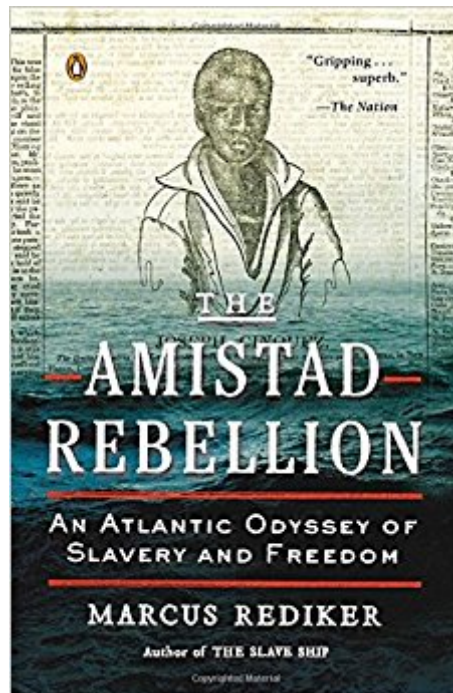




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# The Amistad Rebellion: An Atlantic Odyssey Of Slavery And Freedom



## Synopsis

A unique account of the most successful slave rebellion in American history, *Amistad* is now updated with a new epilogue from the award-winning author of *The Slave Ship*. In this powerful and highly original account, Marcus Rediker reclaims the *Amistad* rebellion for its true proponents: the enslaved Africans who risked death to stake a claim for freedom. Using newly discovered evidence and featuring vividly drawn portraits of the rebels, their captors, and their abolitionist allies, Rediker reframes the story to show how a small group of courageous men fought and won an epic battle against Spanish and American slaveholders and their governments. The successful *Amistad* rebellion changed the very nature of the struggle against slavery. As a handful of self-emancipated Africans steered their own course for freedom, they opened a way for millions to follow. This edition includes a new epilogue about the author's trip to Sierra Leone to search for Lomboko, the slave-trading factory where the *Amistad* Africans were incarcerated, and other relics and connections to the *Amistad* rebellion, especially living local memory of the uprising and the people who made it.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

**\*Starred Review\*** Rediker (*The Slave Ship*, 2007) goes against the grain of most accounts of the *Amistad* rebellion, which feature heroic abolitionists and an American system that ultimately stood up for the freedom of the Africans who mutinied against their slave-catchers. In this impressive account, Rediker stays firmly focused on the African rebels themselves. In 1839, nearly three

months into the journey to Cuba, the 53 captives took control of the ship and, with the help of a hostage navigator, attempted to sail it back to Africa. Recaptured off the shores of America, the rebels were jailed and caught up in a legal challenge to slavery that went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. Originally from various inland African nations, the men developed a kinship that sustained them through captivity, rebellion, incarceration, and the three-year campaign that eventually freed them. Led by Cinque, the Africans asserted their agency, learning English, drawing parallels between the American justice system and their own tribal councils, and working with abolitionists to plan their defense. Rediker details the dynamics of the relationships between the Amistad Africans, the abolitionists, and their slave-trading opposition, offering a totally enthralling account of the Amistad rebellion and its place in the broader American story of revolt against a great threat to liberty. --Vanessa Bush --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

“Gripping...Superb...As Marcus Rediker’s new book reminds us, the place of the [Amistad] rebellion in popular memory hasn’t always been secure.”--The Nation  
“The great strength of this work—aside from Rediker’s vivid style as a writer and meticulous research—is that he brings the Amistad Africans back to center stage where they have often been pushed to the side.”--Pittsburgh Post-Gazette  
Vividly drawn—this stunning book honors the achievement of the captive Africans who fought for—and won—their freedom.”--The Philadelphia Tribune  
“Spectacularly researched and fluidly composed, this latest study offers some much needed perspective on a critical yet often overlooked event in America’s history.”--Publishers Weekly (starred review)  
“A totally enthralling account of the Amistad rebellion and its place in the broader American story of revolt against a great threat to liberty.”--Booklist (starred review)  
“A first-rate example of history told from the bottom up.”--Kirkus (starred review)  
“Rediker takes a fresh approach to the Amistad rebellion by focusing on the Africans who revolted rather than on the American political and judicial response, which takes the central place in most previous works.”--Library Journal

In the acknowledgements of *The Amistad Rebellion* Rediker says that he wrote the book as a companion to his earlier book *The Slave Ship*. He says that after writing about the failed struggles of those enslaved and tortured within the machinery of Atlantic World commerce he wanted to write a story about successful rebellion. And this is what he has done excellently in this book. Just as in *The Slave Ship*, Rediker tells the story from the perspective of those on the bottom. This is

especially challenging as most of the historical sources are written and created by those in more privileged positions. Indeed even when being told from the perspective of the abolitionists who are supporting the Amistad the author is careful to point out that their motives for helping them did not line up perfectly with the rebels themselves and that both used the other to get what they wanted. The reader get the impression that from the moment they broke their chains on board the ship the rebels played an active hand in their destiny overcoming a language barrier and the many racist assumptions about them. Rediker does an excellent job of describing how the rebels fashioned a new African identity in the new world that served their cause of getting back home. He also puts many of the actions and words of the rebels in the appropriate cultural lens so that they do not just come off as quaint tribal customs. Despite his own self criticism, I felt that Rediker demonstrated that even in the most desperate and cruel conditions, enslaved Africans managed to show some agency in their passive and futile resistance to the slave trade. In Amistad he shows just how far this resistance could go. Despite the fact that most of the main characters of the story were African and did not even speak English ( at least in the beginning) their struggle for freedom is a very American one.

The book delves into many facets of the event (and those leading up to it) as well as the time the "AFRICANS" spent in jail. The interplay of politics reminds all of us that the present stupidity in Washington is not a new state of affairs. Then, like now, it was about what will win my next election. We also learned more about the principals and the slavers (many of whom were the "folks back home" who reaped large profits in the trade of humans. All in all, a fine book that puts a hard time in our history in context. I'd recommend this book highly, and in fact - already have

The slave trade of many millions of Africans during more than 400 years, starting in the fifteenth century onwards, has been perhaps the biggest crime ever perpetrated in modern history. True, there were many more horrendous crimes, including the horrible Shoah against 6 millions Jews, however the proportions and magnitude of the slave trade are unique in themselves. One can easily say that tens of millions were murdered after being fully exploited in the name of Mammon. In his new book, Professor Rediker tells the tragic story and history of the Amistad from another perspective, namely that of those rebels who fought for their freedom. Ironically, the name "Amistad" means "friendship" in Spanish. But the Spanish who enslaved the tens of slaves on the ship were hardly the friends of those wretched souls who eventually rebelled against the ship's captain and the rest of the story need not be repeated here. However, the second part of this

fascinating book is more significant and thus more interesting, since it describes in great detail how the rebels adapted to the new life in New Haven, with the strong help offered by their abolitionist supporters and friends. The anti-slavery movement, which started to be active to a greater degree during the 30s and 40s of the nineteenth century, decided on a mass propaganda campaign in order to free the slaves who were originally intended to be dropped as human cargo in Cuba, courtesy of the Spanish government. Sugar was the name of the game and Cuba hoped to become the main trading center of it. The island belonged to Spain and slave ships were landing around 10000 Africans in Cuba every year. Professor Rediker explains to what extent the legal procedures were focused on one main issue which was whether the slaves were legally or illegally enslaved. One of the main heroes in this book is Lewis Tappan, who had been a supporter of the abolitionists. He was a wealthy silk merchant and an evangelical Christian and zealous abolitionist whose commitment of money, time and energy to the rebels was extraordinary from the moment he heard of the uprising. The judge, Andrew Judson, accepted that the Africans were enslaved illegally, however the final decision rested with the Supreme Court of the USA. Another lawyer, Roger S Baldwin, who descended from a powerful political Connecticut family, made the argument about the fact that the rebels arrived in the United States in "the actual condition of freedom" which they had legitimately won under arms. Eventually, the rebels were released and after 1842 returned to Africa. One of the most moving episodes in the book is about the mother of one of the rebels, Burna, who threw herself at his feet, after she had not seen her son for more than three years. One missionary accompanying Burna wrote that he had never seen "before such an expression of nature's own feelings, unrestrained by art or refinement". After a considerable time, the mother began to sing a song of welcome, as she and her long-lost son joyously rubbed the palm of their right hands in the traditional way. However, the missionaries who accompanied them on their way back were disappointed in them, since many of the rebels discarded many of the acquired American habits and ways of life. Some have even succumbed to licentiousness, meaning whoring and bigamy, and even those newspapers in the USA which supported the rebels began asking themselves many questions about the rebels' ways of life. This book is a more than wonderful and engrossing history from below, which gives a spectacular account of everyday life of the rebels and the efforts invested in them to Americanize them. There are chapters about the daily lives of the prisoners, their meetings with the abolitionists, what they ate, drank or talked about, the hellish conditions in which they were being held on the ship, the atmosphere outside the courtroom, the deeds of the activists who spared no effort to free the rebels, the various speeches made by their lawyers, including that of John Quincy Adams, the American President, who "had some fun about the definition of piracy"-the

issue which the prosecutors brought up in order to indict the rebels, and many more episodes which happened after their release as well as descriptions about the daily lives of the rebels' leader Cinque, whose message to his people was the death was preferable to slavery. There is a chapter on a play about the rebellion, which was performed at the Bowery theatre in New York, which opened six days after the rebels were brought ashore in Connecticut. The play was seen by thousands of New Yorkers, many of them workers, and was called one of the hits of the season. Based on new documents, this book is superb and will become a landmark in the historiography of slavery. It is also important because it is one example of the human spirit which defied and vanquished the evil forces. "A small band of multiethnic Africans aboard the "Amistad" succeeded against all odds", writes Professor Rediker. The odyssey of the captured slaves was unprecedented in the annals of New World slavery.

I appreciated how visual the book was because this is a different time and I think the story should not be sugar coated. The details stunned me from beginning to end. I would like a book that is written first hand from the "Mendi People" themselves though. I think a lot may have been lost in translation.

The first two chapters are hard to follow and can get pretty boring. However, after that the story picks up and gets a lot better. Gives you a great understanding of the men involved in the Amistad rebellion.

Its a little boring to read. I did learn a lot about the Amistad and the men who were involved. Buy it and unless you are a history buff read 20 pages or so, then come back to it tomorrow... worth reading and worth knowing.

In addition to describing the Amistad rebellion, the author discusses the rebels' cultures and histories. It's a dramatic and moving story of a successful fight for freedom against long odds.

excellent research; pleasure to read

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