

[Sample of Materials Developed for Harlem Freedom School: Image Builders]

THE AFRICAN CHIEF

Chained in a foreign land he stood,
 A man of giant frame
 Amid the gathering multitude
 That shrunk to hear his name—
 All stern of look and strong of limb,
 His dark eyes on the ground—
 And silently they gazed on him
 As on a lion bound.

Vainly, but well that chief had fought—
 He was a captive now;
 Yet pride that fortune humbles not
 Was written on his brow.
 The scars his dark broad bosom wore
 Showed warrior true and brave;
 A prince among his tribe before,
 He could not be a slave.

—William Cullen Bryant

JOSEPH CINQUE, FIGHTER FOR LIBERTY

The Africans were ready!

In the middle of night Cinque gave the signal and he and his men, shouting war cries, attacked the ship's crew. After a terrible fight, the Africans won and the slave ship was theirs. They were free at last.

Who was this Cinque, this man of courage who led his people to freedom?

Joseph Cinque, the son of a Mendi chief in Sierra Leone, West Africa, was sold into slavery in 1839. After being shipped to Havana, Cuba, he and fifty other Africans were bought by two Spaniards and placed on board the *Amistad* for shipment to Puerto Principe, Cuba.

After capturing the ship, Cinque set the sailors adrift in open boats and ordered the ship's owners to set sail for Africa.

But the Spaniards steered the ship northward. They sailed for sixty-three days, back and forth across the ocean. After ten Africans had died of thirst and lack of food, the *Amistad* arrived off the coast of Long Island in August, 1839.

The Africans had found rich clothing and gold on the ship. They dressed themselves in their new garments and went ashore to buy food and fresh water. Word soon spread throughout the land that a fierce band of Africans was sailing the seas off the east coast of America.

An American Navy vessel sighted the strange ship and sent a party of men aboard. Surprised to find only the Africans in charge, the Americans ordered all hands below deck. Facing the guns of the sailors, Cinque and some of his men dived into the ocean to escape. They swam toward the shore but were captured and brought back to the ship. The *Amistad* was escorted to New Haven, Connecticut. There, Cinque and the other Africans, except for three small girls, were accused of murdering the *Amistad*'s captain. They were placed in jail to await trial.

The Africans spoke a language which no one in New Haven understood. But they made many friends among the townspeople. The three little African girls began to learn English words. Professor Josiah Williard Gibbs of Yale University was able to learn a few words of their language by speaking with them. After a long search, he located a Mendi sailor, named James Covey, aboard a British ship in New York harbor, who could serve as an interpreter for Cinque and his men.

Through James Covey the story of Cinque and *Amistad* was revealed and American newspapers were filled with stories about them. Persons who did not believe in slavery came to their aid. They said that the Africans had been kidnapped from their homes and had the right of free people anywhere to fight for their freedom.

When the trial began, there was great excitement in the country. People talked about the case and took sides. Southern politicians wanted to give the