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Amistad I

Lead: The passengers of the slave ship *Amistad*, remembered in print and film, were swept up into the caldron of national dispute as America decided what kind of nation it would be.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: Unfinished business. When the founders of the United States declared their independence and then later established their national compact, they left several matters of great import for future

generations to decide. Among the most important issues needing resolution was the running moral sore of slavery. To be fair, in the late 1700s only a very few, usually very radical thinkers even considered restricting the practice let alone advocating an end to slavery. It had been part of life since the beginning of human existence.

The intellectual struggle of leaders such as Thomas Jefferson and George Washington was understandable. They were well-read, bright people who could not but cringe at the obvious inconsistency between the lofty ideals of the Declaration and the Constitution and those ideas practically applied. Social and

economic pressure was too great in their generation, however, to permit much more than the banning of the external slave trade by 1808. This festering sore would only get worse and continue to embitter national discussion until it was settled by force of arms in the 1860s.

When the long, low black schooner *Amistad*, coasted to its anchor off Culloden Point, eastern Long Island on August 25, 1839, its passengers would soon find themselves caught up in America's great unfinished business. They were slaves, illegally imported from Sierra Leone in West Africa to Cuba. While being transshipped, they overwhelmed their new owners and found themselves

sailing north along the eastern coast of the United States. Next time: a question of jurisdiction.

**At the University of Richmond,
this is Dan Roberts.**

Resources

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