

This book is the first full-scale treatment of the only instance in history in which African blacks, seized by slave dealers, won their freedom and returned home. In 1839, Joseph Cinque led other blacks in a revolt on the Spanish slave ship Amistad in the Caribbean. They steered the ship northward to Montauk, Long Island, where it was seized by an American naval vessel. With the Africans jailed in Connecticut and the Spaniards claiming violation of their property rights, an international controversy erupted. The Amistad affair united abolitionists in the U.S. and England, drove the White House into almost any means to quiet the issue, and placed the U.S. and Spain in a confrontation that threatened to involve England and Cuba. The abolitionists, led by Lewis Tappan, Joshua Leavitt and others argued that equal justice was the central issue in the case. Appealing to natural law, evangelical arguments, and moral suasion in proclaiming slavery a sin, they sought to establish that all persons, black and white, has an inherent right of liberty and thereby hoped to erase the color line that formed the racial foundation of slavery. In their eyes, the mutiny on the Amistad offered an ideal opportunity to awaken Americans to the injustice of slavery. In this book, Howard Jones shows how the abolitionist argument put the laws of nature on trial in the U.S., as Tappan and the others refused to accept a legal system claiming to dispense justice while permitting artificial distinctions based on race or color. Jones vividly captures the compelling drama that climaxed in a U.S. Supreme court ruling that freed the captives and allowed them to return to Africa. He notes that many of the abolitionists were nonetheless dissatisfied with the decision because it had not rested on the law of nature; yet, he observes, even they failed to grasp the central importance of the affair: that America's legal system had fulfilled its function of securing justice. About the Author: Howard Jones, is Professor of History at the University of Alabama and author of *The Course of American Diplomacy* and *To the Webster-Ashburton Treaty*.

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