

ASSEMBLY JOINT RESOLUTION

No. 228

STATE OF NEW JERSEY 219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED MAY 12, 2021

Sponsored by:

Assemblywoman ANNETTE QUIJANO

District 20 (Union)

Assemblyman BENJIE E. WIMBERLY

District 35 (Bergen and Passaic)

Assemblywoman SHAVONDA E. SUMTER

District 35 (Bergen and Passaic)

SYNOPSIS

Designates February 28 of each year as “Amistad Day.”

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.



(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 6/21/2021)

1 **A JOINT RESOLUTION** designating February 28 of each year as
2 “Amistad Day.”
3
4 **WHEREAS**, The *Amistad* case is arguably the most important legal case
5 involving slavery to arise during the nineteenth century; and
6 **WHEREAS**, Aside from raising issues of criminal and international law,
7 and of property rights, the case served as a test of the United States’
8 commitment to live up to its founding principles; and
9 **WHEREAS**, In 1839, Portuguese slavers illegally transported hundreds
10 of Africans from present day Sierra Leone to Cuba, then a Spanish
11 colony, in violation of treaties that outlawed the international slave
12 trade; and
13 **WHEREAS**, 53 of the Africans were later purchased by two enslavers
14 and boarded onto a schooner called *La Amistad* that set sail from
15 Havana bound for Puerto Principe (now Camagüey), Cuba; and
16 **WHEREAS**, During the voyage, Joseph Cinque, one of the Africans
17 aboard the ship, found a way to unshackle himself and the others
18 aboard and planned a mutiny; and
19 **WHEREAS**, On the morning of July 2, and in the middle of a storm, the
20 Africans killed the captain and a crewmember using knives found
21 in the cargo hold and captured Jose Ruiz and Pedro Montes, the two
22 enslavers who had purchased them, before gaining control of the
23 ship; and
24 **WHEREAS**, Cinque ordered Ruiz and Montes to sail the *Amistad* back
25 to Africa and, although the two men complied during the day, at
26 night they steered the ship northward towards United States waters;
27 and
28 **WHEREAS**, After nearly two months at sea, a U.S. Navy ship seized
29 the *Amistad* off the coast of Long Island, New York and escorted it
30 to New London, Connecticut, where authorities freed Ruiz and
31 Montes and jailed the Africans; and
32 **WHEREAS**, Ruiz and Montes, along with the Spanish government, then
33 went to court arguing that the *Amistad* and its cargo be returned
34 pursuant to a 1795 treaty between Spain and the United States and
35 that the Africans be re-enslaved; and
36 **WHEREAS**, In January 1840, the federal district court in Connecticut
37 ruled that the Africans aboard the *Amistad* were illegally enslaved,
38 that they would not be returned to Cuba to stand trial, and that they
39 should be allowed to return to Africa; and
40 **WHEREAS**, The case was later appealed to the Supreme Court where
41 abolitionist groups enlisted the help of former President John
42 Quincy Adams to represent the Africans aboard the *Amistad*; and
43 **WHEREAS**, In presenting his arguments before the court, Adams noted
44 that the case was a test of America’s willingness to stand up for the
45 ideals upon which it was founded saying that “the moment you
46 come to the Declaration of Independence, that every man has a
47 right to life and liberty, an unalienable right, this case is decided”;
48 and

1 **WHEREAS**, On March 9, 1841, the Supreme Court ruled by a 7-1 vote
2 that the Africans had been illegally enslaved, that they should be
3 allowed to return to their homeland, and that they had rightfully
4 exercised the natural right to fight for their freedom by staging a
5 mutiny aboard the ship; and

6 **WHEREAS**, In honor of the brave men and women who fought for their
7 freedom aboard the *Amistad* and to ensure that the history and
8 contributions of African-Americans are properly integrated into
9 social studies curricula in the State’s public schools, the Amistad
10 Commission was established in 2002; and

11 **WHEREAS**, To advance this purpose, the commission distributes
12 educational materials to school districts and holds annual teacher
13 workshops concerning the African slave trade, slavery in America,
14 the vestiges of slavery, and the contributions African-Americans
15 have made to our society; and

16 **WHEREAS**, The commission also continuously monitors and assesses
17 the extent to which the materials it distributes have been included in
18 curricula across the State and makes recommendations to the State
19 Board of Education on the ways in which content about the slave
20 trade, American slavery, and African-American history can be
21 further incorporated into the New Jersey Student Learning
22 Standards; and

23 **WHEREAS**, The State of New Jersey further recognizes the
24 contributions and accomplishments of African-Americans by
25 joining with other states and the federal government in designating
26 February of each year as “Black History Month”; and

27 **WHEREAS**, It is fitting and proper to set aside a day during Black
28 History Month to further highlight the importance of the *Amistad*
29 case to the American abolitionist movement and to the cause of
30 liberty and equality throughout the world; now, therefore,

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32 **BE IT RESOLVED** *by the Senate and General Assembly of the*
33 *State of New Jersey:*

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35 1. February 28 of each year shall be designated as “Amistad
36 Day” throughout the State of New Jersey in recognition of the
37 importance of the *Amistad* case to the American abolitionist
38 movement and to the causes of liberty and equality throughout the
39 world.

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41 2. The Governor shall annually issue a proclamation calling
42 upon public officials and the citizens of this State to observe
43 “Amistad Day” with appropriate ceremonies, programs, and
44 activities.

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46 3. This joint resolution shall take effect immediately.

STATEMENT

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This joint resolution designates February 28 of each year as “Amistad Day” throughout the State of New Jersey in recognition of the importance of the *Amistad* case to the American abolitionist movement and to the causes of liberty and equality throughout the world. The *Amistad* case is arguably the most important legal case involving slavery to arise during the nineteenth century and has been seen by many as a test of the United States’ commitment to live up to its founding principles.

In 1839, Portuguese slavers illegally transported hundreds of Africans from present day Sierra Leone to Cuba in violation of treaties that outlawed the international slave trade. 53 of the Africans were later purchased by Jose Ruiz and Pedro Montes, two enslavers, and boarded onto a schooner called *La Amistad* that set sail from Havana bound for Puerto Principe (now Camagüey), Cuba. During the voyage, Joseph Cinque, one of the Africans aboard the ship, found a way to unshackle himself and the others aboard and staged a revolt. The Africans would go on to gain control of the ship and ordered Ruiz and Montes to sail the *Amistad* back to Africa. Although the two men complied during the day, they steered the ship northward towards United States waters at night.

The ship was later seized by the U.S. Navy off the coast of Long Island, New York, and escorted to New London, Connecticut, where authorities freed Ruiz and Montes and jailed the Africans. Ruiz and Montes, along with the Spanish government, then went to court arguing that the *Amistad* and its cargo be returned pursuant to a 1795 treaty between Spain and the United States and that the Africans be re-enslaved. The case was eventually appealed to the Supreme Court, which ruled by a 7-1 vote that the Africans had been illegally enslaved, that they should be allowed to return to their homeland, and that they had rightfully exercised their natural right to fight for their freedom by staging a mutiny aboard the ship.

Given the importance of the *Amistad* case to the American abolitionist movement and to the causes of liberty and equality throughout the world, this joint resolution calls upon the State to set aside a day during Black History Month to commemorate the men and women aboard the *Amistad* who bravely fought for their freedom both on land and at sea.