

0. JOHN QUINCY ADAMS FOR THE DEFENSE - Story
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John Quincy Adams, former U.S. President, argues on behalf of the Amistad defendants before the U.S. Supreme Court. Illustration from *Lives of the Presidents, A Graphic History of the United States* by John S. C. Abbott (published in 1902). PD

Roger Baldwin fought the Van Buren administration with a former U.S. President: [John Quincy Adams](#), then a Congressman. At 73-years old, Adams hadn't argued a case in thirty years. His record on anti-slavery issues was not impressive.

He was, however, a passionate believer in the [Declaration of Independence](#) (the link takes you to an original) which his father, John Adams, had [signed](#). (This link, to the 1823 "Stone engraving," is easier to read than the highly faded original. Note John Adams' signature in the right-hand column of the Declaration.)

Adams met most of the imprisoned Africans on November 17, 1840. His [diary](#) reflects his reaction to their plight. More importantly, Adams was touched by the January 4, 1841 letter he received from Kali, an African who had learned some English. That [letter](#) pleaded:

All we want is make us free.

Adams agreed to help. He filed persuasive briefs with the Supreme Court. (This link takes you to one of [his handwritten](#) briefs.)

As the hearing date approached, Adams worried about his presentation. He was outraged at the Africans' treatment. He knew he had a quick-temper. A December 12, 1840 entry from his diary notes his concerns:

Of all the dangers before me, that of losing my self possession is the most formidable - I am yet unable to prepare the outline of the argument which I must be ready to offer the second week of January. Let me not forget my duty.

The *Amistad* Africans had attracted much media attention, thanks to the work of abolitionists. The only surviving account, *A History of the Amistad Captives*, describes each person. (The link takes you to the complete [pamphlet](#).)

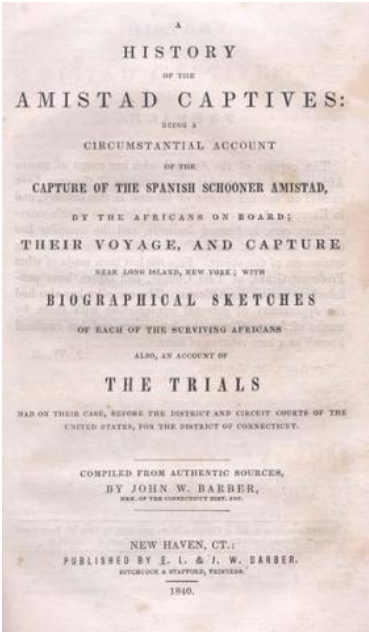
It wasn't just the Africans who were relying on the arguments of the former President. Both the North and the South were keenly aware of the importance of the case. So were the Spaniards, including their Queen.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/JOHN-QUINCY-ADAMS-FOR-THE-DEFENSE-Amistad-Incident>

See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](#)

Media Stream

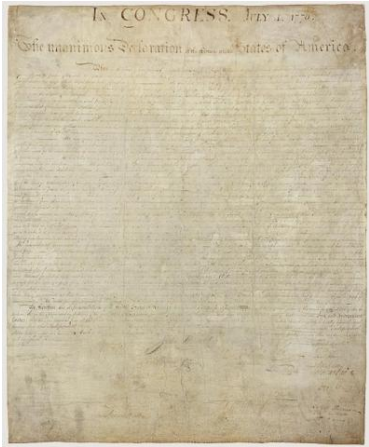


Barber's Amistad Pamphlet

Image depicting the title page from *A History of the Amistad Captives: Being a Circumstantial Account of the Capture of the Spanish Schooner Amistad*, Compiled by John W. Barber. It was published, in 1840, by E.L and J.W. Barber (in New Haven, Connecticut).
 Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.

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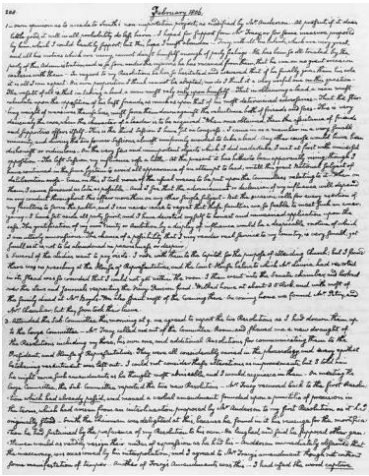
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Declaration of Independence

Image online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.
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Diary - John Quincy Adams

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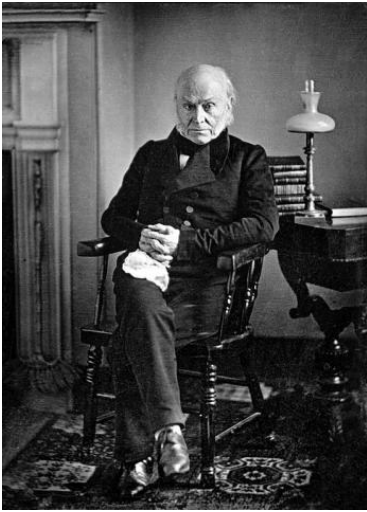


Image - John Quincy Adams

Image, described above, currently maintained at the NY Metropolitan Museum of Art.

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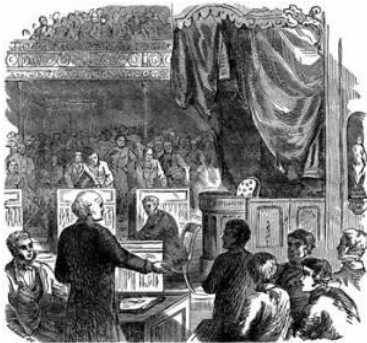


Signatures of the Declaration of Independence

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