

# *Amistad*

Directed by:  
Steven Spielberg

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**Pd 3**  
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*Amistad* (Spielberg, 1997) is a film based on a group of Africans that are transported through the middle passage and revolt and kill the ship's crew. Then the group is captured by the American Navy and is brought to the United States for trial. The most prominent themes in the film were Brutality of the middle passage, irony, and justice. Although unity of a country and moral righteousness were also important to the film Brutality of the middle passage, justice, and irony played larger roles.

Brutality of the middle passage displayed cruelty that was rivaled by no other. After Cinque is kidnapped from his home in Africa he is stowed in slave fortress. From there he is loaded on to a slave ship known as the *Tecora* along with hundreds of other slaves. On this ship the living conditions were unsanitary and uninhabitable. The slaves were forced to eat scraps of unknown foods and packed tightly together where disease and infection spread quickly. The insubordinate were whipped brutality till the brink of death or if the crew felt necessary killed. The women were raped and treated like animals by the crew. As for the sick a fate of unimaginable terror awaited them. The sick were chained together in groups and attached to rocks and then thrown overboard left to drown. Brutality of the middle passage is something that cannot be compared to even the most heinous of crimes or injustices. (Spielberg, 1997)

An equally important theme of the film was the irony exhibited throughout the film. The film had many ironic twist beginning with the scene where the Supreme Court Justices voted on freeing the Africans. Despite seven out of nine of them being slave owners they decided to set the Africans free. The next ironic twist and the most devastating was that of Cinque's return to his home in Africa. After going through all the trouble and hardships to return home Cinque returns to a destroyed and desolate land. He comes back to find his village destroyed and his family captured and sold into slavery. It was a hollow meaningless victory that cut the Africans deep. (Spielberg, 1997)

The Final and most important theme of the film was justice. When the group of Africans led by Cinque arrives to America they are immediately put on trial. There are four groups fighting for the slaves. The groups are the Spaniards Ruiz and Montez, the United State Navy, Queen Isabella, and the abolitionist group. In the first trial the slaves would have been set free by the first judge but he was thrown off the case because they said his opinion was biased. The judge that actually set the slaves free was Judge Coglin despite the fact that he was directly chosen by Martin Van Buren because they assumed he would make the "right choice". Although the slaves were set free Van Buren vetoed the decision and the trial was sent to the Supreme Court. Here in the highest court all the Supreme Court justices decided on letting the slaves go free due to the fact that they were property of no one and were free people. Even though this went against what they believed they followed the law right to the end and chose what was fair. This proved that even with the odds against the Africans justice still pulled through for them. (Spielberg, 1997)

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### **References:**

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