

The New Criterion

Notebook

March 1998

From history to Hollywood: the voyage of "La Amistad"

by [Robert L. Paquette](#)

In 1839, fifty-three enslaved Africans aboard the Cuban schooner *La Amistad*, coasting eastward from Havana toward a village port in north-central Cuba, took advantage of a summer night and a small, sleepy crew to rise in revolt. One of the young men, named Cinqué, a Mende-speaker from a region near the Windward Coast of West Africa, led the uprising by killing the ship's cook and captain. Several crewmen met the same fate, although José Ruiz and Pedro Montes, the Cuban middlemen who had purchased the Africans in Havana, were spared to navigate the rebels back to their homeland. Instead, the clever Cubans tacked indifferently to the east by day and earnestly to the northwest by night, ending up weeks later, with the increasingly desperate mutineers dehydrated and diminished in number, off the coast of Long Island. There the U.S. Coast Guard spotted the wounded vessel and seized it and the reb ...

Robert L. Paquette is **Robert L Paquette** teaches in the Department of History at Hamilton College.

[more from this author](#)

This article originally appeared in The New Criterion, Volume 16 March 1998, on page 74

Copyright © 2008 The New Criterion | www.newcriterion.com

<http://www.newcriterion.com/articles.cfm/amistad-paquette-3100>