



*The Africans walked to the courtroom in chains.*

court was full. People wanted to see the ‘murderers’. Most of the crowd were white but there were one or two black faces.

Judge Judson came into the room and sat down. Immediately the US lawyer, William Holabird, began to speak against the Africans. But as soon as he began, Lewis Tappan stood up among the crowd, waving some papers before the judge. ‘Sir, I and many others would like to speak *for* these men. At the moment, they have no one to speak for them and they cannot speak for themselves.’

‘Mr Tappan, try to remember that you are not a lawyer,’ began Holabird with an unpleasant smile, but again he did not finish his sentence. A policeman with two important-looking men pushed through the crowd. The first man was Señor Calderon, from Spain. The second was John Forsyth, a US government secretary.

Now, nobody knew what was happening.

‘The slaves,’ said Secretary Forsyth, ‘belong to Spain, and we must return them to Spain immediately. . .’

‘Those slaves belong to me and my friend here,’ said another

voice. Everyone looked round to see who was speaking.

‘We, Thomas Gedney and Richard Meade, saved the Spanish ship, *Amistad*, and everything she was carrying. That means the slaves too!’

Secretary Forsyth laughed loudly.

‘Do you think you are more important than the queen of Spain?’ Judge Judson asked.

There were a few laughs from the crowd. The judge told them to be silent. ‘Are there any other people that I need to hear from?’ he continued.

Another voice answered, ‘The slaves really belong to these two men here.’ It was another lawyer, speaking for Ruiz and Montes. Judge Judson looked down into the room full of people. How, he thought, has this case become so difficult? It was almost funny.

A young man standing at the back of the court thought it was very funny. He was a lawyer too – Roger Baldwin – and he thought he knew the answer to the problem.



Outside the court, Baldwin went up to Lewis Tappan and told him his name and job.

‘You’re a property lawyer?’ asked Tappan, looking at the young man’s cheap clothes and untidy hair.

‘Yes, if people cannot agree about property, and who it belongs to, they need me. I’d like to help you.’

Tappan and Joadson didn’t seem to understand.

‘Clearly,’ explained Baldwin, ‘the problem of the slaves is a problem of who they belong to. Everyone thinks, rightly or wrongly, that the slaves belong to them. . .’

Tappan stopped Baldwin with a wave of his hand.

‘I’m sorry, but what we need is a criminal lawyer for these *men*, not a property lawyer for *slaves*,’ Tappan said.