

Florida church remembers historic slave ship mutiny

By Dave Marks

Special to Sentinel-Voice
 FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (NNPA) – The Church of the Open Door, a Congregational United Church of Christ located in Liberty City, recently held an eighth annual Amistad Sunday. It was in honor of the Africans who seized the slave ship Amistad in 1839 and the Connecticut Congregationalists who responded to the Africans' arrest by organizing their defense.

In that case before the U.S. Supreme Court, former President John Quincy Adams argued the case for the Africans who won their freedom.

The service honored the group called the Amistad Committee that defended the Amistad ship rebels. The service also honored the group that developed in 1846 and became known as the American Missionary Association.

These groups grew out of northern churches that were organized, praying over and doing scriptural study around the issues of the abolition of chattel slavery in the antebellum United States.

The people involved in those organizations felt that chattel slavery was a mark upon the early nation, and the nation's solving of the slave issue would be the only way the nation would live or die.

"When the Amistad uprising happened on that ship and sailed into Long Island Sound, a lot of those Christians felt that that was a sign from God that what they were praying about and thinking about was absolutely correct; it was confirmed," visiting speaker Reverend, Pastor of Plymouth Congregational Church in Washington, D.C., and National President of the Ministers for Racial, Social and Economic Justice of the United Church of Christ, Graylan Hagler told the *Westside Gazette*.

"They proceeded to organize through churches and through the community. People put together the defense to raise the question — which was to be one of the substantive questions around the whole the issue of slavery — as to whether somebody was actually cargo or somebody was free," said Hagler.

"The whole issue was those Northerners that were really, in a sense, motivated through the scriptures, through their study of the Bible to move for the abolition of slavery," said Hagler.

After the Civil War, the American Missionary Association went on to help in the founding and early development of what are now called Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

"They took on the issue of creating institutions where those who were now emancipated would be able to go and to receive the educational training, with which emancipated beings could assume roles and responsibilities in the society," said Hagler.

Another phase of the American Missionary Association was the establishment of churches. The Plymouth Congregational Church of Washington, D.C., was one of those churches established by the American Mission Association and Howard University.

"When we celebrate folks who are graduates of [HBCUs], we are really saying that it is because of these institutions that we have these type of constructive responsible players within the community helping to build something out of the community, and in the community because of the talents and gifts that they were given long ago with an uprising on a ship that was carrying cargo, and tried to call them slaves, years ago," said Hagler.

The issue of the Amistad

rebellion is still relevant today, according to Hagler.

"The paradigms often change, but the substance is still the same," said Hagler.

African-Americans have come through chattel slavery, legal segregation, and to today's condition of inequality, according to Hagler.

"We move into this very contemporary culture where few are enticed and feel that they have made it because they are able to achieve the trinkets, the material trinkets that the society offers; and at the same time, we have numbers of people wallowing in poverty, the types of health issues that we face, the types of housing issues that we face, and also the fact that our prisons and jails are filled with young Black men and even Black women at this point," said Hagler.

"The reality is, we have to continue to be vigilant; we have to continue to organize; we have to continue to resist," said Hagler.

"...Unfortunately, we get seduced into themes of patriotism when actually what is really going on is the economics that are ruling it. It's not patriotic at all, so you go and you allow yourself to be used as cannon fodder in a war that basically corporations... engaged in the market place are going to make out," said Hagler.

Church of the Open Door Reverend R. Joaquin Willis felt the service typified what they are trying to do in the African Heritage community with regards to keeping the history of the struggle for justice and freedom moving forward.

"I thought the service was very appropriate and our speaker (Hagler) really hit on the themes we needed to hit on," said Willis.

Dave Marks writes for the Westside Gazette

Jackson

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to show them sexually oriented material. He recalled testimony linked a friend of Jackson, one of several people named as unindicted coconspirators, to showing the material to the boys.

Ordered to bring in other witnesses, Sneddon called to the stand detectives who searched Neverland and had them identify dozens of packages of magazines and books.

The array included some magazines with teen themes that featured women just over age 18. There were titles such as *Girlfriends*, *Finally Legal*, *Girls of Barely Legal*, as well as *Playboy*, *Penthouse* and *Hustler* maga-

zines and centerfolds.

With no explanation, prosecutors also introduced a portrait of a Jackson friend, actor Macaulay Culkin. Under defense questioning, sheriff's Detective Craig Bonner acknowledged it was true no DNA from the accuser, his brother or any member of the family was found on any of the items.

Jackson, who has been late to court previously while being treated for what has been described as back pain, arrived about 20 minutes early Wednesday. He acknowledged a "We love you Michael" shout from a fan by waving, and walked slowly inside without leaning on others as he has at times.

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