



The Amistad Committee, Inc.

"All We Want Is Make Us Free"
Sengbe Pich (Joseph Cinque)
City Hall of New Haven
Dedicated September 26, 1992

Testimony

**Appropriations Committee, General Assembly
February 17, 2009**

Honorable Senator Harp and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

I am Alfred Marder, New Haven, President of the Amistad Committee, Inc. and Chairman of the State of Connecticut Freedom Trail.

In 1995, the General Assembly mandated the creation of the official Connecticut Freedom Trail. This was not only to commemorate the long history of contributions to Connecticut and United States history by African Americans and their White allies, but it was a recognition that highlighting the sites and history that fashioned our state and country would become a great boost to our economy. The legislation charged the Amistad Committee with responsibility for the September Freedom Trail Month and the Commission on Tourism with coordinating the Trail.

We initiated the Trail with 42 sites. Today we have more than 110 with 18 more towns submitting sites awaiting approval. Our aim is to include every town, city and village in Connecticut. We recently dedicated the statue honoring the Black soldiers who fought in the Civil War in the 29th Infantry Colored Regiment They had volunteered immediately after the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. Veterans are buried in 120 towns, your towns. You can see the tourist opportunity to tie this with the 200th Anniversary of the birth of Abraham Lincoln. It is the 150th Anniversary of the attack on Harper's Ferry by John Brown, a native son. There will be a commemoration of that event in Torrington. Harper's Ferry is called the first shot in the Civil War. His family home in East Granby will be added to the Trail.

You entrusted the Amistad Committee with an historic task. We have brought thousands of visitors to Connecticut to visit the sites from Danbury to Farmington to Mystic to New Haven.

The name Amistad and its story, connected with Connecticut, have become internationally recognized, drawing a steady stream of tourists. We have involved town after town in events heralding their history. We are volunteers. The small amount allocated to this historic Trail is absolutely miniscule. The withdrawal of this amount would mean a halt to the Connecticut Freedom Trail. An old expression characterizes such a decision: penny wise; a dollar foolish. It is in these times where the economy needs all the help you can provide, consider the returns. We urge you, not only to provide the meager funding we receive but to allocate funding under Bill 581 for a full time staff person in the Commission on Tourism to work with us and the towns on the Freedom Trail and September Freedom Trail Month. This practical investment will return with thousands of tourist dollars.

We have distributed our strategic plan that lays out our vision for a State of Connecticut Freedom Trail that will fulfill its mission. The Amistad Committee, a small volunteer group, has carried the entire load since the Freedom Trail was created. We consider this our historic responsibility. The Trail deserves the recognition it deserves as an official state function. There must be more funding than enough for postage, telephone and gasoline. To honor our history, we must have a full time staff person in the Commission on Culture and Tourism who can service a statewide Freedom Trail.

Thank you.