Amistad Documents Given to Dillard University

Priceless Papers Deal with Civil Rights

By EMILE LAFOURCADE

COLUMBUS, Ill. (Special wire) — Dillard University has be
come the repository for the priceless Amistad Papers, a
collection of more than three million documents, letters and
creative works dealing with the U.S. Supreme Court's first sig
ificant civil rights decision in 1841 and succeeding develop
ments to this time.

Establishment of the Na
tional Amistad Research Center at Dillard marks the first time
that the documents, most of which come from the archives of
the American Missionary As
sociation, will be brought to
tgether in one location for cata
loging and serious scholarly study.

Dillard’s president, Dr. Brodus N. Butler, said at a hunch
to Tuesday at which a small part of the collection was
displayed that it is "one of the
world's outstanding collections of original manuscripts on
the history of the civil rights con
cept in the U.S." and an
integral part of American history that has long been overlooked.

Initially the collection will be housed in the William Alex
ander Library at Dillard until a permanent campus building can
be built for the research center.

The center’s director, Dr. Clifton H. Johnson, also ad
ressed the audience, which consisted of news media repre
sentatives and university librarians and historians. He said the
collection's variety and quality of the center's materials indicate
that "no definitive general his
tory of Reconstruction or of any state during the period from
1839-1865 should be attempted without thoroughly researching these papers.”

The Amistad case grew out of mutiny by slaves aboard the
Spanish flag ship Amistad (which means "friendship") which was on a routine slave
transport cruise between two Cuba ports.

Under the guidance of the slaves the ship eventually
assisted the Lambs Island, N.Y., and authorities there confiscated
the mutinous slaves for their own gain.

Former President John Quincy Adams, who was in re
presented the slaves (members of the Mendy tribe of
Sierra Leone) and with the as
sistance of a widowed professor, took the case to the Supreme Court. It ruled that hu
man beings could not be sold as chattel—thereby closing slavery
in the U.S.

As a result of the Amistad case the American Missionary Association was formed. It es
stablished missionary work in Africa and universities and high
schools in the U.S. for Africans. It also set up service agencies to help other minority groups in
this country, notably Indians and Chinese.

Because of this background, Dr. Johnson said, the center will lean heavily on gathering materials about all minority
groups that have contributed to America's history.

"Already we have secured documents on Indian tribes in
South Dakota and are now tak
ing oral histories of the tribes," he
said.

"We hope to draw heavily on information and documents from the Caribbean and the
Great Mississippi Valley—all of which will contribute greatly to the
understanding of American and the rest of Louisiana.

"I find that history has too long been written by the upper
class and the articulate, and the contributions of important but less-articulate persons has been overlooked."

He said that since the re
search center began in 1966, the
original collection of material has increased 10 fold.

Dr. Butler said the Amistad collection is a major com
piliment to cultural-historical collections available at other lo
cal universities—including the Jazz archives at Tulane Uni
versity and the Latin American archives at Loyola University.

He said the Amistad Papers will not be used to provide non-scholars with racial com
mentary for making political mileage, but rather for the seri
ous student of American histo
ry.

Dr. Johnson said he hopes to have the center open to the public by Aug. 1.