

PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

Emiliano Mundrucu

Afro-Brazilian soldier, civil rights activist, abolitionist

“Where you see wrong or inequality or injustice, speak out, because this is your country. This is your democracy. Make it. Protect it. Pass it on.”

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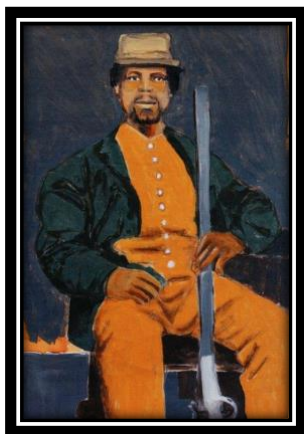


FIGURE 1 COURTESY OF BBC

Background Information

Born: 1791; Died: 1863

Emiliano Mundrucu was born in Brazil in 1791. Not much is known about his childhood or family lineage. What is known is that Mundrucu fled the country after participating in rebellions for Afro-Brazilian independence. Emiliano eventually settled in Boston, Massachusetts, and frequently traveled between Brazil and Boston. During the early 19th century, Emiliano, his wife Harriet, and their infant daughter boarded the steamboat Telegraph and returned to Boston. The next trip would result in an early test to challenge racial discrimination in transportation in the United States.

Mundrucu’s Resistance

In 1825, as Emiliano’s wife Harriet and their baby attempted to access the ladies’ cabin, a white operator blocked her path. Emiliano quickly protested the move by declaring he had paid for his tickets like other travelers and should have full access to accommodations on board. The steamboat captain used aggressive and discriminatory language towards the couple and refused their request.¹ The following evening, the family was again denied access to accommodations and faced the humiliation of being kicked off the ship by the crew. The Mundrucu’s chose to sue the steamboat captain for discrimination.

In 1832, the *Mundrucu v. Baker* case began in Boston, Massachusetts. The short trial resulted in a win for Mundrucu. The jury decided that the steamboat operator had breached the contract between the Mundrucu’s as passengers and him as a paid service provider. Although initially successful, the win was short-lived. Federal courts overturned the initial *Mundrucu v. Baker* decision in favor of the steamboat operator. Emiliano and his legal team prepared to appeal the case to the Supreme Court. Higher courts never heard the case because Mundrucu left Boston after being pardoned by the Brazilian government for his participation in previous rebellions. Upon a later return to the United States, Mundrucu continued to protest vocally about segregation in all industries, from transportation to education.

Achievements

The *Mundrucu v. Baker* decision was one of the first tests to segregation in transportation in the United States.

Essential Questions

1. How did Emiliano Mundrucu resist against discrimination in transportation?
2. Should Mundrucu have stayed in the United States to take his case to the Supreme Court? Why or why not?
 - a. Do you think Mundrucu v. Baker would have won in the higher court? Why or why not?
3. ***“Where you see wrong or inequality or injustice, speak out, because this is your country. This is your democracy. Make it. Protect it. Pass it on.”-Thurgood Marshall***
 - a. Do you consider Emiliano Mundrucu a civil rights leader? Why or why not?

¹ Caitlin Fitz, Latin America and the Radicalization of U.S. Abolition, *Journal of American History*, Volume 108, Issue 4, March 2022, Pages 701–725, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jahist/jaac001>