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MEN OF WAR: THE SEAMEN OF THE HMS MARS AND THE REVOLUTIONARY ERA

By

Harold Victor Hansen

Under the Direction of Christine Skwiot

ABSTRACT

The late eighteenth century witnessed dramatic changes in the social, economic, and political fabric of the Atlantic World. The Sailors of the *HMS Mars* fully participated in this transition to modernity. Over the course of their naval careers, the men laboring on the *Mars* felt the pull of four distinct, but interlocking cultures. Working class, maritime, naval, and British culture all played a part in the sailors' identity construction. As a result of these myriad influences the sailors could have chosen to join the emerging trans-national maritime working class, but instead the *Mars*' seamen fought to gain full British citizenship and acceptance. From 1794 when she first entered commission, to 1798 when she returned victorious from battling the French *l'Hercule*, provides numerous examples of the sailors' identity construction process. Moreover, an examination of the seamen's whole journey also illuminates how the larger processes of the Revolutionary Era functioned.

INDEX WORDS: British History, Naval History, British Sailors, Maritime History

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By

Harold Victor Hansen

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2008

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Harold Victor Hansen Jr.
2008

MEN OF WAR: THE SEAMEN OF THE HMS MARS AND THE REVOLUTIONARY ERA

by

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May 2008

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my grandfather, Joseph Noyes. I never got to meet you, but you have
nonetheless passed on your love of the sea.

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Thanks to my family, Mom, Dad, Sally, Christopher, Ginny, Kacey, Blanton, Joe, Ann, Lucy, Woody, and Jim and Kathy Wallace. Thank you to Christine Skwiot and Denise Davidson for serving on my committee, and putting up with my sloth, stylistic errors, run-on sentences, and general confused nature. Thank you to Casey Cater and Brian Miller for reading various drafts. Thanks to Dr. Hudson and Dr. Reid for providing such great examples of what a historian can become. Last but not least, eternal gratitude goes to my wife Jan, without whose love and support I never could have finished.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On 15 April 1797, the sailors of Britain's elite first line-of-defense, the Channel Fleet, mutinied *en masse* to protest the conditions in the service. In an act of bold defiance, the seamen, including those on the *Mars*, informed their superiors that they would not put to sea until the state addressed their grievances. The mutiny lasted a month, and in the end the sailors emerged victorious with a pay raise and an improvement in the benefits provided by the navy.

Contemporaries and later historians dubbed the event the Spithead Mutiny, but in reality, it more closely resembled a labor strike with the admiralty playing the role of management and the sailors that of modern workers. The Spithead strike demonstrated for the entire British nation the sailors' class solidarity. The work experience of the sailors generated a broad-based collective identity based on the alienation caused by unequal productive relations.¹ The sailors shared this experience with the rest of the emerging Atlantic World working class, which had maintained a century-long revolutionary tradition of resistance to aristocratic and capitalist colonial exploitation.²

Within this tradition, the sailors, as a part of the maritime proletariat, acted as a primary communications relay for the radical underground. The seamen transmitted the revolutionary fever wherever they touched land or interacted with other marginalized people.³ The free-flow of

¹ Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea, Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 149-150, 243-244.

² Patrick O'Brien, "Inseparable Connections: Trade, Economy, Fiscal State, and the Expansion of Empire," in *The Oxford History of the British Empire, The Eighteenth Century*, ed. P.J. Marshall (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 53-57.

³ Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra, Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 173.

Enlightenment ideas on the rights of man and just government culminated in the late eighteenth century with the French and American Revolutions.

Several scholars have tried to fit Spithead into this radical, revolutionary tradition.⁴ A closer examination of the Spithead Mutiny reveals that the sailors did not act like revolutionaries trying to bring down an unjust system. Instead the sailors made use of the existing system to demand better treatment, both material and meta-physical. The sailors' language, tactics, demands, and behavior drew more from the conservative British revolutionary tradition of 1688 than the radical French one of 1789. The seamen's demands and behavior also grew out of naval and maritime traditions, not just working-class experiences. Thus, factors other than class-consciousness must have been at work on the seamen to motivate them to act the way they did.

The *Mars'* sailors' life experiences placed them at the epicenter of the social, economic, and political transformations that accompanied modernity. Historians have addressed these transformations in great detail, but the Royal Navy seamen have largely been ignored despite the fact that the *Mars'* sailors' lives touched on many issues crucial to contemporary scholarship. Since the professionalization of history in the late nineteenth century, naval history has existed separately from mainstream historiography. The geographical segregation of sailors and their ships, naturally enough, seems to remove them from the larger historical picture. Moreover, since history from the bottom up came into vogue, military and naval affairs have long been seen as the purview of Whig historians clinging to outdated conceptions of meta-narratives and the importance of great (white) men. While this larger trend in history from the bottom up has

⁴ James Dugan, *The Great Mutiny* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1965), 15, 29, 31, 451, 467, W.J. Neale, *History of the Mutiny at Spithead and the Nore. With an Inquiry into its origin and suggestions for the prevention of Future Discontent in the Royal navy* (Philadelphia: G.B. Zeibler & Co., 1842), 19-20, 25, 91, 121, 173, Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*, 277, and E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), 167-168.

revealed the agency and awareness of previously marginalized actors, its prejudices against military matters and the elites who guided them have also forced the real importance of military and particularly naval affairs to the margins and footnotes of contemporary scholarship. Along with the admirals and fleets went the sailors as well, and this marginalization of them obscures the fact that the eighteenth-century Royal Navy seaman acted on the same stage and experienced the same upheaval as the rest of the Atlantic World during the Revolutionary Era. Historians have ignored the naval worker despite the fact that the navy represented the single largest industry and employer in Britain. The purpose of this thesis is to re-integrate the Royal Navy's sailors back into the mainstream of contemporary historiography. Towards that end, it will bring specialist naval history, maritime history, and mainstream historiography into conversation with each other to demonstrate how the late eighteenth-century Royal Navy sailors can be read as an example of the emergence of a politicized working class that made use of and struggled with the existing system to secure recognition and respect from the nation.

The Royal Navy of the late eighteenth century provides numerous avenues for social and cultural analysis. The *Mars'* sailors rejected the lure of revolutionary change and instead opted to work within the existing system to better their own positions. In this vein, their example provides a better field for analysis than out-right rebellious peoples because the seamen's embrace of the existing order mirrored that of the majority of their fellow Britons. The sailors' successful negotiations with the state and nation provide a clear example of the British government's responsiveness and flexibility to the needs and desires of its subjects. But the seamen's challenge at Spithead went deeper than just an attempt to improve their material conditions, and in many ways the sailors' defiance in the spring of 1797 represented the turning point in the seamen's re-

conceptualization of their identity as Britons worthy of recognition and respect by all members of the nation.

The *Mars*' seamen needed to re-negotiate their place within British society because of the changes unleashed on them and other workers by the transformations of modernity. The factory-style work required to run an eighteenth-century warship dramatically changed the seamen's identity by destroying their individuality and reducing them to bureaucratically classified replaceable parts. In response to the alienation and de-humanization of their jobs, the seamen re-interpreted their experiences to create a new identity construction. The dangers of their job reinforced the sailors' manhood, and the seamen embraced the hardiness required for their work to replace older conceptions of manhood based on individual exertion and patriarchic hierarchies they no longer had access to. The dangers of the seas and the maritime traditions that arose as a response also influenced the seamen's work-generated identity by meditating class divisions and providing a separate social world. The traditions and rituals of the Royal Navy, with its century-long history of victory, dovetailed with the traditions of the maritime world to psychically reward the sailors for their service and counter-act their class alienation with a social and cultural hierarchy based in large part on nautical skill. Moreover, the extended naval community provided the sailors with a wide field for promotion and advancement that replaced the disappearing craft system and rewarded the skilled and well-behaved worker. Labor on the *Mars* created an opportunity for the sailors to build a new identity based on the multiple cultures at work on board, but the seamen needed the rest of the British nation to acknowledge their new manhood and place in society.

They wanted respect and recognition from a nation that regarded them as little better than plantation slaves, and forced them to serve with the press gang, drove them to their work with

the lash, and imprisoned them on their ships for years at a time. To justify this shameful treatment, both the British state and society stereotyped the seamen as “jolly jack tars” and treated them as irrational children in need of paternalistic protection from their own improvidence. The nation utilized this stereotype to justify the marginalized legal status of the sailors designed to control their labor and trap them at the mercy of the state, ship-owners, and market forces. The sailors demanded that their service as workers reward them with the full benefits of British citizenship. To achieve this end, the sailors used the language and tactics of British political discourse to assert their Britishness and claim their place within the larger political nation. They utilized their patriotism and the national importance of their jobs to convince the rest of the nation that they deserved inclusion. While the seamen did not win the right to vote or escape the dangers of the press gang, they did succeed in winning a new level of respect from naval management that began to treat the professional fighting sailors as men and not irrational children in need of paternalistic care, coercion, and condescension.

The seamen’s experience was similar to, but different from the rest of the land-based working class because they worked for the state and remained geographically and socially isolated from land-based society. The *Mars’* sailors experienced many of the transformations of modernity ahead of the rest of society, and as a result the seamen’s example illuminates the workings of British society during the early stages of the industrialization. The sailors’ struggle during the late 1790s charted the way for the rest of the British working class to follow in their wake during the liberal reforms of the first half of the nineteenth century.

This introduction is divided into two sections. The first section details the four cultures-working class, maritime, naval, and British- that combined to influence the sailors’ identities and actions. The second section outlines the historiography, sources, and methodology that form the

basis of this project and how each of the various historiographical disciplines will be utilized to examine various aspects of the seamen's composite culture.

Four Cultures, One Identity

A detailed, in-depth examination of the sailors laboring on *HMS Mars* reveals that the seamen felt the influence of four distinct, but inter-related cultures: working class, maritime, naval, and British. These four cultures worked together to influence the seamen as they formulated their identity. As a result, they did not exist as workers, sailors, fighting seamen, or Britons, but as a unique combination of all four. This thesis will examine how these four cultures worked, sometimes in competition, sometimes in concert, to influence the seamen's identity.

The sailors worked in a modern industry. The *Mars* herself acted as a moving factory. Eighteenth-century sailing ships constituted some of the first enterprises in the world to make use of new capitalist-inspired management and organizational techniques, and as a result the seamen lived the new industrial experience along with the plantation slaves of the new world. Working on a sailing ship created a horizontal class-based consciousness between the seamen.⁵ The sailors traded their labor for wages, and management reaped the profits. This motivated the seamen to create a distinct social class around their shared work experience, or as E.P. Thompson put it, "to articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs."⁶ As a result of this shared experience, workers and sailors built a culture around labor alienation and the hardships of

⁵ Rediker, *The Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 200-201, 243.

⁶ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 9.

work.⁷ Modern work experiences led to class-consciousness as more and more workers became aware of their shared situation and the exploitive nature of their profession and the whole economic system. This collective identity can be harnessed for large-scale political change, but it also created a distinct shared system of meaning attached to work.

The *Mars*' sailors shared certain aspects of land-based working-class culture. The sailors experienced the dramatic change in the organization and use of their time, and this separated them from the traditional agricultural peasantry. In addition, the seamen embraced the dangerous hardships inherent in their jobs to re-enforce a manhood undermined by their loss of independence.⁸ Moreover, the sailors' experience closely resembled the land-based bachelor culture of journeymen, who had been displaced by the emerging capitalist, manufacturing system that upset not only the traditional economic system but also the old order of social progression as well. The changing economic circumstances caused by proto-industrialization marginalized the young men who struggled to advance under the dying artisan system. Like their land-based, journeymen fellows, the seamen's lack of possession of the means of production precluded them from following the older social progression to the status of independent master, and the changed economic paradigm stunted their social and economic opportunities. As a result, these men created a new homosocial collective based on skill and drinking rituals in defiance of the increasingly impersonal, free labor system, and the growing gentrification of land-based society.⁹

⁷ Paul Willis, "Masculinity and Factory Labor," in Jeffrey C. Alexander and Steven Seidman, ed., *Culture and Society, Contemporary Debates* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 185.

⁸ Willis, "Masculinity and Factory Labor," 192-195.

⁹ Anna Clark, *The Struggle for Breeches, Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 5, and Rediker, *The Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 199-204.

The sailors shared with the land-based working class a new job-based identity, and they interacted with the rest of society on the basis of what they did for a living.¹⁰ But because of the trade they practiced and the internal divisions within the larger working-class culture, the seamen remained isolated from their land-based peers both socially and geographically. Working at sea mediated class-based culture because it created geographical isolation that prevented the sailors from interacting with and learning from the rest of their fellow workers. Moreover, unlike on land the uncertain watery environment created a new dynamic, unlike what existed on land, that generated cross-class linkages that mitigated the influence of class consciousness.

The ever-present danger of the sea produced linkages between everyone on board a ship from the lowest cabin boy to the mighty captain. Orders, hierarchy, and lash-enforced discipline that might have driven class-based alienation to new heights on land, protected everyone on a sailing ship. On a sailing ship, hierarchy and obedience to command helped to ensure the survival of the entire crew, not to increase profits. As a result, maritime culture fostered a strong, universal belief in the need to obey orders. “The prospect of drowning concentrates a man’s mind wonderfully,” Nicolas Rodger presciently observed.¹¹ Within this culture of shared danger, nautical skill became an important social signifier. Skill in surviving the dangers of the sea united the nautically skilled in opposition to landlubbers. In contrast to land-based workers that experienced de-skilling as a result of the industrialization of work, the maritime world still required skilled, experienced workers and this crucial difference buffered the sailors from the full brunt of modernity.

¹⁰ Willis, “Masculinity and Factory Labor,” 184.

¹¹ N.A.M. Rodger, *The Wooden World, An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1986), 207.

The shared dangers and close quarters coupled with the geographic isolation from land-based society also transformed the ship into a space with more freedom from the societal prejudices and norms left behind on shore. Bernhard Klein proposes that ships should be “read as spaces that enable an inversion or contestation of the world they would claim to re-create in fact and spirit but even to export wholesale to different shores.”¹² Thus a ship exists as something of a social world apart from the rest of society, where land-based social constructions like class and race can be challenged. Within the world of a ship at sea, the ship acted as everyone’s master, and this created a bond among shipmates that crossed racial, social, ethnic, and class lines.¹³

Maritime culture also segregated the seamen from mainstream society geographically and socially. Seamen wore different clothes and spoke a different language, or at least a unique dialect. Both maritime dress and language grew out of the technically demanding and unique work experience of the sailors. They spoke strangely, short and to the point, their speech filled with the technical jargon needed for the smooth operation of a complex machine. They wore tarred clothes to protect themselves from the weather and ever-present wet. Moreover, because the seamen existed under such tight constraints while on board at work, when they finally got off their factories they expansively reveled in their freedom and indulged in all manner of debauchery. This distinction in regards to leisure time constituted a key difference with land-based workers and contributed to the seamen’s otherness.¹⁴ These characteristics isolated the

¹² Bernhard Klein, “Staying Afloat, Literary Shipboard Encounters from Columbus to Equiano,” in Bernhard Klein and Gesa Mackenthun, ed., *Sea Changes, Historicizing the Ocean*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 93.

¹³ Rediker, *The Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 154, and Jeff Bolster, *Blackjacks* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997).

¹⁴ Paul Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront, American Maritime Culture in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 6, and Greg Denning, *Mr. Bligh’s Bad Language, Passion, Power, and Theatre on the Bounty* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 85-86.

seamen from the rest of the nation who thought they looked, talked, and acted funny because they never interacted with the sailors in their natural environment on board a ship at sea.

As a result of the sailors' otherness and social isolation from land-based culture, mainstream society stereotyped the maritime laborer as a "jolly-jack-tar," and treated him with condescension as an irrational being in need of protection for his own good. This stereotype enabled society to justify marginalizing the seamen who existed under legal handicaps designed to protect ship-owners, and this special legal distinction created a patently un-free maritime labor market. The maritime legal system existed outside the mainstream British legal customs and increased the sailors' isolation and difference from their fellow British workers.¹⁵

The "tar" stereotype marginalized the seamen and contested the sailors' identity that remained based on their manhood. In order to claim their rightful place in the British nation, the *Mars'* seamen needed to rectify this contradiction between how they saw themselves and how the rest of society saw and treated them. Individually, isolated from their peers, the seamen had little chance to disprove the unjust and erroneous stereotype, but the seamen's naval culture provided a solution and an opportunity. The same factory discipline and obedience to orders that created their alienation and social otherness also granted them the ability to act collectively for their own purposes. The Navy provided them with a national stage that allowed them to gain the attention of not only the nation but also management. Moreover, naval culture worked in concert with maritime culture to modify the seamen's identity construction process and mediate their class identity.

¹⁵ Jesse Lemisch, "Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of Revolutionary America," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., Vol. 25, No. 23 (July 1968): 377-380, and Margarette Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy, British Seapower 1750-1815* (Burlington VT: Ashgate Press, 2002), 3.

The eighteenth-century Royal Navy was a huge, hierarchically dominated, bureaucratically complex, multi-divisional enterprise. The system ran on a combination of state-mandated rules and informal tradition. In many ways the navy operated like a corporation comprised of individual factories connected by a common set of organizing principles and command structure with a unifying corporate identity or imagined community.¹⁶ This unifying structure coupled with geographical isolation generated a distinct naval culture similar to, but greater than traditional maritime culture from which it grew.

All maritime work required hierarchies to ensure the smooth running of the machine and efficiently combine the labor of multiple people for a common purpose. Naval society shared this need for hierarchy, but the navy's massive size and expanded ranking hierarchy created a work environment far different from traditional maritime labor. Merchant ships carried small crews to cut costs, and the ship's captain and maybe a mate or two remained the only crewmen with job security and any prospect of personal advancement. The navy boasted a system of ranks that crossed class lines and provided all its workers with opportunities for promotion. In the navy, a man's pay and his place in the larger social structure remained based on his rank, and this socially stratified the bulk of the ship's labor. The navy based its hierarchy on nautical skill, and this segregated the skilled from the un-skilled on board, which diluted working-class solidarity.¹⁷ Moreover, naval society did not rest on a binary class system of labor versus management. In the navy, there existed numerous areas of overlap, social grey areas where men of talent could advance up the hierarchy and laborers could become managers. The universal and frequent

¹⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities, Reflections On the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso Press, 1991), 6.

¹⁷ Rediker, *The Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 121-124.

opportunities for promotion within the naval hierarchy created linkages between an officer and his men, because naval promotion rested on personal, cross-class, face-to-face relationships.

The Royal Navy also relied on a highly organized bureaucracy that ensured the smooth running of the whole navy, but also helped to mold the sailors into man-o-war's men. The twenty-four-hour-a-day nature of maritime work that forced the seamen to stay confined on their ships required the navy to provide its entire workforce with a dizzying array of benefits: food, medical care, clothes, and other necessities. This served to standardize and homogenize the sailors, and together with the universal rank structure contributed to the navy's ability to utilize the sailors as interchangeable parts throughout the entire fleet. Moreover, the dependence on the state benefits divorced the seamen from the rest of land-based society and plunged them into a modern system of control where paper records and bureaucrats replaced personal relationships.¹⁸ Naval bureaucracy worked to reduce the seamen to faceless cogs within a larger corporate structure, and it also standardized life in the navy on every ship in every ocean of the world. This universal system greatly contributed to the pervasiveness of naval culture that helped to transform the seamen into a uniformly controlled, paid, arranged, and classified modern workers.

The combination of the dangers of the sea and the state-mandated hierarchical, bureaucratic naval system formed the parameters of naval culture, but the entire system also ran on tradition. Because of the navy's long history working under the domain of maritime culture and its ship-versus-nature collective, naval society relied on mutual consent between officers and men as much as the official rules and regulations. This covered most areas, but particularly the ship's discipline. In the eighteenth-century navy discipline meant floggings, but the sailors accepted the need to punish the guilty to protect everyone else. The seamen did not object to

¹⁸ Michel Foucault, "The Politics of Health in the Eighteenth Century," in Paul Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 278-279.

floggings, provided the offense merited that punishment according to tradition.¹⁹ This universal acceptance of tradition influenced life on the *Mars* almost as much as the Articles of War. On a navy ship, every act or practice came not only from written orders but also from tradition, “the ways in which things have always been done.”²⁰ This system mediated class frictions because the informal rules of the service applied to everyone and allowed all naval personnel to bend and break official regulations in traditional ways.²¹ Accompanying tradition came ritualized ceremonies that linked everyday activities to the glorious history of the navy. The ritual and ceremony of everyday life on the *Mars* tied the sailors to the navy, and this greatly contributed to the imagined community and overall culture of the navy.

Naval culture, like its working-class and maritime cousins, helped to form the seamen into recognizable man-o-war’s men. These professional fighting seamen lived and died by the official and informal rules of the service. The navy standardized their lives and provided for their material needs, and this allowed the service to utilize the seamen as interchangeable parts. Moreover, because of the navy’s universal rituals, tradition, and lifestyle, the *Mars*’ sailors all existed as members of the imagined community of the navy that linked them collectively throughout the world. In this vein, the sailors negotiated for all naval seamen at Spithead, not just their shipmates. The navy meant a lot to the sailors, but it also played an increasingly important role in British imperial culture.²²

The navy may have sailed in a watery world with ships full of modern, alienated workers, but they still sailed for king and country. Despite their isolation, the *Mars*’ sailors remained tied

¹⁹ Rodger, *Wooden World*, 205-211.

²⁰ Denning, *Mr. Bligh’s Bad Language*, 27.

²¹ Rodger, *Wooden World*, 190, 201-202, 218-219.

²² Timothy Jenks, *Naval Engagements: Patriotism, Cultural Politics, and the Royal Navy, 1793-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 2, 292.

to and influenced inextricably by British culture. Great Britain existed as a political and ideological construction that overlay other, older loyalties, and “Every Briton ... possessed a composite identity.”²³ British citizenship and British identity remained inseparable and intertwined because of the nature of the British Empire.

Britons tied their identity to their empire and based their collective identity on “imperial nationalism.” The mission of the empire united and gave identity to those who played a part in completing it. Under this rubric, anyone could claim British identity by taking part in the imperial mission. In the 1790s, the British imperial mission involved the defense of “parliamentary government and peaceful progress” against the forces of the corrupt, Catholic powers that had degenerated into weakness and bloody revolution.²⁴ This amorphous, modular identity allowed many groups to take advantage of the British system to claim membership within it in return for imperial service. In contrast to classic nationalism as exemplified by the French model that emerged from the Revolution, British imperial nationalism rejected ethnic and explicitly national requirements to unify the disparate parts and peoples of the British Empire.²⁵

The British based their culture on several unifying traits that represented them and their imperial success. Liberty, trade, Parliament, and competition with the French formed the cornerstones of British identity and citizenship. These traits combined to mould the British people, including the *Mars*’ sailors, into a recognizable nation with shared goals and beliefs.

²³ Laurence Brockliss and David Eastwood, ed. *A Union of Multiple Identities, The British Isles, c. 1750-1850* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1977), 2, and Eliga Gould, “A Virtual Nation: Greater Britain and the Imperial Legacy of the American Revolution,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 104, No. 2 (Apr., 1999), 478-480, 486.

²⁴ Krishan Kumar, “Nation and Empire: English and British National Identity in Comparative Perspective,” *Theory and Society*, Vol. 29, No. 5 (Oct., 2000), 579-580, 589.

²⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, “Inventing Traditions,” in Eric Hobsbawm and Terrance Ranger, ed., *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 13-15, and Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 83-111.

The British people believed that their prosperity rested on their “liberty.” The 1688 revolutionary settlement confirmed the traditional legal freedoms of the people as well as inaugurating the idea that the population possessed the right to unseat a tyrannical government, preferably in a peaceful and orderly fashion.²⁶ To replace royal absolutism, the British relied on a unified Parliament that provided for their needs as well as serving as an example of enlightened government to the rest of the world. An aristocratic oligarchy that controlled Parliament still dominated the British government, but the rest of the population took part in extra-parliamentary politics that granted non-voters influence over the management of the state.²⁷ The liberties enjoyed by the British people rested on the legal restraint of the state, and the private property protection that went along with it encouraged overseas trade. These closely intertwined aspects of British culture: liberty, Parliament, and trade, worked together to promote British Empire and personal prosperity.²⁸ Within this culture, a Briton enjoyed the freedoms ensured by the 1688 Glorious Revolution, engaged in overseas trade on some level, and took part in Parliamentary government.

Britons also utilized patriotism to assert their imperial allegiance and citizenship. Vocal patriotism legitimized self-serving actions, transforming them into examples of private parties promoting the public welfare. The important traits of British identity, Parliamentary government, trade, and liberty provided the political language for people to express their patriotism in

²⁶ Jack Green, “Empire and Identity from the Glorious Revolution to the American Revolution,” in P.J. Marshall, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire: The Eighteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 208-210, and Kathleen Wilson, “Inventing the Revolution: 1688 and Eighteenth-Century Popular Politics,” *The Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 4. (Oct., 1989): 357.

²⁷ Kathleen Wilson, “Empire, Trade and Popular Politics in Mid-Hanoverian Britain: The Case of Admiral Vernon,” *Past and Present*, No. 121 (Nov., 1988): 74-75.

²⁸ Wilson, “Empire, Trade and Popular Politics in Mid-Hanoverian Britain,” 77, 98, 101-103, and Linda Colley, *Britons, Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 56, 59-60.

acceptable, legitimate forms. Thus patriotism and the accepted political discourse served as key signifiers of true Britons.²⁹

The formation of British political discourse, identity, and citizenship also relied on competition and comparison with their traditional enemy, the French.³⁰ Britain competed with France for imperial control and European dominance throughout the long eighteenth century. This long-running competition created a natural comparison between the autocratic, Catholic French whose power largely rested on traditional peasant agriculture and the Parliamentary, free, Protestant British whose power rested on overseas trade.³¹ The French Other provided both a clear and definable enemy as well as a target for the imperial mission of British imperial nationalism. The wars with the French provided many opportunities for state service for all segments of the population. Engaging in the pursuit of empire, whether in war or trade, became an important signifier of British citizenship that filtered down to all classes over the course of the eighteenth century.³²

The Royal Navy played the leading role in the on-going wars with the French, but the navy also played a crucial role in British political discourse because the navy could be utilized as a metaphor for the nation as a whole. Britons saw the navy as an embodiment of the freedoms assured by the Glorious Revolution because it allowed Britain to defeat the French without a large standing army. An absolute monarch or dictator could utilize a powerful standing army to abuse the rights of the people, but Britain's lack of such a force symbolized their freedom in comparison with their fellow Europeans. The navy acted for the nation as the primary imperial

²⁹ Colley, *Britons*, 5, and Wilson, "Inventing the Revolution," 350-353, 375-376, 378-380.

³¹ William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*, second edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1-43, and Green, "Empire and Identity from the Glorious Revolution to the American Revolution," 208-210, 217-218, 224.

³² Colley, *Britons*, 284-285, 312-313, 317-319.

agents of the British state, and the British nation transformed naval victories into national victories by utilizing the navy as a metaphor for the entire British people.

Moreover, Britons believed that the Navy and overseas trade mutually reinforced each other, and the navy allowed for and encouraged the prosperity of trade by defending British commerce and destroying competitors. Naval officers played the role of national heroes, winning power, position, and prestige within the British nation. Despite the fact that the navy “was identified with the defense of liberty, the protection of national religion, and with the prosperity of the nation,” the bulk of its seamen still suffered marginalization within mainstream British society.³³

Even within British culture that vocally valued the maritime world and the navy in particular, the naval seamen still suffered under the same handicaps as the rest of the maritime proletariat. The navy enjoyed prestige and national acclaim, but the sailors did not. The combination of working-class, maritime, and naval culture isolated the seamen from the society that praised the heroic exploits of the navy. Land-based society patronized and stereotyped the maritime workers as “jolly-jack-tars,” uncontrollable, violent, child-like, and generally incapable of rational behavior in pursuit of enlightened self-interest following the example of mainstream British culture. Reflected in language, the legal system, and popular culture, this condescension conspired to reduce the sailors to second-class citizens.³⁴ But during the late 1790s the *Mars*’ seamen and their brothers in the Channel Fleet contested their place in British society by challenging the “tar” stereotype and demanded the full rights of citizens under the rubric of imperial nationalism. The seamen wanted the full benefits and respect of men who risked their

³³ Wilson, “Empire, Trade and Popular Politics in Mid-Hanoverian Britain,” 92, 96-98, and Jenks, *Naval Engagements*, 2, 291-292.

³⁴ Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy*, 3, 29, 64, and Jenks, *Naval Engagements*, 95

lives to defend liberty, parliamentary government, and overseas trade, as well as protecting the home islands from invasion.

The Spithead Mutiny constituted the first skirmish in the battle to gain recognition as rational adults, worthy of inclusion in the British nation. By utilizing the language of imperial nationalism and pointing out their contribution to the imperial mission, the seamen clearly demonstrated their British identity and desire for full citizenship. In addition to improved material conditions, the sailors also demanded the state, the nation, and the navy treat them as men. The end of the mutiny was as much about challenging the “tar” stereotype as about material conditions in the navy.

The *Mars* seamen demanded better material treatment in the form of improved benefits and pay, but they also demanded British citizenship as a reward for their contributions to the imperial mission. The sailors wanted the state and nation to acknowledge their contribution as worker-citizens as well as their manhood. The “tar” stereotype conflicted with the seamen’s identity construct, which remained partially based on their manliness, and the sailors needed the nation to change the way they were treated meta-physically in order to fully embrace the British imperial mission.

The *Mars*’ sailors’ desire for full citizenship mirrored the larger struggle over the rights of men, the make up of a just government, and the place of hereditary privilege within a modern society. The late eighteenth century witnessed numerous challenges to the status quo regarding these issues, and this battle took place in Britain, even though the British state and system survived the revolutionary wars intact. The *Mars*’ sailors’ struggle with their own government exemplified the process of negotiation and accommodation over the questions posed by the Enlightenment that took place throughout British society. As a result of these negotiations,

British society evolved and after the wars the British nation emerged ready for true liberal reforms. In addition, as more and more men utilized the opportunities granted by the wars to prove their Britishness through service for the state, the parameters of citizenship also expanded.

The French set a new standard for citizenship with their conscription armies that made every soldier a citizen and vice versa. Under this new paradigm “all young men, by donning uniform, could display the badge of their full acceptance as equal members of the community.”³⁵ In order for any state to stand against the French Republic(s), they had to follow suit, by bringing their entire populations to the battlefield, and grant them citizenship as a reward.³⁶ The *Mars*’ sailors, as enlisted or conscripted combatants, made use of this new paradigm to further their citizenship quest when they fought the French battleship *l’Hercule* at the mouth of Brest in the spring of 1798.³⁷

The *Mars* clobbered her French opponent in a little over an hour and then sailed the captured prize back to Plymouth to celebrate.³⁸ The contest with *l’Hercule* continued the struggle between the seamen and the nation began by the mutiny at Spithead. The *Mars*’ sailors’ participation in the ongoing war as servants of the state for the general welfare constituted the clearest proof of the sailors’ status as true Britons. By shedding blood for their country under the new popular conditions of warfare, the sailors had gained their ticket for admittance to the British nation.

The pull of British culture counter-balanced the influence of the seamen’s working-class identity because it offered them membership with a larger construction that boasted a clear

³⁵ John Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 349-351, 357.

³⁶ Colley, *Britons*, 312-315

³⁷ *HMS Mars* Master’s Log, 24 December 1795 – 16 May 1798, Great Britain, Public Records Office, London, MSS [Hereafter PRO], Records of the Admiralty [Hereafter ADM], 52/3192.

³⁸ *London Times*, 27 April 1798.

mission: a mission that the sailors played a successful part in accomplishing. The navy, with its modern structure, benefits, and shared culture of victory mediated the handicaps of the maritime proletariat, and compensated the sailors for the alienation and hardships their jobs inflicted. The *Mars*' sailors existed within the intersection of these four cultures. They emerged from the 1790s as workers, sailors, fighting seamen, and Britons. The *Mars* seamen demonstrate the interconnectedness and transient make-up of identity. The sailors utilized the tactics of workers and the language of politically active extra-parliamentary Britons, to play on the navy's pride of place within national consciousness. The seamen used all these tactics to achieve the goals of marginalized "tars" everywhere. Seen in this light the sailors' actions were not revolutionary, they were evolutionary and anchored in the language and tradition of the Glorious Revolution. While they may have forsaken the chance to overturn the British state and system at Spithead, the seamen did take advantage of the new era of European and world society that the French Revolution ushered in.

Historiography, Sources, and Methodology

Just as the *Mars*' seamen created their identities based on the influence of four cultures, this thesis boasts a number of historiographical godparents. Naval, maritime, working class, and British history all possess their own bodies of historical scholarship that this project will build on and contribute to. Each of these largely separate discourses will be brought into conversation with one another to provide a full, all-inclusive picture of the men who labored on the *Mars*. This section is organized from small to large: starting with naval historiography, moving up to general maritime history, transitioning into working-class history, and finishing with British imperial

historiography. Following the discussion of the historiographical debates that this project touches on is a brief discussion of sources and the methodological techniques to be used to interpret them.

Naval history, and particularly that of the British Royal Navy during the age of Nelson, has existed as a thriving sub-genre since the nineteenth century. The study of the navy has mirrored long-term trends evident in the historical mainstream but not engaged them. Unfortunately, the subject has almost always been treated in isolation from the larger social and political land-based events. In general, naval scholarship exists in two broad categories: nationalist inspired hagiography and specialist texts dealing with particular officers, technical issues, or campaigns.

The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries produced a number of works designed to demonstrate the centrality of the navy in Britain's rise to imperial hegemony. These works, the most famous being Alfred Thayer Mahon's *The Influence of Seapower on History*, fall into the Whig school because they demonstrate the march of progress across the seas. Mahon and his fellows sought to convince their contemporary governments of the crucial role of the navy in Britain's success and how sea power offered other nations the same chance at national greatness and global power. This trend in naval history writing lasted until the middle of the twentieth century when naval scholars, like other historians, switched over to a more inclusive model of social history.³⁹

³⁹ Edward Brenton, *The Naval History of Great Britain Vol. 1*. (London: J.F. Dove, 1823), Sir W. Laird Clowes, *The Royal Navy: a History from Earliest Times to the Present* (New York: S. low, Marston, AMS Press, 1897, 1966), William James, *The Naval History of Great Britain* (London: Bentley & Son, 1886), and Alfred Thayer Mahon, *The Influence of Seapower on History* (New York: Dover, 1987).

The abandonment of meta-narratives caused by the decline of moral clarity brought on by the twentieth-century world wars, began a period of historical inquiry based on a more inclusive, democratic paradigm emphasizing the common people as opposed to elites. Naval history received its share of attention on subjects ranging from shipbuilding and shore-based naval administration to the everyday life on a sailing warship.⁴⁰ These works moved beyond admirals and fleet movements to address the structural factors that made the navy work. As a basis for historical inquiry they retain merit, but they tend to treat the subject in isolation from events on shore. Nowhere is this trend more evident than in the literature dealing with the mutinies in the spring of 1797. The majority of the works utilize the mutinies as allegories for later social and political debates.⁴¹ The one exception is Greg Dugan's *The Great Mutiny*, which detailed the events within the larger context of the upheavals of the revolutionary period.⁴² Overall, the specialist works on the eighteenth-century navy either isolate the seamen from the larger flow of land-based historical trends, or translate the seamen's actions on to other issues outside the sailor's element and the actual flow of their lives.

However, Nicolas Rodger has moved scholarship of the Royal Navy beyond the limitations of earlier works. His *Wooden World* paints a picture of the Seven Years War navy that informs the reader of how the navy worked, and he treats all naval personnel as social beings

⁴⁰ Daniel Baugh, *Naval Administration in the Age of Wapole* (Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1965), Brian Lavery, *The Ship of the Line, the Development of the Battlefleet 1650-1850* (London: Spottiswoode Ballantyne Press, 1977), Michael Lewis, *A Social History of the Navy, 1793-1815* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1960), and Christopher Lloyd, *The British Seaman, 1200-1860* (London: Collins, 1968).

⁴¹ Conrad Gill, *The Naval Mutinies of 1797* (Manchester: University Press, 1913), G.E. Manwaring and Bonamy Dobree, *The Floating Republic* (New York: A.M. Kelly, 1966), and W.J. Neale, *History of the Mutiny at Spithead and the Nore*.

⁴² Greg Dugan, *The Great Mutiny*.

with motives and personalities not just as statistics.⁴³ His magnificent follow-up, the *Command of the Ocean*, fully re-integrates naval affairs into a comprehensive study of British history that links the naval world to the world on shore. He linked the running of the navy with the larger political debates of the day, and fully integrated diplomatic and naval social and operational history into one volume, while still providing a detailed narrative of fleet battles and movements.⁴⁴ Rodger's two works inspired the approach taken in this thesis, particularly his effort to include the navy in the larger frame of British history while at the same time addressing the navy and naval culture as an evolving structure that changed over time.

As comprehensive as Rodger's works are, they do fall short in terms of cultural interpretation. His emphasis on the large-scale events in British history, while providing a crucial framework, rest on large-scale generalizations required by his comprehensive scope. As a result, he manages to inform the reader of how and what happened on navy ships, but not what they meant to the seamen. David Cordingly provided a different approach with his *Billy Ruffian*, which examines the great wars with France with the British warship *Bellerophon* as its primary character.⁴⁵ This thesis follows Cordingly's lead by concentrating on a single ship, but instead of just a narrative re-telling of events, this study will offer cultural interpretations of the sailor's existence by combining the techniques and methodology of cultural and maritime history.

Numerous scholars have made great strides by importing cultural interpretation techniques to the

⁴³ Rodger, *Wooden World*.

⁴⁴ N.A.M. Rodger, *To Command the Ocean, A Naval History of Britain, 1649-1815* (London: Allen Lane, 2004).

⁴⁵ James Cordingly, *The Billy Ruffian: the Bellerophon and the Downfall of Napoleon: The Biography of a Ship of the Line, 1782-1836* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2003). The author's decision to concentrate on only one ship played a key role in limiting the scope of this thesis. As a result of this choice, this work does not address the mutiny at the Nore, which irrupted in sympathy with the Spithead mutineers during the spring of 1797. While the two mutinies may have occurred at the same time, the make-up, conduct and tactics of the two groups of were quite different, and thus the events at the Nore had little direct impact on the seamen of the *Mars*.

maritime world to interpret the experiences of seamen and sea travelers. However, this scholarship has very rarely, if ever, been applied to the navy despite its demographic and institutional importance in the eighteenth century. Maritime scholarship generally focuses on either the sailor at sea or the sailor on shore.

A number of scholars have addressed the role and impact of sailors on land during the revolutionary era. These works demonstrate the connections between the seamen and the rest of society, but they treat the sailors out of their element. Jesse Lemisch began this sub-genre with his seminal article, “Jack Tar in the Streets.” Lemisch highlights how the existing order marginalized the sailors because of their otherness. While uncovering numerous aspects of maritime life his analysis is tied to the seamen and their relations with land-based authority. This type of scholarship provides useful insights, but in situating the sailors on the streets it removes them from their natural element and privileges exceptional events over daily experiences.⁴⁶

Scholars have not completely ignored the sailor’s life at sea, the seamen’s predominate experience. Marcus Rediker pioneered the application of new forms of social analysis to the maritime world with his groundbreaking *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*. Rediker utilized a Marxist approach that revealed the inter-workings of labor relations in the eighteenth-century maritime world. Rediker demonstrated that seamen were also workers, and how the realities of maritime work generated work-inspired alienation and class-based identity because of the unequal production relations between the seamen and the ship-owners. Unfortunately, Rediker confines his analysis to the merchant service, and his work only tangentially touches on naval seamen.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Lemisch, “Jack Tar in the Streets,” and Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront*, and Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*.

⁴⁷ Rediker, *The Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*.

Greg Denning combines the cultural study of the sailor at sea and the sailor on shore with modern multi-disciplinary, analytical techniques in his look at the Royal Navy, *Mr. Bligh's Bad Language*. This multi-disciplinary approach offers a blueprint of how to understand the sailors of the king's navy during the eighteenth-century. Denning's choice of topic, the infamous mutiny on the *Bounty* in the Pacific, makes his work less useful for this project because the conditions and experiences of sailors in home waters remained very different from those of the isolated men on the *Bounty* that existed wholly immersed in an alien world(s) far from the rest of naval society for years at a time. But his analytical techniques remain crucial because they reveal so much about the culture of the seamen beyond just their class-based identity and aspirations.⁴⁸

In addition to his cultural analytical techniques, Denning also clearly links the sailor's maritime existence with the shore-based cultures they interacted with in Britain and Oceania. Denning analyzes the sailors' interactions with both shore-bound cultures as well as the ship-based culture of the *Bounty*, and the inclusion of all three enriches his work and provides a clearer picture of how the maritime world and the shore interact by exposing cultural differences obscured by and taken for granted in everyday usage. This crucial linkage addressed the shortcomings of both Rediker's work and the bulk of Royal Navy scholarship. An all-encompassing look at the *Mars'* sailors needs to examine and address the interaction between land and sea.

Numerous scholars have addressed the social and political transformations of the eighteenth century on the British nation. These interpretations vary from Marxist class-based examinations of the rise of the industrial proletariat to studies of the development of the larger

⁴⁸ Denning, *Mr. Bligh's Bad Language*.

British imperial culture and identity.⁴⁹ In general these works ignore sailors and the maritime proletariat. Some scholars have addressed how the navy played a part in mainstream political discourse, but the sailors as ordinary workers and Britons are marginalized.⁵⁰ The sailors, exposed to the same radical intellectual currents as the rest of the world, made a conscious decision to side with the British state, and in this vein, Linda Colley's *Britons* forms a crucial historiographical resource because she unveils how British identity could be adopted and utilized by all Britons for their own purposes. Her interpretation of British imperial identity and politics suggests how the British state gained the willing collaboration of its population to support an oligarchic government in defiance of their class interests. The *Mars*' sailors' actions at Spithead clearly fit into this category and this thesis will utilize Colley's work to interpret how the state and its maritime workers negotiated a new relationship.⁵¹

The *Mars*' sailors were not the only Britons who negotiated with the state during the late eighteenth century, but their experiences placed them at the nexus of several important areas of British life. Historiographically the seamen also exist in between several traditions and bodies of scholarship: naval, working class, maritime, and British. Bringing these works into conversation with each other allows the *Mars*' seamen to be utilized as an example of the transformations of the late eighteenth century. Moreover, the modern nature of the seamen's lives produced numerous documents that provide a rare glimpse of working-class men's lives.

⁴⁹ J.C.D Clark, *English Society, 1688-1832* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 119-198, Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Anna Clark, *The Struggle for Breeches*, Colley, *Britons*, and Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People, Politics, Culture, and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 6.

⁵⁰ Jenks, *Naval Engagements*, 2-76, 291-295, and Wilson, "Empire, Trade and Popular Politics in Mid-Hanoverian Britain," 77-92.

⁵¹ Colley, *Britons*.

The massive bureaucracy of the Royal Navy generated numerous records useful to historians. The *Mars* and her men left behind log books, muster books, and pay records that when properly interpreted lift the veil of mystery surrounding life on a eighteenth-century battleship in the elite Channel Fleet that guarded the gateway to Britain. These records provide the names and movements of the sailors of the *Mars*, and allow historians to reveal some of the marginalized actors from the revolutionary era. But the study of the *Mars* requires more than counting exercises and analysis of sterile reports of time spent at sea and time spent at anchor.

The use of statistical modeling and analytical techniques to help illuminate history, or cliometrics, has been used by economic historians to prove “social facts” and change over time. Greg Denning utilized these cliometric techniques to help understand the causes of Captain Bligh’s mutiny on the *Bounty*, and his methods of using cliometrics to uncover cultural insights form the central methodological framework of this thesis. The *Mars*’ records provide a wealth of raw data that reveal the contours of life in the *Mars* factory, but reporting on the rate of floggings or the frequency of desertion is not enough. Instead, this thesis will sail in Denning’s wake by interpreting the statistics to uncover what they meant in terms of the seamen’s identity, life, and culture. Denning did not stop at just cliometrics, nor did his analysis stop at the water’s edge. His analysis of the *Bounty* also relied on shipboard spatial dynamics, performance of ritual as a key component of culture, and the sailors’ interactions with the shore, crossing the beach, as he would say, to uncover the whole seamen’s experience.⁵²

One central result of the analysis of this data is the transitory make-up of the ship’s company. Military history has long suffered from the flaw of treating military units as sedentary outfits that do not change in character or number once they are mustered. This study has instead

⁵² Greg Denning, *Mr. Bligh’s Bad Language*, 19-28, 113.

followed the movement of the sailors into and out of the *Mars*' community, and it makes crew movement a primary theme of analysis. This focus on movement allows us to understand how naval service bound the individual to his ship and the navy as a whole and how effectively the Royal Navy system trained skilled workers who could be used as interchangeable parts aboard any warship. The *Mars*' sailors did not just direct the action of the ship; instead, they served to physically fill the technological gaps inherent in an eighteenth-century sailing ship, and this interdependence between man and machine produced noticeable effects on the seamen. As Greg Denning succinctly puts it, "A sailing vessel is a machine energized by natural forces and human vigor. Power so harnessed gives every part of a ship a trembling, beating life that transmits itself to the bodies of the sailors and all their senses."⁵³ Thus the seamen and their ship are treated as a single community, each dependent on the other, and as a result the seamen are examined within their natural, watery element.

In addition to the raw data gleaned from the *Mars*' records, this thesis also utilizes several sources of private correspondence. A number of letters from the family of Captain Alexander Hood illuminate both the Spithead Mutiny and the *Mars*' battle with *l'Hercule*. These letters provide a level of personal detail missing from the impersonal, bureaucratic ship's papers. In addition to narrative details, this personal correspondence illuminates naval elite opinion, opening yet another window into how various actors assumed and made use of British identity for their own purposes. Moreover, life on the *Mars* relied on personal cross-class relationships between ordinary sailors and their officers, and thus a complete picture of the *Mars* community must include both management and labor or else it falls victim to similar shortfalls as earlier elite-dominated narratives only in reverse.

⁵³ Greg Denning, "Deep Times, Deep Spaces," in Bernhard Klein and Gesa Mackenthun, ed., *Sea Changes, Historicizing the Ocean* (New York: Routledge Press, 2004), 25.

Several published primary sources provide another perspective on the *Mars*' career. The *London Times* details the opinions of the government while a series of street ballads suggest what the popular classes felt about the *Mars*' seamen's challenge to authority. These sources provide a valuable counter-point to official naval opinion because they demonstrate how the nation interpreted and conceptualized the sailors' actions by using accepted political and social discourse. In many ways these popular sources, aimed at the bulk of the population reveal how the British nation imagined the sailors once they forced their way across the metaphorical beach and into the heart of the nation.

Chapter two examines the *Mars* as a floating naval factory. The *Mars* did not exist solely as a factory and while the realities of everyday work on board generated class consciousness and a clearly discernable class-based identity the other aspects of life on the *Mars*, dictated by maritime and naval culture, also played a role in the sailors' identity construction process. Maritime culture modified the factory-style setting, and the dangers of the sea mediated the class lines generated by the work experience. Naval culture indoctrinated the seamen into the imagined community of the Royal Navy. On the *Mars*, the sailors existed as part of a much larger corporate structure that dictated many aspects of their life, but also granted everyone on board opportunities for advancement that cut across class lines creating vertical relationships between officers and men. As a result of laboring on the *Mars*, the seamen were not just workers and not just sailors or navy warriors, but a combination of all three.

Chapter three takes the *Mars* seamen and re-inserts them back into the topsy-turvy world of the late 1790s. Powered by their class-identity, as a part of their larger identity structure, the sailors challenged the state and nation for better treatment and acceptance within the British nation. Over the course of this chapter the seamen transform themselves from neglected,

marginalized “tars” to national heroes and accepted members of the British nation who enjoyed the rights of citizenship.

Throughout this work, the primary agents are the men who made up the *Mars*’ crew, but it is erroneous to treat them in isolation from either shore or ship. The interdependent nature of the seamen’s existence comprised a crucial component of their identity, and this factor compels this thesis to treat the whole construction of *HMS Mars* as one entity. This entity lived, died, fought, grew, dreamed, and changed together. This fact should not surprise, considering once they sailed out of sight of land, the *Mars* was for all intents and purposes on its own, forced to survive the deadly oceans and enemies based solely on the abilities of the ship and its crew.

Chapter 2: The Cultural Anatomy of the *HMS Mars*

Like other products of the industrial revolution, the British warship *HMS Mars* consisted of a variety of individual, mass-produced interchangeable pieces, assembled with a combination of science and tradition to create a techno-social machine. Sails, masts, timbers, fittings, officers, able seamen, and ships boys constituted *HMS Mars*. The British state ordered and molded these myriad pieces to serve a specific purpose within the empire. Each piece of the *Mars* interacted with others, creating a complex construction composed of a combination of man and machine that allowed for British control over the oceans.

Just as multiple parts made up the *Mars*, multiple cultures combined to influence the sailors' identity. On board the ship, the seamen existed within three distinct, sometimes overlapping cultures: working class, maritime, and naval. These three sets of beliefs and meanings worked together, sometimes in concert, sometimes in conflict, to influence the sailors' identity. Just as the *Mars*' many pieces inter-acted to create a sum greater than its parts, the seamen's cultural influences did the same, and the sailors emerged from serving on the *Mars* as workers, sailors, and fighting seamen. Kathleen Wilson defined the identity construction process as "the negotiation between where one is placed and where one places oneself within social networks, working through what is possible as well as what is forbidden."⁵⁴ In this sense, the *Mars* provided its men with unique social networks, possibilities, and taboos that allowed for and encouraged the seamen to create a new hybrid identity within the nexus of working-class, maritime, and naval cultures.

⁵⁴ Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race, Englishness, Empire, and Gender in the 18th Century* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 3.

The physical structure of the ship played a crucial role in the seamen's lives. The ship isolated the men from land-based society, trapping them in their own little wooden world with its own rules, rituals, and customs. Moreover, the admiralty designed the ship for a specific purpose, to fight at sea. The navy imported the latest modern management techniques to improve the ship's efficiency and maintain its workforce. As a result of the influence of capitalism, the *Mars* operated like a factory and produced a clear working-class culture based on the seamen's collective work experience.

The shared experience and alienation motivated the seamen to create a collective working-class identity, but the seamen's other cultures mediated the effects of class and the strength of class bonds. These dangers united everyone on board within the larger struggle to survive. This universal maritime cross-class bond created a strong ship-based culture and identity grounded in the *Mars*' isolation from the rest of society. In addition, the dangers of the sea created a universal appreciation for and acceptance of the crucial need for hierarchy and discipline, not to re-enforce land-based power dynamics or increase profits, but to ensure everyone's safety.

Moreover, the *Mars* did not sail alone, either physically or meta-physically. She continued a century long tradition of fighting at sea, both against the king's enemies and the violence of the ocean. The *Mars* existed as one piece within the larger naval fleet, and the seamen existed within the larger corporate structure of the navy. Universal hierarchy, rules, customs, traditions, rituals, and benefits combined to mold the men into fighting seamen who all shared in the imagined community of the navy. Naval culture created cross-class bonds between officers and men even as the navy to utilize the seamen as interchangeable parts. Moreover, naval culture and its glorious history allowed everyone on board to subsume themselves into a

larger, higher purpose, and this shared goal pulled the entire ship's company into a larger complex creation designed to defeat Britain's enemies.

This chapter examines the cultural dynamics of the *Mars* and how the combination of man and machine worked together to influence the seamen's identity. The first section, "Designed with a Purpose," details the construction history of the *Mars* inside the context of the eighteenth-century international naval arms race. The ship acted as the men's home and workplace and this living environment controlled their experiences. The navy designed the *Mars* for a specific purpose and role, and this design produced a cultural effect on the seamen as well. "Modern Work for More Efficient Destruction" examines how the *Mars* acted as a factory. This produced a clear sense of alienation and resulting class-based identity caused by the changeover to modern working conditions under capitalism. Section three, "Modern Workers, Modern Benefits," analyzes the fringe benefits enjoyed by the sailors and how they acted as a double-edged sword by rewarding the seamen for their work, but also ensnaring them in a modern bureaucratic system to ensure their continued service. "The Use and Custom of the Sea," the fourth section, outlines how ritual, tradition, and ceremony combined to help maintain social harmony on board the *Mars*, but more importantly these three factors also immersed the maritime worker into an all-encompassing separate world with its own rules. Section five, "Moving In, Moving up, and Moving out," analyzes how the seamen joined the ship and then moved throughout the ship and the navy, and this section concentrates on how crew movement enmeshed the seamen into the much larger naval system that existed as a good form of employment in the late 1790s.

Designed with a Purpose

The British state designed, built, and operated *HMS Mars* for the specialized purpose of destroying other large warships while fighting in the traditional line-ahead formation.⁵⁵ This specialization regulated her design, her deployment, and her crew's existence on board. In many ways a merchant ship and a warship like the *Mars* were similar in that both were made of wood, used sails to harness the wind, and probably carried at least a few guns. On a deeper inspection they were completely different creatures. Gone were the days of dragooning merchant ships into fighting fleets, and by the late eighteenth century, warships had become specialized killing

⁵⁵ The close-hauled line of battle, first introduced in the seventeenth-century, remained the standard battle tactic in use by European navies throughout the age of sail until the coming of steam, with few exceptions. In this tactical formation all the ships sailed in a line, usually close-hauled to the wind (i.e. sailing slightly more than ninety degrees off the wind, or as close to the direction the wind was blowing as possible). In this formation, all the ships in a fleet could bring their broadsides to bear (the majority of a ship's firepower could only be fired sideways), while at the same time the ships in front and to the rear protected the vulnerable, unarmed stern and bow. Since both fleets sailed in similar formation, battles tended to revolve around the two lines sailing parallel to each other blazing away at decreasing ranges as they converged. Only the largest, most powerful ships could handle this role, and those that could were called "ships of the line", i.e. capable of standing in the line of battle. Peter Kemp, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Ships and the Sea* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 485-486, 788, William Burney, ed., *A New Universal Dictionary of the Marine; Being a Copious Explanation of the Technical Terms and Phrases Usually Employed in the Construction, Equipment, Machinery, Movements, and Military as well as Naval Operations of Ships: With Such Parts of Astronomy, and Navigation as will Found Useful to Practical Navigators. Illustrated with a Variety of Modern Designs of Shipping, Together with Separate Views of the Masts, Yards, Sails, and Rigging. To which is Annexed A Vocabulary of French Sea-Phrases and Terms of Art, Collected From the Best Authorities Originally Compiled By William Falconer* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1815) Here after: Burney, *Falconer's Marine Dictionary*, 234-237, and Admiral Sir Cyprian Bridge G.C.B., "Naval Strategy and Tactics at the Time of Trafalgar" in Jon Lewis, ed., *Life Before the Mast, Sailors' Eyewitness Accounts from the Age of Fighting Ships* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2001), 473-493.

machines. The *Mars* was a warship, her primary purpose was predatory, and her physical structure and the men who served on her reflected this specialization.

The Navy classified the *Mars* as a seventy-four-gun battleship, or third rate. Instituted in the seventeenth-century, the British naval rating system designated certain ships for certain tasks based on the number of guns carried.⁵⁶ Over time the ships themselves increased in individual firepower but the ratio between the numbers of guns and the tasks assigned remained the same. By the late eighteenth century, conventional wisdom and experience deemed any ship smaller than a seventy-four insufficient for a major battle in European waters. Navies deployed smaller ships of sixty-four or fifty guns to foreign stations and in areas where geography and water-depth necessitated a shallower draft, most notably in the Netherlands. Major squadrons utilized first and second rates that respectively carried 100 and 90 guns mainly as flagships. While these larger warships boasted greater prestige and firepower their increased monetary and manpower costs counterbalanced the advantage of another deck of guns. By the late eighteenth century all major European navies recognized the seventy-four as the best compromise between firepower, speed, and economy for fighting in line-of-battle fleet engagements.⁵⁷

The British service further divided seventy-fours into the large and small classifications based on the size of the guns carried. The *Mars* fell in the large class, which meant that she carried twenty-eight thirty-two pound cannons on her lower deck and thirty, twenty-four pound cannons on her second deck. In addition, she carried sixteen nine pounders on her upper works

⁵⁶ Burney, *Falconer's Marine Dictionary*, 383, and Kemp, *The Oxford Companion to Ship's and the Sea*, 457.

⁵⁷ Burney, *Falconer's Marine Dictionary*, 454, and Brian Lavery, *The Ship of the Line, the Development of the Battlefleet 1650-1850* (London: Spottiswoode Ballantyne Press, 1977), 106-107.

(the quarterdeck and forecastle).⁵⁸ Carrying her main armament on two decks, the sailors sometimes referred to the *Mars* as a two-decker, even though she had a total of five decks. The *Mars* wielded an extraordinary amount of artillery. Few ships boasted more firepower than a seventy-four, which possessed the capability to fight anything else on the sea. Even in cases of actions against the massive first rates carrying up to 120 guns, the seeming disparity in firepower could not overwhelm a seventy-four. The Great Wars with France are filled with instances of seventy-fours standing toe-to-toe with larger ships during fleet actions.⁵⁹ Because of its combination of massive firepower and relative economy, the seventy-four predominated in all European navies by the end of the eighteenth century.⁶⁰ Serving on the *Mars* placed the seamen in a position to take part in the prestigious fleet battles, and this forward role brought personal and national pride as well as inter-navy respect.

National competition and the need for specialized service inspired the *Mars*' design and creation. During the eighteenth century the British engaged in a naval arms race with the French,

⁵⁸ The *Mars* also probably carried carronades as well, but official records from the time do not list them. Carronades were shorter, lighter guns that fired a heavy ball a short distance. At close quarters they were deadly and earned the nickname "smashers." Burney, *Falconer's Marine Dictionary*, 118, and Lavery, *Ship of the Line*, 184.

⁵⁹ Lavery, *Ship of the Line*, 107. By far the most famous instance of a seventy-four surviving an encounter with a first rate was Nelson's use of the *HMS Captain* (74) to attack and take the Spanish *San Josef* (112) at the Battle of St. Vincent. Kemp, *The Oxford Companion to Ship's and the Sea*, 136-137. While not as spectacular, a better example remains the *Bellerophon*'s attack on the massive French flagship *l'Orient* during the battle of Aboukir Bay during which the smaller *Bellerophon* fought the larger flagship to a standstill until she was finally forced to bear away due to heavy damage, leaving *l'Orient* on fire and at the mercy of the rest of the British fleet. N.A.M. Rodger, *To Command the Ocean, A Naval History of Britain, 1649-1815* (London: Allen Lane, 2004), 459-461, and James Cordingly, *The Billy Ruffian: the Bellerophon and the Downfall of Napoleon: The Biography of a Ship of the Line, 1782-1836* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2003), 141-150.

⁶⁰ In 1794, the Royal navy boasted 71 3rd rates versus 14 1st and 2nd rates, James Henderson, "Strength of the Royal Navy, 1794 Compared with 1814," in Jon Lewis, ed., *Life Before the Mast, Sailors' Eyewitness Accounts from the Age of Fighting Ships* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2001), 461, and David Davies, *The Fighting Ships, Ships of the Line and Napoleonic Sea Battles* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1996), 23.

Spanish, Dutch, and other minor powers for maritime domination. Under threat of war with the Netherlands in 1788, the Admiralty ordered the *Mars* and four other ships for hostilities that never arrived. The dockyard workers at Deptford, a royal shipyard on the Thames, continued to build the *Mars* over the next six years. The *Mars* finally launched in 1794 for the new war with Revolutionary France.⁶¹ The Deptford yards constituted part of the massive Royal Navy shore establishment that built, maintained, and supplied the fighting ships of the fleet. Since the late seventeenth century, the Royal Navy had grown steadily more modern and bureaucratic. The Royal Navy's operation of specialized yards, like Deptford, exemplifies the larger capitalist-inspired move toward efficiency and specialization as hallmarks of modern state organization for military operations.⁶²

Sir John Henslow, later to gain appointment as surveyor of the Navy, designed the *Mars* with his own knowledge from over forty years of experience as well as copying previously successful ships. Henslow based the *Mars* on the *Berwick*, a previously successful design. The *Berwick*, a member of the *Elizabeth* class 74s designed by the legendary Thomas Slade, had been launched in 1775 during the American War.⁶³ Although based on the *Berwick*, Henslow did not build the *Mars* to a standard design. Even though several other ships comprised her "class", each remained slightly different, unlike twentieth-century warships, built to exact technical specifications. Older artisan design strategy and modern manufacturing techniques intersected in the *Mars* to create a ship that made good use of the newest scientific principals but did not

⁶¹ *HMS Mars* Muster Book, December 1794 – August 1795, Great Britain, Public Records Office, London, MSS [Hereafter PRO], Records of the Admiralty [Hereafter ADM], 36/12230, Lavery, *Ship of the Line*, 120, 184, and Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 364-365.

⁶² Burney, *Falconer's Marine Dictionary*, 126, and Kemp, *Oxford Companion to Ships and the Sea*, 240.

⁶³ Slade was most famous for designing the *HMS Victory*, widely considered the finest ship in the fleet, despite its age. Lavery, *Ship of the Line*, 179.

abandon centuries of sea-going experience. The pre-modern, non-scientific design strategy of experience combined with trial and error, led to disparities in speed and handling that made some ships of the same class perform better than others. Together, the strength of the wind, the shape of a ship's hull, the state of her rigging, and the skill of the captain and crew influenced a sailing ship's performance. As a result, the exact scientific design of a ship remained less important than other factors.

Several historical examples from the *Mars* career demonstrate that she out-performed other ships, both British and French. Cornwallis's Action and the fight with *l'Hercule* demonstrated the *Mars* superior sailing qualities. During Cornwallis's encounter with the main French Brest fleet, two of the British ships *Brunswick* and *Bellerophon* were too slow to escape the pursuing French. But the *Mars* successfully covered the squadron's withdrawal even though she had suffered damage to her rigging. The second instance, the fight with *l'Hercule*, began with the *Mars* running down her French opponent and at the same time outrunning the rest of the British fleet. In both instances, the *Mars* proved faster than similar British and French seventy-fours. The combination of the *Mars*' design and her crew's skill repeatedly demonstrated superior speed and maneuverability in comparison to other warships of her class.⁶⁴

Henslow designed the *Mars* within the limiting parameters of the international naval arms race. Because conventional wisdom required warships to fight in the line-of-battle formation,

⁶⁴ For Cornwallis's Action see: *HMS Mars* Master's Log, 2 December 1794 – 23 December 1795, Great Britain, Public Records Office, London, MSS [Hereafter PRO], Records of the Admiralty [Hereafter ADM], 52/3191, Cordingley, *Billy Ruffian*, 96-100, and William James, *The Naval History of Great Britain Vol. 2* (London: Bentley & Son, 1859), 262-267. For the *Mars* engagement with *l'Hercule* see: Alexander Hood (Lord Bridport), at sea, to Samuel Hood, 29 April 1798, Great Britain, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, MSS (hereafter NMM), MKH/19, *HMS Mars* Master's Log, 2 December 1794 – 23 December 1795, Great Britain, Public Records Office, London, MSS [Hereafter PRO], Records of the Admiralty [Hereafter ADM], 52/3191, and William James, *The Naval History of Great Britain*, 121-123.

Henslow designed the *Mars* to not only bring the most firepower to bear but also withstand both the physical pounding of the enemies' fire at close range and the shock of firing her own main armament.⁶⁵ These requirements mandated the use of heavy oak scantlings for structural strength and protection and the devotion of the majority of the ship's space to heavy cannon and supplies. The specialized purpose limited what roles she could play. For instance, her size relative to speed made her a poor cruiser, limiting her usefulness in convoying or attacking merchant trade. In addition, the ship needed to be self-sufficient and able to exist in isolation from the shore for extended periods of time.

From a social perspective, the *Mars*' specialized role generated an urban lifestyle and social and cultural experience for the crew. Because the entire crew lived and worked on board, life on the *Mars* resembled urban life on shore. As Kathleen Wilson argues, urban social environments with their "diverse populations and greater potential for disorder, required more vigorous presentations of authority."⁶⁶ This in turn exposed the urban dweller to a more active political world needed to negotiate the social system required to discipline and order the close-packed population. The urban nature of maritime life held true for merchant ships as well as warships, but in contrast to the merchant service where cutting crew costs increased profits, the *Mars* became more effective the more men she carried.⁶⁷ The *Mars*' specialized purpose re-enforced the need for authority to preserve social order with its own set of strictly enforced hierarchies and drills designed to increase the deadliness of the ship.

⁶⁵ Thomas Cochrane, "The Cruise of the Speedy," in Jon Lewis, ed., *Life Before the Mast, Sailors' Eyewitness Accounts from the Age of Fighting Ships* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2001), 89-90.

⁶⁶ Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People, Politics, Culture, and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 7.

⁶⁷ Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 112.

Because all the European naval powers enjoyed technological parity, the best way to increase the deadliness and firepower of a warship remained improving the efficiency of the crew. The seamen needed to be able to collectively work the guns and sails all while ignoring an enemy's return fire. This demanding task required constant drill and harsh discipline to enable many men to work as one. All of these factors generated by the *Mars*' specialized purpose required a strict social organization to meld the labor of the crew together.

Modern Work for More Efficient Destruction

Despite numerous attempts by all the maritime powers to design a better warship, technological shortcomings limited the effectiveness of new designs, and in response naval officials worked to improve the deadliness of their warships by increasing the efficiency of the ship's crews. The British shared naval technological parity with their French, Spanish, and Dutch opponents. Given that technological advancements failed to tip the balance of naval power, improving crew efficiency remained the best way to increase the deadliness of a warship. To increase the efficiency of the men who composed the crew, the *Mars* operated much like a factory, with excessively strict order and discipline.

The navy imported and applied modern management techniques to the operation of the service as a whole as well as individual ships. Gone were the days of dragooned merchant ships, instead the navy boasted standardized procedures, classes of ships, and clearly defined and enforced expectations of behavior. The navy molded free-spirited young men used to working less-regulated merchant ships into institutional navy men who acted as pieces of living

machinery on board naval vessels. As on land, the ship's factory-like structure served to limit and control the labor force, and as a side effect, working in a factory-like environment transformed the men's identities along recognizably modern lines where work experience became one of the key defining features of identity.

A person's work experience comprised and still comprises a primary component of identity. Paul Willis argues, "Most people spend their prime waking hours at work, base their identity on work activities, and are defined by others essentially through their relation to work."⁶⁸ The *Mars*' seamen's work experience certainly defined the men's identity, because serving on a warship constituted a full-time, twenty-four-hour, 365 day-a-year occupation. The seamen could not go home and spend their time as husbands, fathers, or sons, and the geographical isolation inherent in naval service made work-based identity even more important for the seamen who lacked diverse land-based social opportunities. The men laboring in the navy defined themselves by their jobs, and the imperial role they played by defending the nation provided them with an identity linkage between themselves and Britain. The techno-social organization of the ship and the modern bureaucracy of the navy re-enforced these social classifications by utilizing the sailors as interchangeable parts and reducing them to their functions all while fostering a dependence on the state for basic services.

In Britain, industrialization of both manufacturing and agriculture began in the eighteenth century. With it came profound social change as people left their agricultural existences and moved to urban areas to work for wages. E.P. Thompson has documented the social transformations these changes wrought on England, but his model of a Marxist-inspired class

⁶⁸ Paul Willis, "Masculinity and Factory Labor," in Jeffrey C. Alexander and Steven Seidman, ed., *Culture and Society, Contemporary Debates* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 184.

conflict between management and labor does not directly translate into the naval world where the environment, war-making, and nation-defending purposes mitigated emerging class-consciousness.⁶⁹ Marcus Rediker's *The Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* takes Thompson's class constructions and transfers them to the sea during the early eighteenth century, demonstrating how the atomizing effects of factory labor influenced the seamen's identity. Rediker makes use of Thompson's oppositional class model, but he also recognizes the importance of the maritime environment and how it shaped class relations. Because Rediker concentrated on the Anglo-American merchant sailors of the early eighteenth century, his analysis cannot account for the changes of the later time period and the greater complexity of naval affairs.⁷⁰ The *Mars*' seamen developed class consciousness as a result of the alienation of productive relations just like the other members of the maritime working class, but the greater size and complexity of naval society mitigated an oppositional class structure.

Class consciousness resulted from the modern work experience on the *Mars*. In general, class consciousness and the identity construction that accompanies it derive from the shared experience and exploitation of capitalist productive relations between management and labor. The exploitive reality of naval life and work combined with the collective nature of the seamen's jobs created the conditions necessary for the sailors to create a collective working-class identity in opposition to management.⁷¹ The *Mars*' work experience, with its harsh and dangerous

⁶⁹ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), 21-22.

⁷⁰ Rediker, *Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 16-17, 80, 149, 289, and David Bell, "Modernism, postmodernism and the decline of moral order," in Jeffrey C. Alexander and Steven Seidman, ed., *Culture and Society, Contemporary Debates* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 320.

⁷¹ Anna Clark, *The Struggle for Breeches, Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 3, and Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 9.

conditions, coupled with the de-humanizing aspects of factory work, created the conditions for the sailors to develop class awareness. The changeover to a manufacturing, urban economy changed British society, including the sailors, and they emerged from their experiences as modern workers.

The transition to an urban, wage-based economic system and society from the older traditional agricultural existence formed a key component of modernity. In defining “modernity”, this chapter uses the ideas of Daniel Bell who describes modernity as “making economic activity, rather than military or religious concerns the central feature of society.”⁷² Enlightenment ideas and “scientific theory” inspired the resulting economic, political, and social system, based on specialization, hierarchy, and bureaucratic coordination. This definition of modernity may seem inappropriate for a work dealing with a military organization, but because the Royal Navy’s purpose was in large part to defend trade, the most important aspect of the British economy, the Navy’s role throughout the eighteenth-century should be seen as broadly economic in nature. Moreover, the factory-like structure of a warship and its need for disciplined, trained, and efficient labor required the state to develop a system utilizing modern management techniques to create, maintain, and discipline workers who could succeed under the new modern, economic paradigm. This section examines how the modern factory-style work of operating the *Mars* created within the sailors a clear class identity based on work experience. The naval pay structure and time controls coupled with the types of work performed onboard by the sailors created a clear sense of alienation that allowed for the creation of a working-class consciousness and collective work-based culture despite the fact that the sailors’ factory did not really produce tangible products for sale in the market. However the “goods” the navy did

⁷² Bell, “Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Decline of Moral Order,” 319, 320.

produce acted as a lubricant for the entire economic system by enabling products to reach their markets in both metropole and periphery. Thus, the naval seamen fulfilled a vital, imperial role within the emerging global economy, and their work experience exposed them to modernity in regards to time use, work duties, and wages.

The naval pay structure influenced the seamen's identity because their wages not only dictated their place in the ship's hierarchy, but also tied them to their employer. The navy paid the *Mars*' crew a set wage based on rank. Merchant ships also paid wages, but the constrained number of ranks limited the rates of pay, and the overall rates of pay changed with demand. Naval pay scales stayed constant, despite changes in demand for maritime labor brought on by war and peace. Moreover, the state controlled the naval pay scale. This left little room for financial negotiation based on skill because individual officers were unable to offer differing pay rates, like merchant captains, and this further standardized the sailors. Privateers generally paid the crew a share of any booty taken from enemy merchants, and this made up the entire remuneration for a sailor. In many ways, privateer pay mirrored traditional British peasant agricultural work where a farmer earned a lump sum for the sale of his crop instead of guaranteed pay for time served. Ultimately the state paid the seamen for their time, and they had very few opportunities for personal initiative in making additional money except as a group.⁷³

The navy utilized a prize system to reward its labor force with bonus money for the successful capture of enemy ships. A prize court valued every enemy ship taken (whether a warship or a merchantman) and divided the proceeds amongst the crew(s) of the ship(s) responsible for her capture. Throughout the period of this study, the *Mars* always served with a

⁷³ Burney, *Falconer's Marine Dictionary*, 335-339, Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 622-625, and Donald Petrie, *The Prize Game* (New York: Berkley Books, 1999), 5.

fleet; as a result, any captures made were divided between a large number of ships and seamen.⁷⁴ Battleships like the *Mars* did not often prey on enemy merchants, and thus the chance of serious prize money remained slim. Even the victory over *l'Hercule* resulted in a tiny amount of money for the *Mars*' seamen since they badly damaged the prize, significantly reducing her value.⁷⁵ After a lengthy legal fight involving the rest of the fleet, the crews of the *Mars* and two other ships finally shared out the meager proceeds.⁷⁶ The navy did not distribute prize money equally, unlike on pirate ships or privateers. Instead, the distribution mirrored the naval pay scale with those at the top garnering a much larger piece of the pie. If a lucky ship captured a rich prize, even though all crewmembers presumably labored equally, the top of the hierarchy made the most profit. This clearly constituted an area of unequal economic relations between management that profited greatly, and labor earned comparatively little even though everyone on board played a crucial and necessary role in a capture. Prize money added to the piratical air of wartime naval service, and the chance of a financial windfall as a result of successful job performance served as a constant, if largely unobtainable, incentive.

Wages and a lack of personal incentive to excel in their craft removed the sailors' individuality and independence. The seamen relied on their employer and each other to make a living, not the land or personal incentive. Like other modern workers in the emerging capitalist world economy, the sailors became dependent on economic forces far beyond their control. Unlike peasants who relied on the land and their own labor to make ends meet, the *Mars*' seamen

⁷⁴ *HMS Mars* Pay Book, 1 January 1796 – 31 December 1796, Great Britain, Public Records Office, London, MSS [Hereafter PRO], Records of the Admiralty [Hereafter ADM], 35/1048, *HMS Mars* Master's Log, 2 December 1794 – 23 December 1795, PRO, ADM, 52/3191, and *HMS Mars* Master's Log, 24 December 1795 – 16 May 1798, PRO, ADM, 52/3192.

⁷⁵ *London Times*, 1 May 1798, 3 May 1798.

⁷⁶ Admiralty Court Decision, 1 June 1798, Great Britain, Public Records Office, London, MSS, Records of the High Court of the Admiralty, 42/253.

lacked control over the means of production and correspondingly lost economic independence. Once the seamen joined the navy, their place in the naval world became tied to their place within the modern capitalist structure of the ship.

The navy based its pay scale on specialization, and it offered thirty non-officer pay grades based on job description and the size of the ship.⁷⁷ This tied identity to pay and naval rank, even as it monetarily reduced the men to their functions. In the navy, a man's identity rested on his shipboard position, not on the village where he grew up, or his genealogical descent. The variety of ranks and pay grades also suggest the technological sophistication required to operate a man-o-war effectively and reflect the bureaucratic complexity of the naval system. The naval pay scale labeled the sailors based on their specialized job description, and this new label served as an important social signifier for the seamen's identity because it dominated so many aspects of everyday life. Standardized pay for specific duties also mandated a standardized use of time in order to efficiently utilize the limited supply of on-board labor.

To organize and place that labor in the correct spot and help ensure that the seamen worked in concert, a British warship's crew went to work to the whistles of the boatswain's mates. They followed their drill exactly to protect themselves and their shipmates.⁷⁸ The ship's bell augmented the system of specialized jobs and whistles and served as the central governing instrument of both ship and seamen. The *Mars'* time controls produced the dual effects of increasing production efficiency and divorcing the seamen from land-based society.

E.P. Thompson has examined the social impact of regulated time on the workers of early industrial Britain, and the *Mars'* seamen also experienced the radical change in time use as a

⁷⁷ Burney, *Falconer's Marine Dictionary*, 335-339, and Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 624-625.

⁷⁸ Burney, *Falconer's Marine Dictionary*, 65, and Kemp, *Oxford Companion to Ships and the Sea*, 92.

result of modernity. In addition to ensuring greater productivity and discipline, the ship's bell also formed a necessary part of navigation.⁷⁹ Yet it produced the same effects on the sailors as it did on the industrial workers, with a maritime twist. Regulated factory time, implemented by the ship's bell, strictly ordered everyday life on an alien non-biological rhythm. The daily schedule of the *Mars*, with its universal time periods and watches (shifts) imposed factory-like standardization over the men.⁸⁰ The sailors slept, worked, and ate according to the dictates of the ship's bell, a far cry from the natural rhythms of an agricultural existence where the needs of the harvest and normal night and day time cycles dominated. The *Mars* operated twenty-four hours a day, and the ship had to continue working regardless of the weather or the time.

On a navy ship during wartime there existed little real "off" time because even when a sailor's watch was below deck, there remained the possibility of all hands being called back to work. In further contrast to land-based factory workers, the *Mars*' seamen very rarely left their "factory," because they lived on the ship and did not go home to sleep or eat. Thompson draws a distinction between "employer's time" and a worker's "own' time" and the importance of time off to the workers' happiness.⁸¹ Unlike land-based workers, who fought for shorter working hours, the seamen of the *Mars* wanted shore leave, and this was a key demand made in the Spithead petitions.⁸² The navy's use of regulated time and the geographical isolation caused by the unique nature of the seamen's factory divorced them from land-based society. This separation from the rest of society re-enforced their class-based alienation because it trapped

⁷⁹ E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism." *Past and Present*, No. 38 (Dec., 1967): 56-97, and Burney, *Falconer's Marine Dictionary*, 215-216.

⁸⁰ Kemp, *The Oxford Companion to Ships and the Sea*, 926, and N.A.M. Rodger, *The Wooden World, An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1986), 39-40.

⁸¹ Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," 61.

⁸² *London Times*, 22 April 1797.

them in their job-based identity all the time, unlike their land-based fellow workers who could interact with the rest of society at the tavern or in church.

The navy ran the *Mars* like a factory, but in what sort of production were sailors actually engaged? They did not produce easy-to-quantify batches of cloth like a textile worker. The sailors on the *Mars* worked two separate collective jobs: sailing the ship and working the guns. Each task required different skills and discipline and as a result produced different effects on the sailors' identity and culture. Working the guns closely resembled modern factory work that de-skilled the worker because of the assembly line process, but working the sails still relied on experience and intuition and closely resembled craft work that maintained the need for skill. As a result of working these two "jobs", the *Mars*' laborer fell into a grey area between modern, alienated factory workers and artesian craftsmen because one part of his work remained skilled.

The average sailor laboring at the guns on the *Mars* served as a cog within the larger machine bridging the gaps in operations caused by the technological shortcomings of the eighteenth century. Mass production does not require a complete skill set; instead, each man performs a small part of the task. For example, when firing the great guns, each man had a task and title that denoted his small part of the job, like spounger or rammer. Because of the manufacturing system, "individuals are dissolved into their function."⁸³ One sailor described the navy's view of the seamen as "pieces of living mechanism," and told how the navy's "treating them as automatons ... keeps them degraded."⁸⁴ Working as part of one of the *Mars*' gun teams de-humanized the sailors and created a sense alienation based on the shared work experience.

⁸³ Bell, "Modernism, Postmodernism and the Decline of Moral Order," 320.

⁸⁴ Samuel Leech, "Frigate Engagement," in Jon Lewis, ed., *Life Before the Mast, Sailors' Eyewitness Accounts from the Age of Fighting Ships* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2001), 323.

Although nothing like actual combat, the crew frequently drilled with the great guns.⁸⁵ Gun drill served to train the seamen in the dangerous art of cannon management on a rolling deck. Black powder, close range, and enclosed space made fighting on board an eighteenth-century warship a deafening, bloody experience, and the seamen, the majority stationed below decks with their guns, could not even follow the course of battle.⁸⁶ One observer described a sea fight as “like some awfully tremendous thunder-storm, whose deafening roar is attended by incessant streaks of lightning carrying death in every flash.”⁸⁷ Individual crews did not aim their cannon at individual targets; instead, the whole ship aimed its broadside at the enemy and the cannon operated like a shotgun. The fighting done by the *Mars* resembled later, modern warfare with the indiscriminate death and fire that, when perfected in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, leeched all the imagined glory from war. This change in the nature of war, mainly caused by the mechanization of death, made killing a scientific enterprise where numbers, space, and rate of fire mandated casualties.⁸⁸ But in the eighteenth century, the men’s labor and skill still played a crucial role in the *Mars*’ style of fighting. The drill, organization, and hierarchy strove to create a system as close to automatic precision as possible. The need to improve the guns’ rate of fire led the navy to view the sailors as part of the ship, only useful for filling the technological gaps in the system.

Because the navy utilized modern manufacturing and management techniques to improve the efficiency of their warships, the sailors who played a part in the process experienced

⁸⁵ *HMS Mars* Master’s Log, 2 December 1794 – 23 December 1795, PRO, ADM, 52/3191, and *HMS Mars* Master’s Log, 24 December 1795 – 16 May 1798, PRO, ADM, 52/3192.

⁸⁶ Leech, “Frigate Engagement,” 328-334.

⁸⁷ Leech, “Frigate Engagement,” 329.

⁸⁸ Rodger Spiller, “Courage,” in Robert Cowley and Geoffrey Parker, ed., *The Reader’s Companion to Military History* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 113, and John Keegan, *Face of Battle* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 233-234.

alienation similar to that of land-based factory workers even though their experience remained unique. The loss of individuality and identity caused by the manufacturing process was not just a top-down process of degradation, and the workers utilized the experience to bolster and re-create their own identity constructs. The *Mars*' specialized war-making purpose helped the seamen to re-conceptualize their sense of manhood. The *Mars*' seamen utilized the danger of their work environment to reinforce a sense of manhood undermined by the atomization of factory labor. As Paul Willis argues, "Difficult, uncomfortable, or dangerous conditions are seen, not for themselves, but for their appropriateness to a masculine readiness and hardness."⁸⁹ The dangers of work on the job contributed to the self-esteem and identity of the sailors by re-invigorating a conception of manhood that had been undermined by the changes in their identity brought on by modern, capitalist manufacturing techniques. Thus, working the *Mars*' cannon de-skilled the sailors and this experience created the seamen's class-based alienation, but the skill of the *Mars*' laborers also allowed them to win sea-fights, which partially counter-acted the destruction of their individuality.

The assembly line work of manning the guns only constituted part of the seamen's job, and sailing a large warship like the *Mars* required as much teamwork as firing her guns. Like all proper "ships," she relied on three large masts plus a bowsprit and an almost countless number of sails and sail combinations for motive power.⁹⁰ There existed no real set pattern or instruction manual for sailing; instead, maritime skill and experience told a sailor which combination of sails served best for the wind conditions and the individual ship. Each ship handled differently,

⁸⁹ Willis, "Masculinity and Factory Labor," 193.

⁹⁰ An experienced mariner named and described a sailing vessel based on the type of hull and the rig of the sails. The term "ship" was not used unless it was in reference to a vessel with the proper ship-rig. For example, a vessel with square sails on two masts and triangular sails on the bowsprit was termed a brig, not a ship. Burney, *Falconer's Marine Dictionary*, 454, and Kemp, *Oxford Companion to Ships and the Sea*, 553.

and the always-changing wind and sea conditions required constant vigilance to ensure the best sailing performance and prevent potential damage or disaster. A skilled sailor could not only raise and lower the proper sails at the appropriate times, but could also steer the ship and help with the detailed work of sewing sails and splicing lines.⁹¹ Working the sails required skill and experience that could only be obtained from years of work at sea, and thus nautical skill remained a valuable commodity that could not be mimicked or replaced by modern manufacturing techniques.

The *Mars* required skilled workers not just obedient pieces of biological machinery. Naval culture respected this need for skill and rewarded it with pay and respect. Able seamen, those who could “hand, reef, and steer” earned higher wages and enjoyed greater respect than landsmen whose only purpose remained pulling on a rope.⁹² This hierarchy divided the bulk of the ship’s labor into skilled and un-skilled groups, albeit one that crossed class lines. The surgeon and the purser, who possessed no nautical credentials, received less respect than an able seaman even though they messed in the wardroom and walked the quarterdeck. At the same time, the ship’s officers who had to pass examinations regarding their seamanship shared the common bond of nautical skill with their able seamen.⁹³ Thus the need for and importance of sailing skill created cross-class linkages between management and labor that counter-acted the class-based alienation generated by working the ship’s cannons.

As a result of the seamen’s unique work experience, they developed a unique version of working-class culture, similar to, but different from that of their land-based fellow workers. The sailors’ work experience resembled the emerging land-based culture of the dispossessed

⁹¹ Burney, *Falconer’s Marine Dictionary*, 454-455.

⁹² Rediker, *Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 85, and Burney, *Falconer’s Marine Dictionary*, 2.

⁹³ Rodger, *Wooden World*, 259-260, and Burney, *Falconer’s Marine Dictionary*, 222-223.

journeymen, marginalized by the economic transformations of modernity. Unlike land-based workers, the *Mars*' seamen also felt the influence of maritime and naval culture that combined with their working class experiences to produce a hybrid seamen's culture. The sailors' version of working-class culture separated them from land-based society while re-enforcing work-based social ties.

Naval culture remained almost completely homosocial in that for the majority of time the seamen lived apart from women. The *Mars* existed away from the home and women and wives in general. Miniscule numbers of women did live and work on navy ships, but always in an informal fashion. Sometimes a warrant officer's wife would join him at sea, but she did not appear in the ship's books, and in general superstitious sailors considered women bad luck at sea.⁹⁴ As Kathleen Wilson argued "Not only women, but all things 'effeminate' were considered antithetical to the homosociality of the ship."⁹⁵ In the navy, this translated to intense prejudice against homosexuals and women because they undermined the seamen's identity, which remained based on their masculinity.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Naturally no women are officially listed in the *Mars*' books with exception of some military passenger's wives, but this does not necessarily mean that no women sailed on the ship. William Welch, the ship's boatswain, hailed from Chatham, as did Thomas Welch age thirteen who served as a third-class servant. William and Thomas both joined the ship in early 1795, on the same day, and it seems reasonable to assume that they had some sort of familial relations, either father and son or uncle and nephew. Given William's warrant officer status and his likely on-board young relation, if there was a warrant officer's wife serving on the *Mars* she was probably a Welch. *HMS Mars* Muster Book, December 1794 – August 1795, PRO, ADM, 36/12230. For a more general discussion of women on board Royal Navy ships, see Rodger, *Wooden World*, 76-77, and Suzanne Stark, *Female Tars: Women Aboard Ship in the Age of Sail* (Annapolis, Md. : Naval Institute Press, 1996).

⁹⁵ Wilson, *The Island Race*, 177.

⁹⁶ The navy punished "the unnatural and detestable sin of buggery or sodomy" with death. Burney, *Falconer's Marine Dictionary*, 669. None of the *Mars*' crew fell victim to article twenty-nine, nor were any of the men punished for "uncleanliness," which the navy used as a euphemism to punish the guilty while at the same time spare the rest of the crew from the public humiliation that would accompany a trial for sodomy. Wilson, *The Island Race*, 177, 190-191,

Working on a warship included many dangers and thus the seamen's job became a hallmark of their masculinity in opposition to both women and non-seamen.⁹⁷ The seamen's culture disparaged land dwellers for their lack of nautical skill and hardiness that signified true manhood in their nautical culture. In many ways the sailors' culture tended to gender the whole of land-based society as effeminate and weak or at the least different because all landlubbers lacked the needed skills and hardiness to survive on the *Mars*. The seamen's version of working class culture defined itself in opposition to the rest of British society, including the rest of the emerging working class that experienced similar economic and social challenges.

The manufacturing economy undermined traditional labor systems, and old paths to economic success dwindled. Women and children increasingly played an important economic role by taking work previously performed by men. Skilled seamen did not suffer the indignity of losing their employment to underpaid women and children because they successfully defined their job as too dangerous.⁹⁸ The need for nautical skill, not just un-skilled or semi-skilled workers, meant that seamen could always find a berth because of the endemic shortage of maritime labor that plagued the entire Atlantic World. The dangers of the sea and the unique skills needed to counteract them, helped to insulate the *Mars*' sailors from some of the social transformations of modernity, and this fueled their desire to maintain the existing system. But at the same time, the larger economic transformations inherent in the global economy did affect the seamen because they trapped the sailors as wage laborers at the mercy of management, and this contradiction created a tension within the seamen.

HMS Mars Master's Log, 2 December 1794 – 23 December 1795, PRO, ADM, 52/3191, and *HMS Mars* Master's Log, 24 December 1795 – 16 May 1798, PRO, ADM, 52/3192.

⁹⁷ Willis, "Masculinity and Factory Labor," 192-193.

⁹⁸ Clark, *The Struggle for Breeches*, 5, 13.

The realities of nautical primitive capitalist accumulation made it almost impossible for a seaman to ever own or manage a ship as captain.⁹⁹ Modern economic changes increasingly eliminated the land-based journeyman's prospect of owning his own shop as an independent master craftsman, and the new capitalist system marginalized both journeyman and sailor. Without the opportunities to follow the older craft progression, journeymen and sailors abandoned traditional cultural norms that accompanied professional advancement. These young men embraced a libertine culture that encouraged them to display their manhood through drinking, gambling, and fraternity. They collectivized these activities by basing social and cultural acceptance on skill in specific trades in opposition to unskilled workers and women.¹⁰⁰ The *Mars*' seamen defined themselves in opposition to both women and non-sailors, and they re-enforced this natural collectivity with drinking and libertine behavior while at leisure as well as on the job. The sailors' marginalized and displaced position within the emerging capitalist system forced them to reject traditional life paths, and the corporate associations of their working-class culture largely replaced community and domestic ties.

Only ninety-nine men out of the 978 men listed in the *Mars*' pay book sent their wages home to a "wife." The navy allowed seamen to remit their pay to designated family members to help support land-based domestic establishments, but the records do not indicate the actual relationship between the seamen and his designated family member. Out of those ninety-nine, seventeen were the commission and warrant officers, classed as professionals or master craftsmen. That left only eighty-two main deck sailors and marines with families that they supported on a regular basis. In addition, thirty-nine of these men ranked as landsmen, new recruits not eligible for membership within the nautical fraternity because of their lack of skill.

⁹⁹ Rediker, *Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 35-36.

¹⁰⁰ Clark, *The Struggle for Breeches*, 14, 30-34.

Only forty-eight skilled sailors remitted their pay home, and thus the vast majority of the *Mars*' seamen did not boast any official domestic ties that they regularly supported monetarily. This suggests that the sailors clearly embraced the new, gendered life path offered by journeyman bachelor culture as an outgrowth of their working-class experience and alienation.¹⁰¹

Because the seamen's version of working-class culture remained based on one key component, skill, it segregated them from the rest of land-based society. Workers on shore lacked the crucial seamanship needed for membership and acceptance within naval society. This social divide between the seamen and the rest of the emerging working class stifled the development of any broad-based class-consciousness. Moreover, the seamen's social and geographical isolation made it very difficult for the sailors to make common cause with other workers who faced similar work-related challenges.¹⁰²

Factory-like work dramatically changed British society and culture during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the seamen of the Royal Navy experienced this upheaval. The regulated nature of the sailors' work, designed and organized for maximum efficiency, produced a worker with limited individuality. Each crewmember on the *Mars* existed as a cog in the larger machine, his work identity based on his job. The *Mars*' modern, bureaucratic factory-like organization produced a man with an awakened class-based identity. The exploitative, capitalist-inspired ship placed the seamen in a position to collectively define themselves in opposition to other land-based workers with different work experiences and their own management who

¹⁰¹ *HMS Mars* Pay Book, 2 December 1794 – 31 December 1795, Great Britain, Public Records Office, London, MSS [Hereafter PRO], Records of the Admiralty [Hereafter ADM], 35/1047, *HMS Mars* Pay Book, 1 January 1796 – 31 December 1796, PRO, ADM, 35/1048, *HMS Mars* Pay Book, 1 January 1797 – 31 December 1797, Great Britain, Public Records Office, London, MSS [Hereafter PRO], Records of the Admiralty [Hereafter ADM], 35/1049, and *HMS Mars* Pay Book, 1 January 1798 – 31 December 1798, Great Britain, Public Records Office, London, MSS [Hereafter PRO], Records of the Admiralty [Hereafter ADM], 35/1050.

¹⁰² Clark, *The Struggle for Breeches*, 5, 25-26.

derived profit from their labor. The sailors' modern work experience and the resulting class-consciousness formed a crucial building block of their identity, but other factors of naval life mitigated and affected this class-consciousness.

Modern Workers, Modern Benefits

By necessity, the navy provided numerous fringe benefits to the *Mars*' seamen. In addition to the wages they earned for their labor, the navy provided food, medical care, housing, and even rudimentary retirement benefits.¹⁰³ This benefits package, while meager by modern standards, fulfilled the sailors' needs, needs that could not be met privately because of the ship's geographical isolation. The benefits provided by the state for its maritime workers constituted a key inducement for national service, but at the same time en-meshed the sailors into a modern bureaucratic system that exerted increasing amounts of control over the seamen. Moreover, the admiralty gave the seamen these benefits not out of respect or care as much as self-interest. The sailors served as interchangeable parts of the ship, and the food, medical care, and other benefits

¹⁰³ See *HMS Mars* Master's Log, 2 December 1794 – 23 December 1795, PRO, ADM, 52/3191, and *HMS Mars* Master's Log, 24 December 1795 – 16 May 1798, PRO, ADM, 52/3192 for details about instances of the crew's food being condemned as well as the constant intake of provisions. See *HMS Mars* Muster Book, December 1794 – August 1795, PRO, ADM, 36/12230, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, September 1795 – April 1796, Great Britain, Public Records Office, London, MSS [Hereafter PRO], Records of the Admiralty [Hereafter ADM], 36/12231, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, March 1796 – December 1796, Great Britain, Public Records Office, London, MSS [Hereafter PRO], Records of the Admiralty [Hereafter ADM], 36/12232, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, January 1797 – October 1797, Great Britain, Public Records Office, London, MSS [Hereafter PRO], Records of the Admiralty [Hereafter ADM], 36/12233, and *HMS Mars* Muster Book, November 1797 – June 1798, Great Britain, Public Records Office, London, MSS [Hereafter PRO], Records of the Admiralty [Hereafter ADM], 36/12234 for a record of the sailors' medical movements and retirements to Greenwich. The best work on naval food is Janet Macdonald, *Feeding Nelson's Navy, The True Story of Food at Sea in the Georgian Era* (London: Chatham Publishing, 2004).

should be interpreted as fuel for the naval machine, not necessarily enlightened care for the seamen.

Injury and illness constantly depleted the naval labor force because of the limitations in medical knowledge and the crowded conditions on-board. Seamen moved off the ship and thus out of the *Mars's* community due to poor health and illness. The *Mars* spent the majority of her time in the cold, damp climate of the English Channel and off the northern coast of France. Naturally illness struck the sailors exposed to the elements working the ship in all weather at all hours. However, the ship suffered no mass epidemics, which remained a constant problem for ships stationed in the fever tropics.¹⁰⁴ The navy's ritual cleanliness went a long way toward stopping communicable diseases caused by overcrowding and poor hygiene.¹⁰⁵ The health care system on the *Mars* and in the navy overall corresponded with the larger trends in eighteenth-century medicine during which time it assumed "an increasingly important place in the administrative system and the machinery of power."¹⁰⁶ The navy needed to maintain the health of its labor force, not only because of its scarcity, but also because an outbreak of an infectious disease could render a ship's company unable to perform its duties and therefore leave Britain open to invasion. The Admiralty went to great lengths to protect the health of the seamen and imposed numerous protocols to prevent sickness. This meant the *Mars* carried a surgeon and his

¹⁰⁴ See *HMS Mars* Muster Book, December 1794 – August 1795, PRO, ADM, 36/12230, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, September 1795 – April 1796, PRO, ADM, 36/12331, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, March 1796 – December 1796, PRO, ADM, 36/12232, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, January 1797 – October 1797, PRO, ADM, 36/12233, and *HMS Mars* Muster Book, November 1797 – June 1798, PRO, ADM, 36/12234 for the *Mars's* crew's health, and Rodger, *Wooden World*, 98-99 for deadliness of tropical naval service.

¹⁰⁵ Rodger, *Wooden World*, 105-109.

¹⁰⁶ Michel Foucault, "The Politics of Health in the Eighteenth Century," Paul Rabinow, ed., *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 283.

two assistants who possessed quarterdeck status and power over the health of the crew.¹⁰⁷ The official health policy created yet another aspect of the social architecture of the *Mars* that molded the sailors' lives, forcing modern hygiene on the men whether they wanted it or not.

Over the *Mars*' career, disease seemed an accepted part of naval life, and the ship continued to perform its role even as the ill men were transferred out, sometimes returning, sometimes not. Sick seamen did not leave the naval community. The *Mars*' ill sailors transferred to either hospital ships or to one of the naval hospitals at Plymouth or Haslar Hospital at Portsmouth. But the naval hospitals were not just places for sick sailors to go and die. 101 out of a total of 181 members of the *Mars*' crew transferred who transferred to one of the naval medical facilities, later returned to duty.¹⁰⁸ The navy provided its laborers with health care, and the hospital at Haslar maintained a good reputation as one of the newest and best hospitals in all of Europe.¹⁰⁹ This fringe benefit only seems adequate as the seamen risked bodily harm, not to mention life, on a daily basis, but proper health care and the power structures that accompanied it further enmeshed the seamen into the evolving modern social structure of navy and nation.

In addition to health care, the sailors were eligible for other fringe benefits. Wounded men could receive a pension from the Greenwich hospital, a place where infirm sailors could

¹⁰⁷ Burney, *Falconer's Marine Dictionary*, 513-514.

¹⁰⁸ *HMS Mars* Muster Book, December 1794 – August 1795, PRO, ADM, 36/12230, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, September 1795 – April 1796, PRO, ADM, 36/12331, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, March 1796 – December 1796, PRO, ADM, 36/12232, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, January 1797 – October 1797, PRO, ADM, 36/12233, and *HMS Mars* Muster Book, November 1797 – June 1798, PRO, ADM, 36/12234. Not all of the remaining 81 seamen died of their illness, however. When a sailor went to one of the naval hospitals they left the ship's books, but when or if they recovered they did not necessarily rejoin the same ship they left. One of the clearest examples proving that seamen moved to a naval hospital did not leave the naval community were the seamen in Haslar joining the Spithead mutiny, *London Times*, 21 April 1797.

¹⁰⁹ Burney, *Falconer's Marine Dictionary*, 185-186, Kemp, *Oxford Companion to Ships and the Sea*, 377, and Rodger, *Wooden World*, 110-111.

retire.¹¹⁰ Particularly favored and crippled, main deck sailors earned cook's warrants. Overseeing the galley and managing the boiling of the ship's provisions in the great copper pots filled a cook's time, not delicate, culinary work. As a warrant officer, the cook enjoyed improved pay, legal rights, and respect, but the position of cook filled another function as well. Most cooks earned their position as a result of suffering crippling injuries while serving on a naval ship, and their position on board constituted a sort of floating pension plan for differently-abled seamen. It enabled them to remain in the naval community transmitting their nautical experience to younger generations of seamen, while keeping them employed and not begging on the streets of London.¹¹¹

The ship provided the sailors with their room, a spot to sling a hammock below decks, but it also provided their board. The *Mars* and the rest of the navy served standardized food with a strictly regimented diet. The necessity of preserving food without the benefit of refrigeration limited the menu, but at least the food was plentiful. Each day every man received a pound of ship's biscuit (twice-baked flour or hardtack) and a gallon of small beer. Salted meat (pork on Sunday and Thursday, beef on Tuesday and Saturday) that the ship's cook steeped in fresh water and boiled, served as the primary source of protein. The other three days of the week were called Banyan days, a reference to an east Indian sect that ate no meat, and the sailors ate dried peas and cheese. In addition once a week, the sailors ate a suet pudding called duff as a treat and change of diet.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Burney, *Falconer's Marine Dictionary*, 169-171, and Kemp, *Oxford Companion to Ships and the Sea*, 355.

¹¹¹ Burney, *Falconer's Marine Dictionary*, 103, Janet Macdonald, *Feeding Nelson's Navy*, 104-105, and Rodger, *Wooden World*, 122

¹¹² Dudley Pope, *Life in Nelson's Navy* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1981), 150-151, 155, Rodger, *Wooden World*, 82-83, Burney, *Falconer's Marine Dictionary*, 359, and Macdonald, *Feeding Nelson's Navy*, 10.

Captains seldom altered this diet, partially because of service requirements, and partially because on-board food remained a potential friction point and key negotiating matter between management and the sailors. Seamen and management, whether private ship-owners or the admiralty, entered into strict agreement on the nature of victualing, and any un-approved change could lead to unrest among the crew who had been cheated by unscrupulous ship masters in the past.¹¹³ The most common change substituted a pint of wine in the Mediterranean or spirits (rum) elsewhere for beer. When the beer ran out, the seaman drank half a pint of rum served out twice daily in a concoction known as grog (three parts water mixed with lime juice to ward off scurvy).¹¹⁴ Service on the *Mars* ensured the seamen kept a full belly, and while salt meat and hard tack may not seem like great fare to a twenty-first-century observer, by contemporary standards the seamen's diet provided frequent meat and a daily alcohol ration, a clear improvement over most workers' and peasants' diets.¹¹⁵ The seamen's plentiful diet should not be interpreted as kindness on the part of management. The sailors acted as part of the machine, and for the machine to function it needed fuel. Naturally, the admiralty that defended the entire British nation under trying circumstances and great competition needed the ships of the navy to function as efficiently as possible, and so they ensured that the ships received adequate fuel.

While the navy provided the seamen with food, where and when a sailor ate also served as a social signifier on the *Mars*. The seamen all ate at tables hung between the guns on the main decks. Warrant officers, petty officers, and midshipmen ate in their own messes, separated from

¹¹³ Roger, *Wooden World*, 82, and Rediker, *Devil and Deep Blue Sea*, 126-128.

¹¹⁴ According to the Master's Log, the *Mars* started drinking spirits on 11 July 1796, and never switched back to beer. Regulations that mandated the alcohol ration seemed to be ignored because the sailors liked the stronger drink and the Captains liked the easier to store and keep spirits. *HMS Mars* Master's Log, 24 December 1795 – 16 May 1798, PRO, ADM, 52/3192, Pope, *Life in Nelson's Navy*, 153-154, and Burney, *Falconer's Marine Dictionary*, 172.

¹¹⁵ Janet Macdonald has figured the caloric intake from the basic naval ration to be 5000 calories a day. Macdonald, *Feeding Nelson's Navy*, 10-11.

the bulk of the men. The ship's commission and senior warrant officers ate an hour later in the wardroom, with servants in attendance. Last of all came the captain, who generally ate several hours after the crew in his private dinning cabin, generally alone, but sometimes with invited guests (always officers or midshipmen). The quality of provisions generally improved higher up the chain of command. The ship's captain enjoyed large, expensive meals with many courses, while the seamen made do with the government rations.¹¹⁶ The combination of spatial and time dynamics made food an important social signifier on board the *Mars* and served as a incentive for moving up the hierarchy.

Moreover, meal times served as a key social gathering opportunity, and a man's messmates, generally served as his best friends and confidants.¹¹⁷ Messmates replaced domestic family members in the seamen's lives, and while a journeyman weaver may have gone to the pub for ritual bonding, the sailors experienced a similar ritual twice a day when they gathered at their hanging tables for food and grog. Under the stifling control of the ship's discipline the seamen got to choose whom they ate and drank with, and this represented one of their few chances to make their own decisions. Mealtimes on the *Mars* occurred at set times with set rituals including drumming, and the officers considered them sacred and not to be interrupted unless absolutely necessary. Naval tradition governed the dynamics of meals, but the seamen also took advantage of the opportunities the system offered to affirm self-generated social bonds. Food on the *Mars* served to re-enforce the social and geographic isolation of the seamen, but it also helped to create class bonds based on the seamen's version of working-class culture. While the messing system

¹¹⁶ The exact details of the *Mars*' crew's respective menus are unclear, but judging by the large amount of wine Capt. Hood willed to his Uncle Bridport, he at least drank a good deal. Charles Morgan, Portsmouth, to Elizabeth Hood, 2 August 1798, Great Britain, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, MSS (hereafter NMM), MKH/19, and Macdonald, *Feeding Nelson's Navy*, 100-139.

¹¹⁷ Burney, *Falconer's Marine Dictionary*, 275.

may have generated camaraderie between the skilled sailors, allowing the seamen to choose their messmates potentially excluded the un-skilled landsmen.¹¹⁸ This re-enforced the hierarchy of skill, but also socially stratified labor and this stratification weakened overall class solidarity.

The ship's purser controlled the distribution of provisions and other stores. While the state held him responsible for their proper disbursement under financial penalties, he took this job with the hopes of turning a profit. In order for him to make any money, he needed to cheat the sailors out of some of their provisions. This institutionalized graft made the purser unpopular with rest of the crew, and the *Mars* seamen let their first purser James Cockerele drown.¹¹⁹ However unpopular and un-seaman-like, the purser provided the sailors with valuable services, and he operated the company store.

Despite the fact that he distributed public property, the purser acted as private merchant selling small items to the crew charged against their wages, and he enjoyed a monopoly on the sale of clothes and tobacco on-board. On joining the *Mars*, a new crewman could find himself in debt several months' pay just by having to purchase the necessities from the only shop in "town." Besides hammocks and bedding, the seamen needed clothes. The purser provided

¹¹⁸ Janet Macdonald succinctly describes the politics of naval messes, including the skill-based divisions, and how captains sometimes used them as punishments and incentives. Macdonald, *Feeding Nelson's Navy*, 109, 112-113.

¹¹⁹ Cockerele drowned along with two midshipmen while the ship was anchored at Spithead on 3 March 1796. The muster book lists him as "supposed drowned," as if no one bothered to find the body. No other seamen drowned, which is strange because if there had been an accident involving one of the ship's boats then presumably others would have drowned as well. This suggests that the rest of the crew allowed the purser and midshipmen to drown while saving themselves. *HMS Mars Muster Book*, March 1796 – December 1796, PRO, ADM, 36/12232, *HMS Mars Master's Log*, 24 December 1795 – 16 May 1798, PRO, ADM, 52/3192, Macdonald, *Feeding Nelson's Navy*, 91-96, Burney, *Falconer's Marine Dictionary*, 362-365, and Rodger, *Wooden World*, 96-98.

standardized clothing called slops.¹²⁰ Over the course of time spent on the *Mars*, eventually the seamen all ended up dressed similarly, since they all bought from the same store even though the navy only required uniforms for officers. Working at sea required clothes designed to keep the seamen warm and dry as well as allow them freedom of motion at the guns or in the tops. The seamen's garb, very different from a land-man's "long clothes," served as a mark of pride and solidarity, but also marked him out when on shore making desertion much tougher¹²¹

The purser's monopoly, coupled with his theft, made him very unpopular with the rest of the crew. Just as land-based workers raged against the injustices of the "company store," so too did the sailors rage against the purser. At Spithead, the sailors aimed two of their six demands at curtailing the purser's ability to cheat them.¹²² The seamen's relationship with the navy's bureaucratic system revealed the inherent class-based animosity created by the unequal productive relations between management and capital. The seamen aimed their Spithead demands at improving their material conditions within this bureaucratic system.

The bureaucratic nature of the naval system and its standardized benefits also transformed the seamen from invisible individuals to names on records. This change remained part of the modernization process that marginalized personal relationships and replaced them with relationships with bureaucrats and their rules, regulations, and stamped papers. The *Mars'*

¹²⁰ The *Mars* musters are filled with examples of men such as David Byram, landsman, who owed the purser 36 schillings within the first month of his time on the *Mars*, which equaled two months pay at 18 Schillings a lunar month. *HMS Mars Muster Book*, December 1794 – August 1795, PRO, ADM, 36/12230, *HMS Mars Muster Book*, September 1795 – April 1796, PRO, ADM, 36/12331, *HMS Mars Muster Book*, March 1796 – December 1796, PRO, ADM, 36/12232, *HMS Mars Muster Book*, January 1797 – October 1797, PRO, ADM, 36/12233, and *HMS Mars Muster Book*, November 1797 – June 1798, PRO, ADM, 36/12234, and Burney, *Falconer's Marine Dictionary*, 335-339, 485-486.

¹²¹ Rodger, *Wooden World*, 64, and Robert Hay, "A Pressed Man," in Jon Lewis, ed., *Life Before the Mast, Sailors' Eyewitness Accounts from the Age of Fighting Ships* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2001), 306-307.

¹²² *London Times*, 22 April 1797.

seamen interacted throughout their lives not necessarily on the basis of personal face-to-face relationships but through their place in the modern world of paper which situated them based on impersonal bureaucratic criteria.¹²³ While a boon to historians, the navy's paperwork trapped the seamen, and the *Mars*' books demonstrate the many points of contact and control that the admiralty possessed over the seamen.

The fringe benefits provided by the navy for its workers served to isolate the sailors from the rest of British society. While they filled many of the needs formally provided by family and community on land, the bureaucratic nature of their administration caused many problems for the seamen, leading to discontent among the maritime proletariat. The corrupt administration and profit motive inherent in the whole naval system encouraged a sense of alienation among the sailors. The naval fringe benefits further standardized life on the *Mars*, and institutionalized the seamen. On the one hand the shared experience with bureaucrats confirmed and re-enforced the class-based alienation generated by the factory-like functioning of the ship. But on the other hand, the navy's benefits constituted an improvement over life on shore or on a merchant ship. Working for the state limited the sailors' ability to negotiate working conditions, but it did guarantee a standard of treatment missing from private enterprise that operated based on the market instead of tradition and public opinion.

The Use and Custom of the Sea

The *Mars* may have acted like a factory molding the seamen into modern workers with modern benefits, but the *Mars* sailed on the oceans. The environment, wind, weather, and tide,

¹²³ Roy Porter, *English Society in the 18th Century* (New York: Penguin, 1991), 21.

affect a sailing ship in ways they do not affect terrestrial factories. As a result, the *Mars*' seamen felt the influence of maritime culture, which mediated and modified the sailors' working-class identity along traditional lines delineated by the natural environment. Ships and their crews existed in a separate world where different rules applied. This environment isolated the seamen from both land-based working class culture as well as mainstream society. Moreover, the dangers of the sea created a ship-based collective identity because everyone was literally in the same boat.

The dangers of the unpredictable oceans created a clear camaraderie between everyone on board that transcended the seamen's class identity. Marcus Rediker argues that "the sea's natural terror, its inescapable threat of apocalypse" motivated everyone on board to become "an effective, efficient collectivity."¹²⁴ This universal fear of death due to the violence of the elements created a corresponding belief in the need for hierarchy and discipline. Life on the *Mars* followed the traditional seafaring practice of obedience to command that could be found on ships of all nationalities, military or merchant. For example, on 14 November 1796, when the *Mars* and her crew fought the seas for their lives during a hurricane, the imperatives of survival over-ruled any sort of political, social, economic, or cultural conflict within the ship's community.¹²⁵ Ever-present danger at sea helped to ensure a level of submission and obedience to orders and hierarchies that not only increased everyone's chances of survival, but also greatly improved on board harmony.¹²⁶

The dangers of the watery environment coupled with the complex machine needed to navigate the seas created a need for specialized language. Professional sailors used an

¹²⁴ Rediker, *Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 154.

¹²⁵ *HMS Mars* Master's Log, 24 December 1795 – 16 May 1798, PRO, ADM, 52/3192.

¹²⁶ Rediker, *The Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 154, 243.

extraordinarily large, specialized vocabulary. Unenlightened landsmen could be easily confused by the extensive maritime jargon that experienced sailors took for granted; they often described a sailor's speech as "foul-mouthed, his talk alien and suspect."¹²⁷ Nautical language was direct, to the point, and based on the needs of sailing a ship through the rough waters of the world's seas. Sailors needed the ability to quickly describe the numerous technical pieces of their factory, and over centuries of maritime work, the seamen developed their own unique form of speech based on their work and environment.¹²⁸ For example, to a landsman a polacre and a snow seemed the same, but to an experienced mariner the subtle technical differences in sails and rig stood out instantly and to explain the difference required the use of highly complex professional language.¹²⁹ This specialized maritime language served as the vernacular and language of power on the *Mars*, and it marked true seamen as distinct from landsmen. A seaman's speech marked him as an initiate within the naval community, granting him common ground with his fellows as well as giving him a linguistic way to shame and belittles land-lubbers.¹³⁰ Moreover, this nautical language crossed class boundaries. The entire crew, officers and seamen alike, used it on an everyday basis, and this served to unite the entire crew against the rest of society that could not understand what they were talking about when they discussed the intricacies of their job.¹³¹

¹²⁷ Jesse Lemisch, "Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of Revolutionary America," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., Vol. 25, No. 23 (July 1968): 372.

¹²⁸ Greg Denning, *Mr. Bligh's Bad Language, Passion, Power, and Theatre on the Bounty* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 56-57.

¹²⁹ Both the Mediterranean polacre and the Baltic snow were Brigs, ie they boasted two masts, but the snow possessed fully articulated masts, unlike the polacre that used a single spar for a mast. In addition, the polacre frequently utilized lateen sails on some of its masts, unlike the snow that only used square sails. Kemp, *Oxford Companion to Ships and the Sea*, 656, 814.

¹³⁰ See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities, Reflections On the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 41-42, for his discussion of the importance of a unifying language of power to group identity construction.

¹³¹ Rediker, *The Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 164.

The sailors' unique dialect coupled with the unifying dangers of the sea re-enforced the hierarchy of skill generated by working the sails. The cross-class social linkages created by the dynamics of skill and the use of language counter-balanced the crew's working-class identity and led to a crucial seamanship-based camaraderie. These cultural factors played an important role in the *Mars*' society not because of land-based social conventions or profit motives, but because they served to protect everyone in times of danger. While the ship was at sea, the crew, officers and seamen alike, relied on each other exclusively and the class-based distinctions took a back seat to survival.

In addition to the dangers of the sea, the *Mars*' watery element also isolated the seamen from the rest of shore-based society. The isolation from shore created a society apart from land-based social conventions. At sea nautical skill and a man's place in the ship's hierarchy helped determine his social standing, not his place of birth or his genealogy. The social conventions that dominated aristocratic land-based society held less sway on a ship at sea. Thus the ship can be read as a heterotopia where different possibilities existed than on land. In many important ways the sea acted as "a great social leveler."¹³² On a sailing ship, different social criteria dominated the hierarchy. While the navy did not represent "the world turned upside down" of pirate life, it did offer many more opportunities, both social and financial, to men who would never get such a chance on land.¹³³ On the *Mars* race, class, or status of birth did not matter as much as

¹³² Bernhard Klein, "Staying Afloat, Literary Shipboard Encounters from Columbus to Equiano," in Bernhard Klein and Gesa Mackenthun, ed., *Sea Changes, Historicizing the Ocea*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 93, 104.

¹³³ Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra, Sailors, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 162-167.

competence.¹³⁴ On board a ship at sea, the isolated community operated with its own rules, offering opportunities to everyone on board to transgress their land-based origins.

In addition to working-class and maritime cultural influences, the seamen existed within the naval world and culture. The navy possessed its own centuries-old culture that helped to form the parameters of life on the *Mars*, and this culture certainly influenced the seamen's identity construction. Navy ships ran on traditional rituals with their own important ceremonies that tied the seamen to each other and the officers while at the same time creating a corporate identity or imagined community that linked all the naval sailors together. The *Mars*' fringe benefits and the needs of wartime service allowed the seamen to live on board the ship for months at a time. But the navy also relied on hallowed tradition to socially lubricate the hundreds of men who lived crammed together in such a small place. Ritual and ceremony played a crucial role in the sailors' everyday life, unlike land-based workers or seamen laboring on merchant ships.

Naval rituals re-enforced the state-mandated hierarchy while the ceremonies that accompanied the rituals bound the seamen to the longer history of the navy. In the twentieth century, Lt. Commander Leland Lovette of the US Navy defined ceremony as "tributes to a worthy tradition." He extolled ceremony's value because "it binds us to the past while at the same time it lends an air of dignity and respect in all official relations."¹³⁵ The ritual acts carried out during ceremonies recreate and re-enforce existing power structures because the symbolism attached to each act grants them metaphysical meanings beyond just the acts themselves. Each of

¹³⁴ This idea has been successfully utilized to examine the impact of race in the maritime world by Jeff Bolster in his book *Blackjacks*, but unfortunately surviving naval records from the *Mars* do not list the race of the crew. Thus it is impossible to determine the racial composition of the seamen, but the lack of racial data does reinforce Bolster's larger point that race meant less at sea because the absence of such information demonstrates its relative unimportance on the *Mars*. Jeff Bolster, *Blackjacks* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1997).

¹³⁵ Leland Lovette, *Naval Customs, Traditions, and Usages* (Annapolis Md.: George Banta Publishing for the Naval Institute Press, 1934), 4, 8.

the *Mars*' crewmen whether the captain or the able seamen played a symbolic role that became instantly recognizable to the naval sailors.¹³⁶

Close-quarters living could have led to familiarity, which could destroy discipline within the ship's company. Maritime culture respected the need for discipline and obedience to counteract the dangers of the sea, and the navy and the crew expected the officers to play their roles for the good of everyone. Thus, rituals served as examples of proper conduct as well as providing opportunities for everyone to demonstrate and maintain distance. In this regard ceremony remained crucial for social harmony because as Greg Denning argues, "Ceremony enplots relationships in unambivalent spaces."¹³⁷ Naval culture expected the officers to rule the ship's company without favoritism, treating everyone on board according to his position. Because of the close-quarters and constant intimate contact between ruler and ruled, in order for an officer to perform his role properly he needed ceremonies to allow him to display his distance from even his favorite foremast jacks. Performance of ceremonial rituals provided opportunities for various members of the crew to act their parts, and this re-affirmed the ship's hierarchy. Naval tradition dictated the rituals, roles and actors, and everyone was expected to perform accordingly for the good of the entire ship. Traditions passed down from one generation to another demanded respect. Older hands like forty-four year old John Gile, who was born at sea, would not stand for upsetting the traditional ceremony.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Roland Barthes, "The World of Wrestling," in Jeffrey C. Alexander and Steven Seidman, ed., *Culture and Society, Contemporary Debates* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 88.

¹³⁷ Greg Denning, *Mr. Bligh's Bad Language: Passion, Power, and Theatre on the Bounty* (Cambridge: University Press, 1992), 26-27, 81-84.

¹³⁸ *HMS Mars* Muster Book, December 1794 – August 1795, PRO, ADM, 36/12230. A baby born at sea on a warship was termed a "son of a gun" because women gave birth on the main deck in-between the guns. Kemp, *Oxford Companion to Ships and the Sea*, 816.

Many everyday tasks on the ship came with their own rituals. The quarterdeck remained sacred as the source of power and authority, but also because naval tradition dictated that a crucifix or shrine resided there in the past. Thus all members of the ship's company saluted the quarterdeck when they came on board, including the captain, and this universal ritual demonstrated that the ship remained the master of everyone on board.¹³⁹ Tradition dictated that every morning began when the boatswain's mates woke up the sleeping crew and every one lashed their hammocks into regulation balls for storage on deck. From the time the seamen obsessively cleaned already spotless decks, to the afternoon ritual of the ship going to quarters to practice for battle, the *Mars* ran on a strict schedule laid down as the way things were always done. Each of these actions, while undoubtedly necessary for running the ship, also came with a ceremonial aspect whether simple drumming for dinner or the ritualized dialogue between the captain and his officers during the noon-day sighting of the sun.

Naval custom re-enforced shipboard hierarchy, but it also allowed the bulk of the crew to subsume themselves within the larger history of the navy. The traditions and ceremonies carried out on board the *Mars* transformed ordinary, possibly demeaning tasks, like heaving on the great guns, into acts of profound national import. The naval sailors maintained their own oral historical culture passed on from generation to generation. This formed a key aspect of their version of working class culture. Around the galley fire or at mealtimes shipmates regaled each other with yarns and tall tails of storms and battles.¹⁴⁰ British national culture re-enforced this sea-going historical culture with its own veneration of the navy and its exploits. The rituals of the service linked the sailors on the *Mars* with the seamen who served with Drake, Blake, and Anson, and this transformed and gave meaning to their lives.

¹³⁹ Lovette, *Naval Customs, Traditions, and Usages*, 21-23.

¹⁴⁰ Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 190-191.

The classic naval song “Spanish Ladies” represents a good example of naval culture’s ability to link past historical exploits to later day sailors. Thought to have evolved during Admiral Russell’s stay in Cadiz in 1694-1695, this song remained popular well into the nineteenth century. The chorus begins, “Then we’ll rant and we’ll roar like true British seamen,” but the majority of the verses detail the sights seen by mariners on their way home to the British Isles, particularly noting the historically important points seen on the journey like Beachy Head, Dungeness, and Plymouth, all settings for famous British naval encounters.¹⁴¹ “Spanish Ladies” offers a perfect example of how oral naval culture linked past naval exploits to later generations of seamen who were expected to live up to the glorious exploits of their predecessors.

The seamen possessed their own rituals, not directly mandated by the service, but naturally evolving from the conditions of life. Singing, dancing, and yarning all maintained and passed on the seamen’s plebian culture, but the bond between shipmates went deeper. Seamen’s oaths provide an enlightening example of this culture in action. During the Spithead Mutiny, the sailors took oaths to stick together and not to relent until they carried the day.¹⁴² Oral agreements played a crucial role in their culture because so many of them could not read. Besides, paper agreements were for the purser not seamen. Moreover, a man’s shipboard honor grew from his camaraderie and place within the ship’s community. If a seaman broke his word or disgraced his fellows, he could be thrown out of his mess and shunned by his shipmates. As an outgrowth of this system, the crew itself usually punished theft with offenders sentenced to run the gauntlet of

¹⁴¹ Kemp, *Oxford Companion to Ships and the Sea*, 819-820.

¹⁴² Brian Lavery, editor, *Shipboard Life and Organization, 1751-1815* (Burlington VT: Ashgate for the Naval Records Society, Vol. 138, 1998), 216.

their victims.¹⁴³ This mutually re-enforcing pattern of behavior grew from the traditions of the sea and the navy and created a strong collective bond amongst naval seamen.

Tradition also governed space allocation on board. While at sea or in harbor the crew lived on board the ship, and the *Mars* physical dimensions dictated certain aspects of naval life. The *Mars* displaced 1,842 tons and measured forty-nine feet on the beam and 176 feet on the lower gun deck with a keel of 144 feet three inches. Even such a large ship as the *Mars* could not boast enough space to luxuriously house over five hundred men. As a result, on-board space became a key social signifier.¹⁴⁴ On the one hand, private space came with power, prestige, and position; on the other hand, space mutually reinforced power, prestige, and position to help maintain the social hierarchy.

Military and maritime necessity determined space allocation on the *Mars*, and naval rank largely determined how much space each crewman enjoyed. The Captain enjoyed the most luxurious accommodations. He had multiple cabins, a private cook, and steward. The bulk of the seamen ate and slung their hammocks between the guns.¹⁴⁵ The official social stratification of space mirrored the ranking hierarchy, with officers enjoying private cabins. The higher the deck, the higher ranked its occupant. But there also existed an informal side to the allocation of space, even for the main deck sailors. Where on the gun decks a seaman slung his hammock impacted comfort, and petty officers got to sling their bedding on the edges, next to the hull where they

¹⁴³ Aaron Thomas, "This Naval Life," in Jon Lewis, ed., *Life Before the Mast, Sailors' Eyewitness Accounts from the Age of Fighting Ships* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2001), 452-453.

¹⁴⁴ Lavery, *Ship of the Line*, 184. Rodger, *Wooden World*, 60-61, 65-68, and Denning, *Mr. Bligh's Bad Language*, 20.

¹⁴⁵ Rodger, *Wooden World*, 60-61, 65-68.

enjoyed more space and did not rub up against their neighbor.¹⁴⁶ Thus, space allocation reinforced the vertical social stratification of the ship's company.

In addition to re-enforcing hierarchies, shipboard spaces also served as stages for performance. As Denise Davidson argues, such stages “enabled heterogeneous groups to observe each other, learn from what they saw, and thus construct notions of their own identity.”¹⁴⁷ On the *Mars* with its tightly packed humanity and little privacy all acts became public knowledge very quickly, and thus everyone needed to perform their roles constantly to maintain social order. Where and how a crewmember performed delineated and re-enforced his shipboard place.

In many ways, the ship's quarterdeck served as a combination command center and main stage. As a result of the combined practical and ceremonial functions, the quarterdeck acted as the center of cultural life on the *Mars*. Certain members of the ship's company, those in the upper reaches of ship's hierarchy, walked the quarterdeck at their leisure. With this privilege came prestige because of the proximity to the heart of the ship. For the upper echelons of the naval hierarchy, being on the quarterdeck meant performing for the rest of the crew at all times. The officer needed to act his part while in the ship's holiest of holies and everyone expected him to always behave as a gentleman whilst at the same time never suffering a lapse in seamanship when the unexpected occurred, such as when a squall hit the ship or when a lookout sighted a strange sail. Naval and maritime custom demanded that the officer make the correct decisions to safeguard the entire crew, and while on the quarterdeck his seamanship remained on display for the entire ship's company of knowledgeable critics.

¹⁴⁶ Lavery, *Shipboard Life and Organization*, 18-37, 52-56.

¹⁴⁷ Denise Z. Davidson, *France after the Revolution: Urban Life, Gender, and the New Social Order* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 6.

In contrast, the bulk of the crew spent their time on deck on the forecastle, in the ship's waist, or up in the rigging. This cultural division allowed for multiple performances on multiple stages. Seamen danced on the forecastle, but they also played around in the rigging. This act, called sky-larking, served as a potent display of daring and seamanship because it involved jumping from rope to rope hundreds of feet in the air without any sort of safety line or net. The public nature of life on the *Mars* rendered every act open to comment and gossip, and the seamen's performances of seamanship re-enforced the hierarchy of skill. Both officers and men performed on the *Mars*, and each group of performers utilized a different part of the ship as their stage. This re-enforced the hierarchy of skill while at the same time confirming the spatial dynamics of the ship.

Naval tradition also governed legal affairs on the *Mars*. Commission and warrant officers enjoyed immunity from the captain's punishments, but the rest of the crew served under immediate threat of the captain's discipline.¹⁴⁸ Warrant and commission officers faced a naval court martial for any shipboard offenses, and this legal protection gave them the standing and authority to speak truth to power on their areas of expertise. All men could face a court martial for any capital offences, but short of that, the captain played the role of judge and jury. The *Mars* discharged only seven seamen as a result of legal problems too severe for the captain to handle.¹⁴⁹ Ship's justice, ordered by the captain and carried out by the boatswain's mates with great pomp and ceremony, generally substituted for any sort of trial, and on the *Mars* the sentence was usually flogging.

¹⁴⁸ Burney, *Falconer's Marine Dictionary*, 618-619, 669-673.

¹⁴⁹ *HMS Mars* Muster Book, December 1794 – August 1795, PRO, ADM, 36/12230, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, September 1795 – April 1796, PRO, ADM, 36/12331, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, March 1796 – December 1796, PRO, ADM, 36/12232, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, January 1797 – October 1797, PRO, ADM, 36/12233, and *HMS Mars* Muster Book, November 1797 – June 1798, PRO, ADM, 36/12234.

Both the British army and navy utilized strokes from the cat-of-nine-tails to ensure discipline and obedience to command. During her first four years in commission, the *Mars*' captains only unleashed the cat 86 times for a total of 1,036 lashes, the majority for drunkenness combined with insubordination or neglect of duty.¹⁵⁰ Navy ship's reputations as "floating torments" or "dens of horror, cruelty, confusion and continual uproar" do not match the historical reality on *Mars*.¹⁵¹ The ship's company saw flogging as a necessary part of discipline that protected everyone from the misbehavior of a few, or as contemporary serving officer William Richardson wrote; "But in all my experience at sea I have found seaman grateful for good usage, and yet they like to see subordination kept up, as they know the duty could not be carried on without it."¹⁵² The sailors clearly demonstrated their acceptance of flogging and discipline at Spithead, when they maintained the ship's discipline and flogged each other for misconduct. Moreover, the seamen did not call for the end of flogging in their demands to the admiralty.¹⁵³ This perspective on the ship's discipline, shared by labor and management, suggests that the entire naval community recognized the need for strict order and exemplary punishment for the good of the entire crew.

The case of Charles Fountane, who received forty-eight lashes for leaving his quarters during the fight with *l'Hercule*, clearly demonstrated what type of actions the entire crew held in disdain. This constituted by far the worst flogging on board the *Mars*, and the fact that it was given for abandoning shipmates demonstrates how ship's discipline was less about cruelty and

¹⁵⁰ *HMS Mars* Master's Log, 2 December 1794 – 23 December 1795, PRO, ADM, 52/3191, and *HMS Mars* Master's Log, 24 December 1795 – 16 May 1798, PRO, ADM, 52/3192.

¹⁵¹ Joshua Davis, *An American Citizen Who Was Pressed and served on board six ships of the British Navy*, (Baltimore: B. Edes, 1811), 2-4.

¹⁵² Dean King, ed., *Every Man Will Do His Duty*, (New York, Henry Holt and Co., 1997), 7-8.

¹⁵³ Rodger Morriss, ed., *The Channel Fleet and the Blockade of Brest, 1793-1801* (Burlington VT: Ashgate for the Naval Records Society, 2001), 206-207.

more about maintaining everyone's safety. Fountane received his punishment on 28 April 1798, the day before the *Mars* reached port, and the fact that he still received his lashes despite the glorious victory provides a testament to how serious the entire naval community considered his misconduct.¹⁵⁴ On board the *Mars*, the ship's officers reserved the worst punishment for the man who deserted his shipmates in time of danger, implicitly violating the ship-based communal bond, not the seamen who got drunk and disorderly.

The crew of the *Mars* did not seem to think that the ship's discipline was too severe, and the vast majority of them never felt the lash. Of the fifty-three men who faced some manner of official punishment, only four deserted to avoid continued naval service. Two floggings a month may seem like a lot, but these numbers need deeper evaluation because a number of factors demonstrate that the vast majority of the sailors never got close to the cat. A number of repeat offenders suffered punishment multiple times. The most infamous offender, marine Patrick Dunleavy, received 97 lashes on four separate occasions before being sent off the ship as the result of a court martial. During the late winter of 1796 and early spring of 1797 an upsurge in floggings occurred as the crew's unhappiness built up in preparation to the great mutiny.¹⁵⁵ Flogging on the *Mars* functioned as a way to delineate the bounds of acceptable behavior; it was not vicious, retributive punishment. The captain punished sailors so that others would comprehend these boundaries, and in this sense flogging represented a regulatory act that helped to maintain cohesion.

Naval tradition dictated how and why punishments were carried out on the *Mars*. Each step of the naval legal system included formal rituals that governed the proceedings. When a man

¹⁵⁴ *HMS Mars* Master's Log, 24 December 1795 – 16 May 1798, PRO, ADM, 52/3192.

¹⁵⁵ *HMS Mars* Master's Log, 2 December 1794 – 23 December 1795, PRO, ADM, 52/3191, and *HMS Mars* Master's Log, 24 December 1795 – 16 May 1798, PRO, ADM, 52/3192.

was flogged, the entire crew assembled on deck to witness the punishment, and the whole process was carried out according to the traditions of the service. Just as spatial dynamics, naval tradition dictated the ceremony and ritual of legal affairs, and every member of the crew accepted the system and possessed a vested interest in maintaining the status quo.¹⁵⁶ Because of the ritual and ceremonial aspects of naval punishment, floggings served to delineate the bounds of acceptable behavior. The flogging ended the whole affair, removing guilt from the captain for ordering the flogging and the sailor for his offense. Naval culture required the captain to fulfill his obligations to everyone else on board by playing his role and enforcing the ship's discipline, while at the same time the seamen accepted their place and responsibility as well.

The navy's traditional system of ritual and ceremony served as the informal counterpart to the official rules and regulations that governed life on the *Mars*. The traditional system primarily ensured on-board harmony for the safety of everyone. This system helped to harmonize every ship in the navy, while submerging the maritime workers into their own world with their own laws, customs, and spatial dynamics. This system, coupled with the standardized diet, fringe benefits, language, and modern work experience created a strong class-based horizontal collective among the seamen. This collective went beyond just class-consciousness: instead the sailors existed inside their own imagined community.¹⁵⁷ This collective of the navy reached throughout every ship and fleet in every part of the world and granted the seamen a solidarity missing amongst their land-based fellow workers. In the case of the sailors working on the *Mars*, the seamen's imagined community corresponded with their version of working-class, plebian culture and this proved a boon when the time came for concerted class-based action at Spithead.

¹⁵⁶ Burney, *Falconer's Marine Dictionary*, 49, 362.

¹⁵⁷ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6-7.

Moving In, Moving Up, and Moving Out

Crew movement, both within the ship and the larger naval community, buffered the social architecture of the *Mars* and mediated class conflict. The first page of each of the *Mars* muster books begins by listing the official complement of the ship as 640 men. The *Mars* never once reached this number because throughout her career men came and went with great frequency. Men earned promotions, left the ship due to illness, or died due to enemy action, natural causes, or the maritime environment. Most of the men's movement took place within the larger naval community, and the universal nature of the service made transfers easy and beneficial for both management and labor. The movement of the *Mars*' crew not only played an integral part in the men's existence but also demonstrated the efficiency of the naval system that utilized the seamen as interchangeable parts. This process of crew movement began during the last days of 1794 when Captain Cotton began assembling his work force and first commissioned the ship. From then until the end of Capt. Hood's command in 1798, the stream of new faces continued and only stopped when the ship put to sea.¹⁵⁸

Men joined the ship for many different reasons, and they did not always have a choice as to where or how long they served. The great bulk of the sailors joined the *Mars* in drafts off other warships, and this provided the central corps of seamen of all types needed to man the new ship. The *Mars*' muster books list the overwhelming majority of these men as volunteers. The muster listing "vol." remains somewhat misleading. Men captured by the press gang had no choice but

¹⁵⁸ For crew movement see *HMS Mars* Muster Book, December 1794 – August 1795, PRO, ADM, 36/12230, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, September 1795 – April 1796, PRO, ADM, 36/12231, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, March 1796 – December 1796, PRO, ADM, 36/12232, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, January 1797 – October 1797, PRO, ADM, 36/12233, and *HMS Mars* Muster Book, November 1797 – June 1798, PRO, ADM, 36/12234.

to serve, and they frequently made the best of a bad situation and took the bounty for voluntary enlistment rather than serve without the bonus money given to volunteers.¹⁵⁹ Midshipman George Jackson commented on the seamen's ambivalent, quicksilver attitude towards the press gang when he wrote of how he "frequently captured men who, though inclined to be violent at first, soon resigned themselves to their fate, and became voluntary members of the pressgang, to which they became valuable auxiliaries."¹⁶⁰ For the maritime proletariat, serving in the navy became inevitable, and constituted an accepted part of sea-going life. There exists no real way to determine whether an individual sailor was pressed or volunteered, because the ship's books did not distinguish between a genuine volunteer and a man caught by the press who "volunteered" for the bonus money. In addition, a number of men transferred from other warships, and the *Mars'* muster did not record their true recruitment status.¹⁶¹

This record-keeping confusion muddles the historiographical debate on the issue of naval manning, and numerous historians have addressed the issue of naval impressments. The British Navy was and continues to be notorious for its press gangs that roamed seaside towns and villages searching for the unwary or intoxicated to kidnap and force into naval service. While the government made repeated attempts to find another solution to the naval manning problem, no resolution to the shortage of maritime labor endemic in the Atlantic World appeared.

Contemporaries and many later historians saw the press gang as a great injustice illuminating the

¹⁵⁹ Burney, *Falconer's Marine Dictionary*, 54, 352, and Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 442.

¹⁶⁰ George Jackson, "The Perilous Adventures of a Midshipman," in Jon Lewis, ed., *Life Before the Mast, Sailors' Eyewitness Accounts from the Age of Fighting Ships* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2001), 147.

¹⁶¹ *HMS Mars* Muster Book, December 1794 – August 1795, PRO, ADM, 36/12230, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, September 1795 – April 1796, PRO, ADM, 36/12331, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, March 1796 – December 1796, PRO, ADM, 36/12232, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, January 1797 – October 1797, PRO, ADM, 36/12233, and *HMS Mars* Muster Book, November 1797 – June 1798, PRO, ADM, 36/12234. Robert Hay provides a good first hand account of the operation of the press and the bounty system in his "A Pressed Man," 302-303.

tyranny and oppression of naval life. Generally the empress service has been cast as a strictly oppositional structure with the hapless sailors on one side and the cruel navy on the other.

Because of the difficulty in determining the exact recruitment status of the sailors, an analysis of the *Mars*' seamen in terms of just their recruitment status would paint an inaccurate picture.

Instead, a better measure of the crew's willingness to serve is provided by examining a combination of factors like desertion and recruitment status. A closer examination of the *Mars*' muster books reveals that the politics of impressments and desertion was much more complex than an oppositional model can describe.¹⁶²

Only a handful of explicitly pressed men served on the *Mars*, but the *Mars* also carried a large number of quota men. The government passed the Quota Act in early 1795, to provide men for the navy, and it required each municipality to produce a set number of men based on their population.¹⁶³ Since the acts required each municipality to supply an arbitrarily set quota of men, the towns invariably sent its troublemakers and malcontents to serve in the navy for the "benefit" of their home communities.¹⁶⁴ The empress service and the quota acts may have helped to fill the *Mars*' berths, but economic hardship and displacement played a part as well.

¹⁶² W.J. Neale, *History of the Mutiny at Spithead and the Nore. With an Inquiry into its origin and suggestions for the prevention of Future Discontent in the Royal navy* (Philadelphia: G.B. Zeibler & Co., 1842), 14, and Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many Headed Hydra*, 214-228, Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 32-33, .S. Bromley, *The Manning of the Royal Navy, Selected Public Pamphlets*. Publications of the Naval Records Society, Vol. 119 (London: William Clowes & Son, 1976), Daniel A. Baugh, *Naval Administration 1715-1750* (London: Spottiswoode Ballantyne Press, 1977), 98-106, Jesse Lemisch "Jack Tar in the Streets," 381-385, and Daniel Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 258.

¹⁶³ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 443-444, and E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 60-61.

¹⁶⁴ The vast majority of the *Mars*' quota men were rated as landsmen, and this suggests that these men were not skilled sailors and were sent by their communities for the purpose of exiling troublemakers. *HMS Mars* Muster Book, December 1794 – August 1795, PRO, ADM, 36/12230, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, September 1795 – April 1796, PRO, ADM, 36/12331, Neale, *History*

The *Mars* started gathering her crew very early in the war, and this early start allowed the recruitment of patriotic volunteers. Over the course of the wars with Revolutionary France, the navy grew at a steady pace, and correspondingly the demand for new labor grew as well. In 1795, the *Mars* recruited from an abundance of capable men willing to take the money and serve on board a naval warship whether out of financial necessity caused by sweeping economic dislocation, thirst for adventure, or patriotism. The *Mars* boasted the additional bonus of being a brand-new ship, without a settled ship's company. A newly commissioned ship provided opportunities for promotion to new men unavailable in a ship that had been in commission for years and already possessed a filled ranking hierarchy.¹⁶⁵

Out of the 978 crewmen who served on the *Mars* from 1794 to 1798, the ship's records list only forty-four as pressed men. Despite the fact that the state clearly forced them to serve, only five men out of the forty-four pressed men deserted the ship. This rate of loss does not distinguish them from the rest of the crew.¹⁶⁶ While ascertaining the exact recruitment status is impossible from the ship's books, the desertion records clearly demonstrate that the vast majority of the seamen chose to remain on the *Mars*, as they could have jumped ship if they wished. The lack of desertions from the pressed men suggests that the sailors treated the press gang as a part

of the Mutiny at Spithead and the Nore, 19, and Kemp, *Oxford Companion to Ships and the Sea*, 683.

¹⁶⁵ A number of men are quickly promoted from their initial rating to petty officer status. *HMS Mars* Muster Book, December 1794 – August 1795, PRO, ADM, 36/12230, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, September 1795 – April 1796, PRO, ADM, 36/12331, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, March 1796 – December 1796, PRO, ADM, 36/12232.

¹⁶⁶ *HMS Mars* Muster Book, December 1794 – August 1795, PRO, ADM, 36/12230, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, September 1795 – April 1796, PRO, ADM, 36/12331, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, March 1796 – December 1796, PRO, ADM, 36/12232, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, January 1797 – October 1797, PRO, ADM, 36/12233, and *HMS Mars* Muster Book, November 1797 – June 1798, PRO, ADM, 36/12234. In addition to the desertions, six wrongly pressed men fought their enforced servitude and won, winning their release from the *Mars* in 1796.

of life, something to be avoided if possible, but an unavoidable occurrence for professional sailors.

All ship's captains feared and dreaded desertion with its constant drain of manpower. A sailor possessed very little power to contest his work conditions on a ship at sea where the dangers of the maritime environment forced him under the control of the ship's hierarchy for the good of all. Desertion remained the seaman's best form of labor negotiation, and an unhappy sailor could quit the ship to find a new one due to the endemic shortage of maritime labor in the Atlantic World.¹⁶⁷ Despite the harsh penalties decreed by the Articles of War, affecting a self-transfer remained as common in the navy as it did in the merchant service.

Ninety-five main deck sailors, two marines, and twelve ships' boys deserted the ship during the four years under examination, a rate of about ten percent over time. Almost all of these men deserted in either Plymouth or Portsmouth, two of the largest naval bases in all of Britain, and yet only three men returned to the ship as caught deserters. According to the *Mars*' records, none of the three deserters suffered punishment once they were returned to the ship, which suggests how the informal rules of the service mediated the harsh realities of the official articles of war.¹⁶⁸ It seems unlikely that a navy desperately short on manpower would allow over a hundred men to escape from their largest concentration of strength. Some of the *Mars*' deserters undoubtedly self-transferred to other warships, and their new officers turned a benevolent, blind eye to the desertions. This seemed to be part of an informal agreement between naval officers and the main deck sailors. The navy knew it could never hope to keep all the seamen from deserting, but as long as desertion remained at an acceptable level that did not

¹⁶⁷ Rediker, *Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 105-106.

¹⁶⁸ *HMS Mars* Master's Log, 2 December 1794 – 23 December 1795, PRO, ADM, 52/3191, and *HMS Mars* Master's Log, 24 December 1795 – 16 May 1798, PRO, ADM, 52/3192.

impede normal operations both labor and management tended to turn a blind eye.¹⁶⁹ Moreover, the navy's acceptance of desertion as a part of sea-going life reveals once again how the sailors represented interchangeable parts to the admiralty, and that the *Mars* community's flexibility allowed it to lose and absorb new members.

An analysis of the *Mars* deserters shows most men who deserted did so very soon after they joined the ship. Close to 37% of the desertions occurred in the first four months. Strangely, ten percent of the deserters jumped ship after ten months of service. This total seems abnormally high and appears to disprove the idea that seamen ran early in their time on the *Mars*, but a closer examination reveals the reasons for this cluster of desertions. Twelve men deserted in Portsmouth during March of 1796 after the navy paid out prize money for merchant ships captured earlier in the war and all of them had served either ten or eleven months on the *Mars*. This cluster of deserters waited until the opportune moment and then bolted with cash in hand, probably for a run on shore. Another abnormal cluster of desertions hit the ships' boys, five of whom deserted the day after Alexander Hood replaced Captain Cotton as commander of the *Mars*. Each of these young men, all teenagers, probably bolted because of a change in the ship's governance.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Rodger, *Wooden World*, 201-204.

¹⁷⁰ *HMS Mars* Muster Book, December 1794 – August 1795, PRO, ADM, 36/12230, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, September 1795 – April 1796, PRO, ADM, 36/12331, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, March 1796 – December 1796, PRO, ADM, 36/12232, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, January 1797 – October 1797, PRO, ADM, 36/12233, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, November 1797 – June 1798, PRO, ADM, 36/12234, *HMS Mars* Master's Log, 24 December 1795 – 16 May 1798, PRO, ADM, 52/3192, *HMS Mars* Pay Book, 1 January 1796 – 31 December 1796, PRO, ADM, 35/1048. Tradition allowed newly promoted Charles Cotton to take some men with him, and he did take his steward, George Neave. Neave received a lawful discharge to follow his admiral, but the *Mars*' muster marks the five young men's names with an "R" for run. This differing discharge status shows that Cotton did take followers, but the five ship's boys did not leave the ship with Cotton.

Instead of just examining the men who deserted the *Mars*, attention should be placed on the ninety percent of the sailors who continued to serve. The successful desertions clearly showed that sailors who wished could leave the ship almost whenever they wanted. The *Mars* spent a lot of time anchored in port, and men who wished to run certainly possessed the opportunity. The lack of punishment demonstrates an acceptance and leniency within the naval community for the practice, as long as desertion remained within acceptable limits. The desertion figures also cast light on the politics of impressments because the frequent desertions demonstrate that quitting the ship remained a real possibility for men who had been pressed against their will. Whether or not an individual chose to serve or was forced, the vast majority did not quit even though they would not have suffered if they had. That ninety percent of the men continued to labor on the *Mars* suggests that naval service during wartime provided tangible benefits to the average sailor. The King's navy provided many perks like plentiful food, self-respect, job security, and of course, opportunities for promotion.

Promotion moved the men of the *Mars* within the ship's social construction itself and off the ship onto other ships belonging to the Channel Fleet. On 13 April 1798 when the *Mars* sailed from Spithead for the last time before her battle with *l'Hercule* she carried 594 men of whom forty-three percent had been promoted within the ship's company since the *Mars* had entered active service.¹⁷¹ This percentage is even higher if one removes the marines whose army-based rank structure made promotion more difficult, as there were only five non-commission ranks and

¹⁷¹ *HMS Mars* Muster Book, December 1794 – August 1795, PRO, ADM, 36/12230, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, September 1795 – April 1796, PRO, ADM, 36/12331, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, March 1796 – December 1796, PRO, ADM, 36/12232, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, January 1797 – October 1797, PRO, ADM, 36/12233, and *HMS Mars* Muster Book, November 1797 – June 1798, PRO, ADM, 36/12234.

the vast majority served as privates. This high level of crew promotion demonstrates the upward mobility built into the naval hierarchy and the opportunities available to skilled men.

The multitude of official ranks created a multi-level hierarchy that mediated the nascent class divisions generated by unequal productive relations. For the bulk of the seamen on-board, promotions came due to personal relationships with the officers, and this created vertical ties that crossed class lines. Within the naval hierarchy several social grey areas existed where men could move between management and labor on a large scale. Ultimately the *Mars*' social system was far from binary, and factors such as nautical skill, good behavior, and personal relations mediated clear class distinctions.

Promotion to another ship elevated men within naval society, and demonstrated how talented men enjoyed upward mobility under the naval system that the merchant marine could not match. Thirty-nine seamen gained promotions to other ships. These moves did not constitute large drafts to fill the complements of other shorthanded ships; instead, individual men changed ships to improve their personal prospects for promotion and fill spots in needy ships. John Hayes of Durham, midshipman, jumped to the *Fly*, a sixteen-gun sloop cruising for enemy shipping. This move downward in terms of ship prestige put Hayes in a better position to gain prize money, and also removed him from the promotional logjam on the *Mars*. The *Mars* carried twenty other midshipmen, many of whom enjoyed promotional advantages like connections and seniority that put them ahead of Hayes for promotion. Lateral movement within the fleet improved Hayes' and other men's chances for future promotion.¹⁷²

¹⁷² *HMS Mars* Muster Book, December 1794 – August 1795, PRO, ADM, 36/12230, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, September 1795 – April 1796, PRO, ADM, 36/12331, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, March 1796 – December 1796, PRO, ADM, 36/12232, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, January 1797 – October 1797, PRO, ADM, 36/12233, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, November 1797 – June 1798, PRO, ADM, 36/12234, and J. Glete, "Tables of battlefleet tonnages and strength, 1790-1815," in

Promotion served as the best example of the upward mobility available in the Navy, and promotion rewarded talented and successful men for their knowledge and good conduct. Along with promotion came more money and prestige, if not on land then within the naval community. On the *Mars*, individual promotions served to not only bind the men to the navy but also to their individual officers who made the promotions possible since inter-ship promotion required a combination of skill and the officers' good will. The majority of the *Mars*' promotions rewarded sailors with petty officer ranks. These ranks did not provide much in the way of material rewards, but they did socially stratify the mass of the main deck sailors.¹⁷³ This social stratification helped mute working-class consciousness, and separated the best men on the ship from the marginalized landsmen who existed only to provide unskilled labor.

If petty officer status brought only slight individual improvements in service, it did set a man on the ladder to higher rank. The Naval rank structure allowed men of talent to progress up the hierarchy to positions of greater responsibility and power. Aristocratic and middle-class men dominated the top of the naval hierarchy because of their connections and the jobbed system that allowed them to maintain power, and it was increasingly rare for ordinary sailors of working-class background to gain command.¹⁷⁴ Two men served as captain on the *Mars* from 1794 to 1798: Charles Cotton and Alexander Hood. Both hailed from elite backgrounds. Cotton descended from a baronet Member of Parliament, placing him firmly in the aristocracy.¹⁷⁵ Hood's father was a retired naval purser, which technically made him a scion of the bourgeoisie, but the larger Hood extended family wielded enormous naval power and influence as stalwarts of

Jon Lewis, ed., *Life Before the Mast, Sailors' Eyewitness Accounts from the Age of Fighting Ships* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2001), 466.

¹⁷³ Burney, *Falconer's Marine Dictionary*, 335-339, and Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 622-625.

¹⁷⁴ Roger, *Command of the Ocean*, 388-389, 508.

¹⁷⁵ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 386

the military elite.¹⁷⁶ However, because of land-based social constraints gentlemen rarely filled certain positions on a warship. The standing warrant officers filled most of these positions and carried out many crucial tasks on the *Mars*.

Standing warrant officers, so called because they always stood with the same ship, served as department heads and had responsibility for areas of the ship such as the hull, the guns, or the rigging. These ranks yielded a number of important perquisites that set them above the average sailor, and the navy filled these berths with skilled men from the maritime community. A warrant officer possessed his own private cabin, higher pay, and a set group of sailors who served under his orders. A warrant officer possessed great job security because he served on the same ship from its launching until it was scrapped, unless he proved incompetent or earned promotion, and the captain lacked the ability to promote or dis-rate warrant officers. This meant that he always maintained his job, even with the ship laid up in ordinary without a crew, the warrant officers stayed on board to maintain the vessel for future need. Lastly, a warrant protected its holder from the ship's discipline: the captain could not order a warrant officer flogged. Job security and legal rights combined with power, prestige, and space made a warrant officer one of the most important men on the *Mars*.¹⁷⁷

Warrant officers played the role of the naval middle class, and just like in land-based society, the middle class included multiple gradations. In general, the ship's standing warrant officers based their position on seamanship and experience and filled shipboard positions as a boatswain, carpenter, or gunner. Others warrant officers owed their positions to professional knowledge in non-nautical areas like the surgeon and purser. Last came the ship's master who

¹⁷⁶ J. Ralfe, *The Naval Biography of Great Britain* (London: Whitmore & Fenn, 1828), 48-54, Kemp, *The Oxford Companion to Ships and the Sea*, 394, and Colley, *Britons*, 182.

¹⁷⁷ Burney, *Falconer's Marine Dictionary*, 618-619, 669-673, and Rodger, *Wooden World*, 19-24, 66-76.

served as the senior warrant officer and gained his position through a combination of seamanship and the scientific knowledge of navigation and straddled both divisions. The different types of warrant officers enjoyed different amounts of prestige on the ship as demonstrated by where they messed and lived.

The ship's boatswain, carpenter, and gunner all brought professional expertise to the ship. They were master craftsmen in charge of their area of knowledge, and they enjoyed prestige based on their mastery of one aspect of nautical skill. Moreover, while they technically did not own the means of production, the state did, they did possess the sort of long-term job security similar to land-based master artisans.¹⁷⁸ Without upper-class competition, the standing warrant officer positions allowed ordinary men to still follow the craft model of advancement. Within the corporate naval structure the opportunity still existed to follow a traditional life path and make a successful life long career at sea. Common seamen made good filled the majority of these ranks on warships, and the *Mars*' standing warrant officers served as living examples to the rest of the crew as to the possibilities of a naval career.

The standing warrant officers lived and messed separately from the rest of the crew, but socially some of them overlapped with the commission officers. The surgeon, master, and purser all lived in the wardroom with the lieutenants. These three warrant officers fell into the "professional" class and based their position on book learning as opposed to experience learned at sea. Because of their lack of seamanship and the on-board role they filled, the surgeon and the purser lacked the social standing and acceptance of other warrant officers. In many ways they represented landmen come to sea, and the skills they provided had little to do with nautical culture so much as representing the naval bureaucracy.

¹⁷⁸ Rodger, *Wooden World*, 22.

The master represented the highest rank most men of working-class backgrounds could hope to achieve. The ship's master remained a holdover from the early days of warships when a gentleman commanded the ship during fighting and the master actually sailed and navigated her. By the late eighteenth-century, captains and other commission officers could also navigate the ship, but having another skilled navigator to help with and double-check the complex mathematics used for accurate navigation proved extremely helpful in safely traversing the sea. The *Mars*' master enjoyed similar prestige and social status as the ship's lieutenants, but he was not a part of the commission officer rank progression. Instead, the master served as the pinnacle of the main deck rank progression, and held his position as the senior warrant officer.¹⁷⁹

The master generally took his turn commanding a watch on deck, just like the lieutenants, and received the same rate of pay and share of any prize money. Masters needed to possess mathematical knowledge coupled with years of nautical experience, and in many ways the master utilized as much science as anyone on board. The master kept the ship's log, requiring literacy, and his responsibilities also included maintaining the ship's navigational equipment and charting unknown seas. The *Mars*' two masters, Thomas Clements and William Chrishop possessed power, pay, and prestige due to their professional accomplishments. Masters served on the quarterdeck, but needed no pedigree to obtain their rank and status, only skill and the good word of their captains.¹⁸⁰ A warrant as a ship's master represented a great achievement, and any man with the necessary seamanship could obtain it. Moreover, the master also lived in the wardroom and shared all the other perks of a commission officer. The ship's master represented

¹⁷⁹ Burney, *Falconer's Marine Dictionary*, 267-268, and Rodger, *Wooden World*, 20, 66.

¹⁸⁰ *HMS Mars* Muster Book, December 1794 – August 1795, PRO, ADM, 36/12230, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, September 1795 – April 1796, PRO, ADM, 36/12331, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, March 1796 – December 1796, PRO, ADM, 36/12232, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, January 1797 – October 1797, PRO, ADM, 36/12233, and *HMS Mars* Muster Book, November 1797 – June 1798, PRO, ADM, 36/12234.

a living example of how high a man could climb in the naval hierarchy and how the ship's heterotopic qualities allowed for crossing class boundaries.

This key example of social-class overlap mirrored the ambiguous rank of midshipman. Midshipmen messed together, served as messengers, and walked the quarterdeck while on deck, an important social distinction. Midshipmen operated as officers in training, whether to be future commission or warrant officers, but both career paths overlapped in the same rank. Naval culture also called the midshipmen "reefers" because they spent so much time in the ship's rigging personally working on the sails and learning their trade. The rank of midshipman remained a social grey area since young men destined for both commission and warrant officer status shared the same mess, rank, and on-board status.¹⁸¹ However, prospective officers were not the only member's of the crew who received training.

The *Mars* carried a number of young boys, mostly teenagers who were much like land-based apprentices. While technically officer's servants, these young maritime workers learned nautical skills and acclimated themselves to life on a warship and naval culture. The navy divided these ship's boys into three classes, based on age, skill, and social background. Second and third class were reserved for boys destined to become main deck sailors while servant first class contained the boys of upper-class background who aspired to commissions. These boys served as a valuable source of new labor for the *Mars* and the navy. Five of the *Mars*' boys joined the regular ship's company during the period under examination. They all enjoyed the ordinary seamen rating from the time they entered the main section of ship's books. This ready

¹⁸¹ Each of a ship's large square sails could be shortened in high winds. Seamen furled the excess canvas and tied the bundle at reef points sewn into the sail. Thus the term reefer. Burney, *Falconer's Marine Dictionary*, 276-279, 388-389.

supply of fresh labor, already trained in the ship's ways, filled an invaluable role for the *Mars*, if insufficient to replace attrition from other causes.¹⁸²

The *Mars* continually trained new men from all walks of life, not just the ship's boys. The *Mars*' books rate 324 men "landsman" when they joined the ship. These men possessed no nautical skill and provided only manual labor, heaving on ropes and gun tackles. However, they did not remain unskilled. By the time the ship met *l'Hercule* outside Brest, 131 had been promoted. The vast majority (94%) gained promotion to ordinary seamen, but a few took on idler's jobs like steward's mate or gunroom's tailor. These men had learned the basic aspects of their new job as sailors but still lacked the knowledge and experience needed for an able rating.¹⁸³ The sort of skill and knowledge needed to be an able seaman could not be acquired in a few months. It resulted from years of maritime life. The ship's company, over the course of a few years, taught these landsmen not only their new profession but also their place within the ship's social structure. This training, accomplished with drills as well as example, firmly ensconced the new recruits within the *Mars*' social structure.

The *Mars* required a certain number of talented mariners, wise in the ways of sailing and the sea, to provide the skills necessary for safe operation. Thus, the ship relied on an older economic model similar to land-based apprenticeships to supplement and increase the overall

¹⁸² *HMS Mars* Muster Book, December 1794 – August 1795, PRO, ADM, 36/12230, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, September 1795 – April 1796, PRO, ADM, 36/12331, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, March 1796 – December 1796, PRO, ADM, 36/12232, and *HMS Mars* Muster Book, January 1797 – October 1797, PRO, ADM, 36/12233.

¹⁸³ *HMS Mars* Muster Book, December 1794 – August 1795, PRO, ADM, 36/12230, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, September 1795 – April 1796, PRO, ADM, 36/12331, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, March 1796 – December 1796, PRO, ADM, 36/12232, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, January 1797 – October 1797, PRO, ADM, 36/12233, and *HMS Mars* Muster Book, November 1797 – June 1798, PRO, ADM, 36/12234. The classic able seamen could "hand, reef (a sail), and steer (the ship)." Kemp, *Oxford Companion to Ships and the Sea*, 767-768, and Rediker, *Devil and Deep Blue Sea*, 85-86.

number of skilled sailors.¹⁸⁴ On the *Mars* the servants mostly came from the maritime urban centers of England, following the trade of their home communities. The Marine Society, which prepared orphans for service in the Navy, provided the *Mars* with ten boys.¹⁸⁵ Over the course of this examination, none of the ship's boys distinguished themselves in any spectacular way, but the prospects of serving on one of the King's ships offered a number of benefits to these young men. The assured food supply as well as pay coupled with the marketable skills learned from their shipmates offered an attractive package to a young man of limited prospects. By apprenticing at sea early in life, the ship's servants aspired to skilled employment at sea with all the prestige and vertical connections that accompanied nautical skill. More importantly, they now enjoyed membership within the *Mars* community and opportunities for advancement.

During wartime, the navy controlled a seaman's body and labor until peace. This granted the sailor job security and long-term benefits, all while denying him his traditional negotiating tool of changing ships in search of a better deal. Because of the long length of service time on the same ship or in the universal navy, seamen experienced the effects of naval culture to a much greater extent than merchant seamen who hopped from one shipboard regime to another. The *Mars*' seamen served together for years, and as a result they created a strong cultural bond as shipmates that the merchant service and land-based work could not match.

The official and un-official systems for manning the King's ships created a much more complex picture than a straight oppositional class structure. The system of bonuses for enlistment and the informal rules of the desertion game made the naval service much less harsh than it appeared on paper. The Admiralty designed the naval system to train and assimilate new men,

¹⁸⁴ Rediker, *Devil and Deep Blue Sea*, 199.

¹⁸⁵ *HMS Mars* Muster Book, December 1794 – August 1795, PRO, ADM, 36/12230, and Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 313.

and the *Mars*' crew changed and grew over time as men came and went. While enforced service may have constituted a severe drawback to naval life, the prospect for rapid promotion of skilled men balanced this out, and allowed working-class men opportunities for upward mobility missing from land-based manufacturing work and the merchant marine. Lastly, the *Mars* did not sail alone; instead the ship existed as just one individual node in a much larger naval structure. The larger Royal Navy community provided a huge field of movement and freedom for maritime workers where they could advance up the ladder and transfer to other ships for their own and the ship's benefit.

Conclusion

The experience of laboring on the *Mars* during the late 1790s transformed the seamen. After working on a naval warship for a few years, a main deck sailor no longer existed as a peasant or landed worker, and instead possessed a modern identity generated by his maritime work experience. This new identity construction shared similarities with the emerging working-class on land, but the seamen also experienced naval and maritime culture that modified their working-class identity. The isolation and dangers of the sea trapped the sailors in their own world, away from the rest of society. Moreover, the seamen may have existed in isolation from the rest of land-based society, but they did sail as part of the larger navy. With its hierarchies, opportunities for movement, and traditions, naval culture also mediated and transformed the class-based identity generated by the factory-like experience. The combination of cultural influences created a unique identity construction unlike that experienced by land-based workers.

The *Mars*' seamen's modern work experience, while designed to improve the efficiency and deadliness of the warship, also generated working-class consciousness and identity. This process resulted from the alienation inherent within the capitalist system that increasingly dominated British life. The navy organized their labor with strict factory-like discipline and modern, capitalist-inspired bureaucratic management techniques. The seamen worked for small wages and meager benefits, while management and the merchant class the navy protected reaped the profits. From this experience the seamen developed a horizontal collective bond based on their oppressive work conditions and productive alienation.

Since the seamen labored twenty-four-hours a day, 365 days-a-year on their ships, workplace identity as delineated by rank, position, and wages, played an important role in the sailors' identity construction. For the vast majority of the *Mars*' seamen's lives, they existed under the work and living regime of the ship. This experience limited the roles the sailors could play, and also deeply enmeshed them in the naval system that provided food, shelter, necessities, medical care, and retirement benefits. In turn, the navy in modern, capitalist fashion utilized the sailors as interchangeable parts in the techno-social machine. This led to the standardization of the sailors that furthered their alienation.

However, the sailors' working-class identity did not evolve as it did for land-based workers because of the influence of maritime and naval cultures. The dangers of the sea and the geographic isolation inherent in maritime work created a separate world where different cultural rules and meanings allowed for different, in some ways freer lives. Naval culture granted the seamen a higher purpose and long tradition as well as membership within a larger corporate structure. These two influences mediated and transformed the seamen's work and life experiences.

The dangers of the watery environment created a strong ship-based bond that linked everyone on board into a man-versus-nature collective. This collective universally recognized the need for order and discipline for the good of everyone. At the same time the geographic isolation transformed the sailors' job into an all-encompassing experience inside a separate wooden world. Within this world land-based social conventions possessed less power and maritime ones such as the importance of nautical skill played an important part in the ship's hierarchy. Working on the *Mars* did not require totally unskilled workers, nor did it completely de-skill the laborer. On board a sailing warship, nautical skill played a crucial role in both ship handling and identity construction. Nautical skill served as a social signifier that helped to stratify the bulk of the main deck sailors, separating the skilled from the unskilled. This segregation of labor, just as on land, created deep fissures within the working class that served to dilute class-consciousness and link skilled sailors to nautically skilled officers across class lines.

The importance of seamanship combined with the decreased importance of land-based social conventions created a plethora of opportunities for advancement. Throughout the *Mars*' early career, the ship's workers moved throughout the naval hierarchy. Many of the ship's men earned promotions that improved their naval social standing. Since most of these men earned their promotions directly from the ship's captain, the naval system of promotions created cross-class linkages between the captain and his crew, who owed their social advances to his good word. Moreover, seamen laboring on the *Mars*, did not labor in an isolated, individual factory, and the larger navy provided a huge field for talented men to exploit. Because of the endemic shortage of maritime labor in the eighteenth-century Atlantic world, a skilled seaman could always find a new ship. Whether through desertion or promotion to another warship, men on the *Mars* possessed mobility unavailable to the land-based working class because they operated in

different labor markets. The *Mars*' seamen's systematic mobility reduced the impact of work-based alienation because the sailors enjoyed copious prospects for advancement within the larger naval community. The naval community with its corporate structure and hundreds of individual factories replaced the older community and family-based craft progression with a modern, bureaucratic system of merit-based advancement.

The naval ranking hierarchy comprised only part of naval culture. In addition to capitalist-inspired management techniques the *Mars*' ran according the customs of the navy. These customs lubricated everyday life. The informal customs of the service mitigated the harshness of the official rules of the navy. Moreover, the ceremonies of the service allowed the men to subsume themselves into the glorious history of the Royal Navy. As a result the seamen possessed a higher function, and this mediated the alienation of their work experience. The traditions of the service existed universally on every ship in the navy, and as a result created a huge collective between the thousands of men who labored for the state.

Because of the standardized nature of naval service, the universal customs and rituals, and the bureaucratic benefits, the *Mars*' seamen and their brothers in the rest of the navy all became members of an imagined community. This imagined community, based on the shared experiences, language, customs, rituals, and interactions with the power dynamics of modern society created a horizontal bond between the men serving in the Royal Navy. Naval culture offered the seamen standards of behavior to live up to that went beyond making a profit. It encouraged them to "live up to the courage, stamina, and seamanship of their predecessors" as "untitled knights of the blue ocean."¹⁸⁶ Naval culture in concert with maritime traditions modified and influenced the working-class culture generated by the seamen's labor experiences.

¹⁸⁶ Lovette, *Naval Customs, Traditions, and Usage*, 16.

The *Mars*' crew emerged from their labor as a combination of modern worker, sailor, and warrior. In short they were professional fighting seamen. The combination of cultural influences created a hybrid identity that separated the seamen from both mainstream and working-class society. The seamen's imperial role in defending the commercial empire placed them in a position to experience all of the upheaval of the revolutionary era. But their identity and the myriad of cultures that influenced them predisposed the *Mars*' seamen to resist radical change. The French and American Revolution's socially leveling precepts had no place in maritime and naval culture, and as a result of the seamen's hybrid identity the *Mars*' sailors resisted the siren call of radical change. Instead they embraced their own understandings and interpretations of modernity's challenges within their segregated wooden world.

Chapter 3: *HMS MARS* AND THE BATTLE FOR BRITISH IDENTITY

The *Mars*' sailors' work experience generated their class-consciousness, but maritime, naval, and British culture also influenced them when they challenged their own government and their place in the British nation. The productive alienation caused by factory-style work generated a collective identity between the ordinary workers (seamen) in opposition to management (officers and the state). Some recent scholars have posited the idea that eighteenth-century sailors, because of their early transformation to modern workers in comparison with their land-based cousins, served as some sort of vanguards of the coming working-class storm. These maritime carriers of the revolutionary virus circulated Enlightenment ideas on just government, social equality, slavery, and the rights of the man throughout the Atlantic world. Ultimately these scholars proposed that the seamen formed a trans-national, maritime working class that disseminated radical ideology and provided early shock troops for the large-scale upheavals of the Revolutionary Era.¹⁸⁷

Of course, the late eighteenth century offered numerous examples of resistance to the coercive, patrician, elitist system that dominated social, political, and economic affairs. But, countless smaller acts of accommodation and negotiation between marginalized people and the elites counter-balanced large-scale acts of resistance, like the American and French Revolutions. These accommodations, the compromises and gradual changes that accompanied modernization,

¹⁸⁷ Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 5-8, 149, 200, 243, 289-290, Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra, Sailors, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 144-145, and Marcus Rediker, "The Red Atlantic", in *Sea Changes*, Bernhard Klein and Gesa Mackenthun, ed., *Sea Changes, Historicizing the Ocean* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 116-118.

produced far-ranging effects as well. The combination of revolution and accommodation led to modernity. That said, the speed of modernization accelerated in the late eighteenth century when American and French revolutionaries forced the pace of change, and assaulted the status quo by rejecting the old aristocratic order and replacing it with broader-based representative democracy.

The British Empire, however, withstood the assault of these radical forces, and the political settlement of 1688 continued to govern life in Britain well into the nineteenth century. Britain did not remain immune to the period's upheaval, because it faced the same challenges as the rest of the Atlantic world. Instead of a dramatic re-organization of society on Enlightenment-inspired revolutionary principles, the British state engaged in a series of negotiations with its people that allowed the oligarchic government to maintain its grip on power. The sailors of the *HMS Mars* provide an enlightening example of some of the processes at work in late eighteenth-century Britain. The lives and struggles of the seamen highlight the challenges of ordinary people in reconciling national and working-class consciousness within the existing British system.

Chapter three examines the *Mars*' seamen's interaction with the rest of the British world during the late 1790s. During this time they fought a fierce battle, staged a fleet-wide mutiny, and struggled for respect from their fellow Britons. The *Mars*' sailors made use of their working-class identity to challenge the establishment, but their goals, tactics, language, and actions suggest that they wanted to improve their position within the nation and empire, not bring it down. In this sense, the sailors' mutiny did not constitute a revolution but an expression of Britishness. The seamen's demands expressed both their working-class identity and their British identity. Naturally the seamen borrowed from both cultures as both cultures influenced their identity. As a result of their successful mutiny and its aftermath, the sailors began their

transformation from marginalized, infantilized “jolly-jack-tars” to valued and respected workers and citizens. They accomplished this without bringing down the British state, all while in a shooting war with the French. The British government’s ability to successfully negotiate the Spithead Mutiny serves as an example of how effective and flexible the parliamentary system and British imperial identity could be, and the government’s negotiations with the sailors serve as one example of the larger British negotiation process brought on by the social and political transformations of the late eighteenth century. The eighteenth-century Royal Navy stood “as a metaphor for the nation – ‘the good ship Britannia’” within the political discourse of the day.¹⁸⁸ The metaphor still holds weight for historical analysis. The Royal Navy seamen’s experiences illuminate the larger national processes of modernization and demands for rights, but not revolution.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first, “Revolutionary Seas,” outlines the socio-political situation in Britain during the late 1790s. This will provide the reader with an idea of the seas that the *Mars* sailed in terms of the social and political issues at play in the British Empire during the Revolutionary Era. Specifically, this section shows how the nation stereotyped and marginalized the seamen despite their crucial imperial role of defending national prosperity. Section two, “Oh what an Easter Surprise!” shows how the Spithead Mutiny can be interpreted as example of the British parliamentary system’s flexibility in addressing its citizen’s needs. Moreover, the seamen’s use of the political system demonstrated their qualifications for citizenship and national acceptance. As a result of the Spithead Mutiny and its aftermath, the seamen began the transformation from marginalized “tars” to British citizens, and they accomplished this transformation because of a combination of cultural influences that made them

¹⁸⁸ Timothy Jenks, *Naval Engagements: Patriotism, Cultural Politics, and the Royal Navy, 1793-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 76.

workers and citizens. Section three, “Redemption off Brest,” covers the *Mars*’ battle with the French warship *l’Hercule*. This encounter provided the sailors with their ticket for entrance into the British nation, and as a result of their service to the state, they now possessed a claim to British citizenship. The Spithead Mutiny and the battle with *l’Hercule* did not occur in isolation from each other. The period from April 1797 to April 1798 involved a change in life on the *Mars*, and the entire span of time comprised one process, book-ended by the two dramatic events. Thus this chapter covers the entire transformational year and traces the changes to the seamen’s lives and identities over time.

Revolutionary Seas

The *Mars* metaphorically sailed through many different worlds between 1794 and 1798. First, the seamen existed within the larger Atlantic world system of colonies and European metropolises. Second, they lived under the influence of the British nation, governed from London and possessing its own social and political culture that formed the basis of the sailors’ political identity. Third, the sailors lived within the confluence of maritime, naval, and working-class culture, as outlined in chapter two. These overlapping worlds produced the waves that the *Mars* and her crew navigated, and each exerted its own pull on the sailors. The sailors did not drift aimlessly, only directed by their superiors. Throughout the *Mars*’ career, the seamen display clear agency in charting their course through the violent seas of the Revolutionary Era.

The Atlantic world existed as an interlocking system of colonies and metropolises designed to increase the wealth of the European nations that dominated the system. Various European elite actors vied for control of the wealth generated by the exploitation of the Atlantic and world

economy. Colonies provided both products and markets for an ever-expanding and increasingly capitalist economic system. The maritime segment of the Atlantic world held the entire web together by providing the communications and transporting the goods demanded by consumers on both sides of the Atlantic.¹⁸⁹

Capitalism increasingly played the role of the dominant intellectual framework inspiring systematic colonial expansion and exploitation. Competing European nations fought for control of resources and markets. Over the course of the eighteenth century, capitalist-inspired management techniques led to greater efficiency. This trend toward “rational” management of economic matters became most evident in the maritime sector and in the plantation economies of the Caribbean. These two sectors of the world economy made full use of the most advanced management techniques and set the standard for the emerging global system. Richard Sheridan summed up the all-inclusive nature of the new capitalist plantations: “the New World plantation complex represented the capitalist exploitation of land with a combination of African labour, European technology and management, Asiatic and American plants, European husbandry, and American soil and climate.”¹⁹⁰ The maritime sector also made use of capitalist management techniques, and the drive for increased profits and efficiency led to the formation of a maritime proletariat.¹⁹¹ These new economic industries provided the metropole with vast wealth, but they also created a large, marginalized working class, separated from the means of production by

¹⁸⁹ Patrick K. O’Brien, “Inseparable Connections: Trade, Economy, Fiscal State, and the Expansion of Empire, 1688-1815,” in P.J. Marshall, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Volume II: The Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 53-55.

¹⁹⁰ Richard Sheridan, “The Formation of Caribbean Plantation Society, 1689-1748,” in P.J. Marshall, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Volume II: The Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 394.

¹⁹¹ Rediker, *The Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 8, 13, 149, 155, 295-298.

primitive capitalist accumulation.¹⁹² The *Mars*' seamen, as wage laborers without control of the means of production formed crucial early members of this emerging working class.

The sailors' employer, the Royal Navy, served a broadly economic purpose; it defended the commercial empire and the overseas trade that financed the British system. The ships of the Royal Navy patrolled and dominated the world's seas, defending British merchant ships, and during wartime, destroying the commerce of other nations. During the eighteenth-century maritime wars, the Royal Navy typically swept Britain's enemies from the sea. As a result, Britain's merchant fleet grew and the fleets of its competitors shrank. In addition, every colonial conquest provided new markets overseas for the home island-based merchants to exploit. This imperial expansion required a concurrent expansion of the navy to defend the enlarged empire. As a result, the empire and the navy grew in tandem. British colonialism based its existence and success on the superiority of the Royal Navy at sea. Without a superior navy and its corresponding domination of the seas, Britain's European rivals could have competed more effectively in the imperial race.¹⁹³

The *Mars* spent her early career serving with the Channel Fleet based in southwestern England. Portsmouth and Plymouth served as the primary fleet anchorages for the Channel Fleet, because they were the closest ports to France's main Atlantic naval base at Brest.¹⁹⁴ This strategic position allowed the Channel Fleet to defend the home islands from cross-channel

¹⁹² E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), 195.

¹⁹³ Alfred Thayer Mahon, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783* (New York: Dover, 1987), 224-226, and Linda Colley, *The Britons, Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 65.

¹⁹⁴ *HMS Mars* Master's Log, 2 December 1794 – 23 December 1795, Great Britain, Public Records Office, London, MSS [Hereafter PRO], Records of the Admiralty [Hereafter ADM], 52/3191, and *HMS Mars* Master's Log, 24 December 1795 – 16 May 1798, Great Britain, Public Records Office, London, MSS [Hereafter PRO], Records of the Admiralty [Hereafter ADM], 52/3192.

invasion and to keep tabs on and blockade the French battle fleet in Brest. Experience and the prevailing winds dictated deploying a fleet in the Western Approaches at the entrance to the English Channel. From this position the Channel Fleet, or western squadron, could foil either an invasion attempt or a sortie from Brest. The western squadron solved the military dilemma of how to contain the French naval threat, but it also provided economic benefits. The constant flow of warships down the English Channel to the western approaches made convoying merchant ships easy, and at the same time made French privateers from the Brittany ports cautious during their forays into open water.¹⁹⁵

At various times, beginning during the War of the League of Augsburg, the French tried a different naval approach from fielding one large battle fleet, the *guere de course*, or cruising war. This strategy involved the weaker naval power splitting its fleet into small packets that then dispersed all over the globe to destroy British commerce. Hopefully the mice could then strangle the lion at the source of British wealth and power. This policy failed spectacularly because it left France without a “fleet in being” to hold the attention of the main British naval force. This allowed the Royal Navy to direct its concentrated strength against the dispersed French and destroy them in detail. Thus, by maintaining dominance at home and forcing the French, Spanish, and other naval powers to follow suit, the western squadron not only prevented an invasion of Britain, but also defended trade and the empire around the world. After immobilizing the main French naval force, the numerically superior Royal Navy remained free to attack the enemy’s overseas possessions without fear of interference. This formed the basis of British grand strategy during the early years of the 1790s. The British attempted numerous amphibious

¹⁹⁵ N.A.M. Rodger, “Sea-Power and Empire, 1688-1815” in P.J. Marshall, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Volume II: The Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 174, and Mahon, *The Influence of Sea Power on History, 1660-1783*, 12-13.

landings in the Caribbean to destroy French commerce throughout the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. British colonial conquests overseas and defense of the home islands rested on the strong fleet in home waters; it served as the lynchpin of the entire imperial defense network.¹⁹⁶

Because of her imperial role in the overall grand strategy the *Mars*' seamen's role remained basically economic. The *Mars* escorted numerous convoys out to the chops of the Channel, on their way overseas.¹⁹⁷ The *Mars* never left home waters protecting a convoy, but because of the intricacies of naval grand strategy, her deployment still defended overseas commerce. Moreover, efficient naval protection allowed merchants to sail with smaller crews, fewer cannon, and more cargo, and this cost reduction more than offset taxes paid to the British state.¹⁹⁸ In sum, the Royal Navy, and specifically the Channel Fleet, played an important role in expanding and defending the British commercial empire. In addition, the state deployed its warships for economic as well as strategic purposes, and thus the *Mars*' seamen's work made them global economic actors even though they labored on a warship deployed in the English Channel.

While Europe boasted no sugar plantations, the metropole experienced its own related economic transition that displaced parts of the population and forced them into new manufacturing work in urban areas. The enclosure movements that centralized agricultural production ejected many peasants from their land and forced them to find urban, wage-based employment. As Patrick O'Brien writes, "Between 1688 and 1815 elastic supplies of relatively

¹⁹⁶ Rodger, "Sea-Power and Empire, 1688-1815," 181, and Mahon, *The Influence of Sea Power on History*, 132-135, 317-320.

¹⁹⁷ *HMS Mars* Master's Log, 2 December 1794 – 23 December 1795, PRO, ADM, 52/3191, and *HMS Mars* Master's Log, 24 December 1795 – 16 May 1798, PRO, ADM, 52/3192.

¹⁹⁸ Rediker, *The Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 85.

cheap labour, both skilled and unskilled, organized by merchants who had the ‘know-how’ and capital required, enabled an increasingly diversified range of tradeable products... to be sold on world markets.”¹⁹⁹ In addition, the European-based worker began to consume imperial, tropical products like tobacco, sugar, and tea on a daily basis because more efficient production, competition, and cheap transport transformed these products from luxuries into everyday necessities.²⁰⁰ The *Mars*’ sailors represent a good example of these new workers since they worked for wages in an urbanesque environment and consumed colonial products daily.²⁰¹

The economic transformations of the eighteenth century did not just affect the emerging working class. This time period also saw the rise of the bourgeoisie, who exploited the new economic circumstances for personal and national gain. Over the course of the century, this new middle class began to agitate for political rights commensurate with their material affluence. Dominated by the landed elites, absolute monarchies or oligarchies controlled the European states of the period. The middle-class trading interest had a stake in the political and strategic issues of the empire because they based their livelihood on the commercial empire. This lack of

¹⁹⁹ O’Brien, “Inseparable Connections,” 56.

²⁰⁰ Sheridan, “The Formation of Caribbean Plantation Society,” 394, and Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Penguin, 1985), 67.

²⁰¹ *HMS Mars* Master’s Log, 2 December 1794 – 23 December 1795, PRO, ADM, 52/3191, and *HMS Mars* Master’s Log, 24 December 1795 – 16 May 1798, PRO, ADM, 52/3192, Dudley Pope, *Life in Nelson’s Navy* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1981), 153-154, and William Burney, ed., *A New Universal Dictionary of the Marine; Being a Copious Explanation of the Technical Terms and Phrases Usually Employed in the Construction, Equipment, Machinery, Movements, and Military as well as Naval Operations of Ships: With Such Parts of Astronomy, and Navigation as will Found Useful to Practical Navigators. Illustrated with a Variety of Modern Designs of Shipping, Together with Separate Views of the Masts, Yards, Sails, and Rigging. To which is Annexed A Vocabulary of French Sea-Phrases and Terms of Art, Collected From the Best Authorities Originally Compiled By William Falconer* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1815) Here after: Burney, *Falconer’s Marine Dictionary*, 172, 359.

political power created social tensions between the traditional power elites and the rising bourgeoisie.²⁰²

Fed up with the social and political inequalities inherent in the British system, these marginalized middle-class actors played the lead role in the ensuing American Revolution of the late 1700s. American success in their revolution against the mighty British state set an example for the rest of the Atlantic world. The American Revolutionaries justified their revolt with Enlightenment-inspired ideas about just government, the inalienable rights of citizens, and economic freedom. At its base the American Revolution rested on standard British political discourse and traced its roots back to the 1688 revolutionary settlement that time and economics had now rendered obsolete.²⁰³

The Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the so-called revolutionary settlement that followed gave significant political power to the aristocracy and their Parliament. At the same time it re-oriented British foreign policy away from continental religious and dynastic politics and toward colonial expansion and exploitation.²⁰⁴ This settlement set England and later Britain on the road to enlightened government because it reduced royal power and legitimized popular revolt to unseat un-responsive governments. Many segments of the nation embraced this idea despite the fact that the 1688 revolution maintained elite power and “set the stage for the increasingly formalized party conflict and oligarchic ‘stability’ of the next century.”²⁰⁵ Institutionalized party

²⁰² Kathleen Wilson, “Inventing the Revolution: 1688 and Eighteenth-Century Popular Politics,” *The Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 4. (Oct., 1989), 377.

²⁰³ Wilson, “Inventing the Revolution,” 383.

²⁰⁴ Jack Green, “Empire and Identity from the Glorious Revolution to the American Revolution,” in P.J. Marshall, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire: The Eighteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 214.

²⁰⁵ Wilson, “Inventing the Revolution,” 349-350.

politics reduced the chance of outright revolt because radical ideas could be folded into the accepted give and take of party politics.

Moreover, the events of 1688 formed a crucial part of British political discourse. Both sides of the political debate, the dominant elites and the opposition, utilized the language of the Glorious Revolution to formulate their positions and at the same time legitimize their actions as furthering the aims of the revolutionary settlement. Within this political discourse both radicals and conservatives represented 1688 as a key example of bloodless revolution for social and political change. Moreover, within British society 1688 represented the undefined “people” regaining rights wrongly taken by the excesses of royal tyranny. By utilizing the language of 1688, dissidents could politically harmonize radical ideas about natural rights and the role of government, and this granted liberal desire for change legitimacy instead of treasonous intent.²⁰⁶

Because of the economic changes engendered by the capitalist, colonial system and the corresponding rise of the bourgeoisie, the middle class acted as the primary agitators for political change in the British Empire during the middle years of the eighteenth century.²⁰⁷ The issues of political sovereignty and responsive government played out on both sides of the Atlantic. The American Revolution in many ways grew out of the larger British discourse of 1688 and the idea of a just revolution. Eliga Gould argues that, “In a sense, George III lost the greater part of his North American Empire not because his colonial subjects rejected metropolitan norms and practices but because they had become so thoroughly ‘British’ that they refused to sacrifice any of the rights of self government enjoyed by their cousins on the European side of the Atlantic.”²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ Wilson, “Inventing the Revolution,” 352-353, 372-373, 378-380.

²⁰⁷ Wilson, “Inventing the Revolution,” 375-377.

²⁰⁸ Eliga Gould, “A Virtual Nation: Greater Britain and the Imperial Legacy of the American Revolution,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 104, No. 2 (Apr., 1999), 481.

In this sense, the American Revolution followed the traditional path of a British revolution and did not represent a radical break with the past.

Within British political discourse the myths built up around 1688 fully embraced Enlightenment ideas on natural rights and the power of the people. As a result, Britons saw themselves as constitutional role models for the rest of the Atlantic world. Thus, significant segments of the British nation did not immediately damn the French and Americans for following their benevolent example. Loyal opposition within the accepted political discourse did not constitute treason; instead, it served as yet another example of British political enlightenment. All of this changed once the French Revolution degenerated into excess, violence, and a radical re-organization of society.²⁰⁹ The onset of war with the forces of Revolutionary France transformed the domestic, political dynamic in Britain, and activities and language that had previously been an integral part of political discourse became treasonous. French excesses transformed what had been a continuation of domestic political give and take into a clear competition with the old enemy. The Pitt government instituted domestic repression in order to keep the lid on revolutionary sentiment that threatened to send Britain down the revolutionary path.²¹⁰

The *Mars*' seamen existed in a larger Atlantic world political tradition that influenced how they would challenge their own government. When the time came to challenge the state and nation for better treatment and citizenship in the spring of 1797, the sailors reacted as Britons and formulated their actions and language within long-standing political tradition. But within this political tradition, what were the aims and aspirations of the seamen? Moreover, what was the status of the sailors within a British nation fearful of revolution? Perhaps it might be useful to

²⁰⁹ Wilson, "Inventing the Revolution," 362-264.

²¹⁰ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 18-19, 57, 106-107.

define what it meant to be British and what were the benefits, responsibilities, and language of the British citizen. In addition, it is necessary to define what it meant to be a sailor, or “tar,” and how the rest of the nation treated and imagined the seamen.

British citizenship during the eighteenth century did not follow modern conceptions of written words on a cherished document or the right to vote, as the majority of Britons lacked both of these. Ultimately, a British citizen pledged loyalty to the crown and the unified Parliament at Westminster, and in return, the state worked to improve the prosperity of its citizens and subjects throughout the empire. British identity and citizenship remained closely intertwined because people had to prove their credentials by acting British. Moreover, during the Revolutionary Era, the whole concept of British citizenship evolved as a result of the social, political, and economic challenges of the times. Put simply, a Briton enjoyed the liberty guaranteed by the 1688 revolutionary settlement, engaged in overseas trade on some level, took part in the extra-parliamentary politics of British political culture, served the state by increasing the public good, and competed with the French. These factors formed the basis of British behavior and thus citizenship and the more traits performed the more British the actor.

Liberty formed a crucial part of both British identity and the rights and privileges of citizenship. The 1688 revolutionary settlement secured Britons from the excesses of royal tyranny and maintained historical rights like trial by jury, the free press, *habeas corpus*, and free elections for Parliament. Moreover, this constitutional liberty reinforced and was reinforced by the corresponding freedom from invasion. Ensured by the wooden walls of the Royal Navy, this freedom allowed Britain to exist without a large standing army and the opportunities for state abuses that such a force could encourage. Under this system, the king and his government did not grant the people their rights; instead, his task was to defend the rights of the people. This crucial

legal distinction between Britain and the rest of Europe granted Britons a uniqueness and sense of freedom missing from the rest of their contemporary societies that still toiled under absolutist monarchs.²¹¹

British liberty, and the economic opportunities and security it afforded Britons, also allowed for and encouraged overseas trade. Over the course of the eighteenth century, Britons came to associate themselves and their national greatness with their commercial empire. In addition, because of the economic changes brought on by the capitalist, colonial empire, a growing segment of the British population made their living from trade. This extended from the powerful East Indian Company director to the smallest shopkeeper: both profited from commercial imperialism.²¹² This self-identification with “virtuous” commerce went even further because the British incorporated their use of the sea and their geographical circumstances, being an island nation, into their national character. Margarett Lincoln summed up this process for Britons who “in general consolidated a national fiction in which the sea was held to be part of their being.”²¹³ Just like the 1688 revolutionary settlement, this idea formed a crucial part of British political discourse. Moreover, throughout the eighteenth century, this part of British identity became directly tied to the role, importance, funding, and management of the Royal Navy as a metaphor for the British nation.²¹⁴

²¹¹ Jack Green, “Empire and Identity from the Glorious Revolution to the American Revolution,” 208-210, and Wilson, “Inventing the Revolution: 1688 and Eighteenth-Century Popular Politics,” 352, 360.

²¹² Kathleen Wilson, “Empire, Trade and Popular Politics in Mid-Hanoverian Britain: The Case of Admiral Vernon,” *Past and Present*, No. 121 (Nov., 1988), 77, 98, 101-103, and Colley, *Britons*, 56, 59-60.

²¹³ Margarett Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy, British Seapower, 1750-1815* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate Publishing, 2002), 6.

²¹⁴ Jenks, *Naval Engagements*, 76.

Beginning with the emerging middle-class, a thriving “out-of-doors” political culture that influenced the high politics of the nation developed in Britain. Aristocratic elites, who dominated parliament and its elections, certainly utilized the myths, constructions, and language of British political discourse to advance their own interests and quest for power. But, ordinary Britons also engaged in the politics of the eighteenth century. Print media, patriotic associations, and protests formed the basis of this culture, which coerced and cajoled Parliament to fulfill the needs of the bulk of the population.²¹⁵ Various actors carried out all of this extra-parliamentary political activity without the modern, universal suffrage that motivated later politicians to garner popular support. Although eighteenth-century Britons did not enjoy the right to vote, they did still take part in national and imperial politics.

The whole system hinged on the idea of “virtual” representation. This concept revolved around the public spiritedness of the members of parliament, who selflessly legislated for the good of the whole nation. This system constituted a continuation of the ruling class’s feudal obligations to look after their people. Thus, because of their benevolent intentions, Parliament still served the best interests of the whole population of non-electors. Virtual representation constituted one of the crucial grievances and intractable political disagreements between the American colonists and their metropolitan officials that led to the 1776 revolution.²¹⁶ Within the British nation proper, back on the home islands, virtual representation remained a contentious issue particularly because the public spiritedness and selflessness of the ruling elites remained open to debate.

²¹⁵ Colley, *Britons*, 68, 71, 93, 97, Wilson, “Empire, Trade and Popular Politics in Mid-Hanoverian Britain,” 76, 108, and Wilson, “Inventing the Revolution,” 77.

²¹⁶ Gould, “A Virtual Nation,” 481.

By serving the state and the national interest, a citizen proved his or her credentials by following the example of the ruling elites. Public service became a crucial part of British citizenship in response to the Revolutionary era, and public service took on many forms, beyond just sitting in Parliament or working a government job. Charitable societies served as a crucial example of public spirit, patriotism, and national pride. In addition, charitable organizations founded by middle-class men and women also served to organize like-minded individuals for political action. In addition, new patriotic associations bloomed all over Britain, and they allowed their members to prove their patriotism while at same time organize and make valuable connections useful for economic, social, and political purposes. As Linda Colley explained, “The patriotic societies also encouraged an alternative and much broader interpretation of what it was to be an active patriot. Whereas the existing order made access to political rights dependent on rank, property and adherence to the correct religion, the way that the societies worked suggested that it was the willingness to participate that marked out the true Briton. The quality of an individual’s exertion, they implied, not conformity to legal qualifications was what really mattered.”²¹⁷ This domestic political trend was not limited to the middle classes. Working-class men got into the act with various types of friendly societies based on work and camaraderie that could be turned to political purposes.²¹⁸

During the long eighteenth century public service and patriotism converged through competition with the French. France and Britain literally and figuratively battled against each other for control of the wealth of the Atlantic World and the position of the dominant European power. This century-long competition resulted in several wars. It also “brought Britons, whether they hailed from Wales or Scotland or England, into confrontation with an obviously hostile

²¹⁷ Colley, *Britons*, 93.

²¹⁸ Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 181, 418-419.

Other and encouraged them to define themselves collectively against it.”²¹⁹ War with the French brought many strands of British identity and many different actors together under the unifying flag of patriotism. Military service to the state in the armed forces in this imperial contest clearly demonstrated a man’s Britishness as well as rewarding the patriot with power, prestige, and wealth.

The combination of all these various strands of British identity did not result in a typical nationalism. Conventional nationalism, like what emerged from France rested on a top-down message of ethnic purity and shared history.²²⁰ British identity revolved around a political nation, not an ethnic one. The 1688 settlement, British liberty, the commercial empire, and opposition to the French formed a unifying identity for Britons. The resulting “imperial nationalism” allowed many different ethnicities to assume the identity mantle to forward their own interests and that of the empire. This brought potentially conflicting identities into harmony. Describing this imperial nationalism, Krishan Kumar wrote that “different groups at different times, or mixtures of groups that identify themselves with the imperial cause, may take the lead in advancing the imperial mission.”²²¹ In the British case, the imperial mission consisted of spreading the gospel of British liberty and enlightened government around the globe in competition with the new French model that boasted different interpretations of liberty.

British imperial nationalism and its language allowed people to justify and legitimize otherwise selfish actions. Vocal patriotism served as both the language and a social signifier of British citizenship. “Being a patriot was a way of claiming the right to participate in British

²¹⁹ Colley, *Britons*, 5.

²²⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities, Reflections On the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 4-7.

²²¹ Krishan Kumar, “Nation and Empire: English and British National Identity in Comparative Perspective,” *Theory and Society*, Vol. 29, No. 5 (Oct., 2000), 580.

political life, and ultimately a means of demanding a much broader access to citizenship.”²²² All members of the British nation who acted and spoke according to its precepts could claim British citizenship, but slaves, workers, and sailors spent the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries negotiating for this status with the rest of the nation.

The sailor existed in a grey area of British culture and society. The nature of his mobile, wage-based employment created a modern, rootless lifestyle that separated him from the rest of land-based society. In order to assure a stable supply of maritime workers, the state utilized a separate set of laws to control the seamen and harness their labor. Designed to protect ship-owners and merchants, this system of legal handicaps did not treat the sailors as free, rational adults, and their status more closely resembled that of African plantation slaves than free Britons.²²³ These factors and the sailors’ social differences caused by maritime culture combined to produce the “tar” stereotype that governed and legitimized relations between the seaman and shore-based society.

Unlike in North America, where seafaring represented a temporary form of employment used to advance land-based goals, in late eighteenth-century Britain there existed a clearly defined maritime proletariat that spent most if not all of their working lives at sea. The sailor worked for wages. Pay, working conditions, and opportunities for employment varied from ship to ship and season-to-season. Within the iron discipline necessary for everyone’s safety on a sailing ship, the seamen possessed very little negotiating power with management. As a result, the sailor’s best negotiating tool remained his mobility. Thus sailors deserted from one ship to

²²² Colley, *Britons*, 5.

²²³ Rediker, *Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 120-121.

join another, and the dynamic of maritime employment led to a rootless work style that took advantage of the shortage of skilled labor.²²⁴

The state responded to the unreliability of the sailors by passing numerous laws to protect ship-owners and control the limited labor supply. Signing on to a ship represented a binding contract that gave the ship's master extensive power over the bodies of the seamen. The state couched these laws as "protecting" the seamen from their own profligate ways. The law treated the sailor's desertions not as labor negotiations, but examples of their irresponsibility. The legal handicaps experienced by sailors served to trap them in their factories, isolated from the rest of society for their own good. Their labor had to be controlled for the good of the entire world economy that depended on them to transport the goods that fueled the entire system.²²⁵ Mainstream British society adopted the state's attitude towards the seamen and this contributed to the 'tar' stereotype.

The maritime economy utilized numerous harsh methods to control the seamen's labor. The lash drove the sailors to their tasks, and press gangs and crimps abducted and delivered them to their new factories. The sailors and the plantation slaves occupied similar positions in the world economy. Both slaves and sailors were unfree or semi-free workers who suffered physical punishment to drive them to their tasks and keep them on the job. Moreover, society played up the sailors' and slaves' otherness to justify the harsh regime necessary for their own good.²²⁶ For the sailors, British society created and relied on the "tar" stereotype to justify this assault on liberty.

²²⁴ Rediker, *Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 100-105, 295-296.

²²⁵ Jesse Lemisch, "Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of Revolutionary America," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., Vol. 25, No. 23 (July 1968): 377-379.

²²⁶ Rediker, *Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 31, 81, and Lemisch, "Jack Tar in the Streets," 380-383.

The seamen's isolation from land for months and years at a time meant that when the sailor finally got off his ship, he engaged in riotous excess. He blew months of wages on a few days of carousing. This profligate behavior shocked and threatened land-based society, which forced the seamen into a safe and easily recognizable category. Sailors on shore, out of their natural element, also remained easily recognizable because of their speech and dress. The term "tar" comes from the seamen's clothes, tarred to protect him from the ever-present wet at sea, and the sailor's practical wardrobe signified his otherness at glance to land-based society. The sailor's speech resulted from his work experience, and was filled with technical nautical jargon that was crucial at sea but alien on land. The sailor's obvious otherness and the dangerous example he set, forced the rest of society to create a pre-packaged stereotype to render the seamen safe and put them into their proper place in society.²²⁷

According to Margarette Lincoln, British society created the "popular image of the sailor which came to dominate by the end of the century... of a blunt, cheerful lad determined to enjoy the present and heedless of the future."²²⁸ The improvidence attributed to seamen by society transformed them from competent, experienced workers who ran complex machines in a dangerous environment into objects of pity and sentimentality. Society saw seamen as "jolly, childlike, irresponsible, and in many ways surprisingly like the Negro stereotype."²²⁹ The seaman's behavior on shore and his irresponsibility in deserting his ships whenever it suited his fancy proved his need for society's protection with special laws and treatment. As a result society treated the seamen as valuable, unruly children, kindly but with condescension. According to these popular conceptions, the sailor did not meet the requirements of citizenship

²²⁷ Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy*, 3.

²²⁸ Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy*, 29.

²²⁹ Lemisch, "Jack Tar in the Streets," 380.

because he required the rest of the citizens to look after him, the same as orphaned children and slaves. This stereotype emerged from the sailor's maritime work experience, and the state utilized and encouraged it to justify keeping the seamen as trapped labor. Unlike the plantation slave who labored largely out of sight and out of mind, the seamen existed in every port in the empire. Thus the bulk of British land-based society utilized the "tar" stereotype when interacting with the maritime proletariat.

The sailors on the *Mars* experienced the same treatment as the rest of the maritime proletariat, but the navy just made it more pronounced. On board a navy vessel, the state's direct authority empowered the captain, not just a contract, and the navy punished mutiny not with pay deductions or firings but with death. Sailors laboring in the navy could expect to serve until the end of hostilities with no opportunities for re-negotiation. The navy's recruitment system removed the sailors' negotiating power because they could not change employers to find a better situation.²³⁰

In addition, time off the ship became rarer as the century wore on. The coppering of the British fleet's hulls during the American War greatly increased a ship's speed because it prevented the build-up of barnacles and weeds that retarded progress. Moreover, the copper plating helped fight rot and the dreaded sea-worm that both ate through the hull. While the increased speed from the coppering may have helped the admiralty defeat the king's enemies, it also meant much less time spent in dock for careening and repairs. By preventing the need for extensive down time for repairs, coppering also removed a chance for the sailors to escape from their ships. The dockyard guilds refused to let any sailors work on their ships while in dry-dock, and as a result seamen received time off on shore and the possibility of changing captains while

²³⁰ N.A.M. Rodger, *The Wooden World, An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1986), 150-151.

the ship had the weeds scraped off the bottom. This technological innovation took from the sailors one of their informal rights to shore leave, and removed a crucial time limit for how long they had to serve on one ship under the same regime. The *Mars* entered commission in late 1795, and from her records the ship never spent any significant time down for repairs, and thus the seamen never got to leave the ship or renegotiate.²³¹

The navy also employed a policy of not letting the seamen off their ships. Because the admiralty relied on impressment to fill its berths, it could not trust the sailors not to desert if given an opportunity. In this vein, fear of desertion motivated the state to buy into and help perpetuate the “tar” stereotype, by not granting them shore leave because they could not be trusted on land. The navy’s labor control system and its embrace of the “tar” stereotype combined to reduce the sailors to chattel to be shipped from one ship to the next as the needs of the war dictated. The state and nation did not respect the sailors as workers or citizens, and these twin acts of marginalization motivated the seamen to rise up in the spring of 1797.

Oh, What an Easter Surprise!

On 16 April 1797, Admiral Lord Bridport signaled for the Channel Fleet to raise anchor and sail from Spithead into the English Channel to cruise for Brest. Fed up with their treatment, the seamen universally disobeyed and steadfastly refused to put to sea until their grievances had been redressed. This unprecedented mutiny should not have come as a complete surprise to the officers and the admiralty because unrest had been building in the fleet for several months, and

²³¹ N.A.M. Rodger, *To Command the Ocean, A Naval History of Britain, 1649-1815* (London: Allen Lane, 2004), 374-375, *HMS Mars* Master’s Log, 2 December 1794 – 23 December 1795, PRO, ADM, 52/3191, and *HMS Mars* Master’s Log, 24 December 1795 – 16 May 1798, PRO, ADM, 52/3192.

the seamen had already sent petitions to their superiors.²³² The mutiny lasted about a month, until 15 May when the admiralty sent Lord Howe, the victor of the Glorious First of June, to complete the negotiations personally.

The sailors' actions captivated and horrified the nation. The seamen's strike "became the subject of discussion at the corner of every street, in every place of public resort, and by every fire-side."²³³ What began as unconfirmed rumors spread like wildfire across the nation, and forced the government to action. The *London Times* led its news coverage with the story for days trying to calm the populace and allay its fears.²³⁴ Within the British national consciousness, the sailors' mutiny undermined critical illusions regarding their character and the nation's imperviousness to revolutionary invasion.

Spithead continued to influence the sailors after they returned to obedience, and the aftermath of the strike provides almost as much insight into their motives as the actual mutiny itself. The press and later historians universally referred to the events at Spithead as a mutiny, and moreover, some tried to cast the Spithead sailors as revolutionaries.²³⁵ On closer inspection, the *Mars'* sailors really acted like modern industrial workers striking against their employer, and their inspiration came from British political discourse not radical political ideals. The sailors'

²³² *HMS Mars* Master's Log, 2 December 1794 – 23 December 1795, PRO, ADM, 52/3191, *HMS Mars* Master's Log, 24 December 1795 – 16 May 1798, PRO, ADM, 52/3192, *London Times*, 18 April 1797, and James Cordingley, *The Billy Ruffian: the Bellerophon and the Downfall of Napoleon: The Biography of a Ship of the Line, 1782-1836* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2003), 100-101.

²³³ W.J. Neale, *History of the Mutiny at Spithead and the Nore. With an Inquiry into its origin and suggestions for the prevention of Future Discontent in the Royal navy* (Philadelphia: G.B. Zeibler & Co., 1842), 25-26.

²³⁴ *London Times*, 18 April 1797 - 28 April 1797.

²³⁵ G.E. Manwaring and Bonamy Dobree, *The Floating Republic* (New York: A.M. Kelly, 1966), 16-17, James Dugan, *The Great Mutiny* (New York: G.P. Putman, 1965), 31, 169, Neale, *History of the Mutiny at Spithead and the Nore*, 25, 91, 121, 173, Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 443-452, Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*, 277.

tactics, language, and demands suggest this event should be interpreted in terms of work and national relations. Moreover, the sailors' actions in defiance of authority also defied the "tar" stereotype, and this public example of competence forced the nation and the navy to come to terms with the sailors as men and citizens, not slaves or children.

Each of the sailors' demands included a political and economic component. Not fueled by revolutionary politics and language, but political nonetheless because they touched on issues of citizenship. The *Mars*' sailors' identities resulted from a combination of four cultures, and so naturally their demands included elements from all four. During the Spithead affair, the seamen demanded better treatment as workers and citizens. The twin aspects of the sailors' demands dovetailed because they worked for the state. The seamen as collective workers demanded not only improved working conditions, but also national respect for the important imperial job they performed. They based their demands on their role as workers, valuable workers whose contributions demanded recognition and reward. The sailors' justified their demands based on their shared working-class and British identity, and their demands reflect this.

The sailors issued six demands all of which related to the standards of the naval service. First and foremost, the sailors demanded a wage hike in line with the recent army pay raise. The second and third demands dealt with their food. The fourth and sixth demands covered the treatment of the sick and wounded. The fifth demand requested shore leave, which they had not had in years.²³⁶ All dealt with material concerns, not issues regarding the larger political organization of government. In many ways this list of demands remained very similar to the standard maritime negotiations between seamen and merchant captains over conditions of service. Traditionally, when a man joined a merchant ship, he and the master negotiated the

²³⁶ *London Times*, 22 April 1797.

terms of the individual seaman's service. Food, medical care, wages, and length of service usually formed the points of negotiation.²³⁷ The naval sailors' large-scale collective bargaining set the Spithead Mutiny apart from this traditional practice, and the seamen's working-class identity and shared alienation fomented the strike and gave them unprecedented power because of their collective stand.

The sailors' pay had remained the same since the seventeenth century, and the seamen desperately needed a pay raise to reflect the economic changes of the preceding hundred years. The government had adjusted the officers' remuneration over the course of the eighteenth century, but the seamen still labored for Stuart-era wages. Thus, despite the massive economic changes over the decades, the sailors pay had not been improved to reflect the changed times. In their written demands the seamen made certain to mention that Parliament last adjusted their wages "in the reign of King Charles II."²³⁸ The seamen shamed the government by equating their wages with the pre-1688 regime, and this rebuked the government for ignoring its duty to look after its citizens under the revolutionary settlement. Moreover, the seamen did not frame their demand using revolutionary, French-inspired language, and this points to the British nature of their mutiny.

In terms of their rations, the seamen did not object to the food itself, they just wanted that which the law entitled them. The sailors wanted their provisions to be issued at a full sixteen ounces to the pound. Purser traditionally distributed fourteen ounces per pound, with the remaining two ounces counting as wastage. The purser made his profit off the wastage, and this institutional graft irked the seamen who suffered. In their second food-related demand, the seamen requested that they receive fresh meat and vegetables in port instead of just flour. The

²³⁷ Rediker, *The Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 126-127, 222.

²³⁸ *London Times*, 22 April 1797.

practice of distributing fresh food to the sailors in port had long been a tradition, but the sailors wanted it as an explicit right. Both of these demands demonstrate that the seamen accepted their basic food, but that they wanted their full rights as Britons defending the state.²³⁹

The seamen's demands about their medical care, like their demands over rations, insisted that the admiralty live up to its full responsibilities to them as citizen-workers. The mutineers wanted sick and wounded seamen to continue to receive their wages until cured or fully and lawfully discharged. In addition, the sailors vaguely demanded that their ill comrades receive all the care and comforts possible with an overall improvement in care. Medical care formed a crucial and necessary component of the seamen's fringe benefits, and if they had to risk life and limb then management needed to fulfill their promises. The sailors argued that their good labor and service as workers in the national interest demanded better benefits to reward that service and recognize the seamen's skill and contribution to the imperial mission.

The sailors also demanded shore leave. Because of the necessities of wartime naval service, the seamen rarely left their ships. The need to check desertion motivated the navy to keep their sailors trapped on board. The admiralty's policy on shore leave existed as an extension of the broader legal handicaps and marginalization of all seamen. The *Mars* had been in commission for over two years by the time of the Spithead Mutiny, and no evidence suggests that they had received any time off from the ship's regime.²⁴⁰

The sailors' demands all deal with material concerns relating to their work experience. The seamen did not demand changes to the political system or the right to vote. They sought to improve their conditions under the existing regime. They phrased their demands within the

²³⁹ Macdonald, *Feeding Nelson's Navy*, 25, 37, 91-96.

²⁴⁰ *HMS Mars* Master's Log, 2 December 1794 – 23 December 1795, PRO, ADM, 52/3191, and *HMS Mars* Master's Log, 24 December 1795 – 16 May 1798, PRO, ADM, 52/3192.

paradigm of regaining their true rights as Britons serving their nation, not demanding new ones. Thus the sailors' demands fit within the prevailing British political discourse, and throughout the mutiny the seamen made use of the metaphors of 1688 to press their case to the political nation. The sailors' organization and discipline reinforced their rhetorical tactics.

To press their demands more effectively the seamen relied on tight organization and discipline. Each of the Channel Fleet battleships sent two delegates to the *Queen Charlotte* to manage the strike. These delegates possessed limited authority to manage the affair, but they did not permanently or metaphorically replace the admiralty-appointed regular officers. While they controlled the fleet, the seamen continued to enforce normal ship's discipline, flogging defaulters and maintaining the ship's routine.²⁴¹ The sailors' organization demonstrates that they accepted the naval hierarchy and their place in it. This reinforces the idea that they struck not to bring down the nation and navy, but to win better treatment.

The sailors elected their own delegates to represent their ship at the fleet-wide meetings held on the flagship, and their organization reflected their respect for and acceptance of the naval system. On board the *Mars*, the seamen elected Thomas Allen and James Blythe, both experienced able seamen to represent them.²⁴² Neither man served as a petty officer, indebted to his superiors, but both seemed reliable, skilled sailors who held the respect of the rest of the crew. Allen and Blythe had never incurred any form of punishment on the *Mars*, and there exists no evidence describing them as malcontents or sea lawyers. Allen and Blythe formed part of the

²⁴¹ *London Times*, 22 April 1797, and "Minutes of the Board of the Admiralty, 18 April 1797," reprinted in Rodger Morriss, ed., *The Channel Fleet and the Blockade of Brest, 1793-1801* (Burlington Vt.: Ashgate, 2001), 206-207.

²⁴² *London Times*, 22 April 1797.

elite of the crew, nautically skilled and old enough (29 and 30 years old, respectively) to manage the responsibility of leadership.²⁴³

The committee-like organization demonstrates the sailors possessed no desire to replace the existing hierarchy. The delegates did not claim new ship-based titles for themselves, but instead received their limited authority from their shipmates. By pointedly not replacing their officers, the seamen demonstrated their respect for the vertical relationships that regulated and controlled naval life. Moreover, replacing the ships' officers with seamen would have dramatically challenged the entire British system. The king and his government controlled officer appointments, and a lower deck challenge to this authority constituted treason. The seamen's limited, democratically elected strike organization did not demand new rights and did not attempt to usurp royal authority. The sailors' restraint and organization fit directly into the accepted forms of British out-of-doors political activity because of its acceptance of existing hierarchies. The *Mars*' seamen acted just like their fellow Britons by peacefully petitioning Parliament.²⁴⁴ They strengthened their hand by petitioning in a well-organized, respectful group because this gave them "a degree of influence and importance which they could never have commanded as individuals."²⁴⁵ The sailors' adoption of acceptable organization constituted a key aspect of their tactics. This confirmed their commitment to British political tradition, not a desire for the new French, revolutionary, republican one.

During the mutiny, the sailors maintained normal discipline. The seamen flogged each other for the normal abuses. The board of the Admiralty minutes recorded: "The ships are in the completest [sic] order possible and they punish drunkenness and every other offence against

²⁴³ *HMS Mars* Muster Book, January 1797 – October 1797, Great Britain, Public Records Office, London, MSS [Hereafter PRO], Records of the Admiralty [Hereafter ADM], 36/12233.

²⁴⁴ Wilson, "Inventing the Revolution," 368-369, and Colley, *Britons*, 67-69.

²⁴⁵ Colley, *Britons*, 97.

discipline with the utmost severity.”²⁴⁶ Experienced navy men led the Spithead Mutiny, and they understood the importance of shipboard discipline for everyone’s safety.²⁴⁷ Thus, even though the discipline system appears cruel and unjust to modern eyes, it did not constitute a grievance of the seamen because of its central importance within maritime culture.

Life on the mutineer-controlled ships did not degenerate into a drunken orgy of the world turned upside down. The sailors’ behavior, disciplined without “the smallest appearance of rioting,” undermined the tar stereotype because it demonstrated that the sailors could act as rational adults without coercive supervision.²⁴⁸ The *Mars*’ seamen even allowed Chaplain Morgan to carry out normal religious services during the mutiny.²⁴⁹ The sailors’ behavior constitutes the key reason why the affair at Spithead more closely resembled a modern labor strike instead of a classic seaborne mutiny.²⁵⁰ The military classified any refusal to obey orders as mutiny, and this narrow definition technically makes the affair at Spithead a mutiny. But in reality the sailors acted like Britons and workers, not rebellious soldiers. The *Mars*’ seamen’s behavior in trying to regain the rights of citizens and workers made the Spithead Mutiny into an example of true British behavior.

The Spithead sailors conducted their strike in the spirit of 1688, and throughout the mutiny the seamen insisted on protecting trade, respected Parliament, behaved peacefully, and

²⁴⁶ *London Times*, 22 April 1797, and Morriss, “Minutes of the Board of the Admiralty, 18 April 1797,” 206-207.

²⁴⁷ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 321-322, 392.

²⁴⁸ *London Times*, 19 April 1797.

²⁴⁹ *HMS Mars* Master’s Log, 24 December 1795 – 16 May 1798, PRO, ADM, 52/3192.

²⁵⁰ Edward Brenton, *The Naval History of Great Britain Vol. 1* (London: J.F. Dove, 1823), 409-443, Dugan, *The Great Mutiny*, James, *The Naval History of Great Britain, Vol. 2*, 25-31, 71-75, Rediker, *Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 254-287, Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 445-450, Dudley Pope, *The Black Ship* (New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1964), and Greg Denning, *Mr. Bligh’s Bad Language: Passion, Power, and Theatre on the Bounty* (Cambridge: University Press, 1992), 10-15.

cloaked their actions with vocal patriotism. Because of these tactics the Spithead mutiny should be interpreted as essentially British, and this helped to remove any taint of treason. Casting their actions in a loyal light remained crucial to the sailors because the navy punished mutiny and treason with death.²⁵¹

During the strike, the seamen made certain to continue trade protection. The delegates insisted “all frigates may proceed according to their orders with any convoy under their protection as it was not their intention to interrupt the commerce of the country.”²⁵² This action reflected the importance of overseas trade to British identity and political discourse.²⁵³ By continuing with their important duty to protect the nation’s commerce, the sailors not only reminded the nation of their imperial importance but also signaled their Britishness.

Another important part of accepted British political discourse remained respect for the institution of Parliament. Naval sailors constituted a marginalized part of the political nation because they had no voting rights. Their watery home lacked even rotten borough representation. They did enjoy virtual representation, and just like other Britons they petitioned Parliament for help. The seamen first sent their grievances to Lord Howe, who in many ways could be seen as their natural political representative. Howe understood their situation and could represent them in Parliament just as he served to symbolize them as the public face of the Channel Fleet.²⁵⁴ Petitioning Howe for his help in presenting their grievances fit into the accepted political forms of elite clientage. Britons wanting access to Parliamentary assistance frequently associated

²⁵¹ Burney, *Falconer’s Marine Dictionary*, 21-22, 666-669.

²⁵² Morriss, “Minutes of the Board of the Admiralty, 18 April 1797,” 206-207.

²⁵³ Kathleen Wilson, “Empire, Trade and Popular Politics in Mid-Hanoverian Britain,” 77, 98, 101-103, Colley, *Britons*, 56, 59-60, and Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy*, 6.

²⁵⁴ *London Times*, 18 April 1797, 22 April 1797.

themselves with aristocratic elites who used their social and political influence to bolster the case.²⁵⁵

The mechanics of the sailors' petition reflect the accepted political norms, but the fact that the seamen petitioned Parliament in the first place remains noteworthy. The oligarchic British state did not represent the height of enlightened government. Suffrage remained extremely limited, and the American Revolution had already demonstrated a more egalitarian way to manage the political affairs of a nation. Moreover, the new French, republican system guaranteed its citizens even more access to political power and influence.²⁵⁶ The seamen knew of these political revolutions because of the maritime sector's role as the communication conduits of the Atlantic world.²⁵⁷ When faced with a choice of working through the existing system or trying to bring it down by following the American and French examples, the seamen chose the British system. This acceptance of the British system clearly demonstrated the seamen's desire for British identity and acceptance.

The Spithead sailors conducted their strike peacefully. In contrast to recent events across the Channel in France that degenerated into rioting and violence, at Spithead only one instance of violence marred the proceedings. On 7 May, Admiral Colpoys attempted to force the seamen back to obedience. In the process, his officers killed one of the mutineers. The sailors' delegates managed to defuse the situation before the incensed seamen could kill Colpoys or his officers.²⁵⁸ This singular incident of violence prompted the seamen to send the majority of the fleet's officers ashore. This act diffused the simmering tension and helped to prevent a repeat of

²⁵⁵ J.C.D. Clark, *English Society 1660-1832: Religion, Ideology, and Politics During the Ancien Regime*, Second Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 15, 17, 25, 35-36, and Colley, *Britons*, 61.

²⁵⁶ Wilson, "Inventing the Revolution," 349-350, 356-357.

²⁵⁷ Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*, 144-145.

²⁵⁸ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 446.

Colpoys's folly.²⁵⁹ The sailors' peaceful proceedings fit within accepted British political tradition because 1688 represented a virtuous example of peaceful change.²⁶⁰ The sailors sparing Colpoys and not punishing or killing their officers clearly positioned their mutiny within the British revolutionary tradition.

Both naval officials and the press cried up the loyal intent of the seamen. Lord Bridport reported to the admiralty, "the fleet... are determined not to go to sea until their grievances are redressed unless they know the French Fleet were on the coast."²⁶¹ The Spithead delegates placed an important caveat into their disobedience. If the French fleet sailed for Britain, then they would return to duty to defeat the traditional enemy. This clearly demonstrated that the seamen did not revolt to bring down the state or that they harbored any sympathy with the French cause. The *Times* emphasized the sailor's national loyalty when it reported, "there is no reason to suspect the smallest disaffection in any one to his majesty's service and government."²⁶² The government and their press organs made certain to publicize the sailors' patriotism because it transformed a potentially revolutionary problem into a yet another example of Parliament taking care of loyal Britons.

The seamen did not just rely on elite representations of their patriotism. On 19 April, the Grand Duke of Württemberg arrived in Portsmouth with his new English bride, and the mutineers manned the yards and carried out the traditional salutes.²⁶³ The navy reserved manning the yards for royal visits and celebrations of notable victories, and by performing the appropriate

²⁵⁹ Admiral Bridport, Spithead, to Admiralty, 8 May 1797, in Rodger Morriss, ed., *The Channel Fleet and the Blockade of Brest, 1793-1801* (Burlington Vt.: Ashgate, 2001), 224.

²⁶⁰ Wilson, "Inventing the Revolution," 357.

²⁶¹ Admiral Bridport, Spithead, to Admiralty, 8 May 1797, in Rodger Morriss, ed., *The Channel Fleet and the Blockade of Brest, 1793-1801* (Burlington Vt.: Ashgate, 2001), 205.

²⁶² *London Times*, 18 April 1797.

²⁶³ Manwaring and Dobree, *The Floating Republic*, 54, and Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 446.

ritual, the seamen demonstrated their loyalty.²⁶⁴ This constituted a clear example of the sailors' patriotism for the entire nation to witness. This action followed in the tradition of loyal opposition that formed a crucial part of the give and take of the Parliamentary system. The seamen did not revolt against their king and country; their issue remained with Parliament and its refusal to address their legitimate grievances.

The seamen's tactics, organization, and language did not reflect the actions of stereotypical "jack tars." Their acceptance and embrace of political norms demonstrated their aptitude for inclusion within the nation. The sailors' peaceful, organized behavior, that respected hierarchy and the importance of trade, transformed them into rational Britons, not children, slaves, or republicans. The seamen's patriotic language labeled them Britons, not radical Frenchmen. Lastly, the Spithead Mutineer's embrace of their working-class consciousness to challenge authority clearly suggested that they could no longer be classified as rootless seamen, but instead modern citizen-workers loyal to the nation.

The enormity of the sailors' actions cannot be ignored. This naval, collective strike was unprecedented at the time, and the seamen risked death not just losing their jobs. The seamen knew this, and made certain to demand a written pardon from the king to prevent any retaliation. The articles of war specifically punished mutiny and treason with death. This demand for a clear pardon grew out of the seamen's collective experiences, specifically the aftermath of the 1794 *Culloden* mutiny where the admiralty hanged the ringleaders despite promises made by the on-the-spot negotiators.²⁶⁵ The need for a royal pardon clearly demonstrated the enormity of the sailors' actions. Moreover, it suggested that there remained segments of the nation that would not accept the seamen's new power and independence.

²⁶⁴ Burney, *Falconer's Marine Dictionary*, 429-430.

²⁶⁵ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 445.

The final act of the Spithead Mutiny starred not only the seamen's delegates but also their virtual representative Lord Howe. The government dispatched Howe to Portsmouth to complete the negotiations. This encounter between the seamen's delegates and the elite member of the aristocracy settled the final points to be negotiated and also seriously compromised the myth of the child-like tar. In the early phases of the mutiny Admiral Bridport received several letters from the admiralty imploring him to secure the "ringleaders" and stop the "people from the shore... instrumental in exciting the present discontent."²⁶⁶ After the month-long demonstration of the seamen's manhood and Britishness, the government stopped trying to blame the mutiny on troublemakers and outside agitators, at least in their private correspondence. Instead they dispatched a respected representative of their own to negotiate face-to-face. This last concession to the sailors, treating them as rational adults, undermined decades of condescension and abuse.

The seamen's delegates demanded that they be allowed to remove a group of officers from the fleet. Howe conceded this last point, but their agreement on this matter remained strictly informal. It did not create a precedent for sailors to veto their officers. The *Mars'* delegates insisted that Lieutenant Comyn be removed from his post on the ship. Approximately forty suffered exile, but the rest returned to the fleet to resume their duty.²⁶⁷

What criteria did the seamen use to decide which officers to exile? The decision could not rest just on flogging since presumably then all the officers, including Capt. Hood, should have been exiled since they ultimately held responsibility for naval punishment. Given the seamen's perspective on naval punishment and the fact that they did not demand a change to the

²⁶⁶ Admiralty, London, to Admiral Bridport, 15 April 1797, Admiral Bridport, Portsmouth, to Admiralty, 16 April 1797, and Admiral Bridport, Portsmouth, to Admiralty, 17 April 1797, in Rodger Morriss, ed., *The Channel Fleet and the Blockade of Brest, 1793-1801* (Burlington Vt.: Ashgate, 2001), 198, 202, 204.

²⁶⁷ *HMS Mars* Muster Book, January 1797 – October 1797, PRO, ADM, 36/12233.

ship's punishment system, there must have been a more complex dynamic on the *Mars*. An officer's unpopularity with the crew could rest on other factors like lack of seamanship, but incompetence seems to only constitute part of the reason why an officer earned the enmity of the seamen. The *Mars* situation combined with national social factors suggests that Comyn earned his exile because of how he treated the seamen. Could it have been that he treated them as incompetent, child-like slaves?

After settling the unprecedented mass officer exile, the delegates and Howe rowed through the fleet to the cheers of the seamen.²⁶⁸ The delegates and their admiral then returned to Portsmouth, where they all shared a meal together along with Lady Howe. This meal granted the delegates, and by extension the rest of the seamen, a privilege unavailable to the vast majority of the population. A peer of the realm invited ordinary seamen to sit at his table and interact with him and his wife. This meeting, while not quite an invitation to address Parliament, came very close. This meal not only transgressed land-based protocol, but also naval protocol. Naval tradition and custom strictly regulated when and with whom a man ate.²⁶⁹ Flag officers messed alone, or with captains or other officers, not common seamen. That Howe invited them to join his mess carried significance far beyond just feeding the seamen better quality food than usual. Howe's invitation to the delegates did not change naval dining customs, but it did signal that the seamen were now worthy of sharing his table as valued worker-citizens. This meal signaled that the navy no longer could treat the seamen as "tars," and that a new era of labor relations had begun between workers and management and citizens and their government.

After their meal with Howe, the delegates returned to the fleet and their normal existence. A serving officer, Lt. Beaver, wrote to a friend about the affair: "They have demanded nothing

²⁶⁸ *HMS Mars* Master's Log, 24 December 1795 – 16 May 1798, PRO, ADM, 52/3192.

²⁶⁹ Macdonald, *Feeding Nelson's Navy*, 121-132.

but what to every unprejudiced person must appear moderate and just, and they have conducted themselves with a degree of prudence and decency which I thought them incapable of.”²⁷⁰ In many ways this statement sums up the entire British nation’s opinions about the Spithead Mutiny. The seamen’s demands were “moderate and just,” and no doubt part of the reason they appeared so rested on the patriotic language the sailors utilized to frame their demands within the accepted political discourse. In addition to utilizing language that the entire nation could understand and appreciate, the seamen also demonstrated that they could not be treated as children or slaves. Beaver unwittingly indulged in the “tar” stereotype when he expressed his surprise at the “incapable” seamen’s “prudence and decency.” How did he expect them to behave? The sailors laboring on the *Mars* were highly skilled professional fighting men. They lived in a strictly regimented society based on order and discipline, which they accepted as necessary. Beaver’s letter reflects the societal prejudices that the seamen battled against at Spithead, and the aftermath of the mutiny demonstrated that at least part of the nation recognized the sailors as rational adults and valued citizens who deserved respect.

When Capt. Hood and his officers returned to the *Mars*, they stepped back onto a familiar ship, but the tone had to have changed. After the Spithead Mutiny the officers needed to treat the seamen as rational beings, not slaves to be driven with a cane or rattan. On the *Mars*, several events highlight how the officers and men negotiated a new understanding that moved past the “tar” stereotype.

On 20 June, Capt. Hood promoted 172 men on the *Mars*. Hood promoted most of the men from landsmen to ordinary seamen. This promotion represented a huge step in naval prestige for the promoted men. No longer could they be left as the dregs of naval society since

²⁷⁰ Phillip Beaver, Portsmouth, to Ms. Kate Gillies, 19 April 1797, in J. K. Laughton, ed., *Naval Miscellany I* (NRS Vol. 20, 1902), 410.

they had proven themselves at Spithead. Collective action formed a crucial aspect of the bond generated by working at sea, and every member of the *Mars*' crew had demonstrated that they could be counted on. Hood's mass promotions reflected this dynamic and re-enforced the new respect won by labor at Spithead. In addition to the lower rank promotions, Hood also promoted Spithead delegate James Blythe to Midshipman.²⁷¹ Hood did not punish Blythe for his role in the mutiny; instead, he gave him quarterdeck status and officer rank to reflect his obvious merits and leadership. Blythe became a member of the Hood naval "family" with all the opportunities for upward mobility and patronage it entailed as a reward for leading the strike in an acceptable manner. This promotion demonstrated that, at least on the *Mars*, the officers did not hold a grudge against the seamen. Promoting the ringleader dispelled any lasting suggestions of treason and created a new vertical bond between Hood and Blythe, and by extension the rest of the men.

The promotions did not appease all the seamen, and 25 June brought more unrest to the *Mars*. Recently promoted ordinary seamen William Price and three accomplices attempted to foment a new mutiny in order to gain a more equitable distribution of prize money. The affair ended quickly and badly for Price. One of his shipmates reported him to Capt. Hood, and Price and his co-conspirators left the ship to face court martial on shore. Price had studied law in London and Wales before running away to sea in an effort to avoid problems with a woman.²⁷² In many ways, Price represented the sort of outside agitator the admiralty so feared. He certainly qualified as an "educated troublemaker," but his rank indicates that he lacked the crucial seamanship to serve as a leader in naval society.²⁷³ Moreover, if he had played a leadership role

²⁷¹ *HMS Mars* Muster Book, January 1797 – October 1797, PRO, ADM, 36/12233.

²⁷² Notes, author unknown, presumably Capt. Hood, Great Britain, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, MSS (hereafter NMM), MKH/15, and *HMS Mars* Muster Book, January 1797 – October 1797, PRO, ADM, 36/12233.

²⁷³ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 444.

in the Spithead Mutiny, it seems far-fetched that one of his shipmates would have turned him in. The Price affair demonstrates that the seamen led themselves at Spithead and that the outside agitators talked up in the press were figments of the imagination conjured to reconcile the seamen's behavior with the accepted image of them as "tars."²⁷⁴

In response to the Price's attempt to start a new mutiny, the *Mars*' seamen wrote Capt. Hood an apology letter. The letter no doubt partially served to insulate them from Price's misconduct, but it went further. They wrote of how sorry they were for "past conduct... in open and direct violation to the laws of our country." Later in the letter they praise the officers as "gentlemen of your humanity and candor and who has [sic] ever been forward in promoting our care and welfare."²⁷⁵ Proof of the seamen's sincerity lay in the fact that they all signed it, or made their mark. If the letter represented only an attempt to escape punishment while maintaining hidden contempt, there existed no reason for the seamen to personalize the letter. The seamen pointedly did not apologize for the mutiny, just the disrespect shown the officers. This signified that the sailors remained ready and willing to return to duty now that the objectionable Lt. Comyn was gone and Hood had proven he would continue to treat them well, as always.

The final change generated by the Spithead Mutiny did not occur until the next year. In early 1798, Capt. Hood started flogging men for breaking liberty.²⁷⁶ The admiralty had never officially addressed the seamen's fifth Spithead demand for shore leave, but Capt. Hood started letting his men take liberty on shore in Portsmouth. Winning shore leave from the navy constituted a great victory for the seamen because it demonstrated the trust the admiralty had in them and confirmed their status as British citizens who enjoyed "liberty."

²⁷⁴ Jenks, *Naval Engagements*, 95-96, *London Times*, 21 April 1797.

²⁷⁵ Letter from Crew to Alexander Hood, 27 June 1797, Great Britain, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, MSS (hereafter NMM), MKH/15.

²⁷⁶ *HMS Mars* Master's Log, 24 December 1795 – 16 May 1798, PRO, ADM, 52/3192.

In the part of the Spithead petition dealing with shore leave the sailors asked, “to taste the sweets of liberty on shore.”²⁷⁷ Time away from the ship represented more than just a vacation. For sailors, a run on shore meant time where no man acted as his master. On board the ship, the seamen served under strict hierarchical discipline twenty-four hours a day. A man-o-war’s captain wielded life-and-death power over the seamen, and his authority came directly from the king.²⁷⁸ In Britain, where the 1688 constitutional settlement specifically checked royal tyranny, one of the only remaining examples of absolutist control existed in the navy.²⁷⁹ Thus by demanding shore leave, the sailors also demanded their rights as true Britons. The seamen based their argument for shore leave on their patriotism as “men standing in defense of our country,” and “guardians of the land.”²⁸⁰ As the seamen saw it, they were proud, loyal citizen-workers doing their duty for king and country, not slaves to be imprisoned at their work.

The admiralty’s decision to allow its captains to grant their seamen shore leave after the Spithead mutiny represented a calculated gamble that paid off. Capt. Hood did flog some seamen for overstaying their leave, but the *Mars* did not lose workers to desertion on any large scale as a result of shore leave.²⁸¹ The decision to trust in the seamen’s loyalty closely mirrored the land-based trend of arming the general population in preparation for a French invasion.²⁸² Just like their land-based fellow members of the working class who joined home-defense units, the sailors, by respecting the limits of shore leave, proved their British credentials by returning to

²⁷⁷ *London Times*, 22 April 1797.

²⁷⁸ Paul Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront, American Maritime Culture in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 6, 11, 34.

²⁷⁹ Green, “Empire and Identity,” 209.

²⁸⁰ *London Times*, 22 April 1797.

²⁸¹ *HMS Mars* Master’s Log, 24 December 1795 – 16 May 1798, PRO, ADM, 52/3192, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, November 1797 – June 1798, Great Britain, Public Records Office, London, MSS [Hereafter PRO], Records of the Admiralty [Hereafter ADM], 36/12234.

²⁸² Colley, *Britons*, 309-310.

duty. Moreover, the seamen's respect for the limits of shore leave completely undermined the "tar" stereotype because the seamen proved their responsibility by returning to duty (mostly) on time.

The Spithead Mutiny lasted about a month, but it was just the beginning of a long process of naval reforms. Over the next fifty years the rest of the British political system became more enlightened and egalitarian as a result of the upheaval and ideas of the Revolutionary Era. During this time the navy also continued to receive Parliamentary attention as well. The seamen received another pay raise before the fall of Napoleon and the navy banned the bulk of the physical coercion previously used to drive the sailors to their tasks. Moreover, a number of informal ship-board ranks, like captain of the foretop, that ordinary sailors had long filled but never been paid for, gained official standing and petty officer pay and status.²⁸³ These continuing reforms suggest that the navy understood that the seamen needed to be treated as rational adults and citizen-workers, not "tars." The seamen did not need to strike again because their place within the nation had been secured.

Moreover, the successful techniques of the Spithead mutineers set a valuable example for the rest of the emerging working class. The organization, patriotism, and use of accepted political language displayed so admirably by the sailors served the land-borne workers just as well.²⁸⁴ The seamen's pay raise, while not large, shifted the wage scale for the entire maritime economy, because now merchants had to raise their wages to compete for scarce maritime labor. In addition, because the seamen labored for the state and represented one of the largest groups within the working class, the Spithead negotiations and their peaceful conclusion set the standard for future labor talks.

²⁸³ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 392, 403, 626-627.

²⁸⁴ Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, 25, 80, 194, 418-419.

The last aspect of the Spithead Mutiny's aftermath affected the British population more than the sailors. The nation needed to come to grips with the events of the spring of 1797 that had upset their view of the sailors and the navy. The mutiny complicated the navy as a national metaphor for use in political discourse.²⁸⁵ The sailors' demonstration of class-consciousness rocked the nation, because it so outwardly resembled the disorders in Revolutionary France. Timothy Jenks described the event as a national rupture: "The assumptions and images surrounding naval superiority were fractured in the summer of 1797."²⁸⁶ The sailors' unprecedented behavior shattered the assumed bonds between the nation and the navy because with the state in peril the seamen revolted instead of serving quietly. The sailors' use of British political discourse made the task of reconciling the situation easier, but the fears of invasion weighed heavier on the nation because of the uncertainty unleashed at Spithead.²⁸⁷

The press placed the blame for the mutiny squarely on the heads of outside agitators.²⁸⁸ This interpretation attempted to put the seamen back into the "tar" stereotype while at the same time re-integrating the Spithead Mutiny back into the accepted political tradition of Jacobins and traitors causing trouble. The *Times* described the mutiny as "unpleasant" but "not so serious as it has been generally represented to be."²⁸⁹ It is natural that this publication would attempt to downplay the significance of the mutiny since unrest made the government look weak. The *Times* tried a two-part strategy of blaming the opposition while excusing the sailors. "They [sailors] declare their eagerness to meet the enemy, and glory in the name of their honorable

²⁸⁵ Jenks, *Naval Engagements*, 88.

²⁸⁶ Jenks, *Naval Engagements*, 108-109.

²⁸⁷ Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy*, 61-62.

²⁸⁸ Jenks, *Naval Engagements*, 95.

²⁸⁹ *London Times*, 18 April 1797.

profession.”²⁹⁰ The *Times* never criticized the seamen. Instead the paper emphasized the Britishness of the sailors, and thus the impossibility of their taking any actions that could be defined as treason. “Never could we have believed that the honest character of a gallant British sailor could have suffered itself to be imposed on by the artful intrigues of designing men, who are traitors to their country.”²⁹¹ Having excused the seamen from treason or disloyalty, the *Times* proceeded to blame the opposition. “Let any man compare the language of some of our Opposition prints with the disorderly proceedings now going on at Portsmouth, and say whether there is not a very close affinity between the two parties.”²⁹² This excerpt demonizes Charles Fox, leader of the opposition and proponent of reform, by blaming him for the naval disorder.²⁹³ By placing the blame on domestic political dissidents, the *Times* forced the mutiny back into the accepted party politics of British discourse. This rhetorical technique rehabilitated the sailors and the navy for the public because it removed the taint of treasonous intent from the seamen. Such arguments constituted a start to healing the psychic wounds inflicted by the mutiny, but until the navy re-proved itself by defeating the French threat, doubts still lingered.

Redemption off Brest

On 13 April, 1798 almost a year to the day after the Spithead performance, the Channel Fleet put back to sea hoping to strike a heavy blow against the French and at the same time resolve the doubts about their loyalty still swirling throughout the home islands. This cruise constituted what would become the *Mars*’ greatest individual performance and a testament to the

²⁹⁰ *London Times*, 18 April 1797.

²⁹¹ *London Times*, 21 April 1797.

²⁹² *London Times*, 21 April 1797.

²⁹³ Dugan, *The Great Mutiny*, 134, 188, 217-219, 325.

sailors' British character. At 11:00 AM on 21 April, the Channel Fleet caught sight of a strange sail. By late afternoon the lookouts identified the ship as a French seventy-four. The *Mars*, the *Ramillies* (74), and the *Jason* (38) moved to intercept her before she could reach safety. At the mouth of the *Bec du Raz*, one of the torturous entrances to Brest, the French battleship *l'Hercule*, commanded by Louis l'Heritier, dropped anchor about seven leagues from safety.²⁹⁴

By this time, the swift-sailing and well-handled *Mars* had outrun the other British ships in the race to catch the French warship. As the sun set, the *Mars* closed on her trapped prey. At 9:15 PM the *Mars* dropped anchor alongside *l'Hercule*, and the battle began. *L'Hercule's* men fought fiercely, and they made two brash attempts to take the *Mars* by boarding. But in the end the French seamen could not stand the ferocious British cannon fire, and after just under an hour of close-range pounding by the great guns, *l'Hercule* struck her colors.²⁹⁵

The *Mars* emerged from this duel victorious but bloodied. French grapeshot felled Capt. Hood twenty minutes into the fighting while he stoically stood on the quarterdeck exposed to enemy fire. The French killed fourteen and wounded around fifty other crewmen, including midshipman James Blythe who died on the quarterdeck. The French suffered horrendous losses: out of a complement of over six hundred, the *Mars* carried away only 358 living prisoners. The *Mars* and her battered prize reached Plymouth on the 29th to celebrate the victory and mourn the dead.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁴ *London Times*, 27 April 1798, and Letter Charles Morgan, Portsmouth, to Samuel Hood, 29 April 1798, Great Britain, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, MSS (hereafter NMM), MKH/19, and William James, *The Naval History of Great Britain Vol. 2* (London: Bentley & Son, 1859), 121.

²⁹⁵ *London Times*, 27 April 1798, William James, *The Naval History of Great Britain Vol. 2* (London: Bentley & Son, 1859), 121, and Letter Charles Morgan, Portsmouth, to Samuel Hood, 29 April 1798, NMM, MKH/19.

²⁹⁶ *HMS Mars* Master's Log, 24 December 1795 – 16 May 1798, PRO, ADM, 52/3192, *HMS Mars* Muster Book, November 1797 – June 1798, PRO, ADM, 36/12234, *London Times*, 27

The *Mars*' encounter with *l'Hercule* did not in any real way alter the balance of power in the ongoing war, and at most it only delayed the prospect of another invasion attempt, forcing the French to put off any potential plans until another battleship could be found to cover the landing. However, the battle did produce symbolic and cultural meanings for the *Mars*' crew, the British nation, and their relationship to each other. The British geo-political situation remained perilous because the state and nation were still engaged in an existential death struggle with the forces of the French Revolution. Britons fought this war on both the physical (or watery) battlefield with blood, fire, and steel, and on the metaphysical battlefield with ideas about citizenship, the just organization of society, and the proper formation of government. This section will detail how the state and nation utilized the victory to foster internal unity while offering examples of "proper" British conduct to be emulated by all. At the same time, the victory over *l'Hercule* also produced cultural capital for the crew of the *Mars*, and they made use of it to re-enforce their claims to British citizenship first annunciated at Spithead. The importance of the *Mars* victory over *l'Hercule* went far beyond just holding off the advancing French tide because the cultural meanings of the battle allowed the crew, the state, and the nation to adjust to the unsettled world of the Revolutionary Era.

The late 1790s constituted a low point for Britain during the revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. In addition to the shockingly mutinous spring of 1797, the French landed

April 1798, 2 May 1798, and James, *The Naval History of Great Britain Vol. 2*, 122-124. Records on the exact number of French casualties differ, because the French officers undoubtedly destroyed their own papers to keep them from falling into British hands. The *Mars* log stated *l'Hercule* carried 750 men, but it seems unlikely she carried so many. The prize money system paid the victor for the number of guns and men the ship carried and this probably accounts for the exaggeration. The idea that a new ship like *l'Hercule* could have mustered such a full complement in seamen starved France seems ludicrous. Nonetheless, for *l'Hercule* to have stood toe-to-toe with the *Mars* in a gun duel, she must have carried at least five hundred men or more.

troops in Wales, and Admiral Jervis barely managed to defeat a Spanish fleet at St. Vincent. Even worse, the ever reliable and solvent Bank of England stopped payment in gold due to the financial pressures of paying most of the bill for a worldwide war against the French Revolution.²⁹⁷ On the continent, Britain's allies suffered defeat after defeat, while a young Napoleon Bonaparte rocketed to fame by conquering Italy and forcing Austria to make peace. Moreover, the Corsican general began assembling a new invasion force in the Mediterranean the destination of which remained unknown. Napoleon eventually took his fleet to Egypt in an attempt to sever the links between Britain and her eastern possessions. At the time the British nation braced for another invasion attempt similar to Hoche's failed 1796 landing in Ireland that took advantage of the demographic power of France.²⁹⁸

The French Revolution unleashed war of a heretofore-unseen scale on the world. French conscripted armies of unprecedented size created a new military-political dynamic because as Carl von Clausewitz so accurately noted "war had suddenly become again an affair of the people, and that of a people numbering thirty millions, every one of whom regarded himself as a citizen of the State."²⁹⁹ The new revolutionary French army changed war and transformed it into an extension of the national will. This French innovation forced any nation hoping to stand up to the advancing French tide to expand their armed forces and bring their whole population onto the conjoined battlefield of weapons and ideas. Under the new French regime, anyone who fought for the revolution became a citizen regardless of circumstances. Napoleon exemplified this trend,

²⁹⁷ O'Brien, "Trade, Economy, State, and Empire," 62, and Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 438-440, 456.

²⁹⁸ O'Brien, "Trade, Economy, State, and Empire," 62, Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 438-440, 456, and William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*, second edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 216-217, 332.

²⁹⁹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (New York: Penguin, 1982), 384.

since his wartime service transformed him from an impoverished Corsican to the exemplar of new French nationalist identity and imperial ambition.

In order to stop the French, the British state changed its attitude toward its population. The government armed its people on an unprecedented scale. This practical change required an ideological one as well. British identity relied on “imperial nationalism,” which in turn relied on a shared mission to unify the disparate peoples of the empire under a single banner with a single purpose. With the onset of the French Revolution and the battle of ideas it generated, the British imperial mission transformed into defending peaceful progress and Parliamentary government from the wild excesses of democracy. Under this new paradigm, ordinary men could become British by serving the state mission, not just members of the high elite who served in the united Parliament at home or as colonial administrators abroad. Service and participation, not birth and wealth, became much more important as social signifiers for British identity which implicitly expanded citizenship opportunities across class lines.³⁰⁰

Arming the population and expanding opportunities for full membership within the British nation also produced serious problems for the state because they could not be certain of the loyalty of their own people tempted by the fruits of revolutionary change. Thus, the state and the elites most concerned with preserving the status quo needed to win the loyalty and cooperation of the bulk of the people, and they did this by skillfully utilizing the organs of the mass media. Just as extra-parliamentary politics convinced the marginalized that they had a voice in government, the state and its loyal elites engaged in a multi-layered process of myth making to offer up examples of heroic and “proper” conduct that demonstrated elite sacrifice as well as the glorious nature of the British imperial mission. In this regard the *Mars*’ victory over *l’Hercule*

³⁰⁰ Colley, *Britons*, 93, 308-310, and Kumar, “Nation and Empire,” 578-580, 589.

acted as a prime example because it offered a match up of equal force, dead heroes, and a chance for the entire nation to exult in the humbling of the traditional French enemy.

The encounter at the entrance to Brest resembled a formal duel in many ways, and the rituals and signs that accompanied it transformed the battle into a much more meaningful action that became instantly readable to the entire British nation. By successfully completing the rituals of combat, the *Mars*' crew, officers and men together changed what could have been construed as yet another in a long line of British acts of sea-robbery into a valiant fight filled with heroic acts that transcended mere practical considerations of the balance of power. In this vein, the actions of the *Mars*' men provided a useful example that could be easily marketed to the whole British nation as an example of proper "British" conduct and proof that Britain had re-gained her natural and pre-ordained destiny of imperial and national greatness.³⁰¹ The British population was able to understand and make use of this message of redemption because the *Mars*' victory followed the traditional path and conformed to the expected etiquette of fighting at sea.

The etiquette of naval war involved many rules and conventions that clearly established acceptable forms of fighting at sea. The rituals of battle had to be obeyed in order for the results to produce beneficial, transcendent meaning. Within naval culture, both the French and the British agreed upon a set of rituals and procedures that at the same time limited the fighting and made it possible. Naval etiquette laid down cultural rules that prohibited certain types of behavior as acceptable and allowed for decisive results with clear winners and losers. At the same time, by limiting the contest within mutually accepted borders, naval etiquette also made it

³⁰¹ Clifford Geertz, "The Balinese Cockfight as Play," in Jeffrey C. Alexander and Steven Seidman, ed., *Culture and Society, Contemporary Debates* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 116-121, and Roland Barthes, "The World of Wrestling," in Jeffrey C. Alexander and Steven Seidman, ed., *Culture and Society, Contemporary Debates* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 87-93.

possible for the two antagonists to bring themselves to override their desire for self-preservation long enough to actually fight.³⁰² Thus, a battle's far-reaching cultural effects and ripples had a lot to do with how a battle was fought, not just the outcome. In this sense, Capt. Hood set the stage for this performance, and by preparing the cultural ground in the accepted and traditional way he shaped the ways in which this conflict could be understood and utilized by the nation.

Hood did not wait for the *Jason* and *Ramillies* to join him before he engaged *l'Hercule* because that would have violated the etiquette of the duel. A single ship encounter produced a different semiotic impact than a fleet action because a duel like the *Mars* taking *l'Hercule* reduced the encounter to a fair match between theoretical equals where only skill, discipline, training, and virtue decided the affair. Moreover, if Hood had waited for his consorts to join him, then none of his men could have expected promotion for such a lopsided, three-to-one contest. Thus, Hood gambled that he and his men could take the Frenchmen, but he did so with the highest motives as well as keeping his subordinates' promotional prospects in view. By limiting the forces that the British brought to bear in this contest, Hood set the victory within the accepted one-on-one category that yielded its own specific set of social and cultural rewards within British naval culture.

Hood bore down on his trapped opponent with his British colors proudly flying. Naval etiquette demanded that honorable warriors only opened fire whilst clearly identifying themselves for their enemies. Flying false colors to lure an un-witting opponent within range was considered an acceptable and laudable practice, but actually fighting under false colors or ignobly flying a flag of distress remained off limits to an honorable officer, whether British or

³⁰² Greg Denning, "The Face of Battle: Valparaiso, 1814," in *Performances* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 84-85. Denning bases this section of his work on the ideas of John Keegan from his *Face of Battle*, but Denning's explanation and use of Keegan's theories for cultural interpretation is excellent and informs this section.

French. The French striking their colors in token of surrender, an act mentioned in all accounts of the battle, served as a clear sign that the battle ended in a civilized fashion. Not only did this act end the present hostilities, it also signified that the vanquished now invoked the rules of war. Under the rules of “civilized” war, enemies who lowered their colors and surrendered were entitled to just treatment as prisoners under the accepted conditions.³⁰³ Following the accepted naval etiquette bestowed honor on the winner for emerging victorious, but also on the loser for fighting honorably and conducting themselves in the proper fashion.

Within the British nation, where the Royal Navy represented the personification of the national will and character, large segments of the population possessed knowledge of the rules and conventions of “civilized” war at sea.³⁰⁴ Because the *Mars*’ victory met cultural expectations, the battle could be utilized by the rest of the British nation as a metaphor for their national struggle with the French. The entire British nation could embrace this small contest as yet another example of British superiority.

The British celebrated the victory with newspaper articles and a street ballad, and because the *Mars* and her men followed accepted etiquette this small encounter produced wide-ranging cultural impact on the larger British nation. The battle re-affirmed British naval superiority and re-assured a population unsettled by the prospects of invasion. This victory and others like it (particularly Duncan’s smashing success at Camperdown) repaired the bond between the navy and the nation that had been sundered during the mutinous spring of 1797.³⁰⁵ The seamen’s patriotic, loyal actions in confronting the French obliterated the taint of treason left over from the mutiny. The victories of late 1797 and early 1798 returned the world to its proper order, with the

³⁰³ Leland Lovette, *Naval Customs, Traditions, and Usage* (Menasha Wis.: George Banta Publishing for the US Naval Institute, 1939), 9.

³⁰⁴ Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy*, 2, 6, and Jenks, *Naval Engagements*, 76, 292.

³⁰⁵ Jenks, *Naval Engagements*, 108-109.

“tar stout and good,” defending the nation from its enemies, not sowing panic and disorder with labor disputes.³⁰⁶

The *Times* gloatingly began its coverage of the battle by intoning, “Once more we have the pride and satisfaction to announce the glorious achievement of our navy over an enemy, which dares to boast of the conquest of England.”³⁰⁷ This clearly links the *Mars*’ actions with the nation, and highlights the strategic peril of the British state. French invasion constituted both a physical and metaphysical threat to Britain and British identity. The sailors represented the nation in this contest, and the events of the spring of 1797 reflected the doubts and fears of the entire nation about the efficiency of their own government and political system as well as the fate of the nation. Since the former mutineers defeated the French and put off any new invasion attempt, the nation could resume its previous beliefs in its own invincibility and the inevitability of British progress. The *Times* repeatedly stoked the fear of invasion throughout its coverage, and juxtaposed articles about French invasion preparations with the *Mars*’ victory.³⁰⁸ This produced the effect of uniting the disparate elements of the British nation under the rubric of fighting a common enemy powered by alien and unsuitable ideas.

Throughout its detailed coverage of the battle, the *Times* consistently referred to “Republican colours” to differentiate between the wicked revolutionaries and the virtuous British.³⁰⁹ The disparagement of the French Revolution and its defeat by one of the Spithead ships also dashed any attempt to equate the previous spring’s activities with the French Revolution. The *Times* made a concerted effort to equate the *Mars*’ victory with the overall

³⁰⁶ C.H. Firth, ed., *Naval Songs and Ballads* (London: Spottiswoode & Co., 1908), 285.

³⁰⁷ *London Times*, 27 April 1798.

³⁰⁸ *London Times*, 27 April 1798–8 May 1798.

³⁰⁹ *London Times*, 27 April 1798.

British situation, utilizing the navy as a metaphor for the inevitable restoration of national power and glory.

A street ballad, “A New Song on the Engagement Fought Between the Mars and La Hercule[sic] April 21, 1798,” also linked proper British conduct with the *Mars*’ victory. The song begins, “Bright honor now calls-each true Briton attend.”³¹⁰ This statement equated the *Mars*’ victory and the crew’s behavior with the highest traditions of British character. This fulfilled the dual purpose of re-establishing the metaphorical linkage between the navy and the nation and heaping praise on the brave sailors. The ballad was written in the first person plural; “We were cruising off Brest...”³¹¹ This grammatical choice was doubly inclusive. On one level it grants the seamen agency by giving them clear and vocal credit for their bravery and conduct. On a deeper level, however, the use of “we” can be interpreted as the entire nation taking metaphorical credit for the victory. This style of usage suggests the “imperial we,” similar to but replacing the monarchical “we” of the now marginalized British monarchs. This played directly into British imperial nationalist identity because the *Mars*’ victory was in service to the imperial mission and thus shared by everyone who claimed membership within the British nation.

Thus the *Mars*’ victory produced the dual effect of furthering the imperial mission while at the same time healing the psychic damage caused by the Spithead Mutiny. The Spithead mutiny, and particularly the officer exile, separated the seamen and their elite leaders within the public consciousness.³¹² At Spithead, the *Mars*’ seamen demonstrated the capacity for rational action without direction from the officers. This highlighted the newly revealed class divisions in the navy that reflected the social divide on land that the French Revolution only continued to

³¹⁰ Firth, *Naval Songs and Ballads*, 285.

³¹¹ Firth, *Naval Songs and Ballads*, 285.

³¹² Jenks, *Naval Engagements*, 77.

exacerbate. The victory over *l'Hercule* clearly demonstrated the interdependence of labor and management within the *Mars* community and served as an example of the fruits of cross-class teamwork, group harmony, and united effort needed to defeat the French. This effort to demonstrate cross-class sacrifice and action in the war against the French Revolution formed a key component of the British state's efforts to hold the nation together while under physical and metaphysical attack from across the Channel.

The ballad made use of this strategy in its chorus, "Success to each seaman-a tear for brave Hood."³¹³ The ballad's chorus informed the public that the *Mars* was full of heroes working together to carry out the imperial mission, not just the elite Capt. Hood. The *Times* coverage followed suit. Not only did it make extensive use of "that truly brave man, Captain Hood," but it also published an account of a fore-mast-jack's heroism.³¹⁴ On 3 Maym, the *Times* published a letter from Plymouth recounting the actions of one of the *Mars*' boatswain's mates. On board *l'Hercule*, the French captain, after surrendering, stabbed this "true jack" in the thigh. Outraged at this breach of the rules of war, the sailor delivered a severe beating to the French captain. This possibly apocryphal story praised the average sailor but still referred to him as a "jolly tar." This story shamed the French for their etiquette violation, but at the same time praised the common sailor for respecting the rules of war while recognizing his social place by not killing an officer. Even though he would have been justified in killing him on the spot, the sailor refused to violate the etiquette of war, and would "not stain his cutlass with his blood."³¹⁵ This story demonstrates that even the lowly "tar" had more honor than the French captain, who violated the etiquette of the duel by fighting after he struck his colors.

³¹³ Firth, *Naval Songs and Ballads*, 285.

³¹⁴ *London Times*, 28 April 1798.

³¹⁵ *London Times*, 3 May 1798.

The battle with *l'Hercule* re-assured the British nation that the wooden walls of the nation still stood. The victory and others like it re-established the navy as gloriously representing the nation and allowed the population to forget the unpleasantness of the previous spring. Moreover, the details of the fight could be utilized to re-connect the seamen and the officers and by extension obscuring the class divide that had changed the nature of life in Britain. Unlike the Spithead Mutiny that proceeded almost bloodlessly, the encounter with *l'Hercule* cost the crew, the navy, and the nation some blood.

The casualties suffered in taking *l'Hercule* demonstrated the unity between officers and men. Capt. Hood and James Blythe both died during the fighting.³¹⁶ These two men had respectively represented management and labor during the Spithead strike. Their shared fate served as a clear example to the *Mars*' men that all served and suffered together. But Hood received most of the public adulation. Within national and naval culture, a ship's captain served as nexus between the navy and his crew and served as the identifiable face for the rest of the nation. In this role, Hood's valorization spread to the rest of his shipmates, just as in life he played the role of their elite patron furthering their interests as he furthered his own.

For the nation to make full use of the navy's victories, it needed exemplary individuals to hold up as examples of heroism and proper conduct.³¹⁷ In this respect Hood's victory and death provided great material. His death offered concrete proof of elite sacrifice for the war effort. At the same time the manner of his passing could be promoted as an example of proper conduct. Hood's uncle, Lord Bridport summed up elite opinion of Hood's conduct when he wrote, "Sad as the event is to all his connections, it must afford much consolation to them that he fell gloriously

³¹⁶ *HMS Mars* Muster Book, November 1797 – June 1798, PRO, ADM, 36/12234.

³¹⁷ Jenks, *Naval Engagements*, 291.

in the zealous discharge of his duty, a faithful servant to his king to be remembered.”³¹⁸ This statement minimizes the loss of life and instead praises Hood’s sacrifice for the good of the nation. Bridport held his nephew’s death as the epitome of proper conduct and implied that any true patriot could only wish for such a death. Naval tradition mandated Bridport’s response to his nephew’s death. He would never have imagined shedding tears over his namesake’s passing because for the martial elite Hood’s death was not a tragedy so much as the accepted cost for the greatness of Britain and its empire. Bridport’s letter helped to complete the ritual of Hood’s death, and transformed it into a glorious example of true British character and honor for the rest of the elite to emulate.

The *Times* made use of heroic archetypes to romanticize and ritualize the events of Hood’s death, making it a more effective example of sacrifice for the state. On 5 May, it reported his ostensible last words. “Why was I brought below? Why was I not suffered to die at my post’, he then stretched out his hand, received the sword of his vanquished enemy and instantly expired.”³¹⁹ This version of events was much more heroic, dramatic, and romantic than the truth. All first-hand accounts of the *Mars*’ officers present during these final moments reported that Hood’s last words dealt with his funeral and “temporal affairs in regards to his wife.”³²⁰ The *Times* version of Hood’s last moments stresses attention to duty and the proper conduct of an officer. In order for Hood’s death to become part of the myth-making process, then it had to follow the rules and examples of other heroic deaths. The seamen, the public, and the rest of the elite expected officers to display stoic disdain for personal danger; to die at their posts honorably,

³¹⁸ Alexander Hood (Lord Bridport), Portsmouth, to Samuel Hood, 29 April 1798, Great Britain, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, MSS (hereafter NMM), MKH/19.

³¹⁹ *London Times*, 4 May 1798.

³²⁰ Last Will of Alexander Hood, as witnessed and recorded by Charles Morgan, 21 April 1798, Great Britain, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, MSS (hereafter NMM), MKH/19.

or if injured, to return to duty as soon as possible.³²¹ Hood's request to return to his post transforms his death into a clear example of patriotism and attention to duty in disregard for personal concerns. In addition, Hood receiving his enemy's sword as a token of surrender completed the ritual of the duel, signifying that both sides regarded the affair as honorably concluded. In this version of Hood's final moments, all of the requisite signs appeared, transforming his death into an example of heroic conduct for king and country.

Indeed, British culture ritualized other military deaths in similar fashion and utilized them to promote honorable conduct and to valorize service to the state. As Greg Denning explains, "Putting fine phrases on dying men's lips might belong to a vision of what dying properly should be more than a description of what actually happened."³²² This account of Hood's death and accounts of Lord Nelson's final acts at Trafalgar feature striking similarities. Both spent their last moments surrounded by their officers, while holding on to life until the battle was decided. Moreover, both deaths involved funerals on land, laudatory press coverage, and mass-produced romantic art that idolized and mythologized their passing.³²³

³²¹ John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (New York: Cape, 1977), 191-194

³²² Greg Denning, "The Face of Battle: Valparaiso, 1814," 97.

³²³ Colley, *Britons*, 180-186, William Beatty, "The Death of Nelson," in Jon Lewis, ed., *Life Before the Mast, Sailors' Eyewitness Accounts from the Age of Fighting Ships* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2001), 172-193, and *London Times*, 4 May 1798. James Daniell painted a stylized version of Hood's death in his *The Death of Captain Alexander Hood*.



Figure 1: The Death of Captain Alexander Hood, by James Daniell



Figure 2: The Death of Nelson, by Arthur William Devis

Arthur William Devis's *The Death of Nelson* and James Daniell's *The Death of Captain Alexander Hood* both fulfilled the requirements of the myth-making process. The British print media reproduced both of these works for the mass market, allowing multiple audiences to enjoy and learn from them. Neither work focuses on the battle itself; instead, they capture the glorious passing of their heroes at the moment of their triumph. The similarities between the two are striking. Both works center on their dying protagonist, heroically expiring surrounded by their followers in classic fashion. Moreover, in both works, an overhead lantern (or in Hood's case a candelabra) shrouds the hero in a cleansing light, in sharp contrast to the encroaching darkness. This gives the impression that when the protagonist finally passes, the lights will go out, darkening the world for everyone. Both works offer a clear message of sacrifice for the greater good, and seem to follow the accepted, traditional mode of heroic myth making.

The last similarity between Hood and Nelson involves their land-based funerals. Hood's funeral occurred on land in Somerset a few days after the *Mars*' return to Devon. The rest of the *Mars*' slain crew received a sea burial. Burial at sea involved elaborate ceremony and included important rituals that allowed the crew to honor and mourn lost shipmates. The sail maker sewed the corpse into a sailcloth shroud, and the rest of the crew committed the deceased to the deep. Afterward the pursuer auctioned off the dead man's possessions to the crew. As it raised a nice purse for the man's next of kin, it also allowed shipmates to hold onto mementos of their lost friend to cherish their memory and the memory of the action itself.³²⁴ In contrast to the rest of the ship's company, Hood's body traveled with the ship back to England for burial on shore.

Again Hood acted as a symbol for his men, but this time his burial on land served as a surrogate service for all the slain. The twin funeral services, at sea and on land, completed the ritual of battle. The sea burials were private, ship-based affairs that linked shipmates to each other and helped them to deal with the losses. Hood's funeral on land constituted a public affair for the entire nation. His burial service linked the sailors and their sacrifice to the land for which they sacrificed and bled. Moreover, the special treatment of Hood's body reflects the limits of the seamen's newly won social acceptance. In British society, Hood had to be their public face because their citizenship and acceptance remained British and naval. Thus, it respected and conformed to tradition and hierarchy. Hood's funeral re-enforced British societal norms where elites represented their subordinate followers and acted for the greater good.

Heroic service to the state for the good of the nation as an example of proper conduct played a crucial role in the national consciousness. The *Mars*' victory over *l'Hercule* provided excellent examples of heroic, British conduct and glorious service to the state. However, service

³²⁴ Lovette, *Naval Customs*, 37-42.

to the state also produced far-reaching effects on the parameters of British citizenship. Service and sacrifice for the state and the national interest became a crucial social signifier of British citizenship over the course of the eighteenth century. Defeating the French Other demonstrated the greatness and unique nature of British liberty, government, national character, and imperial destiny.³²⁵ The *Mars*' seamen's part in taking *l'Hercule* provided them with cultural capital within the British political nation. Service in the navy had long provided elites with a path to power, position, and prestige, but in the late eighteenth century the French Revolution opened up a pathway towards advancement and citizenship to all the men who labored in the navy. In Britain, as in the rest of Europe, military service to the state for nationalist causes became a normative activity for all people.

For the navy, this process began in 1779 when King George III sent his son Prince William Henry to sea to serve as an ordinary midshipman. This decision constituted a dramatic response to the previous year's unrest and defeat at the hands of the American colonists and a symbolic effort to re-gain the social and political cohesion undermined by the questions and challenges of the Revolutionary Era.³²⁶ The king's act instantly raised the social cachet of naval service within the British nation and linked the navy and the monarchy for the first time since the seventeenth century. Naval service became a desirable choice for the high elite, despite the harsh conditions of service. This influx of aristocrats increased the navy's social and political standing, but did not close out opportunities for everyone else until after Waterloo.³²⁷ The naval service had long allowed young men of marginal prospects to rise within the British Empire and gain

³²⁵ Colley, *Britons*, 5-6, 93, 177-178, 312.

³²⁶ Rodger, *Command of the Ocean*, 388.

³²⁷ Samantha Cavell, *Playing at Command: Midshipmen and Quarterdeck Boys in the Royal Navy, 1793-1815* Unpublished Master's Thesis, Louisiana State University, 2006, 95.

social and political influence. Alexander Hood's family provides a useful example of the upward mobility available in the navy.

The Hood family naval dynasty began by accident when Capt. Thomas Smith spent the night with a Butleigh vicar in 1739 while waiting for coach repairs. When he left the next morning he took with him the vicar's youngest son, Alexander. Alexander and his older brother Samuel made a life in the navy under Smith's patronage, and both ended their careers admirals and peers.³²⁸ Between them, the two brothers, along with their nephews, forged a naval dynasty. The Hood dynasty owed its power, position, and prestige to state service, not from family genealogy, wealth, or land ownership.

Alexander Hood, the younger, first joined Captain James Cook's *HMS Resolution* on its famous Pacific voyage. He advanced rapidly up the hierarchy thanks in great part to his naval genealogy. Hood performed admirably in his duties throughout his career, taking enemy ships and gaining promotion to captain during the American War after Rodney's victory at the Saints.³²⁹ His prospects for promotion increased because he frequently captained ships assigned to squadrons commanded by his uncles. At the Saints, young Alexander served under his uncle Lord Hood, and during the late 1790s his ship in the Channel Fleet fell under the command of his other uncle Bridport. Under the watchful eye of his naval family, Capt. Hood prospered, and his

³²⁸ Rodger, *The Wooden World*, 276. The men of the Hood family all share the same three names, Alexander, Samuel, and Arthur. For clarity, this thesis refers to the older generation by their titles, i.e. Bridport, while referring to the younger Alexander by name and rank. Moreover, technically Capt. Hood and Lords Bridport and Hood were cousins, but within their correspondence they referred to each other as uncle and nephew and given the disparity in their ages that represents a more realistic and accurate description of their relationship.

³²⁹ J. Ralfe, *The Naval Biography of Great Britain* (London: Whitmore & Fenn, 1828), 48-54, Kemp, *Oxford Companion to Ships and the Sea*, 394, and R.L. DeNardo and David Syrett, *The Commissioned Sea Officers of the Royal Navy Vol. II* (Greenwich England: The National Maritime Museum, 1954), 455.

connections ensured that he continued to expand the family network by promoting men on the *Mars*.

Even in death, Hood's patronage network continued to work for his naval followers. Signal Midshipman Thomas Southey, who joined the *Mars* with Hood, garnered mention in the official letter for bravery after the battle with *l'Hercule* and transferred to the Admiral's flagship to continue his career within the same "family." Moreover, after Hood's death, Chaplain Morgan continued to press the patronage claims of Hood's seamen at the request of Hood's widow Elizabeth. Morgan assured his friend's widow that he continued to badger Lord Bridport to take care of Hood's coxswain, but it remains unclear to what result.³³⁰ These post-death workings of the naval patronage system demonstrate the reciprocal obligations built into the system. The vertical linkages across class lines required the seamen to support their officer while at the same time the officer looked out for the seamen's advancement and well being. While not unique to naval society, this patronage system helped to create on board social harmony, and at the same time, reward loyal men for their service.

Unlike in the army, which maintained parade regiments to keep incompetent officers out of harm's way, the naval service allowed no place for petty aristocrats to avoid real responsibility and danger. A naval officer had to really be an aristocrat, not just pretend to be one. A ship's captain held ultimate responsibility for his ship and its crew, and disaster could occur if he failed to perform his roles properly. While Hood's connections granted him a chance to play the role handed down to him by his family, he had to perform up to expectations. If he failed, not only

³³⁰ *London Times*, 30 April 1798, Thomas Morgan, Portsmouth, to Elizabeth Hood, 3 October 1798, Great Britain, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, MSS (hereafter NMM), MKH/19, and *HMS Mars* Muster Book, November 1797 – June 1798, PRO, ADM, 36/12234. Morgan's letter is unclear exactly who the coxswain was and does not list his name. The *Mars*' muster lists two men, James Brownfield and John Wilkenson, as coxswains, but neither was transferred off the ship or promoted as a result of Morgan and Elizabeth's agitation.

did he end his career, he also jeopardized his family's power, prestige, and future influence. The Hood family patronage network did not ensure success for its members, but it did ensure that its members would be given opportunities to succeed with the family's training and tradition to help them. As a reward for risking death fighting for the British state and for carrying out their duties, the Hood family network continued to exercise and enjoy the power and privileges reserved for the martial elite. The Hood family clearly demonstrates that service to the British state in the navy generated extensive rewards and social acceptance within the highest levels of the British nation. They formed part of the service elite, and their example of service acted as a template of behavior that others could follow, including the ordinary sailors.

As a result of following the example of the service elites, Britain's ruling class increasingly saw themselves gloriously leading their nation in battle against the French Other.³³¹ Heroic sacrifice for the state became one of the normative tropes of British public life. Defeating the French revolutionaries remained a crucial elite concern because all of Europe had witnessed the fate of the French elite at the hands of the republicans.³³² The threat of defeat at the hands of the French was in many ways even worse for the naval service elites because they were unlikely to survive the fighting to be left disgraced, penniless, and facing the guillotine. However, the war with the French Revolution, while directly threatening elite privilege, also opened up dramatic opportunities for the ordinary seamen.

The new French *levée en masse* opened the door to citizenship and honor for previously marginalized people, among the French and among their primary enemy the British. Serving the state and nation in the armed forces allowed ordinary people to make a new claim on their governments based on their wartime service. As the Hood family history demonstrated, middle

³³¹ Colley, *Britons*, 155-177.

³³² Doyle, *French Revolution*, 394-396.

and upper-class actors had long followed this path to power, and as a result of the changed cultural and social situation engendered by the bourgeois assault on the status quo, the sailors on the *Mars* utilized their heroic actions in taking *l'Hercule* to prove their worth to the larger navy and nation.

As previously discussed in chapter two, naval culture rested in large part on the traditions and history of the service. This took the form of official policies like naming new warships after important victories and officers as well as informal lower-deck oral histories transmitted from one generation of seamen to the next. Within naval culture the seamen of the *Mars* earned status and prestige because they had taken part in such a notable action. Unlike larger fleet action where the whole fleet divided and shared the honor and credit, the *Mars*' community garnered all the cultural laurels of victory. For the time being, the rest of the naval community had their example to emulate.

The seamen participated in the worldwide war in a forward role, not just supporting the effort with patriotic toasts and subscriptions. Their participation transformed them from the displaced dregs of society into national heroes. The cloud of treason that hung around the Channel Fleet after Spithead could not resist the breeze of heroism and victory that wafted from the gun ports of the *Mars*. By serving the state under the British banner, the seamen earned membership within the British nation, and helped to begin the tradition of military service as a crucial part of citizenship within modern Britain.³³³ The cultural capital they earned defeating *l'Hercule* provided them with a ticket to full membership and even a place of honor within the British nation. Because, really, who was more British than the professional fighting seamen who

³³³ John Keegan, John, *A History of Warfare* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 357.

manned the wooden walls and brought confusion to the French whenever they dared to trespass on Britain's chosen watery purview?

Conclusion

By 1798 when the *Mars* returned to England victorious, the sailors on board epitomized Britishness. Even though the British state did not fall and the French never conquered the home islands, the 1790s witnessed dramatic challenges to the qualifications for British identity and citizenship. The sailors experienced all the economic, political, and social changes of the eighteenth century, and emerged from the wars as valued and respected heroic British citizens.

Because of the new management ideology apparent in the navy, the seamen enjoyed their British liberty as exemplified by their enjoyment of shore leave. They took advantage of the spoils of empire by drinking rum everyday, and their whole employment rested on guarding the British commercial empire and nation. Their actions at Spithead forced their entry into national politics. The seamen's shocking display of competence and class-consciousness shook British political discourse and set a new standard for out-of-doors political activity in pursuit of influencing Parliament. Their service to the state thrust them into the international imperial competition with the French, and unlike a lot of their fellow Britons, they actually drew Gallic blood. Lastly, by serving the state in great numbers the sailors of the navy met and defeated the conscripted hordes of France. This service, combined with the popular expansion of war caused by the French Revolution opened the door to citizenship for the *Mars*' sailors.

The navy as an example continues to provide insight into the complex dynamics of late Georgian Britain. The navy experienced modernity before the rest of the nation, and as a result it provides visible examples of the processes of the Revolutionary Era. Because of its importance to not only political discourse and culture, but also the practicalities of conquering, controlling, and maintaining an empire, the navy needs to form a part of any analysis of the British state and politics. Moreover, the naval seamen, marginalized in the eighteenth century as “tars,” provide valuable examples of the experiences and challenges of ordinary non-elite actors. The social challenges faced by the sailors as workers, citizens, and men highlight the larger trends in the population at large. The *Mars*’ seamen, just like the rest of the British population, witnessed the example of the French Revolution, but they stayed loyal to their King and country.

The seamen of *HMS Mars*, with their embrace of British identity demonstrated that not all maritime workers acted as the conduits of radical ideas. The *Mars*’ seamen actively fought to stop the spread of radical ideas, demonstrating that the oceans of the world can serve as a moat or as a bridge to commerce, peoples and ideas. Yes the seamen experienced class alienation, and the experiences generated by their modern work did lead to the Spithead Mutiny. But resistance within the British nation utilizing accepted political language and techniques does not necessarily translate into a revolution. The seamen could only utilize the political language that they knew, and in many ways this limited them.³³⁴ They could not demand control of the means of production in Marxian language because they were decades ahead of Marx. But the sailors certainly knew of the language and examples of the French and American Revolutions because British culture embraced various aspects of both, and the seamen consciously made the choice of not following the example of the French royal army in supporting the overthrow of the existing

³³⁴ Anna Clark, *The Struggle for Breeches, Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 3.

regime. The Spithead sailors did not storm the Bastille or shell the winter palace; instead they bought into British identity and continued to fight for it for another 15 years.

The seamen's identity also felt the pull of British national and naval culture. Their actions and demands during the late 1790s reveal that their identity rested on a combination of working-class, national, and naval culture. That culture offered the seamen a better deal under the existing regime and displayed enough flexibility and responsiveness to convince the sailors to cast their lot with Britain, not the trans-national working class.

Chapter 4: CONCLUSION, A NEW KIND OF CITIZEN?

The admiralty named *HMS Mars* for the Roman god of war, a typical choice of the British navy during the late eighteenth century. In 1794 the Navy boasted eighty-three warships christened with names from Greek and Roman mythology.³³⁵ Scuttlebutt attributed this practice to former First Lord of the Admiralty the Earl of Sandwich who allegedly kept a copy of Lemprière's book on mythology for the purpose of naming ships.³³⁶ Mars, the patron saint of Rome, served as a central religious and ceremonial figure of the Roman Empire, the gold standard of Imperial greatness based on military strength, enlightened government, and the primacy of the rule of law. Therefore, the admiralty chose to grant its new battleship a name that invoked the virtuous historical example of Rome to counter-act the numerous questions about the status and greatness of the British Empire caused by the defeats suffered during the American War.³³⁷

Eighteenth-century societies had other uses for mythology besides naming warships. Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh, in their book *The Many Headed-Hydra*, point out the eighteenth-century practice of utilizing metaphors from classical mythology to draw parallels with contemporary affairs. They demonstrate how both radicals and conservatives utilized the figure of Hercules during the century-long battle over social, political, cultural, and economic

³³⁵ J. Glete, "Tables of Battlefleet Tonnages and Strength, 1790-1815," in Jon Lewis, ed., *Life Before the Mast, Sailors' Eyewitness Accounts from the Age of Fighting Ships* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2001), 460-471.

³³⁶ James Cordingly, *The Billy Ruffian: the Bellerophon and the Downfall of Napoleon: The Biography of a Ship of the Line, 1782-1836* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2003), 17-18.

³³⁷ Thomas Bulfinch, *Bulfinch's Mythology, The Age of Fable, The Age of Chivalry, and the Legends of Charlemagne* (New York: Random House, 1998), 11.

matters. Hercules proved a useful figure because the story of his twelve labors could be interpreted as an allegory for re-ordering society into a more efficient and just model by radicals and reformers while his destruction of the hydra could be invoked by conservatives to support their desire to crush opposition to the status quo. By the 1790s, even the emerging working class had seized on Hercules as a symbol of the triumphs of the people as exemplified by the French Revolution.³³⁸

To take advantage of the ideological strength of their position as the vanguard of enlightened society, the new republican government(s) began re-naming their ships with titles like *le Peuple*, *Revolutionnaire*, *Droits de l'homme*, and *l'Hercule* to reflect their embrace of a new cultural ideal. In contrast the British continued to name their new ships after mythological deities, famous victories, and important members of the elite.³³⁹ This contrast in naming practices reflected the diametric opposition between the British Empire and the French Republic. The British clung to tradition while the French embraced change and new ideas.

Thus on a large scale, the battle between the British ship named *Mars* and the French one named *l'Hercule* can be interpreted as a metaphor for the entire physical and metaphysical contest between these two powerful nations during the end of the eighteenth century. The battle between these two ships did not really decide any of the important issues swirling around the

³³⁸ Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra, Sailors, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 327-330, and Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 87-119.

³³⁹ William James, *The Naval History of Great Britain Vol. 2* (London: Bentley & Son, 1859), 264, N.A.M. Rodger, *To Command the Ocean, A Naval History of Britain, 1649-1815* (London: Allen Lane, 2004), 437-438, David Davies, *Fighting Ships: Ships of the Line and Napoleonic Sea Battles, 1793-1815* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1996), 63-64, C.H. Firth, ed., *Naval Songs and Ballads* (London: Spottiswoode & Co., 1908), 276-277, and Brian Lavery, *The Ship of the Line, the Development of the Battlefleet 1650-1850* (London: Spottiswoode Ballantyne Press, 1977), 182-190.

Atlantic world, just as their names do not reveal any details about the ships themselves or the men who worked them. The results of the numerous battles between the two states did not tell the whole story either, because even though the British Empire emerged victorious after twenty years of war, the British elites could not close Pandora's revolutionary box. Instead of stubbornly clinging to the status quo, the British nation embarked on a half-century long period of intense social and political reform that owed a lot to the ideas that the French revolutionaries fought and died for.³⁴⁰ Thus the British may have won on the physical battlefield be it at Trafalgar or Waterloo, but ultimately they lost the meta-physical fight with modernity. By the middle of the nineteenth-century the franchise had been drastically expanded, the British state had led the fight against slavery, and bourgeois culture increasingly came to dominate society.

The late eighteenth century brought many changes in European and Atlantic world society. Economically, the growth of capitalism undermined traditional life and work styles, and ultimately transformed Britain into a modern industrialized society. Socially, the rise of the middle class, enriched and empowered by the wealth of capitalist imperialism, eradicated the last vestiges of the feudal system. Politically, the American and French revolutionaries assaulted the political status quo and demanded a political voice for a larger share of the people and ushered in a new era of popular participation in government. Thus, the late eighteenth century rightly deserved the title of the Revolutionary Era, and it paved the way for the recognizably modern nations and societies that emerged during the nineteenth century.³⁴¹

³⁴⁰ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), 13, 711-712, 830-832, Anna Clark, *The Struggle for Breeches, Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 267-269, and Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*, 328, 332-334.

³⁴¹ Roy Porter, *English Society in the 18th Century* (New York: Penguin, 1991), 3-4.

Even though the majority of them seemed to fight the forces of change tooth and nail, the British had to deal with the same issues relating to this transformation as the rest of their fellow Europeans. As members of the larger British nation, the sailors who labored on the *Mars* faced the same challenges as the elites and masses all across the Atlantic World confronted during the Revolutionary Era. In this vein, the *Mars*’ seamen can serve as an example of how the British state and nation dealt with the challenges posed by modern workers demanding full citizenship in return for their national service. Like the rest of the nation, the *Mars*’ seamen created their identities and lived their lives under a variety of influences, and the *Mars* example demonstrated how these influences combined and interacted to produce a complex identity construction far beyond what a Marxist or nationalist interpretation can provide.

The seamen experienced a modern factory-style work experience well ahead of the rest of British society.³⁴² The collective work they engaged in generated class-consciousness and a class-based identity in opposition to both management and the rest of society. In addition, this work experience created a corresponding working-class culture that enabled the seamen to make sense of the changes in their lives.³⁴³ The *Mars*’ sailors’ experience included many similarities to other parts of the land-based working class, and reveals the uneven and disparate responses of working people to economic changes and dislocation.

But maritime and naval culture modified this version of the working-class experience. The dangers of the sea and the social dynamics it generated on a sailing ship created a distinct

³⁴² Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 78.

³⁴³ Clark, *The Struggle for Breeches*, 3.

wooden world with its own rules and cultural meanings.³⁴⁴ Within this world, nautical skill and obedience to command remained much more important than land- or class-based social concerns. As a result the ship acted as everyone's master, and social status relied in part on a man's standing on board not where he came from or who his father was. Maritime culture formed a crucial part of the sailors' life and identity and it mediated the effects of class-distinctions. Moreover, Britain relied on a large maritime economic and social sector, and the unique aspects of sea-going life greatly influenced the entire nation. Whether through overseas trade or providing salt beef for ocean voyages, the entire British Empire rested on maritime endeavors and any analysis of British history needs to include the important influence of maritime culture.³⁴⁵

On top of maritime culture, the seamen also existed as a part of the larger naval culture. Naval culture provided hierarchies, traditions, and benefits for its sailors, and the standardized aspects of naval life created a universal lifestyle. This re-enforced the cultural dynamics of life at sea, but naval culture also granted the seamen a purpose higher than just earning a living. Working on the *Mars* granted the crew membership in the naval community that existed throughout the extended fleet. This brotherhood of sailors, based on the shared work and life experience of the navy, gave the seamen's version of working-class culture its own flavor that defined itself in opposition to land-based society as a whole, that lacked nautical skill, as well as the rest of the maritime and working class, who did not face the same dangers as navy men. Thus

³⁴⁴ Bernhard Klein, "Staying Afloat, Literary Shipboard Encounters from Columbus to Equiano," In Bernhard Klein and Gesa Mackenthun, ed., *Sea Changes, Historicizing the Ocean* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 93-94.

³⁴⁵ Kathleen Wilson, "Empire, Trade and Popular Politics in Mid-Hanoverian Britain: The Case of Admiral Vernon," *Past and Present*, No. 121 (Nov., 1988): 96-98,

when the seamen struck for better working conditions at Spithead, they fought for all naval sailors, not all workers.

The myriad of cultural influences on the *Mars*' seamen explains why the sailors did not embrace a trans-national working-class or the enlightenment ideas of the French and American Revolutions. On paper, the sailors possessed immense revolutionary potential, and many later writers have tried to attribute revolutionary intent to the seamen's actions during the spring of 1797.³⁴⁶ Attempting to give the seamen enlightenment-inspired revolutionary ideas and treating the spring of 1797 as a missed progressive opportunity ignores the cultural identity of the seamen. The seamen did not want to bring down the British and naval system that served them so well and enabled them to rule the waves. Instead, they wanted full membership within the expansive British nation and all the entitlements that went with it.

The *Mars*' sailors fought the French, but they also battled with their own employer and nation for acceptance as full citizens. The legal and social stereotypes that the sailors labored under made them into second-class citizens. While better off than plantation slaves, the seamen were not free workers, and the entire maritime and naval labor market relied on coercion and violence to control and exploit a limited supply of workers.³⁴⁷ In order to justify this oppression, British society stereotyped the seamen as child-like incompetents in need of special protection. As a result, while British society may have valued the "brave tars" and their contributions to

³⁴⁶ James Dugan, *The Great Mutiny* (New York: G.P. Putman, 1965), 15, 29, 31, 451, 467, W.J. Neale, *History of the Mutiny at Spithead and the Nore. With an Inquiry into its origin and suggestions for the prevention of Future Discontent in the Royal navy* (Philadelphia: G.B. Zeibler & Co., 1842), 19-20, 25, 91, 121, 173, Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*, 277, and Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 167-168.

³⁴⁷ Jesse Lemisch, "Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of Revolutionary America," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., Vol. 25, No. 23 (July 1968): 377-381, and Marcus Rediker, "The Red Atlantic," in Bernhard Klein and Gesa Mackenthun, ed., *Sea Changes, Historicizing the Ocean* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 117-125.

national and imperial greatness, mainstream society treated the seamen with pity and contempt.³⁴⁸ This stereotype extended all the way into the navy that imprisoned the seamen on board, used physical force to drive them to their tasks, and press-ganged them into service because they were perceived as being too unreliable to play their role.

The sailors battled for the respect and rights of full citizens that they felt they had earned as valuable workers and protectors of the empire. The British middle class based their demands for more political and social rights on their contributions to British society and imperial greatness, and the sailors followed suit. The seamen justified their national inclusion with service to the state in pursuit of the imperial mission. Within the paradigm of British identity, their work and patriotism justified their admittance to the British nation, not ambiguous claims about the rights of men. The *Mars*' seamen knew of the French example, and they actively chose not to follow it.

The sailors' language, actions, tactics, and demands resulted from these cultural influences, not the French Revolutionary example. During their challenge for acceptance and better working conditions, the seamen acted like Britons. They adopted and utilized the tropes and myths of British identity in order to justify their potentially treasonous behavior. Their demands for better working conditions reflected the sort of negotiations commonplace between seamen and all ship's captains over food, length of service, and medical care. They did not demand changes to the fundamental maritime or naval system, because they accepted the harshness of sea-going life as necessary for everyone's survival. Moreover, the naval system provided them with opportunities for upward mobility to replace the capitalist-destroyed craft

³⁴⁸ Margarette Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy, British Seapower, 1750-1815* (Burlington Vt.: Ashgate, 2002), 3, 29.

system. The sailors asked for what they wanted and needed not what later Marxist-inspired observers thought they should have asked for.

The *Mars*' seamen provide a valuable example of the challenges and responses of ordinary people. They emerged from their battles as worker-citizens, not jolly-jack-tars. The seamen battled for social and cultural respect as well as improved working conditions. The navy extended to them a new level of respect that acknowledged their citizenship and value to the nation and the service. Commander William Dillon displayed this newfound respect in the midst of complaining about his new brig, the *Childers*, when he wrote, "I had a better opinion of the crew. There were several stout fellows amongst them, and my knowledge of that class of man inclined me to place reliance upon their exertions."³⁴⁹ The sailors earned the respect of their officers and the naval hierarchy as a result of their actions at Spithead.

Many scholars have acknowledged the importance of the Royal Navy to British history and the rise to power of the British nation, but the seamen who worked the ships are generally ignored. The evolution of British society from backward feudal island to world-spanning commercial imperial behemoth has also been well chronicled by scholars. But analysis of this transformation's effects on the average Briton has tended to be confined to land-based peoples in a decidedly oceanic age. The *Mars*' sailors provide a well-documented example of both of these larger historical trends. The *Mars*' example touches on the intersection between citizenship, capitalism, worker's rights, nationalism, modernity, and imperial identity. The sailors addressed and internalized all of these issues during the late 1790s, and their reactions demonstrated the many paths to modernity available within the Atlantic world. All of the larger trends

³⁴⁹ William Dillon, "The Prize," in Jon Lewis, ed., *Life Before the Mast, Sailors' Eyewitness Accounts from the Age of Fighting Ships* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2001), 211.

transforming the world converged in the character of the humble ignored seamen, who more than anyone else ended up epitomizing the British experience during the Revolutionary Era.

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