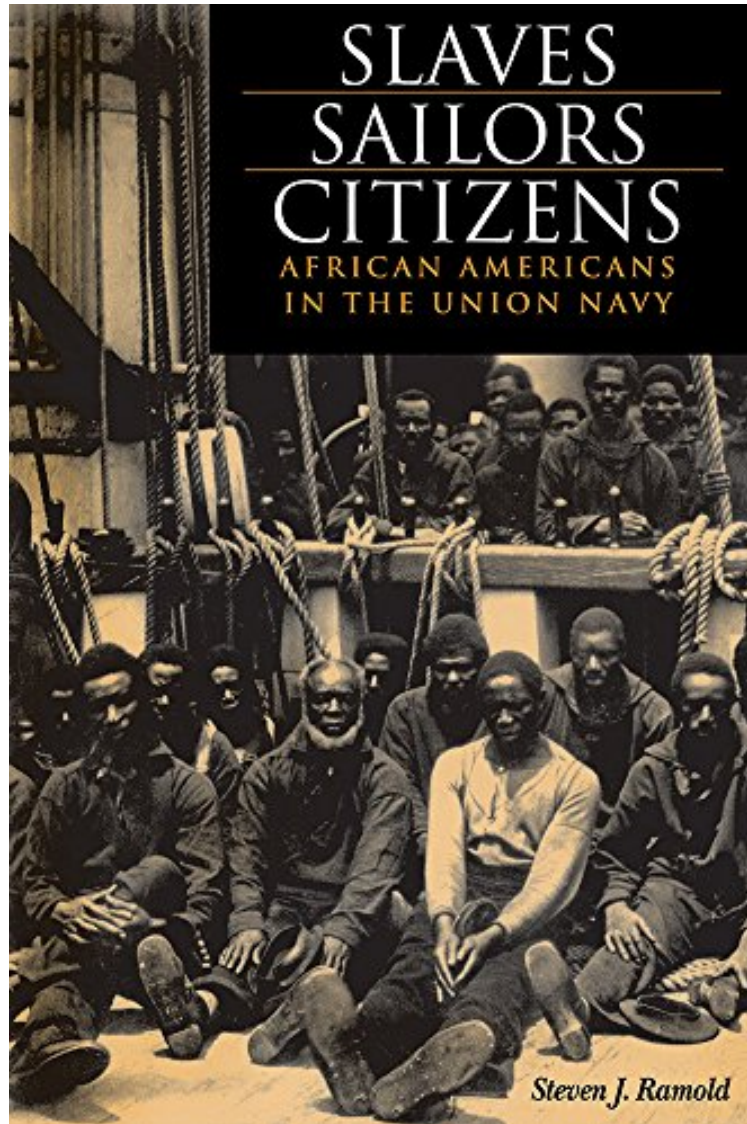


(Library ebook) Slaves, Sailors, Citizens: African Americans in the Union Navy

Slaves, Sailors, Citizens: African Americans in the Union Navy

Steven J. Ramold

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Steven J. Ramold : Slaves, Sailors, Citizens: African Americans in the Union Navy before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Slaves, Sailors, Citizens: African Americans in the Union Navy:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Civil War Sailors By Gregory O. Grant One of the lesser known parts of American History. And, one that need to be told, and need to be researched. 1 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Often badly reasoned; confused analysis of tabular data; occasionally marred by error By Customer This book might be worth purchasing on the basis that it collects some interesting anecdotes. But as a treatment of its

subject, I cannot recommend it either to amateur students of history or to scholars. It contains some interesting parts, such as a discussion of the prisoner exchange cartel and its racial ramifications. But all in all, it is a tedious read and does not repay the effort. Most fundamentally, Ramold fails to satisfy the burden of supporting the key claim expressed in his introduction, that Negro sailors met with significantly less racism and oppression in the navy than in the army, and that the navy, with certain faults, was more or less fair in its treatment of Negro sailors. Only later in history, he argues, did really serious racism emerge in the navy. One key argument that Ramold makes to support this is that those Negroes who served on commissioned warships were exposed to hazards of combat equally with their Caucasian counterparts. That is true, but he overlooks that Negroes were assigned disproportionately to support vessels and navy yards, and that on all types of vessels, they were disproportionately assigned to menial roles. On commissioned warships, for example, Negroes often were made heavers (of coal into fireboxes) or stewards. Ramold also argues, in a long chapter, that court martial records show that navy justice treated Negroes equally with Caucasians. That perhaps is to be expected, given the extreme formality of court martial proceedings, and that Negro sailors were nominally equal to Caucasian ones. But the vast bulk of navy justice was not dispensed at courts martial, but informally by ship's officers. Ramold omits to consider that punishment at this level may well have fallen more severely upon Negro sailors (though evidence on this point must surely be very scant). It would have been useful to learn if things went any different in army courts martial, but Ramold is silent on that subject. Strangely, he dwells at some length on the severity of informal punishment in the army, but doesn't seem to recognize that punishments of comparable severity were informally applied in the navy. In a chapter on Negro sailors in combat, Ramold observes that 8 of 307 Medals of Honor awarded to sailors went to Negro recipients. He then passes on! But since, conservatively, Negroes constituted eight percent of personnel on commissioned warships, fully 24 Medals of Honor, three times the number actually awarded, would have been expected to go to Negro sailors! Far from supporting the main argument of this book, this key statistic undermines it. No doubt it reflects both the assignment of Negroes to roles unlikely to offer distinction in combat and a lack of recognition of legitimate achievements by Negro sailors. In two long chapters, one on naval enlistment and one on naval courts martial, Ramold acceptably relies on key data sets collected elsewhere. He reports extensively, but confusedly and almost randomly, various percentages of this and that and the other thing. There never seems to be a coherent argument, but only a light tripping from one subject to another, and with very little explanation of its context, significance or possible causation. Very disconcertingly, one finds in the footnotes numerous reports of chi-square and anova significance levels, without Ramold making at all clear what hypotheses are being tested, what are the null hypotheses, or what numbers went into any given test. Therefore, as a scientific analysis of these two important sets of data, the work fails utterly. Given the work's popular emphasis, the tests should have been omitted, or if included, there should have been extensive numeric appendices to support them. The work is occasionally marred by errors of fact. On page 29, it is claimed that the Constitution establishes death as the penalty for treason; in fact, it leaves the penalty to the discretion of Congress. On page 42, it says that "enlistees generally joined the navy at a relatively small number of navy yards on the East Coast," but this was true only before the war (in fairness, this is clarified later in the work, but that information would undermine the argument of this page). On page 49, the army "had relatively few African American combat personnel," a very peculiar remark indeed. On page 95 it is oddly said, after the previous paragraph listed the relatively varied and sumptuous rations of the average sailor, that "navy diet varied only slightly from that issued to army troops." On page 96, the "frozen beef" that is alleged to have been carried by certain support vessels could not have been available before the invention of frozen food in 1930; at best, chilled beef could have been supplied. On page 105, it says that John V. Lauderdale was a "doctor attached to the Mississippi Squadron," and it cites one of his remarks as evidence of good medical care supplied by the navy; in fact, Lauderdale was a doctor contracted to the U.S. Army, and the boat on which he served, the "D.A. January," was a U.S. Army hospital boat. On page 106 in a discussion of navy medicines, it oddly says, "Navy drug treatments were so effective that scurvy, an ailment usually associated with the navy, was a greater burden to the army"; but of course, scurvy is not treated with medicine, but with nutrition. On page 108, it says that steam condensers "distilled" water, the excess of which was available for consumption; but condensers did not distil water, and water was not normally drawn from condensers to drink, on account of its being contaminated with engine oil (also condensers were not used on the western waters, where non-condensing engines were almost universal, and where water was normally drunk straight from the rivers). On page 165 the term "hog chain" is equated with "anchor chain"; but a hog chain was instead a series of iron rods, connected by turnbuckles, used to brace the hull of a vessel fore-and-aft. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. I liked Ramold's book. By Customer I liked Ramold's book. It was interesting and oftentimes well thought out. The discussion on prisoner exchanges was interesting, along with the recollection of the Fort Pillow Massacre.

As many as one in six Union navy sailors was African American, many of them former slaves. This richly detailed history shows that the free blacks and "contraband" slaves who joined the U.S. Navy during the Civil War were essential to Northern victories at sea. Through their role in preserving the Union, they helped to win recognition for African Americans as full citizens. African Americans joined the U.S. Navy from the first days of the war and soon

demonstrated to a skeptical Northern population that they would fight for their freedom. Faced with the hazards of battle, African American sailors performed with great heroism, and several earned the nation's highest military tribute, the Medal of Honor. Their service in the navy paved the way for their wider employment in the U.S. Army. Despite the lack of official records on the subject, Ramold has combed through mountains of memoirs, court documents, pension reports, and other sources to discover the true magnitude of African Americans' contribution to the naval effort. The book presents a vivid description of the lives of these sailors from enlistment to discharge, telling the story as much as possible in the words of the sailors themselves. A dozen rare photographs illustrate the range of African American service. Ramold demonstrates that the navy, from necessity and from tradition, treated African Americans in its ranks far more equitably than did the army or any other public institution in antebellum America. Decades later, black sailors would be consigned to work in the mess hall, but in the Civil War era they fought side by side with white sailors, were treated equally in courts-martial, and received the same pay and benefits. *Slaves, Sailors, Citizens* allows us to rediscover these largely forgotten heroes, whose story can now take its rightful place in the history of the war and in the struggle of slaves and free blacks to become citizens.

"Fascinating.... No previous historian has explored this topic so thoroughly or so persuasively."—TLS "This highly readable book offers important insights into an understudied aspect of the African American experience.... Ramold should be congratulated."—*Military History of the West* "An excellent record. A first-rate book ... greatly contributes to American, African American, and American military historiographies."—*The Historian*