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Wonders in the Deep: Faith and Religious Practice in the Shipboard Writings of American Sailors, 1810-1859

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Wonders in the Deep:
Faith and Religious Practice in the Shipboard Writings of American Sailors, 1810-1859

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by

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Abstract

While stereotypes of sailors as immoral, godless ne'er-do-wells flourish in mainland historical accounts, little attention has been paid to the records left by sailors that document their own faith and religious practices. This thesis examines the logbooks, journals, and diaries written by American sailors while at sea, sounding the depth of sailors' religious beliefs through their own words. While American seamen certainly drank, swore, and caroused, sailors also frequently captured in their writing a much more religious nature than the mainland expected of them. Sailors' position as highly mobile laborers on the ultimate borderlands—the sea itself—impacted their religious practice and beliefs. The American sailing ship was a site of intersection of—and frequently conflict over—race, class, and gender norms. The religious environment on ships formed in response to these physical and cultural constraints and often functioned as both an extension and exaggeration of American life at large in the early nineteenth century.

The progress of the Second Great Awakening and the hardening of racial and gender identities on the American mainland impacted sailors' perceptions and practice of religion and faith at sea, far more than previous historians have articulated. While the Second Great Awakening empowered lay believers to interpret scripture on their own and emphasized independence from spiritual hierarchies on the mainland, sailors extended the reach of such doctrines to their furthest physical and interpretive extent at sea. Even lower-class sailors did not reject faith wholesale but often practiced religion in tandem with their less spiritual behavior. Their middle-class deck mates often attempted to maintain both the moral and religious mores of the mainland, including the role of women as spiritual leaders within the family, despite their physical separation from their homes and the women in their lives. The bulk of sailors, even the least religious, still reflected the worldview of evangelical Protestantism found on the mainland

when considering their shipmates of other races or faiths. White sailors used class, race, and religion to craft an American identity for themselves that coupled Protestantism with a stoic, masculine, and nationalistic culture on board American vessels, while non-white and non-Protestant sailors crafted spaces of religious leadership and practice for themselves, despite persecution from the disapproving Protestant majority.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my husband Jordan, for his ceaseless encouragement and support of my graduate education and my research. Especially his ability to listen to countless anecdotes from sea journals and logbooks with seemingly genuine interest, even if I did not cite the song "Cabin Fever" from *Muppet Treasure Island* in my historiography as he suggested. And to my parents, Mike and Karen Farris, who raised a family of academically inclined bookworms in a small town in rural south-central Arkansas, for making countless trips to libraries and used bookstores to support our reading interests. And to my sister-in-law, Jessica Sallis, for her unfailing help and support to make sure I had time for my coursework and research. Also dedicated to the memory of my mother-in-law, Bobbie Sallis, one of the bravest women I have ever known, who encouraged me to pursue my goals and always asked questions about my research progress, even during her final battle with ALS.

Table of Contents

Introduction

"They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters
These see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep.
For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof.
They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths…
Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses.
He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still.
Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven."
Psalm 107:23-30.

The sailor has long held a contradictory place in religious thought. From the ancients to early nineteenth century America, sailors were often viewed as occupying the lowest rank of public morality. Mainland religious critics across centuries have seen sailors as particularly prone to drunkenness, swearing, and other forms of immorality—classifying them as hardened sinners, far from God. However, as seen in Psalm 107 above, sailors have also long been described by religious writers as having special access to God through their immersion in the "wonders in the deep." A sailor's view from the decks—of powerful storms, vast ocean depths, huge creatures, strange sights, and unexplained phenomena—was thought to give them unsurpassed witness to supernatural power and a profound dependence on divine providence.

While sailors' religious beliefs—or lack thereof—have long been debated and examined by their contemporaries on land who sought to evangelize or condemn them, less attention has been paid to the records left by sailors that document their own spiritual lives. This thesis avoids a land-oriented view of sailors' beliefs and instead charts sailors' religious experiences via their own shipboard writings. By examining the logbooks, journals, and diaries written by American sailors while at sea, the depth of sailors' religious beliefs are sounded through their own words. This research adds to growing scholarship examining ships' logs and journals as a unique genre of primary sources shaped by the maritime environment and to our understanding of manuscript culture in the maritime world.

Revealing a more accurate picture of sailors' faith beyond their contemporaries' stereotypes of the godless seaman, this thesis illustrates that while American seamen certainly drank, swore, and caroused, sailors also frequently transgressed societal expectations and captured in their writing much more religious fervency than the mainland expected of them. This study shows how sailors' position as highly mobile laborers on the ultimate borderlands—the sea itself—impacted their religious practice and beliefs as recorded in their writings at sea. As the American sailing ship was a site of intersection of—and frequently conflict over—race, class, and gender norms—the ship itself as a unique physical and cultural space bears important consideration when exploring the role of religion in the life of American sailors. This thesis will show how the formation of a ship's religious environment in response to its physical constraints and cultural makeup functioned as both an extension and exaggeration of American life at large in the early to mid-nineteenth century.

I also argue also that major themes and patterns of nineteenth century American life such as the Second Great Awakening and the hardening of racial and gender identities impacted sailors' perceptions and practice of religion and faith at sea, far more than previous historians have articulated. Rather than being completely separated from religious life and broader culture on mainland in America, sailors acted in many instances as extensions of the dominant culture. While the Second Great Awakening empowered lay believers to interpret scripture on their own and emphasized independence from spiritual hierarchies on the mainland, sailors extended the reach of such doctrines to their furthest physical and interpretive extent at sea. Even while participating in the "immoral" activities that gained them an ill reputation with those on land, lower class sailors did not reject faith wholesale but often practiced religion in tandem with their less spiritual behavior, while their more upper-class deck mates often attempted to hold to both

moral and religious mores of the mainland. This included the validation of women as spiritual leaders within the family, associations middle class sailors maintained despite their physical separation from their homes and the women in their lives. American sailors also carried with them onboard a view of Protestantism as the standard by which all other religions were measured, judging the faith and moral habits of their non-Protestant Christian shipmates against their own normative view of Christianity as a part of American identity even at sea.

While maritime historians have contributed to steady uptick in cultural studies using sailors' writings, these have largely focused on issues other than religion or on much earlier or later periods in American history.[1] Paul A. Gilje's landmark work, *To Swear Like a Sailor: Maritime Culture in America, 1750-1850,* examines sailors use of language, storytelling, writing, reading, and songs in their own words versus their representations in popular culture. However, the religious culture of sailors is a tangential interest, only referenced in a handful of pages and limited largely to how religion influenced sailors famous cursing and shipboard reading habits.[2] This thesis starts where Gilje leaves off, with chapter one expanding on these themes while exploring other ways that sailors lives intersected with religion while at sea—including religious services at sea, spiritual conversations with other sailors, personal religious reflections in journal entries, and less formal religious observations that pepper sailors' writings.

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[1] Marcus Rediker's *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* broadly covers maritime social culture from 1700-1750, but only occasionally touches on religion and relies primarily on print sources rather than journals. More recent work by Hester Blum, *The View from the Masthead,* looks at sea narratives as a genre, but primarily in published works via literary criticism, rather than analyzing the historical content of personal writings at sea. Myra Glenn's *Jack Tar's Story* utilizes sailor's narratives as a primary source but in the form of published memoirs after their time at sea, and the role of religion is covered in a single chapter.

[2] Paul A Gilje, *To Swear like a Sailor: Maritime Culture in America, 1750-1850* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 16-17, 215–222.

Classic works, likewise, make heavy use of sailor's journals and logbooks but limit their focus to one specific industry, context, or primarily examine the social environment on the ship and not the cultural importance of religion. For example, Margaret Creighton's foundational study of whaling, *Rites and Passages*, looks only at one occupation and limits its interpretation of religion.[3] Amy Mitchell-Cook's *A Sea of Misadventure*, provides an extensive study on shipwreck narratives in early America but contains only a single chapter on the use of religious narrative in shipwreck tales, and the book's narrow focus on shipwrecks leaves much ground uncovered in other areas of religious experience at sea.[4] Such works still provide important background to this research, especially Creighton's cultural study of the working and social environment on a whaling ship and Mitchell-Cook's understanding of the perils and uncertainty associated with sea travel in this era.[5] The climate of fear associated with oceanic voyages provides necessary context to the inclination to turn to religion during dire events at sea.

This thesis also extends the reach of religious histories of the maritime to sailors as a group of interest. Much of the work of religious historians thus far regarding the sea has focused on the experiences of passengers or on the work of those trying to evangelize sailors from land. Stephen Berry's *A Path in the Mighty Waters* examines the role of religion in passengers' experiences in transatlantic crossings in the early 1700s. Despite its earlier focus, two themes Berry highlights were helpful in framing my research—the powerful effects of isolation at sea in prompting people to turn to religion for comfort, and the need for individuals to provide their

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[3] Margaret S. Creighton, *Rites and Passages: The Experience of American Whaling, 1830-1870* (Cambridge [England] ; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 6–15, 101–5.
[4] Amy Mitchell-Cook and William N. Still Jr, *A Sea of Misadventures: Shipwreck and Survival in Early America* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2013), 51–71, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv6wgj04.
[5] Mitchell-Cook and Still, 30.

own spiritual support at sea in the absence of the religious organizations available on land.[6] Robert Miller's *One Firm Anchor* highlights religion's interaction with sailors, but primarily the outreach efforts of mainland churches in Great Britain in the nineteenth century.[7] Miller does spotlight nineteenth century American efforts to convert sailors on commercial vessels in one chapter, but the perspective is decidedly directed from the land to the sea rather than focusing on sailors own religious identity.

The timeframe covered by this thesis, 1810 to 1860, coincides with a period of enlargement of American fleets—shipping and whaling both expanded greatly during this period due to exponential population growth in the early nineteenth century and commercial growth following the end of Jefferson's embargoes against foreign trade in 1809. The size of the United States Navy also expanded dramatically during and after the War of 1812. I end in 1860 due to the Civil War's impacts on both maritime and religious life in the United States, but more importantly due to the fundamental restructuring of seaborne life due to the increasing adoption of steamships. The advent of steam significantly shortened voyage times, changing not only the duration but the character of sea travel, affecting shipboard culture and sailors' work and social practices. While steamships certainly increased in use during the period of study, sailing ships remained the standard in oceanic travel until after 1860.[8]

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[6] Stephen R Berry, *A Path in the Mighty Waters: Shipboard Life and Atlantic Crossings to the New World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 9.
[7] R. W. H. Miller, *One Firm Anchor: The Church and the Merchant Seafarer* (Havertown, United Kingdom: James Clarke Company, Limited, 2012), 14, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uark-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3328475.
[8] Raymond L. Cohn, "The Transition from Sail to Steam in Immigration to the United States," *The Journal of Economic History* 65, no. 2 (2005): 470, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3875069.

This study focuses on sailing ships from the United States and on American sailors—which for these purposes are defined as sailors on ships registered as American owned or with the vessels' home ports located in the United States. On rare occasions, sources highlighting sailors of American origin serving on foreign vessels are included as well. Due to the importance of New England and Mid-Atlantic ports in American sailing during the period of study, and the damage to Southern port cities during the Civil War, the bulk of the surviving sea journals come from ships sailing from the Northeast Coast of the United States. However, the origin of crew members and the destinations of American ships range across a wide swath of the Atlantic and Pacific.

This research focuses primarily on the religious experiences of deep-water sailors—rather than passengers, port workers, or coastal itinerant boatmen. Passengers transiting from point-to-point on short journeys and port workers and coastal boatmen living on shore and working at sea for short stretches all would likely have retained their religious ties to shoreside churches and religious organizations. Deep sea sailors with their lengthy periods of separation from religious infrastructure and cultural influences on land are most likely to have unique religious practices develop from their time at sea. As such journals and logs of deep-sea sailors are prioritized as sources for this study. However, writings of long-distance passengers have also been included where the voyages were lengthy—multiple months or more, creating more separation from mainland culture—and especially where such journals comment on the religious behaviors of the crew.

Primary sources written while at sea—such as logbooks, journals, and diaries—form the bulk of the sources for this study as they provide the closest access to sailors' thoughts while away from influences on land. However, some later published accounts and memoirs have been

included where original sea journals are unavailable and to provide a voice to underrepresented groups in archival sources. In centering a research project on sea journals, it is important to recognize their limitations as well as their strengths. While crucial sources for finding individual reflections, journals—both published and unpublished—are inherently limited by their nature as episodic, personal, and highly selective remembrances. Sea journals and logbooks give one person's perspective from a single voyage, out of hundreds crew members on many thousands of voyages during the period. In addition to the limits of perspective, logs kept at sea are also uniquely constrained by the physical nature of life and work aboard ship. The rotational nature of shifts on deck—and the need for dry paper, ink, and a calm enough sea for writing when not working—limited the time available for journaling, meaning events documented at sea were often written about some time after their passage.

In maritime culture, sea journals have extensive roots that intertwine naval traditions of keeping official logbooks with those personal diarists. Diary and journal keeping was a long-established tradition in American social and religious culture, and diaries or journals that mentioned faith or religious practice would have been the norm on shore. Commonplace books chronicling religious reading or confessional style journal entries revealing struggles with sin or attempts at reform had been part of American practice on land for centuries. [9] However, due to sailors' supposedly irreligious outlook as described by their contemporaries on land, their writing about spiritual matters at sea would be expected to be relatively infrequent in comparison. The terms logbook and sea journal are used interchangeably in this study to describe sailor's writings at sea, as both historical use and modern cataloging conventions often conflate the two terms.

[9] Colleen McDannell, *The Christian Home in Victorian America, 1840-1900*, Religion in North America (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 4.

Naval logbooks had a prescribed format and regulations as to what data must be recorded, merchant logbooks followed similar patterns and were also required by laws of the admiralty, though they did not have to include as much detail as naval logs. However, logs could also include personal journal-like entries depending on the time available for writing and what the keeper chose to record other than basic navigational and weather data on any given day.[10]

Commanders of naval fleets could also issue their own requirements for log keeping. The head of the United States Exploring Expedition, Commander Charles Wilkes, ordered that all naval officers on the six vessels in his fleet must keep their own journals, rather than requiring just one official log per ship as typical, perhaps hoping to create an American publication to rival that of the European exploring expedition led by Alexander von Humboldt.[11] The command was obeyed with spotty adherence and some outright annoyance by officers. Lt. Robert Johnson of the *USS Porpoise* did not begin his journal until a year after the voyage began, and then only begrudgingly. Proclaiming in his first paragraph "a diary to be a damned bore," Johnson then professed he kept one "not from any sudden desire to enlighten the world, with my nonsense, but merely to oblige my commander, who seems to insist on seeing something of the kind from me."[12]

In addition to any requirements to keep an official log, sailors often kept their own personal journals that mimicked the structure of logbooks with daily entries beginning with the weather, location, and then extending to notable personal events and thoughts. Sailors working in

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[10] Gilje, *To Swear like a Sailor*, 68–71.
[11] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1992), 111, 117–19.
[12] Robert Johnson and Department of the Navy. U.S. Exploring Expedition. 1838-1842, "USS Porpoise, 12/1/1840 - 3/25/1841" (1842 1838), 5, Series: Journals and Logs Kept by Expedition Members, 1838 - 1842, National Archives, Washington, DC.

commercial vessels also had inducement to keep their own logs, even when not strictly required, as practicing navigation techniques could help them advance if they had ambitions to become an officer. For literate sailors, a log or journal helped pass the time at sea that sometimes weighed heavily on all aboard during the lulls in activity that characterized maritime work.[13] Also, as life on a sailing ship frequently exposed sailors to existential dangers—from storms, accidents, or their own crewmates—writing in a journal helped sailors process thoughts about morality, mortality, and the afterlife arising from their perilous experiences.

In the mid-nineteenth century, sea journals were highly popularized by Richard Henry Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast* published in 1840.[14] However, a slew of lesser-known authors kept unpublished writings of their own voyages before and, especially frequently after, Dana's famous account. As with most written records, due to their requirements of literacy and leisure time to be created, most of the authors of sea journals—Dana included—were wealthier, better educated, and whiter than the average sailor. Though some journals written by sailors from working class or backgrounds of poverty have survived, they are the exception rather than the rule within archives.

The central group of sources for the study are twenty-six journals and logbooks, written by authors of various ranks from the primary occupations of the mid-nineteenth century American maritime industry—merchant shipping, whaling, and the U.S. Navy. Two of the twenty-six journals are published transcriptions of original manuscript journals held in archival

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[13] Gilje, *To Swear like a Sailor*, 79–80, 85.

[14] *Two Years before the Mast* is written in the style of a traditional ship's logbook, but the events were reconstructed from a short pocket notebook after Dana's longform sea journal was lost. The book was highly influential in popular culture and maritime literature of the nineteenth century. At least one of the journals read (Robert Rogers, 1842) explicitly mentions Dana's book in their first pages. The high numbers of sea journals surviving from the decade immediately following its publication is likely at least partially due to sailors emulating Dana's writing.

collections not available online, the other twenty-four were scanned manuscripts available online via digital repositories or were consulted in person in archives. In addition to manuscript journals, four published memoirs of sailors were used to provide additional evidence and context, but not included in the quantitative analysis of the journals and logbooks religious content. As sailors' spelling and grammar could be as varied as their religious beliefs, in the interest of readability, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization has been normalized in quotations. The exception being instances where meaning could be impacted by changes, in which cases bracketed corrections have been used.

An overview and analysis of the types and frequency of religious practices noted in this sample of sailors' logbooks is given in the first chapter of this thesis. Evaluating the content of sailors' writings shows that despite the condemnations of sailors' godlessness from shore, faith and religious practice were frequently on the mind of American sailors at sea, even prior to the establishment of missionary organizations designed to convert them. This chapter also explores how sailors' religious practices continued or diverged from themes on the mainland—such as how the Second Great Awakening impacted sailors, as well as how the uniquely isolated environment of the sailing ship affected sailors' religious practices.

The second chapter investigates the ways sailors attempted to remain connected to or deviate from any lingering religious ties to the shore. In particular, sailors frequently wrote about the women they left behind in religious terms, and this chapter explores the importance of gender in sailors understanding of religion and the practice of their faith. Sailors' journals demonstrate the power of women's leadership in religious thought and education in the nineteenth century in how often they still emerged in sailors' writings as a spiritual point of reference despite lengthy periods of physical separation while at sea. This chapter also explores how sailors viewed

mainland religious efforts to convert them to Christianity as well as the efforts of missionaries to convert the native populations that sailors frequently encountered in their travels, especially the native women who religious sailors framed as spiritual temptations.

The closing chapter explores how race, religion, and class impacted sailors practice of religion aboard ship. It shows how sailors' perceptions of the differing religious practices they encountered while at sea shaped their opinions on race and class and visa versa. While the writers of most surviving sea journals and logs were white Protestants, their writings still reveal the larger multifaith world that they were brought into close contact with on board their own ships as well as in foreign ports. As white evangelical writers grappled with differentiating their own racial and religious identity, their comments, even filtered through their prejudice, reveal how sailors of colors and sailors of other faiths negotiated spaces for worship and asserted their own identities in contrast to the white Protestant majority.

In total, this thesis attempts to provide a limited basis for navigating the religious environment of the American sailing ship as well as linking it to the contemporaneous developments on the mainland in the early nineteenth century. As American ships ventured ever further into the Artic and Pacific, sailors were confronted with the morality of their own actions and those of their crewmates, the fragile line between life and death at sea and the possibility of an afterlife, and religious differences between those on deck and those in port. These and a host of other issues mundane and mortal inspired sailors to write about issues of faith and religion in their journals and logbooks, whether pondering "the works of the Lord" or hoping to reach "their desired haven."[15]

[15] Ps. 107:24,30

Chapter 1

'They That Go Down to the Sea in Ships' –

American Sailors, Faith, and Writing at Sea, 1810-1859

In his 1826 appeal to the mainland population to support religious outreach to sailors, John Truair proclaimed the dire religious situation of seamen as "the prey of vice in every form." Attempting to encourage his audience, presumed to be doubtful, that sailors could in fact be converted, Truair provided two pages of biblical quotations supporting the idea that sailors could be brought to faith and rebutting popular assertions that "you may as well labour with a main-mast, to produce a moral change, as with a sailor."[1] Truair was a founding member of the American Seamen's Friend Association (ASFA), an evangelical missionary organization officially founded in 1828 and charged with spreading Christianity within the sailing world. Even prior to the founding of the ASFA, Americans had long cast a judgmental eye on the religious and moral behavior of its maritime population. Were sailors truly as godless as their reputations with their shoreside contemporaries implied, or was religion practiced on American sailing ships even prior to the launch of missionary groups interested in sailors' spiritual welfare? This chapter examines the writings of sailors at sea to determine their own thoughts on their religious state, how sailors' beliefs compared to religious developments on shore, and how and when religion was practiced at sea by American sailors.

Rather than being irreligious as a body, American sailors instead developed their own particularly independent and ecumenical religious culture, in part due to their status as an often

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[1] John Truair and American Seamen's Friend Society, *A Call from the Ocean, or an Appeal to the Patriot and the Christian, in Behalf of Seamen* (New-York: Printed for "The American Seamen's Friend Society," 1826), 3–6, https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/008927359.

marginalized and highly transitory community in early American society that spanned racial and socioeconomic lines. This chapter examines sailors' religious beliefs and activities within the context of larger religious trends amongst Christians in the Second Great Awakening. Previous scholars have noted increasingly egalitarian developments in Christianity during this period in the formation of new denominations and revivals of old ones, especially among Protestant working class believers in the backcountry.[2] The sailors' writings studied here show that the shore had no monopoly on religious virtue and the sea no monopoly on vice during the early to mid-nineteenth century—in both areas religion and irreligious behavior existed simultaneously. While corporate worship was necessarily less common at sea, the rates of personal practice of religion at sea noted in the writings of American sailors seem comparable to those of their contemporaries on land, showing that the impact of the Second Great Awakening did not stop at the coast, but its emphasis on personal spiritual growth and responsibility extended to the sea.

Despite sailors' bad reputations, their own shipboard writings demonstrate that religion was indeed a major undercurrent of life at sea. Of the twenty-six logs and journals analyzed for this study, nineteen contained references to religion or spiritual reflection. Of the seven journals lacking religious content, many were strictly nautical logs with no entries of a personal nature. Logs with religious references represent a variety of maritime vocations and social ranks, as journals were read from naval vessels, merchant vessels, whalers, and a few passenger vessels. The authors of those works also cover a variety of ranks ranging from low-ranking positions—such as seaman, cook, and steward—to middling ranks—like cooper, clerk, and second mate—

[2] Major works in the area include Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989). and Jama Lazerow, *Religion and the Working Class in Antebellum America* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995).

all the way to first mate, master, and captain. Regardless of rank or vocation, sailors' journals across the gamut frequently mention religion in some facet.

The length and the amount of detail in any given log or journal varies tremendously—from page long religious parables to single lines that mention holding services, bible reading, or prayers at a funeral. The nineteen journals and logbooks that mention religion and spirituality range in length from 28 to 517 pages long and cover periods as short as three months to as long as three years. As such, the absence of recording a particular event or type of religious practice cannot be interpreted as evidence of a lack of its occurrence, as it may have happened and simply not been entered into the log or journal. Despite their irregularity as individual sources, analysis of logs and journals in aggregate reveals strong patterns in the kinds of religious practice most often recorded at sea. By far the most referenced religious activity in logbooks and journals kept at sea is religious reading—with Bible reading and religious reading of material other than the Bible (religious treatises, devotional works, tracts, religious magazines) recorded in nine and eight journals, respectively—meaning religious reading of scripture and devotional material together appeared in seventeen journals, eighty-nine percent of journals with religious content and sixty-five percent of all journals. The next most frequent practice was religious reflection—defined as a written contemplation of a religious issue entered in a journal or log. Fifteen of the nineteen, or seventy-eight percent, of the journals containing religious references included religious reflections, or fifty-seven percent of all journals read. These high percentages for the top two practices indicate that religion was often on sailors' minds, likely at an even higher rate, since not every instance of religious reading or reflection would have been recorded in a journal. Though it is important to remember that not every religious reading would have been uncritically accepted by sailors and not every religious reflection would affirm popular religious thought.

The third most frequently mentioned religious activity for sailors was attending church services while in a port, recorded in ten journals, just over half of the journals with religious content and almost forty percent of all journals read. Instances of superstition, folk religion, and mythology appeared in six journals, or thirty-one percent of religious journals and twenty-three percent of all journals. Still often mentioned, but less frequent practices included the recording of religious rites at funerals, formal shipboard services, and religious conversations with other sailors or passengers. These three practices were mentioned in five journals, just over twenty-five percent of journals containing religious references, and almost twenty percent of all journals read. Less common practices included public Bible reading (not at a funeral) and private prayer, the least commonly recorded religious activity was group singing of hymns.

Table 1. Types of Religious Practices Recorded and Frequency of Recording

Types of Religious Practice	**Number of Journals Recording**	**Rate of Appearance in Journals with Religious Content**	**Rate of Appearance in All Journals**
Religious reading overall *See breakdown in next two rows**	17	89.48%	65.38%
*Private Bible reading/quotes	*9*	*47.37%*	*34.62%*
*Other private religious reading	*8*	*42.11%*	*30.77%*
Religious reflection	15	78.95%	57.69%
Church service in port	10	52.63%	38.46%
Superstition/folk religion	6	31.58%	23.08%
Funeral	5	26.32%	19.23%
Religious conversation	5	26.32%	19.23%
Shipboard services	5	26.32%	19.23%
Public Bible reading/reading aloud	4	21.05%	15.38%
Private prayer	4	21.05%	15.38%
Hymn singing	3	15.79%	11.54%

The frequency that journals or logs mention religion or spirituality only represents a portion of what logs and journals can tell us about sailors' religious lives. What sailors wrote

about religious practices and beliefs, and how they wrote it, provides a fuller picture of religious life at sea, and that religious life was often up to sailors' own construction. Nathan Hatch has called the "seething mobility" of the early United States one of the primary causes for the development of independent religious thinking and the creation of new church doctrines and denominations during the Second Great Awakening. As migration westward from the original thirteen colonies separated frontier Christians from mainline denominational structures back east, settlers increasingly rejected the authority of distant, highly educated spiritual authorities that seemed to have little knowledge or understanding or appreciation for the conditions they faced in the west.[3] However, even at the western coast, the distance separating the frontier from the east was a small stream easily forded compared to the leagues of ocean isolating sailors at sea. While there were evangelical Christian missionary outposts and chapels scattered throughout the seas by the mid-nineteenth century, itinerant preachers and camp revivals reached the American backcountry on a more regular basis than a sailor had access to clergy while afloat.[4] When a ship left port, its crew not only left behind family and friends, but also the religious infrastructure the mainland provided them for months and years at a time. The only exception being if a ship happened to have a minister travelling as a passenger, or a chaplain on the crew, highly uncommon in the period even for naval vessels, along with periodic visits to scattered port churches or missionary chapels.[5]

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[3] Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 64, 71–73.
[4] Hatch, 50–56, 88–90.
[5] Prior to the Civil War, very few chaplains were appointed and of these many were not ordained. Though the number of chaplains increased during the War of 1812, most ships had no chaplain prior to 1860. United States and Clifford Merrill Drury, *The History of the Chaplain Corps, United States Navy* (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print Off., 1948), 13, 15, 23–24, https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001623110.

When ships were far from ports or had no formal services on deck, as was the norm, sailors had to provide their own spiritual structure. The most common religious activities present in sailor's journals were religious reading and reflection. These expressions of faith could be performed during sailors' moments of leisure and required little permission or participation from others, allowing spiritual independence regardless of sailors' control of formal religious activities on board. Having this degree of spiritual independence was likely of special value to a sailor due to their general lack of autonomy in shipboard life. While frontier Christians of the period on the mainland chafed against attempts at control of eastern leaders, sailors lived under one of the most restricted and authoritarian power structures applied to free men. All actions and events aboard ship were ordered or circumscribed by the captain and officers on pain of physical punishment and even death.[6] Focusing on their spiritual state through religious reading and reflection gave sailors an inner life beyond the reach of the lash. This individualism of sailors' religious life, while taken to an extreme due to physical separation from churches, was supported by changing landscape of American Christianity back on land. Many Americans of the period, especially in the backcountry, rejected hiring ministers with seminary training and spurned hierarchical denominational for egalitarian organizations with self-educated ministers and largely autonomous congregations. These changes reflected the growth of evangelical Protestantism that emphasized the importance of personal religious belief and the laity's ability to divine meaning for themselves from scripture over formal instruction and received truth from clergy.[7] Whether due to doctrinal appeal or physical necessity, sailors were similarly often left to their own devices in terms of religious practice afloat. Fortunately, the nature of work at sea gave sailors

[6] Creighton, *Rites and Passages*, 104–15. Gilje, *To Swear like a Sailor*, 100–104.
[7] Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 43, 58, 64, 129.

ample time for reflection and reading even under the strictest of officers. Work at sea ebbed and flowed from moments of crisis or heavy work—such as boiling down a whale, firing at an enemy ship, or loading supplies in port—to long periods of little to do while sailing in open waters.

Such moments of quiet could lead to boredom, or to spiritual reflections, at times regretful of life choices. Orson Shattuck, on board the whaling ship *Frances*, spent a Sunday in October 1850 examining his past conduct, declaring, "I wish I could get religion, but I am afraid it is too late. The time has passed by I have grown old in sin and I am afraid that I must live and die in sin… 'O, if I had only listened to my sisters or Father or brother'…"[8] These gloomy reflections seem to agree with bleak mainland perceptions of sailor's moral state, but were not unique to sailors, as many back on shore also shared fears over their spiritual state during the period. Early to mid-nineteenth century America had no shortage of opinions on who could be redeemed and who was past salvation. On the mainland, fears tied to Calvinist understandings of salvation that it was limited to a predestined few, the elect, and that a person's spiritual status could not be changed by your own efforts were even tied to increases in suicide rates and psychiatric institutionalization for religious mania.[9] While suicide certainly occurred on sailing vessels and was noted in several logbooks, it is most often linked to sailor's attempts to escape shipboard abuse from officers rather than to spiritual dejection, and many sailors like Shattuck seemed to take a prosaic view of their fate even if they believed themselves damned. The state of a sailor's soul was not only the subject of personal reflection, but a topic for discussion with

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[8] Frances (Ship : 1826-1853) and Orson F. Shattuck, "[Logbook of the Frances (Ship : 1826-1853) of New Bedford, Mass., Mastered by William Swain, Jr., Kept by Orson F. Shattuck, on Voyage from 4 Sept. 1850-24 Dec. 1852]" (1850), 11, New Bedford Whaling Museum, New Bedford, MA, http://archive.org/details/logbookoffrances00unse.

[9] Kathryn Gin Lum, *Damned Nation: Hell in America from the Revolution to Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 88–89, 117–20.

other sailors. Robert Possac Rogers had "religious talks" with the second mate on his vessel and found him "somewhat liberal in his views, though always allowing that he is a great sinner and will certainly go to h.l. [hell]."[10] Sailors boldly declaring to each other their sin and fate of damnation could be mark of spiritual humility, but could also represent embracing the general assumption of sailors' depravity. Claiming hell as a final destination might be part of a deliberately rebellious maritime identity, similar to the way Paul Gilje identifies sailors intentionally using swearing to shock hearers and reject mainstream, and mainland, society.[11] However, spiritual reflection—in addition to inspiring despair or rebellion—could also renew religious zeal.

Such journal entries often state the goal of increased bible reading, one of the most common forms of religious practice aboard ship. Bible reading was foundational to late eighteenth and early nineteenth century American education and literary practice, and its influence extended to the sea. Particularly in New England, where most early American sailors hailed from, the spread of educational efforts stemmed directly from a belief in the importance of Christians to read the Bible for themselves. This doctrine of *sola scriptura*—the individual Christians' ability to discern spiritual truth by reading the Bible alone—was central to many of the Christian movements of the Second Great Awakening. Although the competing sects might differ on what the correct individual interpretation of the scriptures was, Protestant Christians at large were encouraged to teach their children to read. These efforts resulted in the flourishing of church sponsored Sunday Schools as well as secular community education to increase literacy

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[10] Robert Possac Rogers, "MSS 0097, Item 064 - Journal of a Voyage from Boston to Rio de Janeiro on Board Ship Franklin" (Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, October 5, 1842), 12, Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, Newark, DE, http://udspace.udel.edu/handle/19716/11201.
[11] Gilje, *To Swear like a Sailor*, 17.

rates. By the end of the eighteenth-century, New England's literacy rates neared ninety percent, the highest rate in the country.[12] Sailors, however, often came from the poorest classes, and their literacy rates may have lagged somewhat behind shoreside rates.

How to determine the literacy rates for sailors is a matter of debate among scholars—with those looking at signatures on seaman's protection certificates asserting lower levels of literacy and those using ship's logs, crew lists, and other sources arguing for higher rates. Taking into account differing estimates, there appears to be consensus that at least seventy-five percent of sailors were literate by the early nineteenth century with some estimates reaching ninety percent by mid-century.[13] This research supports higher estimates of literacy among sailors since many logbooks and journals sampled refer to crewmembers of varying ranks reading on deck. However, it is worthwhile to note that while reading and writing are often conflated under the single term of literacy, they are in fact separate skills. Some sailors who did not feel confident enough in their penmanship to attest to official documents may well have had some reading ability. In any case, primary sources at sea attest that sailors often read aboard ship—and read widely from material ranging from the profane to the pious.[14]

The extent of this culture of literacy on board can be seen early on Jonathan Chapel's 1844-1845 whaling voyage, when he recorded the majority of crew on his vessel reading on deck on ten out of the first eighteen Sundays. Religious reading material seems to have been particularly popular early in the voyage with Chapel reporting on the second Sunday at sea that

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[12] David Paul Nord, *Faith in Reading: Religious Publishing and the Birth of Mass Media in America*, Religion in America Series (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 17–18.
[13] Gilje, *To Swear like a Sailor*, 91, 183. Myra C Glenn, *Jack Tar's Story the Autobiographies and Memoirs of Sailors in Antebellum America* (Cambridge [etc: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 91.
[14] Gilje, *To Swear like a Sailor*, 103–15.

"the officers and men aft passed their time in reading the Bible, magazines, tracts, and newspapers" and he "gave the people forward several Missionary Heralds." Chapel's mention of "people forward" reading missionary newspapers is particularly significant since the forecastle housed sailors of the lowest ranks, often from poorer economic backgrounds, exactly the sorts of sailors usually accused of being illiterate and irreligious. On Chapel's ship at least some of the forecastle men were demonstrably able to read as *The Missionary Herald* was a text heavy magazine that published letters and reports from missionaries around the world and not the sort of heavily illustrated material that typically would be of interest to sailors with no reading ability. Later in the voyage, the crew's reading material varied more widely towards the secular. Chapel noted in August 1845 some of the officers "reading novels and *The Pirates Own [Book]"*—a popular collection of lurid pirate tales that became a fixture in ship's libraries following its publication in 1837.[15] Chapel remained with a milder choice that day noting "for my reading it has been the 2nd volume of the Spectator." Chapel however soon felt disturbed at the slackening in his religious reading, logging in October 1845 that "it is so seldom I read my bible of late," but after overhearing two sailors presumably making derogatory remarks about the Bible, he recorded that he purposely read three chapters in Matthew, perhaps to counter exposure to sacrilegious views.[16] As the incident shows, it is important to remember that though religious reading was popular on vessels, not all sailors held scripture or devotional reading in high esteem, and even the dedication to scriptural study of a seemingly devout man like Chapel could fluctuate over time.

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[15] Gilje, 183–86.

[16] Jonathan A. Chapel, "A Whaling Voyag[e] to the North West Coast," manuscript (n.d.), entries for November, 1844 to March, 1845; August 31, 1845, and October 3, 1845, Boston Athenaeum, Boston, MA, http://catalog.bostonathenaeum.org/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=367732.

Throughout the Second Great Awakening, there was no shortage of organizations working to remedy lapses in religious reading and put free bibles in the hands of any who would accept them, sailors included, the largest being the American Bible Society. However, several evangelical groups directed their efforts specifically at sailors like the American Seaman's Friend Society, which distributed Bibles as well as religious tracts and magazines in port cities. Even prior to the foundation of such societies, Josiah Quincy Guild, supercargo on a ship sailing to Tunis in 1810, noted with satisfaction that "I was pleased to see out of eight souls on board, five of them had bibles or testaments."[17] As such, Guild's ship had a bible ownership rate of 62 percent, but some vessels went even higher. Whether it came as a personal copy, from shared shipboard libraries, or from evangelical missions that printed bibles specifically to supply to sailors—the Bible frequently found its way on deck.[18]

Sailors' bible ownership rates were likely still slightly lower than those on land as the American Bible Society reported that by 1861, ninety-four percent of American households owned a copy of the Bible.[19] However, it is worth noting that the presence of a Bible among a sailor's effects required a higher dedication in terms of space than placing one on a shelf in a typical American home. As most seamen were limited to a single chest of personal possessions aboard ship, proportionately, making room for a Bible at sea represented a larger physical, and perhaps spiritual investment. While the American Bible Society reported ruefully that some household bibles were gathering dust, bible reading across the crew was a common shipboard activity reported in logs, especially on Sundays. At times, the issue of Bible access for seamen

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[17] Josiah Quincy Guild, "Journals, 1810-1813." (2 volumes, 1813 1810), 16, Boston Athenaeum, Boston, MA, https://catalog.bostonathenaeum.org/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=367724.
[18] Gilje, *To Swear like a Sailor*, 215–17.
[19] Nord, *Faith in Reading*, 136.

was taken under command by the helm. On John Randall's ship in 1852, bibles were provided to the entire crew by the captain—presumably a particularly devout man. Randall wrote on the first Sunday of their voyage, "our Captain called hands aft and gave all those that had none a Bible, at the same time exhorting them to devote their spare time to reading and improving the mind."[20]

However, sailors' reasons for reading the Bible might not always include personal piety. Sailors admitted to reading stories like Samson and Delilah, Job, or the Old Testament prophets aloud to the crew for the titillation value of their violent and racy content rather than as moral instruction.[21] Sailors could also read the Bible out of boredom, loneliness, ease of access due to its ubiquity or having been acquired for free, or a combination of motives. Jonathan Chapel, of the whaleship *Meteor* had much on his mind when he reached for the Bible in June 1845, writing "I turned in for a nap, but could not sleep for dreaming. After I lay down, I took my Bible and read 3 or 4 chapters about Sampson taking a wife and going in unto a whore and of his death. By enlarging the matter of our joy, we increase the occasions of our sorrow in dreaming, I really should like to see my wife..."[22] A few weeks prior Chapel noted being disturbed by having dreams about being with another woman, but wrote "I do not think a man or woman is any the worse for dreaming, no matter how lustful their thoughts may be in their slumbers." Chapel's "not being able to sleep for dreaming" and choice of Bible passages may thus be linked. In choosing to read about Sampson's moral and physical downfall due to sexual liaisons with women, Chapel was perhaps seeking a way to both read about sexual encounters and remind himself of the dangers of acting on lustful thoughts. As Chapel identifies, for a sailor, "enlarging

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[20] John Randall, "[Cleora (Bark) of New Bedford, Mass., Mastered by James L. Smith, Keeper John T. Randall, on Voyage 18 May 1852 - 31 March 1855]" (May 18, 1852), 5, New Bedford Whaling Museum, New Bedford, MA, http://archive.org/details/odhs-699.
[21] Gilje, *To Swear like a Sailor*, 215–16.
[22] Chapel, "A Whaling Voyag[e] to the North West Coast," entry for June 25, 1845.

our joy"—having more ties to the mainland, like a wife left ashore for months or years at a time—could lead to increased loneliness and concern over the many temptations available to sailors in foreign ports. Sailors' lingering religious connections to the shore, especially women's roles as spiritual anchors for seafaring men will be explored in chapter two.

While sailors' religious lives were most often solitary, they did not totally eschew corporate religious services when they were available. Attending churches in port was the third most frequently recorded religious activity in sailors' journals. When in port, shore leave allowed for those who missed formal services to seek them at any churches they could find. Though at faraway ports, the choice of churches was often limited to the faith of missionary groups present in that area, or a nondenominational chapel. Naval officer George Sinclair in Valparaiso aboard the *USS Relief* in 1839 noted the complications of portside attendance writing he "intended to have gone to church but got onshore too late. The foreign residents here have a chapel at which to worship their God according to the dictates of their consciences." That the government allowed the existence of the chapel at all, Sinclair considered fortunate—a "liberal act"—as Chile's constitution declared Catholicism "the Religion of the Republic."[23] The availability of only one or two local churches, regardless of what faith the sailor might have held personally, lead to a decidedly ecumenical flavor for sailors' church attendance. Lydia Nye, the wife of a sailor travelling to meet her husband in Hawaii in 1842, seemed impressed by her captain's respect for religion as he and the crew attended weekly Sunday services and biweekly bible classes held on board. Despite this, while Nye seemed confident that the captain was "pious," she

[23] George T. Sinclair and Department of the Navy. U.S. Exploring Expedition. 1838-1842, "Journals of George T. Sinclair, USS Relief, 12/19/1838 - 6/15/1839" (1842 1838), 55, Series: Journals and Logs Kept by Expedition Members, 1838 - 1842, National Archives at Washington, DC.

still had concerns that "he had not united himself with any church."[24] The captain's denominational independence was in keeping with not only the separation from churches back home by the sea, but a budding theme on the mainland. As the number of evangelical church movements highlighting spiritual independence grew during the Second Great Awakening, some believers took the idea of independent religion one step farther and eschewed formal religious association altogether, living instead as solitary Christians without fixed church membership.[25]

Occasionally, mariners had access to portside churches specifically catering to sailors—established as part of the wider missionary efforts of the Second Great Awakening and attempts to counter sailors' perceived depravity. Such churches were frequently undenominational, perhaps in part due to sailor's religious tastes, but also likely out of necessity due to the fiscal and physical impracticality of founding a separate sailors church for each denomination. Sailors' churches were typically found in the largest port cities frequented by American sailors—Boston, New York, and London in the Atlantic and Honolulu and Canton in the Pacific. Such churches were financed by groups like the Bethel Union and American Seaman's Friend Association that were pan-denominational, supported by clergy from multiple churches.[26] Sporadic and pan-denominational church going sometimes followed sailors back home—Richard Found, an itinerant sailor staying with his family for a few months in 1858 before going back to sea,

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[24] Lydia Rider Nye and Doyce B. Nunis, *The Journal of a Sea Captain's Wife, 1841-1845: During Apassage and Sojourn in Hawaii and of a Trading Voyage to Oregon and California* (Spokane, Wash: Arthur H. Clark Co, 2001), 31.
[25] Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 35–36, 43, 71–73, 225.
[26] Miller, *One Firm Anchor*, 120–21, 186-189.

recorded attending both the "Scotch" and "English" churches in town, seemingly based on which friends or family members he was attending with that week.[27]

While Lydia Nye's merchant passenger ship may have held regular services afloat, all corporate means of worship were up to the command, or at least sufferance, of the captain and accordingly their performance varied widely from ship to ship. From to the logs sampled, naval vessels held formal religious services more often than any other kind of ship. The reason for this was not so much the individual piety of naval captains, but naval regulations—which like army regulations of the time, required religious services due to the belief that religion helped improve the morale and behavior of service members.[28] The earliest regulations for the Continental Navy required vessels hold twice daily prayers and weekly sermons, and mandated punishments for religiously linked offences like blasphemy and cursing.[29] The prescribed services would likely have been drawn from the *Book of Common Prayer*, which had published prayers and sermons specifically for use at sea in American editions since the 1790s, as British editions had since the 1600s. The U.S. Navy had strong ties to the Episcopal Church—over forty percent of chaplains appointed prior to 1860 were Episcopalian. Many other officers shared the same background, meaning that even on ships without a chaplain, prayers would likely have been offered from the *Book of Common Prayer*. In 1859, naval regulations were clarified by the House of

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[27] Richard Found, "Journals" (n.d.), entries, January to May 1858, Boston Athenaeum, Boston, MA, http://catalog.bostonathenaeum.org/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=424714.
[28] James P Byrd, *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War: The Bible and the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 6–7, 42..
[29] "VIII. Rules for the Regulation of the Navy of the United Colonies, 28 November –December 1775," *Founders Online*, National Archives, accessed September 29, 2019, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/06-03-02-0076-0009. [Original source: *The Adams Papers* , Papers of John Adams, vol. 3, *May 1775 – January 1776* , ed. Robert J. Taylor. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979, pp. 147–156.]

Representatives, under pressure from complaints of bias, to explicitly state that chaplains were not required to read prayers from the *Book of Common Prayer* or use any specific liturgy in their services.[30]

From the logs sampled, the frequency of actual services compared to the regulations' mandates was much reduced when faced with the reality of life in the navy. During the period, captains often struggled with shortages of crew and supplies, disease, and leaky vessels. Analyzing the logbook of the *USS Constitution* kept from May 20, 1844 to July 5, 1846—of the one-hundred and ten Sundays in the log, formal religious services were logged on sixty-eight of them or slightly less than sixty-two percent of the Sundays during the voyage. Services seemed to be held cyclically, sometimes regularly for several weeks, presumably when conditions were favorable, followed by several weeks with no mention of services. It is possible that a few services were held on some Sundays but not logged, but it is unlikely for this to be the cause of all gaps in the record since services were required by naval regulations, recording them would likewise have been mandatory.

While chaplains were scarce, on rare occasions, a minister in port was invited to hold services on board as happened in Valparaíso when the *USS Constitution* hosted a Presbyterian minister and missionary in Chile associated with the Seaman's Friend Society in 1846. However, unlike attending church on shore leave, since the service was held aboard a naval vessel, the shipside meeting was not optional for the crew.[31] More typically, naval services were

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[30] United States and Drury, *The History of the Chaplain Corps, United States Navy*, 68–69.
[31] Department of the Navy, "USS Constitution" (Logs and Journals Kept by U.S. Naval Officers, 1789 - 1938, May 20, 1844), 499, Record Group 45: Naval Records Collection of the Office of Naval Records and Library, 1691 - 1945. Logs and Journals Kept by U.S. Naval Officers, 1789 - 1938., National Archives at Washington, DC.

incorporated into a longer, multipurpose all hands meeting. For an average Sunday service on the *Constitution,* the crew was mustered to an all hands at 10 am. Daily prayers or a divine service were read by an officer in absence of a chaplain from the *Book of Common Prayer* or another liturgical aid, followed by any announcements to the crew from the captain and officers. Several times this included reading the Articles of War or naval regulations to the crew, and at times crew punishments were administered during the same meeting. On August 11, 1844, several men were flogged for neglect of duty directly following the "morning service" at 10 a.m.—a seemingly curious combination for a Sunday at sea from a mainland perspective, but one that does not appear to be out of the ordinary from other similar instances on the *Constitution*.[32]

Officers gave no reasons why services were not held, but from the context of surrounding daily entries, the crew skipped services most frequently on Sundays when the ship was in port. Presumably at these times, the crew was often busy loading supplies, completing time sensitive repairs while docked, or on shore leave and assumed to be attending shoreside churches if they desired. While some sailors record attending services in ports, it is likely many took the time for extra drinking rather than spiritual reflection. Other Sundays with skipped services coincide to periods when ships were in increased danger. In September and October 1844, when the *Constitution* was leaking badly and needed continuous pumping to remove inches of water in the hold to stay afloat—which would have taken up a good deal of crew time working in shifts, and twenty to thirty crewmembers were also on the sick lists reducing available hands—services were not recorded for over five weeks.[33]

[32] Department of the Navy, 66.
[33] Ibid, 72–111.

Despite naval regulations policing sacrilegious speech, captains evidently had more pressing disciplinary issues at hand than issues of irreligious language. No instances of punishment for blasphemy or swearing for religious reasons alone have been found in the logs sampled. Sacrilegious swearing was occasionally punished where it was part of an act of insubordination or a threat. In 1844, a sailor on the *USS Constitution* was flogged for attempting to strike the captain and proclaiming he would have punched him "had he been Jesus Christ." However, the violence towards the captain seems to have been the reason for the punishment rather than the invocation of Jesus Christ's name in anger.[34]

On commercial vessels, the ability to practice formal religious observances was entirely dependent on the good or ill will of the captain. John Clarke, a passenger sailing on board the *Governor Morton* from New York to San Francisco in 1852, noted early on their voyage that the passengers were allowed to hold Sunday services. As Clarke recorded, "We had a meeting this morning on the quarter deck, one of the passengers read a sermon and prayed and we had singing. Some of the crew and most of the passengers were present, it was very still and orderly." The presence of crew members at the service is important since for crew members to be present, the captain and officers would have to provide time off from their duties. However, as the voyage wore on, relations between the passengers and captain grew strained due to complaints over rations. In retaliation, the captain banned congregating in the quarter deck, the primary communal space available to passengers, ending their ability to hold religious services and for the crew to attend them.[35]

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[34] Department of the Navy, 139.
[35] John Clarke, "MSS 0097, Item 013 - On Board the Ship Governor Morton" (Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, March 10, 1852), 36, http://udspace.udel.edu/handle/19716/11171.

On ships with no formal services at sea, it was not uncommon for Sunday to be a day primarily of rest with time set aside for whatever reading, devotional, or leisure activities the sailors wished. As noted by John Randall on the whaling bark *Cleora* in 1852, there was a noticeable difference on deck on the first day of the week. He thought "on the whole it looks like Sunday, although you would miss the merry singing of the church bells and happy faces of the congregation just from their devotions. All was quiet on board and no work was done but the actual duty required in working ship, which of course could not be dispensed with."[36]

Affirmations of religion regularly appeared in conversations at sea that could be encouraging despite hailing from different church backgrounds. W.B. Graves on a voyage to China on Sunday, May 13, 1848, wrote with qualified approval, "the captain and passengers seem to have considerable regard for the Sabbath. Dr. Ball is quite a serious minded man although a Unitarian."[37] However, religious differences under discussion on board were not only between different denominations of Christianity. Despite the predominance of Protestant sailors, sailing ships were not single faith environments, much to the distress of those used to more homogenous settings. Passenger John Clarke, hopeful prospector bound for California from New York, was certainly disconcerted by the variety of beliefs he found on his vessel. He soon regretted taking passage for the gold rush, writing on Sunday, May 23, 1852, that "such confusion as there is on board is not according to my fancy, we have all sorts of folks here.

[36] Randall, "[Cleora (Bark) of New Bedford, Mass., Mastered by James L. Smith, Keeper John T. Randall, on Voyage 18 May 1852 - 31 March 1855]," 5.
[37] "Journal Kept during a China Voyage in the Ship Thomas W. Sears W.B. Graves, Master, A.D. 1848" (1848), 5, Boston Athenaeum, Boston, MA.

Infidel and Atheists arguing their different doctrines. I try to keep my mind on home and God and religion as much as possible."[38]

The role of danger and death in pushing sailors towards religion existed as a common trope in sea journals and logbooks. After the unexpected loss of a crew member, Richard Henry Dana wrote that the cook while "reading his Bible on a Sunday in the galley, talked to the crew about spending the Lord's Days badly, and told them that they might go as suddenly as George had, and be as little prepared."[39] Dana refers several times in *Two Years Before the Mast* to having conversations about religious beliefs with the cook, who was African American, as was typical of the position in the early nineteenth century.[40] The way in which race intersected religious practice and perspectives aboard ship will be explored more fully in the chapter three.

In Paul Gilje's examination of swearing in maritime culture, he notes that "even for the most persistent swearer, under a thin veneer of a seasoned salt's profanity, was a deeper religiosity that surfaced in moments of crisis."[41] Indeed, other than the formal prayers included in services on navy ships, one of the most common moments for prayer and religious reflection at sea came when the ship and its occupants were in mortal danger. Whether the hazard came from the sea itself in storms or from other external threats—such as running low on vital supplies or attacks by whales, natives, or enemy ships—existential danger frequently prompted even the most profane sailors into religious interpretations of their situations. Sailors had frequent

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[38] Clarke, "MSS 0097, Item 013 - On Board the Ship Governor Morton," 86.
[39] Richard Henry Dana, *Two Years before the Mast*, Harpers' Family Library ;No. CVI (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1840), 41, https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000392702.
[40] W. Jeffrey Bolster, "'To Feel Like a Man': Black Seamen in the Northern States, 1800-1860," *The Journal of American History* 76, no. 4 (1990): 1174, 1178, https://doi.org/10.2307/2936594.The next chapter will more fully examine how race intersected with religious practice and perceptions at sea.
[41] Gilje, *To Swear like a Sailor*, 17.

exposure to such dangers as almost five percent of sailing vessels of the period were unrecoverably shipwrecked during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Many more returned severely damaged or lost crew members during their voyages.[42] The lack of scientific understanding of the ocean and mankind's seeming powerlessness in the face of it, encouraged religious engagement with the sea. References to God's power over the sea and religious interpretations of disasters are endemic in maritime writings of the period.

The terror of being at the mercy of the sea was not limited to "greenhands" or new sailors—experienced Navy officers were not immune to the overwhelming force of storms at sea. The keeping of journals was mandatory for officers on the United States Exploratory Expedition, the first major scientific voyage sponsored by the United States to explore and survey the Pacific Ocean. Lt. George T. Sinclair's journal from 1838-39 on board the USS *Relief* recorded the ship's narrow escape from an "equinoxal gale" off the coast of Tierra del Fuego. Sinclair makes no attempt to hide his fear when describing how his ship—already stripped of its two main anchors, relying on a smaller spare—was slowly but inexorably being pulled out of harbor by the storm towards the rocks ringing Noir Island. With no other ways to slow the ship's movement, Sinclair wrote that "having done all that men could do, we resigned ourselves to whatever fate our God might have in store for us." However, it seems the sailors still had religious action left to them, as Sinclair wrote that "most fervently did we pray that the ship would hold on till dawn so that we might have daylight to assist us in our last struggle." That long night, Sinclair wrote of desperately listening to "the noise made by the cables as they dragged on the rocky bottom…the lord grant I may not hear it again, the clinking of a chain cable makes me nervous even now."

[42]Mitchell-Cook and Still, *A Sea of Misadventures: Shipwreck and Survival in Early America*, 1, 30.

His relief was palpable when at last "the wind now through the goodness of God moderating…at midnight the gale had broke." His closing note that "there were few hearts that did not silently but sincerely return thanks to god for … rescuing us from a watery grave"—shows Sinclair's emphasis on prayer being part of the proper response to both crisis at sea and deliverance from it.[43]

For some however, religious fervor from crises at sea was fleeting. James L. Harris, a relatively green hand on the *Tamerlane* out of New Bedford, had been at sea for almost two months during which the ship took no whales when he wrote in December 1850, "I have just come to the conclusion that the occupation of a whaler is a very dull one indeed."[44] However, Harris was not bored when encountering fierce storms off Cape Horn. The whaler devoted a page in his journal in June to crafting an extensive parable in which a terrible gale was framed as the struggle between a mariner's guardian angel and the attacking Beezlbub, or "Old Bones":

> The mariner instinctively…in this solemn hour of fearful danger…implores the kind mercies of heaven and promises repentance of his sins, which now fill his bosom with the deepest remorse, the storm gradually ceases… the mariners set about repairing their noble ship…Soon they are again gallantly springing over the.. waves again… all solemn vows are forgotten and no restraint is laid upon their actions. So frail, so ungrateful is mankind, how can they in sudden dangers implore the mercies of him who they wickedly profane, in their more prosper[ous times].[45]

Harris's account is interesting for its dramatic style, but also its clear-eyed appraisal of the transitory nature of some sailors' religious responses to the perils of the sea. Other writers also noted in their logs how periods of calm at sea could lull the mariner into a false sense of

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[43] Sinclair and Department of the Navy. U.S. Exploring Expedition. 1838-1842, "Journals of George T. Sinclair, USS Relief, 12/19/1838 - 6/15/1839," 47–49.
[44] Harris, James L., "[Tamerlane (Ship) out of New Bedford, Mass., Mastered by William Irving Shockley, October 24, 1850 - January 12, 1852]" (1850), 4, New Bedford Whaling Museum, New Bedford, MA, http://archive.org/details/tamerlaneshipout00tame.
[45] Harris, James L., 30–31.

safety, only to be reminded of the dangers by an unexpected death within the crew. Josiah Quincy Guild wrote after the passing of a sailor who fell from the rigging, “How little do we think of the dangers that surround us, and how rashly do we expose ourselves to them without considering of the consequences…God speed me safe home that I may sail under happier auspices.”[46]

As shocking as any individual death may have been, death at sea was a regular part of life at sea. Sailors met their demise in a wide variety of ways—shipboard accidents, disease, foul weather, extreme shipboard punishment, or suicide. As much as it inspired personal religious reflection, deaths at sea often incorporated some form of religious services for the deceased, however disreputable his life or death may have been. Funeral services at sea often included a reading from the Bible as well as a prayer or reference to the sailor’s afterlife. Orson Shattuck recorded a fairly typical burial at sea in his journal on November 12, 1850, the “last duties” including the body being “shaved and washed and then sewed up in a piece of canvas from 50 to 60 lbs of brick fastened to the feet, and after the reading of a chapter in the Bible by the Captain, the body was committed to the deep. It sank immediately to rise no more until the last trump shall sound."[47]

Bodies disappearing into the depths without a marker were powerful images to sailors, and an anonymous resting place was a fate that at times captains and sailors attempted to avoid. In several journals when deaths occurred near port, bodies were sent ashore for burial. For instance, the *USS Constitution* sent three bodies to shore for internment in Singapore Harbor in

[46] Guild, “Journals, 1810-1813.,” 254.
[47] Frances (Ship : 1826-1853) and Shattuck, “[Logbook of the Frances (Ship,” 16.

February 1845—indicating burial on foreign ground was preferable to a watery grave.[48] The crew likely buried the trio at a Christian cemetery within bounds of the British Fort Canning in Singapore, which existed from 1822 to 1865, though graves were not always segregated between Protestants and Catholics until after 1845. A 1912 survey of the cemetery did not record tombstones for the three sailors named in the *Constitution*'s log as having been sent ashore, although the report notes that many gravestones were broken or illegible.[49] However lax upkeep may have been in later periods, the fact that a British fort allowed burials of non-British Christian sailors within its cemetery shows that common ground on religion sometimes outweighed sailors' citizenship when it came to burial in foreign ports.

Lack of cemetery upkeep as well as changing property needs for local inhabitants meant foreign land burials did not guarantee a marked grave for sailors. A fact that Jonathan Chapel discovered on attempting to revisit the grave of a former shipmate buried onshore in 1838, only to no trace of the grave seven years later as French colonists had built houses over the area in the intervening time.[50] The idea of the erasure of memory of the dead regardless of their resting place shook Chapel enough to devote a three page long, religiously suffused narrative to the death of another sailor in September, writing that "No stone marks the spot but the inhabitants of the deep pass by his watery grave and ships sail over him without disturbing his repose, but when the last trumpet shall sound his bed of shell shall hold him no more. He shall arise with the thousands that now sleep beneath the surface of the great deep." While death could inspire hope

[48] Department of the Navy, "USS Constitution," 206, 208.
[49] H. A. Stallwood, "The Old Cemetery on Fort Canning, Singapore. With a Plan and Four Plates," *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, no. 61 (1912): 77–78, https://www.jstor.org/stable/41561670.
[50] Chapel, "A Whaling Voyag[e] to the North West Coast," entry for January 6, 1845.

for sailors in beliefs of resurrection and the afterlife, fear of death also prompted sailors to seek other religious outlets for protection and comfort.

Christianity or other established religions were not the only source of spirituality at sea, maritime culture was awash in folk religion and superstition. Sailors' yarns of the period are full of ghosts, devils, and foul luck that snared the unsuspecting, or punished the ill-acting, sailor. Such tales not only made for a good story to pass the hours on deck, but elements of them were often incorporated into the spiritual practice of sailors with conventional religious backgrounds. To avoid storms and other disasters, sailors called on luck, fate, and the providence of whatever deities—or combination of deities—might aid them to safe harbors and good fortunes.

The folk religious incorporations of sailors had ancient origins. In her paper on maritime superstitions, Christina Hole wrote that sailors had for centuries faced the dangers of the sea by "acknowledging Christ on shore, but taking care not to offend the Old Gods at sea."[51] This research affirms that statement, but shows that rather than a clear division of loyalties between deities of shore and sea, sailors appealed to both, near simultaneously, in their hour of need. Multiple journals surveyed in this research contain not only requests to the Christian God for his providence, but imprecations to the Greek and Roman pantheon for aid.

Some of the most frequently invoked ancient gods in sailors' journals were the Greek god of the North Wind, Boreas, who was associated with storms and bad weather, and his counterpart the God of the West Wind, Zephyr, associated with good sailing.[52] Complaining of a strong wind

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[51] Christina Hole, "Superstitions and Beliefs of the Sea," *Folklore* 78, no. 3 (1967): 186, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1258183.

[52] "Boreas -- Britannica Academic," accessed November 30, 2021, https://academic-eb-com.eu1.proxy.openathens.net/levels/collegiate/article/Boreas/80725; "Zephyr | The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy, Houghton Mifflin - Credo Reference," accessed November 30, 2021, https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/hmndcl/zephyr/0.

blocking their progress from Boston to Tunis in 1810, Josiah Quincy Guild invoked both gods to give them better aid, the frustrated supercargo writing "Oh Borus [Boreas], call back to thy cave this destroyer of the human race, this nervous rascal and suffer that little beauty Zephyr to flap his wings."[53] James Harris writing from a whaling ship in 1850 saw no issues with the Greek gods working in tandem with Christian angels to protect sailors. His journal features a lengthy narrative about a mariner's guardian angel fighting Beelzebub for the sailor to survive passage around the Cape of Good Hope. After the angel was knocked unconscious by "Old Bones" and all seemed lost, aid arose from an unexpected source when "Borus [Boreas] (who has changed his quarters to the southard) gently arouses the fallen angel, who (upon seeing what havoc has been made by his most deadly enemy) immediately expels him from his territory."[54] We cannot know whether requests to Greek gods were made fancifully, to display classical knowledge to future readers, as a storytelling device, or as serious prayers for aid from any quarter, but their appearance in multiple sources indicates that such combinations of religious references were not considered unusual for sailors.

References to the old gods were also embodied by sailors in the form of Neptune, Roman god of the Sea, who led a religiously tinged hazing ritual referred to as "Crossing the Line" that occurred widely on sailing ships of all occupations through the period. The normalcy of such activities at sea could result in log entries startling to a land based modern reader, such as James Minor's entry for April 30, 1849 stating prosaically that the ship, "Crossed the Equator about 2 o'clock and Neptune came aboard in the Evening." Minor, a passenger bound for gold rush

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[53] Guild, "Journals, 1810-1813.," 18.
[54] Harris, James L., "[Tamerlane (Ship) out of New Bedford, Mass., Mastered by William Irving Shockley, October 24, 1850 - January 12, 1852]," 9–10.

California, obligingly provided further explanation of the otherwise miraculous occurrence and the strange behavior of the crew for his journal audience:

> The sailors say it is the rule when crossing the Equator to shave such as never crossed before by dressing up someone in a fantastical rig calling him Neptune or the God of the Sea. The shaving is done by giving them a good lathering with soot grease & shaving them with a barrel hoop or some old piece of iron & by a finishing touch to douse them in a tub of Salt Water. If they refuse to be shaved they have to pay the forfeit whatever it is, most generally liquor all round. It is dirty bruising & sometimes some one of the party gets seriously hurt.[55]

Crossing the line ceremonies had extensive roots in maritime culture and had been practiced for centuries by the early 1800s. The ceremony was an important part of marking the transition of new sailors into seasoned hands. Minor's journal entries capture the major elements of the ritual—the role playing of Neptune, face blacking with soot or tar and grease followed with shaving a blunt instrument, ritual dunking or dousing, and elements of violence. Fusing Christian references to the Roman inspired ritual, the dousing element is often referred to as a baptism, though instead of marking the sailor's death to sin and new life as a Christian, it marked the end of a greenhands' land-based life and the beginning of his career as a seaman.[56]

Aside from placating ancient gods, more recent superstitions about bad luck and ill omens could affect crew behavior, even when crew members recognized the unlikeliness of their having any true effect. On board the ship *Franklin* in 1842, clerk Robert Possac Rogers noted his satisfaction at losing sight of a Dutch brig that had been sailing nearby even while acknowledging that such feelings were probably unfounded, writing, "for in sailor fashion, our calm, storm, and head wind had all been laid to her infernal influence, with how much justice I

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[55] James Minor, "Diary, 1849 March 24-June 5" (1849), 15, Mystic Seaport Museum, Mystic, CT, https://research.mysticseaport.org/item/l024398/.
[56] Creighton, *Rites and Passages*, 118–21.

cannot say though to me she looked as innocent as hull and canvass could."[57] This prejudice against the Dutch brig was likely linked to the famous maritime legend of the Flying Dutchman, as it was believed that simply seeing the ghost ship caused ill luck and bad weather.[58]

Phantoms were not the only dangers a superstitious sailor needed to avoid, but also bad luck arising from inhabitants of the natural world. In particular, the killing of gulls or other seabirds was thought to bring bad fortune as birds were viewed as good omens and oracles capable of predicting the weather.[59] Josiah Guild described himself as only somewhat superstitious, but noted about gulls that "seamen say when they are in numbers round the ship and particularly when they sing, it is a sign of a heavy gale."[60] Likewise, a fellow sailor on Jonathan Chapel's ship caught some gulls to show to the ship's boys but made a point to release them, "saying he would not hurt the Gulls for they was all his luck."[61] Such respect for superstitions was not universal, however. James Harris wrote in January 1851 that the captain on his vessel had shot a large albatross with a wingspan of sixteen feet and that dinner was albatross soup. This despite a longstanding superstition that shooting an albatross brought cursed luck, a legend that inspired Coleridge's famous poem. [62] Despite the ancient mariner's warning, "And I had done a hellish thing, And it would work 'em woe: For all averred, I had killed the bird, That

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[57] Rogers, "MSS 0097, Item 064 - Journal of a Voyage from Boston to Rio de Janeiro on Board Ship Franklin," 21.
[58] Fletcher Bassett, *Legends and Superstitions of the Sea and of Sailors.* (n.p., 1885), 344, https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/011207283.
[59] Bassett, 128, 132.
[60] Guild, "Journals, 1810-1813.," 2.
[61] Chapel, "A Whaling Voyag[e] to the North West Coast," December 8th, 1844 entry.
[62] Harris, James L., "[Tamerlane (Ship) out of New Bedford, Mass., Mastered by William Irving Shockley, October 24, 1850 - January 12, 1852]," 8; Bassett, *Legends and Superstitions of the Sea and of Sailors.*, 128.

made the breeze to blow," Harris's captain did not seem to fear reaping the same damned fate, perhaps trusting in better angels to carry his ship through.[63]

Faith was a topic that sailors frequently discussed in their journals and logs despite sailors' persistent association with irreligion and moral depravity. Like those experiencing revivalism on land during the early nineteenth century, sailors' writings at sea frequently pondered the fate of their souls and the moral character of themselves and their crewmates. However, the ways in which seamen interacted with spirituality had some unique features due to the maritime environment. Sailors' religious practices extended common Second Great Awakening doctrines of *sola scriptura* and the autonomy of the Christian individual to their utmost end, as at sea religious observance was almost entirely up to each sailor's agency and interpretation. Sailors filled the void in communal worship and doctrinal authority with personal devotional activities such as religious reflection or private Bible and religious reading, even combining elements of various religious traditions as needed. Sailors were largely independent in terms of religious association, again amplifying moves towards denominational separation and disassociation during the Second Great Awakening back on land.

Sailor's attendance at church services was either limited to the extremely sporadic when in a port, only available on merchant ships with highly religious captains, or else on naval vessels where services were mandatory and a rote part of other forms of ship discipline. Whatever their availability, religious services were likely available in only one faith tradition or a nondenominational bent regardless of a sailor's spiritual background. Other communal religious participation at sea like prayer largely revolved around situations of danger or death as sailors

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[63] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. (New York: D. Appleton, 1857), 15, https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/006672211.

banded together at funeral services to affirm a general hope in their shipmates' afterlife or to pray for deliverance from a storm. How sailors used lingering ties to shore, particularly to the women in their lives, to support them through difficulties of sea life, or else severed ties with shoreside religious organizations and sought comforts elsewhere, will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 2

Viewing Religion from Ship to Shore –

Sailors' Writings on Women, Religion, and Missions

While sailors were physically distanced from the mainland—and developed independent religious practices to sustain themselves, they were not wholly sundered from all shoreside ties. The religious thoughts and writings of sailors still turned back to land with regularity. Sailors wrote while at sea about the women they left at home, not only of homesickness for the physical comforts of a mother or wife, but also of religiously suffused memories of their moral instruction and spiritual care. A dark mirror image to the women waiting at home, sailors cast strange women in foreign ports as potential stumbling blocks on the road of faith rather than guiding lights. While these highly gendered and racialized religious themes were prevalent among many writers at sea, especially among seamen of middle-class backgrounds, they were not unanimous among sailors. Some free-spirited crewmen resenting the judgment of their more religious shipmates, sought freedom from shoreside religious moralism and at times violently advocated for their right to the companionship of women wherever they could find them at sea.

While women occupied a prominent place in sailors' thinking and writing, other mainland connections persisted as well through the outreach of religious organizations intent on converting and reforming sailors' behavior at sea. Just as their mainland critics held back little on their views of sailors' actions and beliefs, sailors wrote about their own perceptions of the missionaries they encountered and evaluated their efforts based on their own religious beliefs. Taking stock of how sailors' remaining religious ties to shore were expressed in their writings shows how sailors' opinions on gender, spirituality, religious outreach, and evangelical culture

continued popular themes of the Second Great Awakening. Sailors' writings provide their own interpretations on the interweaving of ideas of domesticity and religion, moral and physical purity, as well as the millennial missionary impulse. All of which carried on trends from on land but were complicated by unique features of seafaring life—the lengthy periods absence of all women from sailors' lives and estrangement from formal religious associations—that required sailors to step into roles usually held by women to uphold their personal faith or to transgress religious boundaries around sex and morality and reject mainland evangelical norms.

Scholars that examine gender and culture at sea, like Margaret Creighton and Lisa Norling, have interpreted young men taking to the sea as a deliberate rejection of their mothers' influence and domesticity in exchange for adopting a rough, masculine life aboard ship. Adventures beyond the conventions of polite society doubtless appealed to many shipping out for long voyages, however, their sea journals show that even if that was the intent of many sailors they fell short of shedding their attachments to home and mother at sea. Sailors wrote of their longing for the comforts of home beyond the physical succors of mothers' home cooking and care after enduring weeks of seasickness and near spoiled shipboard fare.[1] While previous historians have documented sailors' simultaneous rejection of and longing for domesticity, they have largely delved into this topic in terms of women's religious writings to men, examining the role of sentimentality in the affective ties of sailors to women at home, or as part of sailors' attempts at forging a stoic masculine culture—at least superficially—aboard ship. Prior examinations of religion and gender at sea have focused predominantly on sailors' direct

[1] Creighton, *Rites and Passages*, 51–52, 75–76; Margaret S. Creighton and Lisa Norling, eds., *Iron Men, Wooden Women: Gender and Seafaring in the Atlantic World, 1700-1920*, Gender Relations in the American Experience (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 73, 126. Lisa Norling, *Captain Ahab Had a Wife: New England Women & the Whalefishery, 1720-1870* (Chapel Hill, N.C: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 170–72, 219.

interactions with female missionaries in ports or on missionaries' attempts to restrict sailors access to alcohol and women on shore leave, topics which do appear in sailors writings with regularity.[2] However, little attention has been paid to the fact that in writing about missing women at home, sailors also frequently used explicitly spiritual and religious language and consequently such writings reveal the enduring religious influence of women on seafaring men despite physical separation. Rather than trying to reject or escape religious domesticity, beyond missing tangible home comforts, seamen wrote longingly of the absent spiritual care and instruction that was believed to be the special purview of the nineteenth century woman.

The religious fervor of the Second Great Awakening and its egalitarian and individualized impulses, as discussed in chapter one, included women as well as men as active participants in spreading the faith. Religious ideas of the importance of education and reading scripture for oneself soon converged with growing Victorian ideologies of domesticity and separate spheres that gave women responsibility for the care and nurturing of children. By the mid-nineteenth century, these combined cultural and religious forces made women the primary teachers of biblical knowledge and the leader of religious practices for the family within the home. As such, ideas of women, the home, and religion were all but inseparable in mainland

[2] In addition to works cited by Creighton and Norling, for others on this treatment of gender, sex, and religion see also: Brian Rouleau, "An Intimate History of Early America's Maritime Empire" in *With Sails Whitening Every Sea: Mariners and the Making of an American Maritime Empire*, 1st ed. (Cornell University Press, 2014), https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt1287cd0; Briton Cooper Busch, "Whalemen's Women, Whalemen's Wives," in *Whaling Will Never Do For Me*, 1st ed., The American Whaleman in the Nineteenth Century (University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 135–57, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt130jnvp.12.; and Myra C Glenn, "Straddling Conflicting Notions of Masculinity: Sailor Narratives as Stories of Roistering and Religious Conversion," in *Jack Tar's Story the Autobiographies and Memoirs of Sailors in Antebellum America* (Cambridge [etc: Cambridge University Press, 2010), http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=329366.

popular culture, and for sailors at sea. Nineteenth century Christian women were expected to teach their children to read and analyze scripture and to pray, meaning when sailors exercised these practices onboard ship, it is likely their minds were naturally drawn back to associations with their mothers and the home. As women increased in religious leadership during this period, they also took up important roles in the many Christian benevolent societies and organizations that provided free bibles and tracts to sailors like the American Bible Society and American Seamen's Friend Society. As such, in addition to women enabling sailors to read through teaching at home, it is likely much of their religious reading material on ship also passed into their possession through female hands. However, for lower class sailors, maternal associations with reading and religion may not have had the same pull. The nineteenth century model of religious "true womanhood" carried implicit associations with class and race, given that it was largely middle class, or wealthier working class, white women who had sufficient means to devote time and energy to teaching children in the home or to send their children to formal schools. Poorer sailors were as likely to have learned to read on board vessels in informal shipboard schools for cabin boys and greenhands as they were from a maternal figure.[3] Along with providing access to scripture and tracts, middle class mothers were also expected to instruct their children in moral behavior through careful selections from the voluminous array of didactic domestic religious literature available from publishers in the nineteenth century.[4]

This kind of reading material explicitly reinforced spiritual ties to women and home, as Richard Henry Dana wrote when discussing the effect of providing sailors with spiritual reading, "It is difficult to engage their attention in mere essays and arguments, but the simplest and

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[3] Tracy Fessenden, "Gendering Religion," *Journal of Women's History* 14, no. 1 (2002): 163–69, https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2002.0017.
[4] McDannell, *The Christian Home in Victorian America, 1840-1900*, 132–35, 143.

shortest story, in which home is spoken of, kind friends, a praying mother or sister, a sudden death, and the like, often touches the hearts of the roughest and most abandoned."[5] Domestic religious reading was surprisingly popular on ships full of men supposedly severing ties with mainland life and home comforts. Orson Shattuck wrote on a Sunday in October 1850 that his time was spent reading "the Fathers and Mothers Manual, a book that Mr. Davis lent me, it is a very good book that and the Bible are the only books I have that I care anything about."[6] The *Father's and Mother's Manual and Youth's Instructer* was a monthly periodical aimed at the proper religious and moral instruction of the family published from 1849-1850 in Boston and edited by Harrison Park, an ordained minister.[7] While such material may seem an odd choice to have circulated on a whaling ship—Shattuck mentions being given it by another sailor—reading materials that conjoined domestic and religious fare often were shared on ships. Some sailors may have read such works to obtain practical help in caring for their own effects for the first time, as sailors had to perform tasks traditionally known as women's work like managing their own clothes washing, mending, etc.[8] Family instructional manuals could also offer mild titillation with their veiled discussions of female health and pregnancy. Such works could also provide instruction and aspiration for young men hoping to earn enough money to be married and support a family through their work at sea.[9] However, is also likely that religiously minded young men—like Shattuck who held such reading along with the Bible as his favorite books—

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[5] Dana, *Two Years before the Mast*, 479.
[6] Frances (Ship : 1826-1853) and Shattuck, "[Logbook of the Frances (Ship," 11.
[7] Mortimer Blake, *A Centurial History of the Mendon Association of Congregational Ministers* (Boston: For the Association by Sewall Harding, 1853), 189; Cynthia Lee Patterson, *Art for the Middle Classes: America's Illustrated Magazines of the 1840s* (Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2011), 202.
[8] Creighton, *Rites and Passages*, 185–86.
[9] Gilje, *To Swear like a Sailor*, 184, 203–4, 214.

read domestic manuals as a proxy for their mother's spiritual guidance and moral advice on board.

The absence of female spiritual guidance on vessels was of particular importance since while mid-nineteenth century fathers still maintained the public role of leading the family in formal worship outside the home, evangelical Protestantism's growing emphasis on individual study and personal study exercised within the home gave weight to women's leadership in these areas. This gendered understanding of the divide between communal worship and private religious devotion is of special importance for young male sailors, who as discussed in chapter one, were often separated—whether by choice or physical distance—from the male led world of formal church membership and instruction. What Colleen McDannell has defined as the "maternal model of domestic religion"—the practice and teaching of religion as an individual activity of private devotion rather than public worship, lacking communities, hierarchies, and set theologies—more closely parallels the conditions sailors faced at sea than did traditional, patriarchal church polity.[10] In order to continue personal devotional practice at sea then, sailors would have to step into the role intended in Christian society for the mother or wife and often felt lack of her leadership. In 1845, Jonathan Chapel on board the whale ship *Meteor* wrote of dreaming about reciting the Lord's Prayer to someone "as it was taught me by my Mother in the days of my youth." However, Chapel acknowledged that he had allowed the effect of his mother's instruction to wane, saying that "I could not rehearse the same now if I knew I should never see another day."[11]

[10] McDannell, 127–31.
[11] Chapel, "A Whaling Voyag[e] to the North West Coast," entry for September 4, 1845.

Even beyond physical reach of their mothers' watchful eyes and spiritual direction, sailing men nonetheless still felt the gaze of their mothers at sea, especially when, like Chapel, they felt themselves not living up to their religious guidance. Not only mothers were considered to have spiritual influence and leadership in the home, but wives were also expected to help "redeem their husbands" and keep them on the straight and narrow path. The evolving "feminization of Protestantism" in the nineteenth century shifted away from earlier views of women that saw the gender as inherently more prone to sin to a viewpoint that saw women as inherently more spiritual than men. By mid-nineteenth century, Protestant circles saw women as ministering angels able to turn rough men to spiritual thoughts through their loving direction.[12] Jonathan Chapel, the whaler who was also troubled by the lustful dreams of other women discussed in chapter one, amidst writing of his dreams penned a short poem which seems to indicate his hope that his wife's spirit was with him on board—perhaps to keep him from temptation—even despite their physical separation, writing: "What is joy, such only truth gives, The hearts deep anthem swells, That where the Christian friend lives, Her angel form dwells." Chapel's wishes were not granted however, as he expressed frustration a few pages later after having yet more dreams of strange women and wrote that he wished he would dream of his wife instead, only to be denied even the dream of her presence.[13]

Even unmarried forecastle men felt the spiritual influence of sweethearts left on shore. Orson Shattuck, the reader of the *Father's and Mother's Manual*, who declared himself now past the ability to be saved and wished "O, if I had only listened to my sisters" as discussed in chapter one, also gave extended consideration to his spiritual faults as related to a romantic relationship

[12] McDannell, *The Christian Home in Victorian America, 1840-1900*, 19, 126, 130, 143.
[13] Chapel, "A Whaling Voyag[e] to the North West Coast," June 6th 1845 entry.

with a woman. Shattuck evidently left behind a former love and felt he had separated himself from her forever, by inference at least in part due to past immoral conduct. Shattuck wrote searingly of "her who was dearer to me than all else" and "what innumerable blessings and happiness I have thrown away" by not listening to "her exhorting and pleading" that "my heart told me they were right, but the fiend that I had taken into my soul fought against and I let him conquer." Shattuck sees the fault not with his intended's spiritual exhortation, accepted as a natural and correct action on her part, but with his own response. Shattuck however sees no chance for his spiritual or familial redemption, as "all hope is fled it finds no resting place with me thousands of miles separates me from her now." However, hopeless the writer may claim to be, it appears he yet clung to her memory as a form of spiritual strength, believing that even short exposure to her presence would generate enough power to sustain permanent separation. As Shattuck wrote for "if able to take one look at your dear countenance unknown to yourself, Dear Elisabeth, then I will be content to become abo wanderer again and sale out a life of repentance and misery among strangers."[14]

Separation from loved ones at sea, if not permanent, could last years at a time, especially for sailors like Chapel serving on whalers, which continued cruising until enough barrels of oil could be collected to make a sufficient profit and could span three to four years per voyage. However, marriage was primarily the province of officers or veteran sailors, as most greenhands and lower ranking sailors were either too young to marry or did not earn enough to marry and support a wife at their wage level regardless of age without years of saving. Whalers and merchant sailors were not paid until the end of a voyage, thus much rode on the success of the whale hunt or sale of cargo, bad weather or luck could blight or delay marital ambitions for

[14] Frances (Ship : 1826-1853) and Shattuck, "[Logbook of the Frances (Ship," 11.

years. Even married sailors found themselves trapped in a cycle of continuing to sail and further separating themselves from their wives to be able to financial support them.[15] Elias Davison aboard the merchant ship *Hoogly* bound for Calcutta wrote several poems dedicated to his wife during the two year voyage, including on New Year's Day in 1831 in which he yearned to attain the highest rank available of master so "That I might accumulate wealth faster, So to live independently on shore, With my beloved whom I adore… Where virtue resides, and paths seldom trod, Ourselves our society our Creator our God," shows Davison's yearning for acquiring both spiritual and physical permanent residence with his wife.[16]

The rank of captain or master not only increased income but also provided the benefit of at times being able to take their wives along on some voyages. This practice was most common on whaling vessels but required the permission of the owners of the vessel who often feared that having women aboard would diminish profits, as captains would be distracted by their company and prioritize their health and safety over capturing whales. It is important to note however that not all sailors missed the spiritual or physical presence of mainland women, and at times openly resented them when they were onboard, especially when their spiritual leadership took the form of trying to enforce temperance or not whaling on Sundays on the crew. As such even at the height of American whaling, only about twenty percent of captains took their wives with them on long voyages, meaning that the vast majority of ships did not have women aboard as a rule. Having women aboard meant the possibility of children aboard ship, either through pregnancy occurring while afloat or a wife bringing along the family, which similarly was frowned on by

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[15] Creighton and Norling, *Iron Men, Wooden Women*, 73–76.
[16] Elias E. Davison, "Seaman's Journal: Journal of a Voyage from Boston to Calcutta in the Ship 'Hoogly,'" manuscript (n.d.), 168, http://catalog.bostonathenaeum.org/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=399065.

owners. More mouths to feed and health concerns to treat without adding to the productivity of the ship along with the possibility of children distracting sailors from their work meant that owners were disinclined to approve family voyages, though they did occur especially when captains were major stakeholder in their vessels.[17] The practice was worthy of remark enough that on Christmas Day in 1852, John Randall paused long enough from his grumbling at the lack of Christmas pies for the crew—"a world of wonders"—to note that they had talked with another vessel where "the Captain had His Wife and Child with him"—a circumstance that may have only reminded him of the former comforts of his own home on Christmas.[18]

In addition to missing the familiar comforts of home while afloat, sailors feared whether those homes would be there to return to after an absence of years. The only physical link between sailors and their wives for months at a time were scattered letters. Before the establishment of regularized sea postal service in the late nineteenth century, early to midcentury sailors took their chances with letters were sent back home via any ships met at sea heading that direction, and family sent word with any ships headed to the general area of the world in which they might arrive. Due to the vagaries of oceanic transit—delays affecting individual ships such as wrecks, bad weather, and missed connections in ports due to needing to shift course or make repairs—letters were often received months or years after they were sent.[19] On being one of the "fortunate" to find a letter waiting for him in a harbor, John Randall wrote of the joys of successful correspondence saying, "there is nothing I think that gladdens the heart of a sailor so much as a letter from home" and waxed poetic that "This feeling of a home comes forth, From

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[17] Norling, *Captain Ahab Had a Wife*, 240–41. Creighton, *Rites and Passages*, 164–65. Creighton and Norling, *Iron Men, Wooden Women*, 135.
[18] Randall, "[Cleora (Bark) of New Bedford, Mass., Mastered by James L. Smith, Keeper John T. Randall, on Voyage 18 May 1852 - 31 March 1855]," 26.
[19] Norling, *Captain Ahab Had a Wife*, 150.

'neath the soul's pure throne as not of earth, It is the blessed enchainment of our love."[20] Some sailors' wives enjoyed having the run of their households and the increased independence their husbands' absence provided as they managed financial affairs at home and prospered while their men were at sea.[21] However, in less sunny economic situations, wives left on shore eking out a precarious living while awaiting their husband's indeterminate pay or sweethearts waiting for a fiancé to save enough for marriage might well move on to more stable providers before their sailors return. It is unsurprising then that in addition to praise, sailors' letters and diaries frequently are laced with reminders of the promises made to one another before God.[22]

Even if wives and sweethearts proved faithful, sailors still faced the high mortality rates of mid-nineteenth century America and knew that loved ones might well have passed away before their return. Orson Shattuck fretted about not hearing from home on his second whaling voyage, writing in his journal pensively that "I perceive by the papers that the cholera has raged to a considerable extant and the feeble health of some of family when I sailed combined with the nonreception of any letters makes it almost impossible to avoid having dark forebodings."[23] In facing such worries, sailors often turned to prayer. Jonathan Clarke was a passenger and not a sailor, but four months into the long voyage from New England to California in 1852 to join the goldrush, he felt enough separation and worry for his family to "feel that in leaving my Wife and Children I have left the dearest I have on earth for paltry Gold." The regretful prospector felt the

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[20] Randall, "[Cleora (Bark) of New Bedford, Mass., Mastered by James L. Smith, Keeper John T. Randall, on Voyage 18 May 1852 - 31 March 1855]," 22–23.
[21] Norling, *Captain Ahab Had a Wife*, 42–45.
[22] Norling, 201–2.
[23] Eliza F. Mason (Ship) and Orson F. Shattuck, "[Logbook of the Eliza F. Mason (Ship) of New Bedford, Mass., Mastered by Nathaniel H. Jernegan, Kept by Orson F. Shattuck, on Voyage from 2 Dec. 1853-10 Apr. 1857]" (1853), 42, New Bedford Whaling Museum, New Bedford, MA, http://archive.org/details/logbookofelizafm00unse.

need to think of “them that we have left behind and commit them to God who is abundantly able to take care of them."[24]

While the sailors quoted thus far attempted to some extent to retain their spiritual and domestic ties to women at home, many sailors were perfectly content to accept female companionship wherever it could be found at sea and made no effort to remain either physically or spiritually faithful to any mainland connections. Some sailors formed long-term relationships with women in the most heavily frequented ports in Hawaii or other maritime centers, providing regular gifts to mistresses and lovers they returned to year after year. A few even married “native wives” according to the customs of the location, but such relationships were often not expected to be as enduring or monogamous as those with American women.[25] Other sailors were satisfied with temporary liaisons with women who were brought onto ships for a few days by captains seeking to pacify their men. Sailors also found access to women on shore leave whether in formal portside brothels or with individual women in towns and villages they visited.[26]

Many of the women available to sailors in the far-flung ports frequented by merchants and whalers were members of Pacific Island indigenous communities. Sailors’ descriptions of the native women in foreign ports often conflated nineteenth century ideas on race, gender, and religion with nautical culture’s own particular views of women. Western culture’s well documented hyper-sexualization of women of color combined seamlessly with American sailors’ preexisting tendency to depict women in general as either innocent maidens or wanton whores. Drawing a stark moral and physical division between wives and mothers waiting at home and

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[24] Clarke, “MSS 0097, Item 013 - On Board the Ship Governor Morton,” 103, 109.
[25] Creighton, *Rites and Passages*, 181–84.
[26] Busch, “Whalemen’s Women, Whalemen’s Wives,” 140–41.

women available in brothels or carousing with sailors on ship in ports, who might be white or of color depending on the locale, helped sailors disassociate the cultural and religious associations and expectations of treatment of the former group with that of the other.[27]

These gendered stereotypes of women as either virtuous or carnal paired neatly with the Second Great Awakening's ideas of the "heathen." While the term was at times applied to white subcultures like sailors who were associated with particularly sinful behavior, "heathen" also held overtly racial connotations and was used frequently to paint indigenous cultures as deviant and demonic. Non-monogamous sexuality, unashamed nakedness, and polytheism—all of which were common features of Pacific Islander cultures—were pointed to as signs of godlessness and damnation.[28] Thus other sailors' unrestrained amorous connections with women in foreign ports were often cause for alarm for their more religious crewmates, who not only framed the "strange" women as physical dangers due to widespread sexual diseases within nautical communities, but as spiritual ones as well. As such native women often figure in religious sailors' writings as temptations to be avoided lest they ensnare and degrade the unwary sailor and make him unworthy of his spiritual and familial ties back home.

Orson Shattuck on board the *Frances* was shocked by the situation aboard ship after arriving in January 1852 to Hope Island in the far South Pacific, writing that "the natives came on board... they exhibit a deplorable want of morality and natural modesty and place no restraint at all on their sensual passions and I was both grieved and mortified to find that our men could be quite as shameless in their actions." In condemning his crewmates "depravity and lechery"

[27] Creighton, *Rites and Passages*, 174–75.
[28] Gin Lum, *Damned Nation*, 67–71.

that continued over two days, Shattuck while admitting his own religious faults, still complementing himself on his restraint, reflecting that:

> I pretend to no religion and very little morality but I cannot so far forget the respect I owe to myself to my friends and above all to the commands of my maker as to help these poor creatures to their eternal destruction by my own actions… I have been a great sinner am still, but I do try not to break God's commandments knowingly but if there was no restraint of that nature I do think that my own natural sense of propriety and taste would forbid my having any connections with these disgusting creatures… I thank God from the depths of soul that He has given me restraining influences to keep me from placing any more barriers between me and those so dear to me.[29]

Shattuck's disgust at not just the immorality of unrestrained sexual relations with native women, but at the women themselves—calling them creatures multiple times, distancing himself from their humanity—reflects the hardening of racial categories and growing belief in inherent inferiority of non-white peoples that was spreading throughout American culture in the nineteenth century which will be further discussed in chapter three. Shattuck however did not hesitate to blame white men and Western influence in the role of sailors in fueling the sex trade in foreign ports writing, "I think the fact that the natives of all these islands (with very few exceptions) bring off a large number of women to every ship that visits them speaks plainer than words for the morals of the white race and more especially the Americans & English as very few others visit them."[30] Judgments like Shattuck's overlooked the degree to which the women engaging with sailors may have been voluntarily, as Pacific Islander cultures at times used sexual relationships as ways to form ties of trade, reciprocal partnerships, or other forms of cultural engagement. However, Shattuck's concern, shared by other religious sailors and missionaries,

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[29] Frances (Ship : 1826-1853) and Shattuck, "[Logbook of the Frances (Ship," 72.
[30] Eliza F. Mason (Ship) and Shattuck, "[Logbook of the Eliza F. Mason (Ship) of New Bedford, Mass., Mastered by Nathaniel H. Jernegan, Kept by Orson F. Shattuck, on Voyage from 2 Dec. 1853-10 Apr. 1857]," 42.

did highlight the worry that not all such unions were consensual, and that the desires of foreign mariners were generating a boom in the exploitation of native women for the profit of their male relatives. As such, the relations between sailors, indigenous islanders, and missionaries in the Pacific in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries reprised many of the themes seen in the "middle ground" of the American frontier a century earlier. The use of sexual ties to forge relationships of survival and trade between natives and frontiersmen, whether on land or sea, was still met with the reciprocal disapproval and attempt to restrain such behavior by missionaries and devout settlers, or sailors, in a new location and cultural context.[31]

Another group who worried about the moral influence of sailors on native societies were missionaries who had begun setting outposts in the Pacific in the late eighteenth century to introduce Christianity to the islands. Thanks to the influence of the Second Great Awakening and millennial understandings of Christianity that believed "the heathen" across the globe must be converted before Christ's return, sailors soon encountered Christian missionaries from America and European countries in far flung ports across the seas. British missionaries had established a foothold in the late 1790s in New Zealand and Americans missionaries in the 1820s in Hawaii. Spreading out from these bases, by the 1840s, Christian missions were scattered throughout the Pacific—not just on the most densely settled islands but in the most isolated atolls visited by sailors.[32] Those on land did not spare their pens when discussing the religious and moral

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[31] Busch, "Whalemen's Women, Whalemen's Wives," 136–39, 142–43. Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 60–75, ProQuest Ebook Central.
[32] Briton Cooper Busch, "The Practice of Religion," in *Whaling Will Never Do For Me*, 1st ed., The American Whaleman in the Nineteenth Century (University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 108, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt130jnvp.11.

behavior of sailors, and in return sailors at times bent their pens to giving an evaluation of the Christian missionaries.

Often the most approbation for missionaries' work came from sailors who most closely shared the background of those back home who funded missionary work—middle class white evangelical protestants. Such sailors of more privileged backgrounds—termed Victorian seamen by Margaret Creighton to differentiate them from the rougher background of common seamen—often already disapproved of the types of activities the missionaries tried to restrict and judged their fellow sailors for their activities.[33] Orson Shattuck, though he claimed little religion, frequently quoted in this chapter both reprobating his own conduct and that of his crewmates and natives, perhaps typifies this viewpoint. As such, Shattuck perhaps unsurprisingly found much to commend in the English missionaries at Mangaia, one of the Cook Islands frequented by whaling vessels seeking fresh water, wood, and other provisions in the far reaches of the Pacific. However, some of the benefit of the missionaries' influence Shattuck felt in the islands was immediately physical rather than spiritual, as Shattuck's ship the *Frances* was grounded on a reef offshore on December 24, 1852 and the crew needed to work quickly to save their provisions and personal belongings. English missionaries had been established in the islands for several decades and their facility with the local language made them the point of contact for an American vessel in crisis. Shattuck wrote that "the Capt sent word to Mr. Gill the Eng[lish] missionary for all the help he could raise and we soon had a fleet canoes around us ready to transport our effects to the shore." The missionary's fluency in the native language and position of authority with the native population impressed Shattuck so much that he wrote that "Mr Gill himself came on board and appeared to sympathize deeply with us in our misfortunes His services were most invaluable to

[33] Creighton, *Rites and Passages*, 10, 54.

us in giving directions to the natives who yielded the most ready and implicit obedience to his orders, setting an example which would well for civilized people to follow."[34] Shattuck's experience was not isolated, as other ships—like the *Tacitus* who wrecked in Rarotonga in 1845—also were helped by missionaries organizing native canoe parties to aid ships in distress. At other times, missionaries received the approbation of captains for mediating with local chiefs and diffusing attacks on vessels, either due to cultural misunderstandings, or in several cases the misbehavior of the crew. In 1825 in the Society Islands, a missionary successfully intervened to prevent an attack by a Raiatean chief on the whaleship *Tuscan* when the crew were suspected of attempting to abduct a group of local women who were still on the vessel as it was preparing to depart.[35]

At times, sailors' approval of the local population and missionaries was linked not only with their responsiveness to temporal orders but by the extensiveness of the island's conversion to Christianity. Despite differences in religious denomination or practice, many sailors and missionaries shared a belief in the racial and cultural superiority of Western Christendom. Both groups often believed that successful interactions with native groups depended on indigenous populations becoming more culturally and religiously like nineteenth century Americans. As such, in contrast to his disgust of the Society Island natives, Orson Shattuck wrote approvingly of the Hope Islanders that "the natives are very friendly and very hospitable. They all believe in the Christian religion and there are about 300 regular members of the church the whole population of the island being about 4000 ever family has a bible and the most of them over 14 years of age can read and many of them write…" Rather than the outrage Shattuck expended at

[34] Frances (Ship : 1826-1853) and Shattuck, "[Logbook of the Frances (Ship," 133.
[35] Busch, "The Practice of Religion," 111–12, 119.

islanders who maintained their traditional dress, cultural practices, and did not conform to Victorian sexual mores, he expounded happily on the missionaries' "great success in civilizing and converting the natives having succeeded in abolishing their old heathenish rites…" having "established many good and wholesome laws suppressing immorality which abounded universally before he came. Polygamy was practised and a chaste man or woman was unknown." The missionaries' wife was commended for providing a model of Shattuck's ideal of proper domestic and religious behavior, "Mrs. Gill is very highly respected and beloved…for her unceasing benevolence and kindness."[36] Shattuck, like many Americans of a Protestant spiritual background, believed that the example of Christian women could lead not only their children and families to God but "civilize" and convert distant tribes from the American West to the far Pacific.[37]

However, from some sailors, missionaries earned no such praise for their efforts to conform locals to Western ideals. While the lower-class sailors scorned by Shattuck, and frequently characterized as irreligious by modern historians, may have engaged in portside activities their more restrained crewmates reprobated, such actions were not seen by rough seaman as mutually exclusive with faith or religious practice. As shown in chapter one, even their more middle-class religious deck mates commented on their regular reading of the Bible and other religious literature as well as their affirmation in the belief of a God and afterlife modeled after a general Protestant belief structure, which will be further explored in chapter three. As such even lower-class sailors did not necessarily reject faith so much as the interpretation of moral applications of scripture and attempted constraints on their actions

[36] Frances (Ship : 1826-1853) and Shattuck, "[Logbook of the Frances (Ship," 133–35.
[37] Gin Lum, *Damned Nation*, 102–4, 111–12.

favored by missionaries and middle-class sailors. As such, the relationship between missionaries and sailors was often characterized by what other historians have termed "shared loathing."[38] Missionaries' influence could make sailors' pursuit of usual shoreside activities difficult or impossible, and sailors did not always take such interference meekly. When looking to provision their ships and having the misfortune on arriving on a Sunday, often a mild form of irritation was felt by seaman arriving in a port with missionary influence. As Jonathan Chapel found when attempting to trade cloth for potatoes with a local, writing "They said it was Sunday and the Mysionarys [missionaries] did not allow them to traffic on the Lord's Day." However, things ended in Chapel's benefit in this instance as "one of the natives sent for me & told me he should give me potatoes and onions, but would not take pay for them…"[39] Enforcing restrictions on trade on Sundays was a common practice for missionaries seeking to ensure both natives and visiting sailors did not profane the Sabbath, regardless of their needs or inclinations. Such blue laws, common in nineteenth century America, were often the first actions of missionaries, and enforced with the support of local officials who had converted. Multiple sailors' journals mention arriving in ports across the Pacific on Sunday and being unable to patronize shops.[40] However, when missionaries attempted to restrict not only the purchase of consumables on Sundays but cut off sailor's access to traditional shore leave carousing, sailors' resistance went beyond complaining in journals and could be explosive.

Missionaries attempts to conform local populations to "Christian" behavior often began with curtailing sailors' access to alcohol and sex on shore. While this was often limited to

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[38] Busch, "The Practice of Religion," 105–6.
[39] Chapel, "A Whaling Voyag[e] to the North West Coast," April 27, 1845 entry.
[40] Davison, "Seaman's Journal," 123; Frances (Ship : 1826-1853) and Shattuck, "[Logbook of the Frances (Ship," 132.

exhorting native groups—often unsuccessfully—to not engage in such behaviors, when missionaries gained support of local rulers to enforce moral bans, violent eruptions could occur. Hawaii was the first Pacific Island to establish American missionary outreach, beginning in 1820, and over the next few years missionaries gained the support of Hawaiian royal family to enact a ban on native women being taken to foreign ships for sex. In 1825, a British whaleship, the *Daniel* arrived in port to find the restriction in place and their captain was fined for attempting to violate it. In response, the crew surrounded the home of American missionary William Richards and threatened to kill him if the ban was not reversed, and Richards was saved only by the intervention of armed Hawaiians sent by the local chief. [41] American seamen from the *U.S.S. Dolphin* landing in Honolulu in January 1826 also physically protested local vice laws in Honolulu, even attempting to attack the American minister in retribution. Captain John Percival pressured the Hawaiian Queen directly to repeal the law, and while he was eventually successful, the events caused a minor international incident resulting into a sustained Congressional investigation into Percival's conduct and an official repudiation of the actions of the crew. Percival was ultimately pardoned by a court martial and a few of lower ranking rioting sailors were deemed responsible for the mayhem.[42] However, American sailors demands for local women and the willingness of even naval officers to press for such access made its impression on local missionaries and the ruling house of Hawaii, further linking sailors with

[41] Creighton, *Rites and Passages*, 139–40; Busch, "The Practice of Religion," 109.
[42] "US Navy and Hawaii-A Historical Summary," accessed February 26, 2022, http://public1.nhhcaws.local/content/history/nhhc/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/u/the-us-navy-and-hawaii-a-historical-summary.html; American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, *Annual Report - American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions* (Boston: Printed for the board, by Crocker and Brewster, 1826), 60–62, 78–82, https://www.google.com/books/edition/Annual_Report_American_Board_of_Commissi/u1BFAQAAMAAJ?hl=en.

debauched conduct and violence in the minds of those who sought to restrict their moral influence in the Pacific.

It was not just the intrusion of missionaries into their sexual lives that frustrated some sailors. Some resented the judgment and interference of missionaries into their spiritual lives and found the attitude towards sailors adopted by some mission groups as inherently patronizing. Many missionaries saw those they were seeking to convert—not just indigenous peoples, but also American sailors—as inherently culturally and morally inferior. At times this resentment revolving around missionaries, women, and morality converged in the spiritual activities of female missionaries seeking to proselytize sailors in port cities. Jacob Hazen, a navy seaman, was in no mood for spiritual reprimands or attempts at cajoling towards a better way of life when female missionaries visited the *USS Columbus* while in harbor at the Boston Navy Yard. On being offered a religious tract in place of the novel he was reading while in irons as punishment for confusion over to which vessel in the squadron he was assigned—Hazen claimed he had been assigned to the *Preble*, another vessel in the squadron, and had been serving there, while commanding officers of the *Columbus* claimed he was assigned to that vessel and had been absent without leave and ordered him chained to the mast. Hazen scorned the woman's claim that tracts would provide comfort to him in his present situation, stating he questioned whether his situation with the devil "would be much more intolerable than it is in this ship." Hazen was a low-ranking sailor, who published his own memoir, *Five Years Before the Mast*, in 1854, a saltier parallel to Richard Henry Dana's more romantic and spiritual memoir of time in the forecastle, *Two Years Before the Mast*.[43] Unlike Dana's college educated and wealthier

[43] While this research attempts to prioritize manuscripts written at sea over later memoirs, Hazen's account is included here as its perspective from a lower income sailor is rare.

background, Hazen grew up in near poverty. To many lower-class sailors like Hazen, domestic piety was the luxury of the middle class who could not understand the troubles of the lower classes, nor the physical comforts they sought to soothe them. As such, in spurning the tract, Hazen recommended the female missionary offer such religious reading to the officers instead as "they need it a great sight worse than I do." In further distancing himself from middle class domesticity, Hazen brazenly titled his chapter recounting the incident with the missionary, "In which the adventurer becomes a heathen, and after being visited in vain by a Boston missionary, is introduced to the cat-o'-nine tails" in clear defiance of traditional religious mores.[44] While some sailors like Hazen may have been defiant atheists, the rejection of conventional religious morality by lower-class seamen should not be assumed to comprehend of rejection of faith and religion in itself, as many the documented instances of lower-class sailors reading religious material, praying for deliverance from a storm, or hoping for a fallen comrade to reach an afterlife discussed in chapter one are not statistically explainable as expressions of boredom or fear alone. As seen in Myra Glen's examination of ex-sailors published works, their journals also show that rather than rejecting faith, forecastle men instead held their natural freedoms to include taking the parts of faith that were useful to them without accepting the evangelical interpretation of proper Christian living and morality that missionaries or particular denominations insisted was necessary to adopting faith in any part.[45] The inclusion of lower ranking white seaman as part of a general Protestant worldview in contrast to other religious beliefs on American ships will be further explored in the next chapter.

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[44] Jacob A. Hazen, *Five Years before the Mast* (Philadelphia: W.P. Hazard, 1854), 208, 212–16, https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/011204788.
[45] Glenn, *Jack Tar's Story the Autobiographies and Memoirs of Sailors in Antebellum America*, 170–74.

Although most of the time sailing vessels were entirely inhabited by men, women were never far from the minds of most sailors. While the longing for or repudiation of domesticity and sentimentality among sailors has been studied by other maritime historians, sailor's lingering ties to women at home have often been considered separately from religious belief and practice. However, whether missing mothers and the comforts of home, wives and the bonds of marriage, or dreaming of temporary unions with beautiful native women, often sailors wrote of such yearnings in religious terms. For the pious sailor, domesticity and the religion of the home were conjoined in sailors' minds, while illicit sex in foreign ports were spiritual temptations to be avoided. Such sailors commended missionaries' efforts both to restrain the sex trade and to convert native groups to both Christianity and Western cultural mores.

However, sailors were not a homogenous group and not all sailors held religious or physical associations with Christian women in high esteem—particularly among the lower ranks that filled the forecastle, though this group is least likely to leave surviving written accounts of their thoughts. Through documentation of their actions by others however, it is obvious that many at sea agreed with neither the restraint of their proper Victorian crewmates or the prohibitions of foreign missionaries that attempted to interfere with the so-called licentious behavior of native groups in which free spirited sailors wished to partake. Such sailors felt free to take their comforts from women—whether physical or spiritual—when and how they wished without the moderating influence of religious or political authorities. In the end, sailors whether pious or profane, engaged with women in ways that—in their own minds or those of their critics—were tinged with both spiritual and physical meaning, and the continuing impact of women's religious influence on sailors was felt even thousands leagues across the sea. The sailing ship as a community, particularly as one of multiple races and faith backgrounds, and that

environment's impact on the ability to practice religion and on sailors' perceptions of diversity in religious practices will be examined in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Mixed Decks – Religion and Racial Diversity at Sea in Sailors' Writings

While sailors displayed a variety of individual religious practices at sea and attended churches of various denominations while on shore, sailors were by no means universally accepting of all religious beliefs. Richard Henry Dana claimed in *Two Years Before the Mast* that "sailors are almost all believers; but their notions and opinions are unfixed and at loose ends" and the study of sailors' writings shows that many more seamen claimed faith than previously supposed by sailors' contemporaries and modern historians. However, sailors' beliefs were not so unfixed that they truly embraced religious or racial plurality on American ships.[1] The "loose" beliefs found in the majority of sailors' journals and logs examined for this study may have eschewed specific church affiliation, but sailors' religious writings by and large still represented the "simplified and unifying Protestantism" that was the foundation of Christianity in many American homes in the nineteenth century.[2] For the most part, sailors beliefs maintained the evangelical Protestant emphasis that propelled the Second Great Awakening, rang through the religious readings given them by mothers and missionaries, and appeared in their own religious reflections at sea. Though relatively ecumenical and independent in the practice of their Protestantism, in keeping with conditions at sea discussed in chapter one, sailors frequently expressed negative reactions towards other systems of belief, especially when found in tandem with differences in race. As such, white Christian sailors can be read as part of both the "drive

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[1] Richard Henry Dana, *Two Years before the Mast*, Harpers' Family Library; No. CVI (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1840), 46, https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000392702.
[2] McDannell, *The Christian Home in Victorian America, 1840-1900*, 143.

towards Protestant hegemony" and the hardening of racial hierarchy in the early nineteenth century that occurred on the mainland and sailors carried with them to sea.[3]

Evaluating race and religion at sea is a particularly meaningful because of the unique environment of the sailing ship—a simultaneously very compressed and hierarchical, yet unusually diverse miniature society—that created both heightened intimacy and potential for conflict. The maritime world brought white Protestant sailors in close and sustained contact with sailors of varying skin tones who held a multiplicity of views both within and outside Christianity. American sailors worked and lived aboard ship side by side with black sailors from newly formed African American denominations, Catholic immigrants, and native sailors taken on from Pacific and Indian Ocean ports who practiced religions completely unaligned with Judeo-Christian faiths. Depending on the officers and crew, a ship could offer a haven of relative freedom and social mobility for sailors of color away from the concerns of land or be a hotbed of racial abuse and violence. With the expanding reach of American vessels looking for new ports of trade, cross-racial interactions at sea during this period were frequent occurrences—within the crew as well as from ship to shore. To understand these varying levels of religious and racial difference and forge a distinctive American and Christian identity for themselves, white Protestant sailors used overlapping lenses of religion, race, and class to evaluate their crewmates beliefs and those of unfamiliar groups they met on shore. In the process, such sailors constructed narratives that often reveal more about how they wished to see the practices of sailors of color and native groups than it does the actual beliefs of those under their scrutiny.

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[3] Dickson D. Bruce Jr., *Earnestly Contending: Religious Freedom and Pluralism in Antebellum America* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2013), 22, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uark-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3444099.

Previous historians have traditionally examined race at sea by limiting their scope to a single group of color—African Americans have been particularly well studied by W. Jeffrey Bolster and others—but religion has often been a minor subtheme of such work. However, recognizing the role of religion in influencing the tone of racial interactions must include not just one group but the many other ethnicities and religions represented on board American vessels, all of whom white Protestant sailors reacted to and defined their own identities against. The relative dearth of records left by sailors of color in archival collections challenges the ability to present first-hand accounts of religious experience from sailors of all races on American ships. Uneven literacy levels among sailors of color likely resulted in fewer logs being kept in the first place. While literacy rates for African Americans were highest in New England and the mid-Atlantic, the areas where most black sailors hailed from—and especially among church members who learned to read in Sunday Schools—African American literacy rates still lagged well behind those for the white population through the nineteenth century.[4] Other sailors of color like those from the Pacific also faced challenges from low literacy levels in addition to cultural backgrounds that emphasized orality over written record keeping. Collecting bias in maritime historical organizations, which were typically founded by white New England Protestant families, means that even if logbooks or sea journals were created by sailors of color, they were less likely to have been preserved. As a result, this chapter relies more heavily on published memoirs and autobiographies to attempt to capture the perspective of sailors of color where they

[4] Violet J. Harris, "African-American Conceptions of Literacy: A Historical Perspective," *Theory Into Practice* 31, no. 4 (1992): 279, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1476309; Sylvia R. Frey and Betty Wood, "The First Awakening: Patterns of Founding," in *Come Shouting to Zion*, African American Protestantism in the American South and British Caribbean to 1830 (Chapel Hill, N.C: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 85–86, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9780807861585_frey.8.

can be found. In addition, reading against the grain of white sailors' journals can reveal traces of the religious preferences of sailors of color in addition to the religious and racial prejudices of their crewmates.

African Americans were one of the most visible and numerous groups of sailors of color on American vessels, especially early in the nineteenth century. Between 1800 and 1820 almost twenty percent of seafaring jobs were held by black men. African Americans were most heavily represented in sailing crews in New England and the Mid-Atlantic in the early nineteenth century, but they would not have been an unusual site in ports all along the coast.[5] Many black sailors were freemen descended from maritime slaves of the eighteenth century allowed to keep a portion of their wages as inducement not to desert, who pooled such savings eventually purchasing their and their families' freedom. This combined with gradual abolition in the New England eventually contributed to a substantial population of free black sailors. Black sailors were drawn to maritime jobs by the ability to travel and gain skill and status as paid seamen that offered a chance at social mobility. While being a sailor was considered by many to be a disreputable occupation for white men, for black mariners, it was one of a very few job markets that readily accepted black applicants and paid wages comparable to those earned by white sailors. Steady wages and access to national and international news and ideas often made black sailors' prominent members of African American society on shore. Black sailors helped fund, and many led, black fraternal and religious organizations as well as abolition societies in the early nineteenth century.[6]

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[5] W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997), 2–6, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uark-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3300703.
[6] Bolster, 26–28, 36.

In contrast to W. Jeffrey Bolster's claim that black sailors were "more likely to be religious" and that "religion created a racial divide" in maritime culture, the intersection of race and faith aboard ship was more complex than labelling white sailors irreligious and black sailors religious.[7] As documented in chapter one, the writings of many white sailors reveal that they frequently participated in religious practices aboard ship, and many affirmed a belief in God. It is not religion itself, but rather how religion was practiced in tandem with race that divided white sailors from sailors of color. While as Bolster found, some white sailors condemned or mocked religious practices wholesale, they also often used racial perceptions to approve those practices that fit their preferred religious narratives and aligned with their own spiritual practices. Meanwhile sailors of color also used implementations of religion to differentiate themselves from their white crewmates—creating spaces of religious freedom and independence, and even leadership, for themselves on ship despite the racial or religious prejudice they faced at sea.

The most successful black mariner of his generation, Paul Cuffe, participated in leadership on multiple religious reform movements including abolition, education, missions, and benevolent outreach. The son of a manumitted black man from West Africa and a Native American woman, Cuffe learned to sail as a teenager signed aboard a whaler before the Revolution and rose through the ranks to captain and beyond into a position of wealth unknown to most mariners of the time, white or black. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Cuffe owned and built his own ships, ran a thriving merchant company, and owned extensive property in Westport, Massachusetts. Cuffe was an active and devout Quaker, whose support was also solicited by black and white leaders of other religious denominations for abolitionist and educational projects. In 1810, Cuffe began planning a trip to Sierra Leone, interested in both

[7] Bolster, 123.

establishing trade with the free black settlements there as well as investigating the living conditions of the settlers, both spiritual and physical.[8] For all the notoriety attending the venture of a black captain with an all-black crew sailing for Africa, and Cuffe's subsequent invitation to England to meet with prominent British abolitionists, missionaries, and traders, Cuffe's log of the time at sea is in many ways very unremarkable. Cuffe's entries reflect many of the same religious practices and a similar spiritual outlook as white captains of similar religious devotion and class.

Like his white cohorts, Cuffe's primary religious observances aboard ship were religious reading and reflection, although the content of his reading varied from the white norm of more domestic spiritual texts. On the way to Sierra Leone in 1811 on board his brig *Traveller*, Cuffe noted reading "Clarkson's Records on Abolishing Slavery." *The History of the Rise, Progress, & Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-trade, by the British Parliament* is a two-volume work published in 1808 by Thomas Clarkson, a British Anglican abolitionist and Member of Parliament instrumental in the outlawing of the British slave trade. Clarkson's writing is dense with Biblical quotations and a joint spiritual and legal analysis refuting slavery. Though Cuffe was fully literate, and well-read for a largely self-educated sailor, he evidently struggled with the heavy theological text, but persisted in its study even at sea. Cuffe wrote the work often "baptized my mind" though "at home would land very over my head but in giving my mind and dependence on the allwise protector, it would afford me consolation and comfort."[9] Though no other white sailor in the logs sampled for this study has recorded the religious reading

[8] Paul Cuffe and Rosalind Cobb Wiggins, *Captain Paul Cuffe's Logs and Letters, 1808-1817: A Black Quaker's "voice from within the Veil* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1996), 48–52, 57–61.
[9] Cuffe and Wiggins, 103.

of abolitionist material, support of moral and economic reforms based on religious reasoning was a key feature of the Second Great Awakening.

Cuffe shared a hope in the ability of religion to improve daily life with the white Christian captains seen in chapter one who encouraged spiritual and physical reforms such as temperance or provided their crew with Bibles in the hopes of improving their behavior. Cuffe was also likewise committed to the importance of access to scripture for self-interpretation. Cuffe gave copies of the Bible as formal gifts when establishing trade relations with the King Thomas of Sierra Leone—to whom he also presented a copy of the works of Elizabeth Webb, an American Quaker missionary of eighteenth century. In addition to gifts for leaders, Cuffe noted the lack of bibles in family homes when he visited towns in Sierra Leone and so picked up a crate of 80 bibles in London to distribute to black settlers on a return voyage. As seen in white sailors' writings, Cuffe also attended religious services while in port regardless of the denomination available. Though Cuffe was a lifelong member of the Quaker faith, he attended both Baptist and Methodist meetings while in Sierra Leone, sometimes both on the same day, as noted on November 24, 1811, when he "went to the Baptist meeting in the morning and in the afternoon the Great Methodist meeting where I had a good service."[10]

As white sailors did, Cuffe likewise offered prayer and thanksgiving for safe passage when danger was past. Cuffe's journey was attended by many dangers to an all-black crew sailing between Britain and Africa in the tense atmosphere just prior to the War of 1812. Cuffe had one crew member impressed into the British navy on his way to London, and several more attempts were made to claim other members of his crew along the way. Cuffe also weathered the

[10] Cuffe and Wiggins, 108, 149, 170–71.

illness of himself and members of his crew that delayed the return voyage for America for months. Thus, at last on April 6, 1812, nearing home he noted with satisfaction that "all hands employed in ships duty all well from which I desire to be thankful to the Great Preserver of the universe & world without end amen."[11] Cuffe had planned another trip to Sierra Leone after the end of the war but passed away before it could be accomplished. However, in part due to his success and wealth, Cuffe left a rich archival record of personal letters, business records, and the logbooks of his Sierra Leone voyages preserved in the Free Library in his hometown of Westport, Massachusetts—a trove of manuscripts largely unique in the world of black sailors of the early nineteenth century. Cuffe's middle-class status and "unifying" Protestant religious views largely meshed with the prevailing white Protestant middle class worldview. Though they may have differed over the implementation of abolition or other specific doctrines, Cuffe largely had the support and approval of the religious establishment on land and those who held onto similar beliefs while at sea.

However, when race and class intersected in religious beliefs that were more in keeping with the enthusiastic populist religion of the poor and religious practices held over from traditional African worship, reactions were disapproving. White Protestant sailors used race as well as religion to distance themselves from practices that ruffled the quiet, cerebral Protestantism of self-study and reflection that they were comfortable with at sea. The mass conversion of black Americans to Christianity did not begin until the eighteenth century, which saw the rise of enthusiastic religion during the First Great Awakening. Features of enthusiastic worship like call and response, rhythmic movement, and being taken by the spirit had corollaries to traditional African religions that resonated with new black converts to Christianity. By the

[11] Cuffe and Wiggins, 206.

Second Great Awakening, black Christians were joining evangelical Protestant churches in large numbers. The most popular denominations for African Americans were the Baptists and Methodists, sects which encouraged public displays of devotion along with other hallmarks of the revivalism discussed in chapter one like egalitarianism and education. However, there was a growing divide between treatment of black Christians in the Northern and Southern branches of such churches, as Southerners pushed back against black participation in white churches and their religious education. In the north, white and black religious leaders clashed over equality within the church, leading to the founding of African American lead denominations like the A.M.E. (African Methodist Episcopal) and African Baptist Church. Black lead denominations not only gave black Christians an escape from racism found in white churches, but also a chance to lead their own congregations—providing African American believers independence and authority to order communities of worship as they saw fit.[12] However, long standing negative associations in Protestant ideology with giving free reign to the passions as a gateway to sin made many Christians suspicious of large displays of religious fervency regardless of race. Some white converts to Christianity also participated in enthusiastic religion, particularly among the working classes who flocked to camp revivals, and for whom the displays could be a form of popular resistance to the middle classes' cultural dominance. However, the popularity of enthusiastic worship among white Protestants began to gradually diminish over the nineteenth century across the classes, even as it remained common in black congregations.[13]

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[12] Cedrick May, *Evangelism and Resistance in the Black Atlantic, 1760-1835* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 4, 15, 17, 22, 99, ProQuest Ebook Central; Sylvia R. Frey and Betty Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion*, African American Protestantism in the American South and British Caribbean to 1830 (University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 118–24, 152-154, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9780807861585_frey.

[13] Bruce, *Earnestly Contending*, 49; May, *Evangelism and Resistance in the Black Atlantic, 1760-1835*, 19–22.

For sailors, even in the lower ranks that otherwise might be expected to have seen the appeal of enthusiastic religion based on demographics, there was little evidence of enthusiasm for fervent displays of worship among white mariners. The forms of religious practice noted among white common seamen in logbooks and journals tend to echo the practices of their more middle-class crewmates—religious reading and attending church on shore independently being the most common practices. This perhaps was motivated by concerns with ship order or intrusion into the independence of others as well as a desire to, at least outwardly, present a stoic, masculine front as discussed in chapter two. When black sailors did not adhere to these norms of quiet personal religious devotion, the reaction from officers and other crew was often swift and violent. A black sailor on board the *Panther* in 1822 was beaten by an officer with "a piece of treble sinnet"—a triple braided length of rope—to discourage his "Methodistical exhortation" that interrupted work and caused crewmates to label him "the common disturber of the peace."[14]

Another fervent evangelical, John Jea, a former slave and itinerant black preacher, signed on as a cook on a transatlantic vessel in the early nineteenth century to gain passage from Boston to Liverpool, where he felt called to preach. Jea, who could read but not write, published an autobiography written with help of friends in England in 1811.[15] In his reflections on his first voyage, Jea remembered that the crew were constantly laughing at his inexperience, which "made me the more afraid and terrified." Even more disturbing for the religious cook, Jea wrote that on seeing him praying during a storm, his fellow sailors called him "a Jonah" and threatened

[14] Bolster, *Black Jacks*, 124.
[15] As Jea could not write, thus having no logbook to refer to, and others were involved in the writing of his autobiography, it is perhaps more important to read Jea's work for its representations of religious fervor and his emotional response to his crewmates rather than for an expectation of exacting correctness of the details of the voyages.

to throw him overboard.[16] It is possible that in addition to his crewmates' reaction to his unfamiliarity with the ship and racial prejudice, that Jea's penchant for enthusiastic religion also marked him for ill treatment from the crew. If the crew noticed Jea praying in the middle of a storm, in which they would likely have been busy maintaining the ship in a loud and chaotic environment of whipping sails, creaking ropes, rain, and thunder, it likely indicates that his prayers were not quiet or confined to his galley but likely rather took place loudly and in a conspicuous position on deck. Although, it is possible that the ire of his crewmates was not only on religious grounds due to Jea's fervency, but that he added a distraction during a time of strenuous effort when sailors needed to concentrate. Whether such taunts were made in mockery in hazing a green hand, or as serious threats, Jea's writing shows the fear he felt in an unfamiliar and hostile environment at sea. When lightening later struck the ship, killing two sailors and wounding seven more, Jea interpreted it as punishment from God for their ill treatment of him, writing:

> At the time this dreadful carnage happened, I was standing about seven or eight feet, from them; my eye-sight was taken from me for four or five minutes, but my soul gave glory to God for what was done. When I recovered my sight I saw the captain standing in the cabin gangway, and the cabin-boy and three passengers behind him, lamenting greatly, ringing their hands, and plucking their hair; the captain crying out--"O! my men, we are all lost!" I then took the boldness to speak unto him, and said, "Why do you cry and lament? You see that your ship is not hurt, and that the Lord has been pleased to spare your life; and what the Lord has done is right."[17]

Jea's boldness in directly censuring the captain was characteristic of his fervent preaching and evangelism while at sea. Despite the difficulties in his first voyage, Jea signed on as a cook for several more vessels using the position to finance his travels as an itinerant preacher

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[16] John Jea, *The Life, History, and Unparalleled Sufferings of John Jea, the African Preacher. Compiled and Written by Himself.* (Portsea, UK: The author, 1811), 48–50, https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/jeajohn/jeajohn.html.
[17] Jea, 49–52.

explaining "as St. Paul saith, 'I would rather labour with my hands than be burdensome to the church." Unabashed in his ministry, on his later voyages Jea would repeatedly confront his officers and crewmates with religious reproofs and exhortations, despite sailors on multiple voyages telling him, they "did not want any of my preaching." Jea's rejection by his crewmates could be based on anti-black or anti-enthusiastic prejudice, or a combination of the two that rendered his fervent religious exhortations less acceptable than the milder, more respectable reproofs coming from the white women in white sailors' lives. Regardless of the reason for their dismissal of Jea's preaching, to Jea's telling, many of these scoffing seamen were struck down by God shortly thereafter, by a variety of means including being hit "by the dart of death" on the yard arm and drowning in addition to lightning. Regardless of whether the crewmates died because of rejecting Jea's preaching or as casualties of the high mortality rate of working at sea in the nineteenth century, what is clear is that Jea continued to assert his religious convictions vigorously despite repeated rejections and abuse from white crewmates.[18]

Through the 1820s, as limitations on black mobility and freedom grew on land, racial barriers were increasingly directed at the sea amongst white panic over attempted slave revolts, some of which involved black mariners, like ex-sailor Denmark Vesey. By the late 1830s and early 1840s, stringent restrictions were implemented even in Northern states to limit the numbers of black crew members on a vessel and restrict them to roles such as steward and cook.[19] The duties of such positions—which required protecting the profits of vessel owners by preparing meals out of often spoiled foods and enforcing rationing—did not endear them to their fellow sailors.[20] As well, food preparation was considered "feminine" work and beneath the dignity of

[18] Jea, 67–68, 78–79.
[19] Bolster, "To Feel Like a Man," 1174, 1178, 1194–96.
[20] Bolster, *Black Jacks,* 81–82.

white crew, adding gendered bias to racial prejudice.[21] Even prior to the 1830s, black sailors, and particularly cooks and stewards like Jea, were disproportionately targeted by officers with greater amounts of violence for minor offenses compared to their white shipmates.[22]

On Josiah Quincy's vessel in 1810, the captain beat the black cook multiple times before he finally jumped overboard and drowned after attempting to escape from abuse on the ship. Although Quincy himself had frequently written disparagingly about the cook being "dirty, intemperate, & ignorant" and thought the captain had been lenient with him considering, Guild mustered a curt entry of "May God almighty have mercy on his soul" to mark his passing.[23] According to a log kept by Stephen Reynolds aboard the *New Hazard* on a voyage from 1810-1813, the ship's black cook and steward were flogged or beaten multiple times each on the journey, far more frequently than any other crew members. Their punishments were for such infractions as being sick and refusing to distribute rotten pork, at times with no reason at all given.[24] As a punishment designed to deter others through a combination of public humiliation and intense violence, flogging was considered ideal for environments in which a small number of people maintain control over larger numbers in an isolated environment—conditions found on the plantation and prison as well as the sailing ship. Even merchant captains were permitted to flog crew members to death, if necessary, to ensure compliance with orders, and flogging continued sporadically in the navy even after its abolition in 1850, which was driven in part by

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[21] Bolster, 167.
[22] Daniel Vickers and Vince Walsh, *Young Men and the Sea: Yankee Seafarers in the Age of Sail* (Yale University Press, 2005), 239–41, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5vkv68.
[23] Guild, "Journals, 1810-1813.," 1, 7, 21–22.
[24] Stephen Reynolds and F. W. Howay, *The Voyage of the New Hazard to the Northwest Coast, Hawaii and China, 1810-1813* (Salem: Peabody Museum, 1938), x–xi, 11, 58, 141, https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001271135.

campaigns from religious reformers.[25] Richard Henry Dana's captain even explicitly compared his power to that of a plantation overseer, yelling out when flogging one of Dana's white crewmates for a minor offense that "You've got a driver over you! Yes, a slave driver, a negro driver! I'll see who'll tell me he isn't a negro slave!"[26] Sailors were one of the few groups—along with slaves and convicts—in which flogging was still prominently conducted by the 1840s. The significance of the racial overtones of the punishment was not lost on sailors. Orson Shattuck described the flogging of a black sailor, Henry Clay, in October 1850 after Clay got into an altercation with the first mate during Clay's time at the wheel when Clay refused an order from the officer. Being called to an all hands to witness the punishment, Shattuck wrote, ""it was a painful sight to me, not but what he deserved it I think he did, but it seems too degrading and I think he could have been punished more severely some other way."[27]

However, black cooks and sailors' lot was not only one of abuse as some successfully navigated the prejudices associated with the position and took advantage of other associations with the work to assert their religious beliefs and influence the white crew. Richard Henry Dana in *Two Years before the Mast* notes the cook and the steward on his ship were the only black crew onboard. Of the cook, Dana writes that "Our cook, a simple hearted old African, who had been through a good deal in his day, was rather seriously inclined, always going to church twice a day while on shore and reading the Bible on Sunday in the galley, talked to the crew about spending their Sabbaths badly."[28] Chiding the other crew members for their lack of piety seems to indicate that the cook felt confident enough in his position on board to interact with and

[25] Bolster, *Black Jacks*, 70–73.
[26] Dana, *Two Years before the Mast*, 128.
[27] Frances (Ship : 1826-1853) and Shattuck, "[Logbook of the Frances (Ship," 10.
[28] Dana, *Two Years before the Mast*, 46.

attempt to alter the behavior of his white shipmates. Dana describes the cook as both serious minded and old—the latter could be relative given the very young age of many sailors—but the cook's age and demeanor likely gave him more authority when with speaking with the younger white crew than younger more enthusiastic black cooks like Jea, who would have been in his twenties or thirties during his sailing career. While previous historians have shown that black sailors associated their roles with exerting masculinity within the African American community in earning wages and providing for families, the feminization of the role of cook in the eyes of his white shipmates who associated cooking and food preparation with maternal roles might play to his advantage in this situation.[29] Having a significantly older person in a domestic role giving quiet, corrective spiritual instruction may have been in keeping with white Protestant expectations of feminized roles and made the crew more amenable to his message than the response given to a younger more assertive black man such as Jea. While Dana may not necessarily have gone to church with the cook or read the Bible with him in the galley, he seems to have been familiar enough with his routines to indicate a level of intimacy, and perhaps influence, despite their difference in status and racial backgrounds.

African Americans were not the only sailors on American vessels whose skin color or religion "othered" them in the eyes of white Protestant crewmembers. The sailing ship was almost always multicultural, as ships travelling long distances often needed to pick up fresh hands due to crew losses from illness, death, or desertion. Having locals aboard who could help navigate treacherous areas at sea and cultural differences in port was a distinct benefit to those in unfamiliar waters. Richard Henry Dana claimed that "more than three fourths of the seamen in

[29] W. Jeffrey Bolster, ""Every Inch a Man" : Gender in the Lives of African American Seamen, 1800-1860" in Creighton and Norling, *Iron Men, Wooden Women*, 140–44.

our merchant vessels are foreigners."[30] While Dana's statistics may have been high, sharing the ship with foreign crewmates were a part of regular life for American sailors.[31] From research compiled on crew lists by Margaret Creighton, outbound whaling vessels in the early nineteenth century left New England with 5-10% foreign sailors, but the percentage of foreign sailors increased as voyages wore on and new hands were needed. Customs checks at Chile and Hawaii, common ports of call mid-voyage, showed a rise to 20-40% foreign sailors on American vessels once well into the Pacific. On Josiah Guild's merchant vessel on the return voyage to the United States from Europe, he noted that five of thirteen hands had "dusky bosoms" making the crew thirty-eight percent sailors of color, though how many were American and how many foreign was not noted.[32] Likely on some vessels the share of foreign sailors went even higher but was undisclosed, as after the passage of an 1817 law requiring American vessels to have at least two-thirds American citizens, captains had encouragement to massage the numbers to show higher numbers of American sailors.[33]

These foreign-born sailors could fluctuate in their inclusion with or distinction from the "white" crew, as white sailors were as likely as their counterparts on land to make sense of their identities in an increasingly diverse world via an "obsession with categories of otherness."[34] Robert Rogers, clerk to the supercargo aboard the *Franklin* out of Boston in 1842, in describing the crew early in the voyage, called out two Portuguese sailors and an Irish boy separately from the mass description of white hands from New England. Possac saying of the two Portuguese

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[30] Dana, *Two Years before the Mast*, 469.
[31] None of the crew lists in the journals consulted in this survey had even a fifty percent foreign born crew, let alone seventy-five percent, but every vessel did have several hands from foreign countries.
[32] Guild, "Journals, 1810-1813.," 233.
[33] Creighton, *Rites and Passages*, 215–19.
[34] Bruce, *Earnestly Contending*, 70.

sailors that they were "quite handsome fellows but as ignorant and dull as their marlin spikes."[35] Complicating sailors understanding of ethnic backgrounds, sailors claiming Portuguese heritage could be of varying skin tones depending on whether they hailed from Iberia or a Portuguese speaking colonial area. Josiah Quincy recorded that the black cook much abused and maligned on his vessel "calls himself Portuguise"… "his lingo is the French mixed with Portuguise."[36]

Beyond skin tone, a method of distinguishing whether foreign sailors were considered white was whether they were Protestant or Catholic. John Randall on the *Cleora* in 1852 described the Irish cooper on board "as pugnacious as the sons of the Green Isle generally are." Such stereotypes of sailors from Portuguese or Irish backgrounds as ignorant, lazy, or violent were likely influenced by anti-Catholic sentiment. As Protestants pushed for cultural dominance on the mainland in the mid-nineteenth century, anti-Catholic propaganda was rife on the mainland. A flood of immigration from Ireland and Southern Europe in the 1830s and 1840s of poor and working-class Irish and Italian families escaping famine and political instability doubled the numbers of Catholics in the United States twice within the span of two decades. Protestants watching the number of Catholic churches in their towns and cities swell saw the sudden influx as a threat to their cultural and numerical supremacy, particularly on the eastern seaboard. Combining anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic sentiment, an explosion of tracts, magazines, and newspapers pushed images of Catholics immigrants as criminals or duped tools of the Catholic church, pictured as an oppressive, authoritarian institution that was inherently un-American in belief and identity.[37]

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[35] Rogers, "MSS 0097, Item 064 - Journal of a Voyage from Boston to Rio de Janeiro on Board Ship Franklin," 13.
[36] Guild, "Journals, 1810-1813.," 1, 7.
[37] Bruce, *Earnestly Contending,* 26–27, 136–38.

From the writings of sailors, such prejudices against Catholicism extended to the sea as well. Josiah Guild, attending a Catholic church with his captain in France while waiting for his ship to sail home, wrote slightingly of the iconography on display in the small church calling the altarpiece a "wretched image of our saviour upon the cross."[38] Other sailors' writings refer slightingly to the "superstitions" of Catholicism—somewhat paradoxically as sailors were themselves considered to be remarkably superstitious—and denigrated Catholicism being held as the state religion as evidence of backward and oppressive governments. Even Jacob Hazen, the navy seamen who rebuffed outreach from a female Protestant missionary and proclaimed himself destined for hell, still echoed the Protestant majority perspective when visiting European ports. Hazen disdainfully proclaiming about Minorca that its inhabitants like in "most other Catholic countries, are passionately fond of religious parades, shows, masquerades, and fandagoes. One third of that time, which in intelligent communities would be passed in the study of books... Idleness and ostentation seem as inseperably connected as ignorance and vice."[39] However, at some junctures, sailors' disapproval of Catholicism seemed as much tinged with jealousy over their religious festivals as religious bias. Richard Henry Dana, while watching an Italian ship near his in port celebrating Easter with three days of shore leave, reported enviously "while perched up in the rigging, covered with tar and engaged in our disagreeable work, we saw these fellows going ashore in the morning, and coming off again at night, in high spirits." Dana concluded, "So much for being Protestants. There's no danger of Catholicism's spreading in New England; Yankees can't afford the time to be Catholics. American ship-masters get nearly three weeks more labor out of their crews in the course of a year, than the masters of vessels from

[38] Guild, "Journals, 1810-1813.," 236–37.
[39] Hazen, *Five Years before the Mast*, 307.

Catholic countries."[40] Though his tone is tongue-in-cheek, Dana's writing still reflects the presumption that "American ship-masters" would not be Catholic themselves, reinforcing American Protestant ideas of the innate foreignness of Catholicism.

In addition to serving alongside African Americans and Catholics of various ethnicities, American whaling crews hunting in the South Seas and merchant vessels travelling to Asia often hired Pacific Islander crewmen.[41] Such crewmen were called "Kanakas" in crew lists—Kanaka means man or human being in Native Hawaiian. Perhaps due to misunderstanding in early contact, the generic term was applied by Europeans not only to all Hawaiians (also called Sandwich Islanders at the time), but any peoples originating from the South Pacific.[42] The practice of hiring Pacific Islander sailors was also common in the U.S. Navy. Lt. Robert Johnson on board the *USS Porpoise* in December 1840 listed among his crew, "Billy Pitt, Jim Koon, John Porpoise, Paul Pry, Jo Barber, Frank Kid, Manlius Kyner, Jim Crow, + Harry Buck (Kanakas)."[43] According to Richard Henry Dana, the unwillingness of white crewmembers to attempt proper pronunciations of native names often led to Kanakas being "called by any names which the captain or crew may choose to give them."[44] The freedom taken by white superiors in naming Pacific Islander crewmembers often made them the recipients of fanciful, and frequently derogatory, racialized names. The presence of a Jim Koon and Jim Crow in the list of Kanakas on board the *Porpoise* imply that white crew members viewed their Pacific Islander shipmates as

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[40] Dana, *Two Years before the Mast,* 167.
[41] Susan Lebo, "Native Hawaiian Whalers in Nantucket, 1820-60," *Nantucket Historical Association* (blog), Accessed October 26, 2020.
[42] *American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fifth Edition*. S.v. "Kanaka." Retrieved November 25 2020 from https://www.thefreedictionary.com/Kanaka
[43] Robert Johnson and Department of the Navy. U.S. Exploring Expedition. 1838-1842, USS Porpoise, 12/1/1840 - 3/25/1841, Series: Journals and Logs Kept by Expedition Members, 1838 - 1842, 1838, National Archives, Washington, D.C., 16.
[44] Dana, *Two Years before the Mast,* 180.

racially akin to African Americans due to their dark skin. The choice of names “Jim Crow” and “Jim Koon” indicates the crew’s familiarity and engagement with derisive racial caricatures from the blackface minstrel shows that were wildly popular in early nineteenth century America.[45]

Richard Henry Dana’s crew worked with Kanakas while gathering hides in San Diego harbor. He reflected fondly on his Kanakan bunkmates in *Two Years before the Mast* saying that they were the “most interesting, intelligent, and kind-hearted people that I ever fell in with.” It seems doubtful that the Kanakas could have said the same for the bulk of their interactions with white crewmembers. Dana reported that the Kanakas were “frequently abused by insolent officers of vessels” or purposely given less food or medicine than the rest of the crew. Pacific Islanders also faced confrontation with negative stereotypes of South Sea natives in maritime culture. The most pervasive of these was being presumed to be cannibals, famously portrayed and reinforced in popular culture by Herman Melville’s Queequeg in *Moby Dick* in 1851. Some of the cultural distance between white and Kanaka sailors may have been exacerbated due to language, as Dana wrote "Their language, I could only learn orally, for they had not any books among them, though many of them had been taught to read and write by the missionaries at home." No logs or journals kept by Kanaka sailors were found in this research, it is possible that some may have existed and not have been preserved, but also likely that due to the primacy of oral tradition in Pacific Island culture that keeping written logbooks was not prioritized by Pacific Islander sailors while at sea. Many however spoke English, as Dana mentioned having long conversations with a Hawaiian sailor "named 'Mr. Bingham,' after the missionary at Oahu"...."Mr Bingham was a sort of patriarch among them, and was always treated with great

[45] Brian Rouleau, “Jim Crow Girdles the Globe,” in *With Sails Whitening Every Sea*, 1st ed., Mariners and the Making of an American Maritime Empire (Cornell University Press, 2014), 43–44, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt1287cd0.7.

respect.... I spent hours in talking with this old fellow about Tamahamaha, the Charlemagne of the Sandwich Islands... and also about the customs of his country in his boyhood, and the changes which had been made by the missionaries...Certainly, the history of no people on the globe can show anything like so rapid an advance."[46] Few sailors commented specifically on their Pacific Islander crewmates religious practices other than similar comments regarding the islands' mass conversion to Christianity. Dana's commendation of the missionaries' work in converting Hawaiians from their native beliefs and practices echoes other middle-class sailors like Orson Shattuck whose approval of indigenous populations was directly related to their level of Christianization and adoption of Western mores. It is likely the desire to present the successes of missionaries and a narrative of Christian progress in such accounts would lead to the occlusion of any instances of syncretism that may have been expected in such a recently converted population. Although it is also likely that white sailors could have observed native religious practices like prayers or songs onboard and not understood them as such due to lack of understanding of the language and practices or have discounted any traditionally native practices as irrelevant.

A group even more unfamiliar to American Protestants—more frequently found on British vessels, but also making their way into American crews—were sailors of Middle Eastern or South Asian origin, referred to as Lascars. The word originated in Persia, referring to soldiers or camp followers, and as Britain hired locals in the Middle East and then Southeast Asia to serve its far-flung imperial armies in the eighteenth century, it was broadly applied to sailors

[46] Dana, *Two Years before the Mast,* 180–82.

from those regions as well.[47] As with Kanakas, the dark skin of Lascar sailors often found them placed in the catch all category of "black" depending on the situation. Depending on their point of origin, Lascar sailors might also be practitioners of Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism or other Southeast Asian religions. Charles Nordhoff, an American sailor of the early nineteenth century who published several maritime memoirs of his time at sea, served briefly on board a Scottish ship sailing from China to Mauritius with a significant Lascar presence on board which necessitated a unique physical layout in deference to their religious needs. Nordhoff wrote, "Our bark had a barricade stretching across from the mainmast to each rail, ten feet high, which was put up every evening at sunset, and abaft of which no Lascar was allowed to come at night, while forward of it no European ventured, except when working of the vessel required it..." Nordhoff framed this barricade as part of the European crew "submitting to their prejudices in religious matters" though "the officers generally abuse them scandalously." However, despite Lascar sailors stoicism in the face of beatings, Nordhoff claimed "so slight a misdemeanor on the part of any of the Europeans as handling any of their cooking utensils, or drinking from their water cask, would produce an instantaneous remonstrance, and a repetition of the offense would no doubt create a revolt. So also, any interference with their superstitious idol worship would provoke a most sanguinary return." While Nordhoff's tone is derisive, his descriptions reveal that Lascar crew members were able to carve out a significant amount of space for themselves including "a separate galley and cook" to practice their religion away from the abusive behavior of European crew members. Their efforts also resulted in protected space for devotional worship at an altar, Nordhoff writing, "The Lascars firmly believed their prayers and offerings had propitiated the

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[47] Aaron Jaffer, *Lascars and Indian Ocean Seafaring, 1780-1860*: *Shipboard Life, Unrest and Mutiny* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell & Brewer, 2015), 1, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt17mvjwr.6.

ruler of the winds in our favor, and triumphantly adduced this as evidence of the power of their idol, whose altar was now decked with ribbons and bright-colored papers--tokens of the gratitude of his worshipers."[48] Whether approved by their white crewmates or not, Lascar sailors serving with American and British crews in the Indian Ocean and South Pacific were able to band together at times to negotiate substantial cross-racial religious accommodations.

Cross racial interactions did not only occur within crews at sea, but also from sea to land, without the intermediation of missionaries as discussed in chapter two. The most extreme cases of racial interaction often took place when sailors reached groups that they had not previously contacted. Throughout the early nineteenth century, whaling crews spread ever deeper into remote areas of the Pacific as competition increased for prized whale oil and bone. Meanwhile U.S. naval exploratory vessels vied with those of Britain and France for scientific and geographic discoveries that might add to the academic prestige, and the treasuries, of their countries. The first proposals for a small American scientific exploratory expedition were approved by the Adams administration in 1828, only to be quickly scuttled by Andrew Jackson, who approved his own much larger expedition in 1836. The United States Exploring Expedition was a venture of unprecedented size and complexity, made up of half a dozen vessels with a combined crew of 346, mostly U.S. Navy (including black and Kanaka sailors hired for the voyage) along with nine civilian artists and scientists. The expedition left in 1838 with the goal of increasing American prestige through scientific discovery, as well as opening up new commercial trade routes and creating more accurate sea charts for American merchants. The voyage would take four years and circumnavigate the world via the Antarctic Circle, the South Pacific, and the Pacific

[48] Charles Nordhoff, *The Merchant Vessel: A Sailor Boy's Voyages to See the World* (Cincinnati: Moore, Wilstach, Keys, 1856), 228–29, 239, https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/006089885.

Northwest.[49] In the process, the sailors and scientists would come into contact with many peoples previously unknown to Americans, taxing their powers of communication as well their preexisting racial and religious classifications, much of which would be recorded in their shipboard writings.

When encountering new peoples, sailors frequently drew on racial stereotypes and a growing body of "scientific" analysis of physical appearances to make assumptions about a group's cultural and moral traits. Lt. Johnson recorded about one islander group that "that they were cannibals, I have not the slightest doubt, for none other could have an expression so utterly demoniacal. Unlike most others of the Islanders they are not tattooed, but are marked with long gashes cut with some sharp instrument, probably a shell, over all parts of the body and limbs and in cases where these cuts were not yet healed it had the appearance of a steak or fish, slashed and ready for the pan."[50] Not having any way to communicate with the group under description as "their language was entirely unintelligible to the natives of either Tahiti or Oahu which we have on board," Johnson based his assessment of their spiritual depravity solely on external cues such facial expression and body modification.[51] The highlighting of scarification is intriguing especially since Johnson contrasted it negatively with tattooing, which was not only common among Pacific Islanders but also a significant portion of white sailors of the time. While tattoos were taboo on land, their familiarity at sea seems to have given Johnson another point of reference from which to further distinguish an unfamiliar and threatening new racial group by

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[49] Nathaniel Philbrick, *Sea of Glory.: America's Voyage of Discover, the US Exploring Expedition, 1838-1842.* (New York: Viking, 2003), xvii–xix, 28–32.
[50] Johnson and Department of the Navy. U.S. Exploring Expedition. 1838-1842, "USS Porpoise, 12/1/1840 - 3/25/1841," 31.
[51] Johnson and Department of the Navy. U.S. Exploring Expedition. 1838-1842, 32.

appearance alone.[52] Some African sailors in the eighteenth century were also noted to have tribal scars, called "country-marks" by white observers. The practice may have been in decline by black sailors in the 1840s, since by the mid-nineteenth century, black sailors were typically born in the U.S. rather than Africa, but it is unlikely that white sailors would have been completely unfamiliar with scarification. Unlike tattooing, scarification through branding or cutting was not widely adopted by white sailors, and seeing the fresh wounds of the unfamiliar Pacific Islander men, rather than the healed scars of black sailors, may have reinforced ideas held by the white crewmen about the perceived barbarity of the practice.[53]

Not just the physical appearance of the natives' bodies but also their clothing, residences, and lack of understanding of the religious texts and symbols of the American crew were methods of racial differentiation when sailors viewed new groups. Another officer in the expedition, George T. Sinclair aboard the *USS Relief*, frustrated when expedition officers could not make a tribal chief understand the importance of a gift of the *Book of Common Prayer*, claimed, "if there is a race on earth that has no idea of a God I think this must be a sample." Linguistic and cultural barriers were further highlighted by a gift of clothing motivated by a quote from the Bible. Sinclair was further bemused when "in obedience to dictates of humanity 'we clothed the naked'"—a native man who was given a Pea coat, cap, and pantaloons was found later wearing the Pea coat upside down and the pantaloons tied around his waist. Drawing on long standing Western presumptions about race, poverty, and character, Sinclair also linked living conditions to morality in his description of a new native group saying that their huts were "not half so good as an ordinary dog house in the U.S." followed with his observation that they were a "raskally

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[52] Simon P. Newman, "Reading the Bodies of Early American Seafarers," *William & Mary Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (January 1998): 61, https://doi.org/10.2307/2674323.
[53] Bolster, *Black Jacks*, 57, 62.

[sic] cutthroat looking set of fellows. I would not like to meet one of them alone in the dark without being armed."[54]

The use of physical observations by Sinclair and Johnson to differentiate new groups was in keeping with the evolving concepts of "racial science" of the time. Physiognomy—the systematic reading of facial features to reveal character, popularized at the end of the eighteenth century by Johann Lavater—was still a widely respected scientific field in the early nineteenth century. The influences of physiognomy when combined with other "scientific" movements such as phrenology and the growing field of physical anthropology fed beliefs that race and moral character were self-evident traits that could be distinguished into clear types by viewing. The idea that these types could then be evaluated scientifically statistically by comparing skull sizes and other criteria to confirm racial assumptions (still largely based on appearance and character) would lead to the expansion of the field of "scientific racism" applied to African Americans and other minority groups within the United States as the century progressed.[55]

Whether in interacting with unfamiliar tribes in the South Pacific or alongside African American or Portuguese sailors who had been serving on American ships for years, cross-racial and cross-religious interactions frequently occurred at various levels on American vessels. In understanding such interactions, white sailors used a base narrative of restrained evangelical Protestantism as the norm and layered understandings of class and skin color to distinguish themselves from sailors of color or those considered nonwhite for religious reasons. Where sailors of color like Paul Cuffe conformed to an acceptably middle class version of

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[54] Sinclair and Department of the Navy. U.S. Exploring Expedition. 1838-1842, "Journals of George T. Sinclair, USS Relief, 12/19/1838 - 6/15/1839," 34, 35, 72.
[55] Fernando Armstrong-Fumero, "'Even the Most Careless Observer': Race and Visual Discernment in Physical Anthropology from Samuel Morton to Kennewick Man," *American Studies* 53, no. 2 (2014): 10–12.

Protestantism, white Christian sailors, like Protestants on the mainland could be relatively supportive of their religious goals.[56] However, when sailors of color deviated from expected practices—either in more enthusiastic forms of Protestant worship or in Catholicism, let alone practicing non-Christian religions—verbal rebuffs, denigration, and violence were common responses from white sailors. However, sailors of color did not take rejection or attempts at suppression meekly but pressed for their rights to worship with varying degrees of success. From black cooks like John Jea who spoke out regardless of repeated rejection, Pacific Islander sailors who may have continued traditional practices under the cover of white ignorance of their language, or Lascar sailors who carved out literal room for their religious practice on deck, sailors of color negotiated spaces of religious independence for themselves within ships dominated by white Protestant worldviews, even if few accounts of their efforts survive from their time at sea today.

[56] This is not to say Cuffe never experienced racial discrimination either within the Quaker church or in his cross-denominational dealings with Methodists and Baptists in America and Europe, but that in general his actions and views met with more success and less rebuff than other black Christian sailors who had less wealth and/or more charismatic practices.

Conclusion

"Best say if the Lord wills, I'll shift the course & topsails
for thou knows not what a day may bring forth
Tonight there may be a prospect of a calm
so that our minds are made up we'll have this & that done on the'morrow.
The morrow comes and with it perhaps a calm or a gale
if a gale then our intents are vanished in empty air"
Elias E. Davison, translation of James 4:13-16 into sailor's slang on the ship *Hoogly*, 1831

Although shoreside viewers saw sailors as completely outside mainland religious practices and norms, often sailors' religious attitudes and practices echoed those on land. While their worship practices were augmented to fit the extreme isolation of conditions at sea, they still carried along the major features of the Second Great Awakening—a focus on self-interpretation and study of scripture and independence from hierarchical church structures. In many ways, sailors had ways of worship in common with their counterparts on the Western American frontier, though taken to an exaggerated extent due to their physical separation even from travelling camp meetings, circuit preachers, and country churches. Instead, sailors were largely confined to Bible and religious reading aboard ship in their free time and worshipping at whatever churches were available at their ports of call. At times, as in the quote above taken from the journal of Elias Davison, sailors even adapted scripture to suit maritime parlance, showing the extent of their self-interpretation and self-application of faith to the context of a sailing vessel.[1]

While separated from church membership, sailors remained influenced by spiritual ties to land from a particular source—that of the women in their lives, whose role as spiritual educators and guides was given extra weight both by the focus on self-improvement of the Second Great

[1] Davison, "Seaman's Journal," 156.

Awakening as well as the conditions at sea that magnified the lack of those qualities. Sailors often wrote in terms of religious as well as physical longing for wives, mothers, and sweethearts, whose spiritual presence they craved while apart. Less longing existed for the influence of shoreside churches and missions who tasked themselves with converting sailors to proper Christian morality. Though some sailors did applaud such efforts, others rejected the coupling of Victorian sexual mores with Christian faith and advocated forcefully, and even violently for their enjoyment of whatever few pleasures life at sea afforded them. For many sailors, this included sexual access to native women in foreign ports despite the criticism of missionaries and their more conservative crewmates.

Yet the bulk of sailors, even the more irreligious ones, still reflected the religious worldview of evangelical Protestantism found on the mainland when viewing their shipmates of other races or faiths. White sailors used class, race, and religion to craft an American identity for themselves that coupled Protestantism with a stoic, masculine, and nationalistic culture that rejected fervent displays of Protestant belief popular with Black Christians, scorned the Catholicism popular with recent immigrants, and disdained non-Christian beliefs entirely as idolatry and superstition. White Protestant sailors not only differentiated themselves from sailors of color and practitioners of other beliefs through mocking and repudiation of other practices, but at times through violence. However, many sailors of color and sailors believing in other religions used their own differences to craft spaces of religious leadership and practice for themselves, despite persecution from the disapproving Protestant majority.

While this research has made strides to address the lack of scholarship surrounding sailors practice of religion at sea, it has also opened many avenues for further exploration. Increasing the small sample size of logbooks and journals studied for this thesis would give a

more comprehensive view of the topic. The journals consulted for this research came from a total of six institutions, increasing both the total number of journals read and the number of institutions the journals are drawn from would help to address inherent bias in any one collection of sea journals. While the high percentage of sailors recording religious practices in their writing, across journals of various periods in multiple institutions, indicates that such experiences were common, it does not mean such viewpoints were universal. Just as the logs of sailors of color might have been less likely to be preserved by maritime archives primarily founded by white New England Protestant families, it is also possible that journals expressing other religious viewpoints than evangelic Protestantism may not have been selected for preservation. Reading more sources would help reveal whether there may be more dissenting opinions existing elsewhere or else confirm the numerical supremacy of the white Protestant viewpoint in surviving sailors' writings. Avenues for further research also include exploring other forms of sailor's self-expression such as scrimshaw and sea shanties to see how these mediums capture views of religion at sea.

As well, the complexities revealed in chapter three regarding the layering of racial and class identities in the acceptability of religious practice aboard ship bears further investigation. Particularly broadening research into the role of class in African American religious practices, and whether African American sailors felt estranged due to class from their African American churchgoing counterparts on shore, as well as their white crewmates, or if they maintained ties to their home churches and denominations more closely than white sailors. In addition, studying the role of violence in motivating work aboard ship merits more research, as sailors were one of the few groups where both white and black men were punished with violence in the workplace in the mid-nineteenth century, and such working conditions could easily have an impact on religious

practices and views for both white and black sailors. The role of violence in anti-Catholicism and the assertion Protestant dominance on the mainland merits more research as well to determine to what extent religious violence extended to the sea on American vessels with crewmen from Catholic backgrounds. The religious experiences of different maritime occupations could also be compared—whether the experience of religion at sea in the United States Navy was unique versus spirituality as experienced by whalers and merchant sailors.

Though there are always opportunities for further study, this thesis has demonstrated that American sailors were no stranger to religious practice or pondering questions of faith at sea, even prior to concerted efforts from the mainland to convert them. Religious life at sea was as complex and multifaceted as on land but experienced in a constrained setting that only heightened differences and strengthened bonds of similarity. Many sailors' writings show them to be very introspective of their faith, writing with passion about their beliefs, highlighting their spiritual flaws as well as their foundations. While other sailors certainly lived up to their reputations for wild behavior at times, this does not mean that even the roughest common seaman was by necessity irreligious. Many affirmed a normative version of Protestant faith as a source of comfort and hope while separated from those they loved ashore, despite—or even at times while participating in—the swearing, drinking, and womanizing around them.

While professed atheist sailors certainly existed, what many common seamen rejected was not a belief in a Judeo-Christian understanding of God or an afterlife, but the Victorian morality often coupled with Protestant religious belief in the nineteenth century. However, sailors who affirmed generic Christian belief while rejecting traditional morality often found themselves separated from missionary and benevolent groups on land, who believed both were essential to true belief. However, a common Protestant background also drew white sailors

together as a defined religious culture in contrast with the sailors of other races and beliefs they served with at sea. In the end, rather than being godless, many sailors—of a variety of religious backgrounds—held onto their faith and found it a spiritual haven when writing at sea in the face of both the wonders and perils of the deep.

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