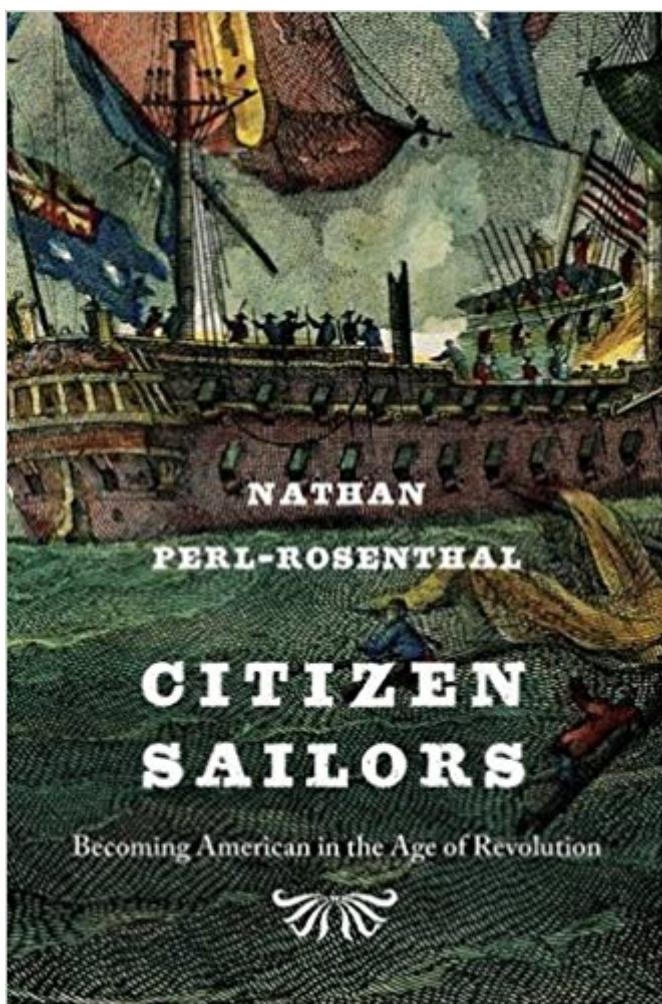


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# Citizen Sailors: Becoming American In The Age Of Revolution



## Synopsis

In the decades after the United States formally declared its independence in 1776, Americans struggled to gain recognition of their new republic and their rights as citizens. None had to fight harder than the nation's seamen, whose labor took them far from home and deep into the Atlantic world. *Citizen Sailors* tells the story of how their efforts to become American at sea in the midst of war and revolution created the first national, racially inclusive model of United States citizenship. Nathan Perl-Rosenthal immerses us in sailors' pursuit of safe passage through the ocean world during the turbulent age of revolution. Challenged by British press-gangs and French privateersmen, who considered them Britons and rejected their citizenship claims, American seamen demanded that the U.S. government take action to protect them. In response, federal leaders created a system of national identification documents for sailors and issued them to tens of thousands of mariners of all races—nearly a century before such credentials came into wider use. Citizenship for American sailors was strikingly ahead of its time: it marked the federal government's most extensive foray into defining the boundaries of national belonging until the Civil War era, and the government's most explicit recognition of black Americans' equal membership as well. This remarkable system succeeded in safeguarding seafarers, but it fell victim to rising racism and nativism after 1815. Not until the twentieth century would the United States again embrace such an inclusive vision of American nationhood.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"By skillfully coaxing narratives out of previously unorganized troves of documents, Mr. Perl-Rosenthal lets us see that the Custom House certificates "offered a glimmer of a far more inclusive model of the American nation than existed in any other official quarter." He also ably describes the complicated national identities of sailors and the human suffering of Americans wrongfully impressed." - Wall Street Journal

*Citizen Sailors* is the first book to explore how sailors were crucial to definitions of U.S. citizenship during and after the War for Independence because of their central role in national politics and because of the peculiar problems in ascertaining their nationality. Engagingly written and marshaling terrific new evidence, this important book will alter our understanding of the American Revolution, the Atlantic world, and the dynamics of national identity. (Joyce E. Chaplin, author of *Round about the Earth: Circumnavigation from Magellan to Orbit*)

With erudition and eloquence, *Citizen Sailors* tells the remarkable story of the federal government's efforts to protect the welfare of seafaring Americans, doing so without regard to region, class or, surprisingly, race. Showcasing maritime history at its best, the result is a tour de force that will appeal to general readers and specialists alike. (Eliga Gould, author of *Among the Powers of the Earth: The American Revolution and the Making of a New World Empire*)

*Citizen Sailors* is a useful reminder that Revolutionary America was more inclusive than the republic would become in the 19th century and than some might wish to make it today. By skillfully coaxing narratives out of previously unorganized troves of documents, Perl-Rosenthal lets us see that the Custom House certificates offered a glimmer of a far more inclusive model of the American nation than existed in any other official quarter. He also ably describes the complicated national identities of sailors and the human suffering of Americans wrongfully impressed. (Mark Spencer Wall Street Journal 2015-10-25)

Nathan Perl-Rosenthal is Assistant Professor of Early American and Atlantic History at the University of Southern California.

Interesting but not what I expected, though quite important. Didn't realize the citizenship issue was as widespread as it was. More of civics lesson than naval history.

Good read on the early days of the US Navy and old nautical practices. My only complaint about the book is that at times the author goes into the whole "So and so would have what if'ed this had happened."

This book investigates a little known piece of the War of American Independence. Extremely well researched and written. Anyone with an interest in the Revolutionary War will find this book full of unusual and informative history.

intriguing, thoroughly researched

A great read about the origins of how Americans became Americans!

Great background for anyone interested in the war of 1812. A must read.

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