Niklas Frykman, *The Bloody Flag: Mutiny in the Age of Atlantic Revolution*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2020. xi + 285 pp. (Cloth US\$32.95)

The Bloody Flag is both a considerable academic achievement and a joy to read. Coming after a substantial amount of scholarship on the revolutionary Atlantic, it is no small feat to carve out a niche distinctly his own, yet Niklas Frykman has achieved this. In part because he is multilingual, he takes the Anglo-based historiography of the revolutionary Atlantic and adds to it in a much-needed manner.

Frykman shows how the events of the revolutionary era affected the working men of the Atlantic rim who manned the ocean's ships. He explores how impressment butted up against the age's calls for liberty, and how in the wake of mutiny a "wave of punitive terror took the lower deck in its grip" (p. 9). Intriguingly, he reveals that many sailors were not only involved in more than one mutiny but some of them were central to revolts in different nations' navies. By doing this, he achieves the task of taking the overarching argument that seafaring men were moving anti-authoritarian ideas around the Atlantic—the thesis of such influential and pathbreaking works as Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker's *The Many-Headed Hydra* (2000) and Julius S. Scott's *The Common Wind* (2018)—suggesting more detail on how this happened.

The Bloody Flag begins with the best-known naval mutiny of the era, that at the Nore in 1797: "the largest, best organized, most sustained working-class offensive in eighteenth-century Britain" (p. 2). Stepping backward in time from that event, Frykman then contextualizes it by studying the European and Atlantic wars of the era, as well as the uprisings that swept the Atlantic rim. This includes not only the better-known French/Haitian Revolutionary context, but also events in the Swedish and Dutch navies, as well as others such as the Irish insurgency.

Frykman also adds to our understanding of the Spithead and Nore Mutinies themselves, when "more than forty thousand men on over a hundred ships rose on their officers and for nearly two months refused to do the work of war" (p. 128). He explores the pressures facing sailors at this time, such as wages failing to keep pace with inflation, and shows how impressment blunted their earning potential and ability to achieve career progression. Kept under martial law, they demanded fair treatment and the removal of overly brutal officers.

A central issue with all such histories is how to position the class-based analysis of the mutinies against the backdrop of racial slavery of the Atlantic world. European sailors are held to be remarkably egalitarian to men of non-European origins, and yet they manned slave ships. Arguably, this is the issue that is least explored in the book. It begs questions as to what the relationship

was between the “‘bloody flag’ inscribed with the words ‘death to all whites’” and the “‘bloody flag of defiance’” flown at the Nore (p. 147).

Yet Frykman treats this subject with nuance and in doing so teases out some of the complexities of this question. Dutch naval service sometimes became “debt peonage” in these years (p. 19); two French mutineers were branded GAL, or “galley slaves” (pp. 74–75); and the average number of lashes inflicted for mutiny rose substantially during this era (p. 111). Moreover, it was the loss of control over one’s life as much as the dangers of battle, Frykman argues, that created a level of stress and anger below deck that exploded into mutiny. When sailors (particularly the significant minority of African origin) called their service “slavery,” they were nevertheless more aware than most how true slavery looked throughout the Americas and were perhaps aware that all of these factors did not in the end add up to what plantation slaves were enduring.

The research that went into this volume is impressive, yet the book can also be read as a rollicking naval yarn, never dull and always bringing the lives of revolutionary-era seamen to life. It might not sit easily with those who prefer their naval histories with a liberal slice of jingoistic triumphalism, but that is not Frykman’s aim. For those interested not just in maritime rebellion but in Atlantic revolutions more generally, this book is an excellent addition to the existing literature. In tying together events in locations as widespread as Ireland, Denmark, Santo Domingo, the United States, Australia, Suriname, and Uruguay, Frykman shows how maritime history still continues to challenge national perspectives in exciting new ways. Highly recommended.

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