Adopting a largely unexplored perspective, this article attempts to understand the processes and explanations for naval emancipation during the American Civil War. The Union Navy accepted and enlisted runaway slaves earlier and in greater relative proportions than the Union Army, even though the latter receives greater attention among proponents of the “self-emancipation thesis.” This article offers three related explanations for why the Navy was more likely to accept runaway slaves. First, a host of practical and legal factors gave the Navy a significant manpower deficiency. Second, the institutional history of the Navy facilitated emancipation. Third, the diaries of officers and sailors suggest that the experience of being on blockade significantly affected white sailors and persuaded them to endorse naval emancipation. More broadly, this study has implications for students of the American Civil War. It shows that slaves had been liberating themselves long before government officials had approved it and were being used directly to fuel the war effort, providing much needed manpower to sustain the ships serving on blockade duty. This article thus calls attention to a long-overlooked element of self-emancipation during the American Civil War.

On January 1, 1863, Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, a document now enshrined in American history. Lincoln declared that “all persons held as slaves within said designated States [in rebellion]...are, and henceforward shall be, free.” He invoked the moral authority of the “judgment of mankind and the gracious favor of Almighty God” and his constitutional authority “as Commander-In-Chief of the Army and Navy” to justify the measure. While often receiving less emphasis, Lincoln also directed the “military and naval authority” of the country to “recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons” while prohibiting attempts at “repress[ing]...any efforts they may make for their actual freedom.” Furthermore, he instructed that “persons of suitable condition will be received into the armed service of the United States,” allowing the freed slaves to enlist in the Union’s armed forces.

However, the process of emancipation is often mischaracterized in two fundamental ways. First, it is often claimed that President Lincoln, with the stroke of his pen, established a policy to free Southern slaves through the Emancipation Proclamation. In fact, Union military officers had already been receiving and, in effect, freeing slaves for nearly two years. Runaway slaves, officially called ‘contrabands,’ had been fleeting to Union lines since shots were first fired at Fort Sumter. Second, historians who study this early emancipation often emphasize the operations conducted by the Union Army as the focal point of a “military emancipation” that predated the Emancipation Proclamation. Dudley Cornish has called the reception of contrabands and their enlistment in the armed forces part of a broader effort to “free the slaves and let them fight to preserve the Union.” James Oakes also emphasizes military emancipation as the beginning of an undertaking in which “180,000 black men” would be recruited over the course of the war, proving “indispensable to northern victory” and “slavery’s destruction.” For historians like Oakes, the importance of the Emancipation Proclamation is not its language of freedom, but rather its instruction that Union soldiers entice slaves to escape, accelerating the enlistment of black troops.

However, a closer examination of the Emancipation Proclamation also hints at the underemphasized emancipatory role of the Union Navy. President Lincoln specifically mentioned that the emancipated slaves would be able to “man vessels of all sorts.” Historian William Fowler once lamented that “the nation remembered the Federal soldiers, [but] it did not remember its sailors” when celebrating the Union's victory. In much the same way, the Navy's role in emancipatory efforts between 1861 and 1863 has largely been forgotten. In fact, naval emancipation represented a distinctly aggressive form of military emancipation, with the Navy accepting and enlisting contrabands earlier and in greater relative proportions than the Army. Naval emancipation, and the riddle of its interpretation, is certainly worthy of further exploration in the broader study of emancipation.
Though relatively few sources directly address the Navy's process of formulating a contraband policy, they span a wide array of perspectives. For example, contemporary newspapers provide commentary on the flight of slaves from their masters. Other valuable resources such as Acts of Congress, Executive Orders, and General Orders mark key moments in the development of the Navy's policy. Elsewhere, a closer examination of official and personal correspondence provides important context for understanding these attempts to articulate a cohesive policy. Letters between Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles and naval officers reveal the motives behind the Navy's policies. Similarly, other documents contained within the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion are invaluable in tracking the historical trajectory of the Navy's policies. Other documents provide insights into the motives of specific actors and individuals. Andrew Hull Foote's Africa and the American Flag demonstrates the abolitionist sentiment that resulted from the Navy's activity in preventing the transatlantic slave trade via the Africa Squadron. Similarly, diaries provide personal insight into the mechanics and effects of naval emancipation. The diary and letters of Admiral Samuel Francis Du Pont, most known for his failed assault on Charleston in 1863, illustrate the growth of abolitionist sentiment among naval officers that resulted directly from the war itself. Together, these sources help to explain the important role of the Navy in the reception of runaway slaves prior to the Emancipation Proclamation.

The development of the Navy's policy towards contrabands before the Emancipation Proclamation must be juxtaposed with the progress of the Army's policies during the same period. Thus far, many historians have described the respective evolutions of these policies in complementary terms. For instance, Barbara Brooks Tomblin links the respective evolutions of these policies in complementary terms. For example, the Navy had a pre-existing tradition of allowing blacks into the service. This practice lowered both the legal and social barriers to accepting contrabands aboard ships. Furthermore, the Navy's experience in stopping the transatlantic slave trade with the Africa Squadron gave the branch a prior firsthand encounter with slavery, affecting its senior officers and causing some, such as Andrew Hull Foote, to embrace plans for emancipation. Chronic manpower shortages coupled with the rapid growth of the Navy during the early phase of the war forced officials to look for alternative methods of recruitment, thus facilitating naval emancipation. At the same time, contrabands possessed useful experience that would lead them to serve as sailors, stewards, engineers, and pilots while denying these same resources to the Confederacy. Second, for institutional reasons, the Navy was more receptive to the notion of accepting and incorporating contrabands into its ranks. Due to historical, political, and social precedents, it was easier for the Navy to enlist contrabands early in the war. For example, the Navy had a pre-existing tradition of allowing blacks into the service. This practice lowered both the legal and social barriers to accepting contrabands aboard ships. Furthermore, the Navy's experience in stopping the transatlantic slave trade with the Africa Squadron gave the branch a prior firsthand encounter with slavery, affecting its senior officers and causing some, such as Andrew Hull Foote, to embrace plans for emancipation. Third, wartime experiences would drastically affect many officers in the Navy, such as Samuel Francis Du Pont, leading them to agitate for abolition. Though this final category does not necessarily distinguish the Navy from the Army, it represents another important factor in the evolution of the Navy's contraband policy. In summary, compared to the Army, the Navy accepted and enlisted contrabands earlier and in greater proportions on account of its practical concerns, its institutional arrangement, and the experiences of naval officers in facing and confronting the reality of slavery.
Before delving into the factors that drove naval emancipation, it is important to first summarize the relevant legislative and political developments. Several acts passed by Congress represent an attempt to create laws that clarified the expectations for the armed forces with respect to fugitive slaves. In early 1861, the only such law was the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. This act was the successor to prior legal efforts to prevent the flight of slaves, namely Article 4, Section 2 of the Constitution and the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793. Passed at a time of escalating sectional tensions, the Fugitive Slave Act dictated that “any person…[who] shall rescue…such fugitive…[shall] be subject to…imprisonment.” In the first months of the war, this provision would obfuscate whether military officials were legally required to return escaped slaves. In an attempt to clarify this ambiguity, Congress passed the First Confiscation Act on August 6, 1861. This act allowed for the confiscation of any property used to support the rebellion, including slaves. It even explicitly stated that slaves who were “employed in…any military or naval service whatsoever, against the Government” could be confiscated by Federal officers, thereby partially clarifying the matter. However, the law was ambiguous when it came to fugitives who were not connected to the war effort. In theory, it might have required that these slaves be returned under the Fugitive Slave Act. Within a year, on July 17, 1862, Congress would pass the Second Confiscation Act. This act allowed for the confiscation of all property, including slaves, which belonged to supporters of the Confederacy. Much like before, ambiguity still remained in cases of allegedly pro-Union slave owners. Finally, Congress adopted the aptly-named Act Prohibiting the Return of Slaves later in 1862. Through this act, Congress officially prohibited military officials from returning runaway slaves, regardless of their owners’ allegiance. In fact, the act mandated that any officer who returned slaves be “dismissed from the service” with a dishonorable discharge. Together, these legislative
efforts attempted to address the growing need for a comprehensive policy for the thousands of slaves who were running to Union lines.

However, though congressional legislation was significant, the decisions of individual commanders on the front lines often determined the military’s policy regarding fugitive slaves in practice. In fact, these developments often preceded the laws described. Some historians, such as Oakes, claim that emancipation was always the intention of Republicans in Congress. The fact that military commanders preempted these legislative efforts does not contradict these claims, but rather, shows how the course of the war provided an opportunity for congressional legislation. Just weeks after the bombardment of Fort Sumter, the issues presented by runaway slaves would become clear on the front lines. Long before the Confiscation Acts and the Emancipation Proclamation, military commanders were receiving slaves and refusing to return them to their owners, in apparent violation of the Fugitive Slave Act. At Fort Monroe, General Benjamin Butler formulated one of the earliest military contraband policies. On May 23, 1861, three slaves rowed to the Union lines and claimed they had been forced to work on the Confederate defenses. In a letter written to Winfield Scott the next day, Butler claimed that “the fugitive-slave act did not affect a foreign country, which Virginia claimed to be,” therefore allowing him to circumvent the law. Still, Butler felt bound by the law, admitting that if their owner would “take the oath of allegiance to the Constitution of the United States [he] would deliver the men up to him.” Northern newspapers generally applauded Butler’s policy as one that hurt the rebellion without alienating those who were still hesitant about abolition. One writer noted that the policy even appealed to those who are “reluctant to have slaves declared freemen.” Thus, by late May 1861, the emancipatory policies of Union military commanders were already being driven by developments on the front lines.

Shortly thereafter, an equivalent policy emerged in the Navy. In mid-July, Secretary Gideon Welles received reports from Flag-Officer Silas Stringham and Commander Oliver Glisson that Union ships had encountered fugitive slaves who were working on Confederate installations at Stingray Point, Virginia. Glisson claimed that the slaves fled in rowboats on the Rappahannock River in the hopes of “being picked up by some vessel passing in the bay” after being told they would be “plac[ed] in the front of the battle,” leading him to keep them aboard the USS Mount Vernon. Again, this episode demonstrates that military officials were accepting and utilizing fugitive slaves prior to the First Confiscation Act. Welles responded to these reports on July 22nd by imploring Flag-Officer Stringham that, though “it is not the policy of the Government to invite or encourage this class of desertions,” returning them would be “impolitic as well as cruel.” Therefore, he directed Stringham to make them “serviceable on board our storeships,” noting that the Flag-Officer would “do well to employ them.” In a letter sent on the same day to Flag-Officer William Mervine, Welles echoed the policy by telling the officer to “let [fugitives] stay on board and employ them as usefully as possible.” Shortly thereafter, Welles articulated an even more radical policy. In response to an inquiry from Stringham regarding the contrabands’ tattered clothing, Welles insisted that they were “employed” and therefore “entitled to compensation” from the Navy. This policy of paying contrabands for their labor foreshadowed Welles’ call for their enlistment in September 1861. These incidents illustrate how the Union Navy also preempted federal law by receiving and employing fugitive slaves.

Given this background, it is worth noting that, in many ways, the Army and the Navy acted quite similarly with respect to contrabands. For example, both the Army and Navy adopted policies that used contrabands to provide support services for Union forces in the field. Furthermore, both the Army and the Navy organized contraband camps for the vast numbers of black women and children who were seeking refuge behind Union lines. Of course, there were slight differences between the two types of contraband camps. Steven Ramold points out that while Army contraband camps were often placed in the North, in order to “supervise better their African American charges,” the Navy kept their camps in the South in order to stay “close to the area where they would serve.” The Navy also made modifications to the contraband camps in order to create a nautical equivalent. For instance, barges were occasionally attached to ships on station in order to house hundreds of fugitives. Thomas Lyons, a steward on the USS Carondelet, recorded that these barges were so large that there was enough room for separate wedding, prayer, and baptismal services to be held at the same time. Though slightly different, as early as May and July 1861, both branches were accepting slaves and largely skirting the legal problems posed by existing policies. In this way, both the Army and the Navy acted to accept slaves as part of an early policy of unofficial emancipation.

In the early stages of the war, these policies formulated in the field also faced similar problems in their universal enactment. By and large, enactment was left to individual commanders, both in the field and at sea. This led to many instances of local commanders returning slaves, regardless of the orders of superior officers. For example, Flag-Officer Garrett Pendergrast ordered that his “commanders are not to have anything to do with fugitive slaves” and that all fugitives would be “delivered to the bearers of the flag of truce” who demanded their return. Certain officers gained a reputation for being particularly aggressive in returning fugitives. For instance, Barbara Brooks Tomblin calls Captain Thomas Craven, who had been serving in the Western Gulf, one of “the most flagrant violators” of the Navy’s contraband policy. Contemporaries also acknowledged his vigor, as Commander Christopher Rodgers wrote to Samuel Francis
Du Pont in the summer of 1862 that “Craven has been…
giving up Negroes.”51 Apparently Craven had violated the
contraband policy so egregiously in 1861 that Welles wrote
him a letter on September 25th, in which he reminded
the captain that the fugitive slaves were not to be “expelled from
the service” under any circumstances.52 Similar problems
existed within the Army. For instance, General Don Carlos
Buell continued returning slaves to their owners long after
policy was established to the contrary. Buell even returned
slaves after the passage of the Act Prohibiting the Return of
Slaves in 1862, thereby blatantly violating the law.53 Clearly,
significant enforcement problems hampered the contraband
policies of both branches.

The similarities in these policies and their difficulties
in enforcement can be partially attributed to the close
cooperation between the branches throughout the war. As
Craig Symonds records, the branches were most effective
militarily when they worked together.54 For example, in
the beginnings of the struggle for control of the Mississippi
River, maritime forces were often incorporated under
Army command.55 This same principle of close-knit
cooperation played a key role in numerous campaigns that
led to the freeing of many slaves, helping to explain the
coevolution of their similar policies. Furthermore, the Navy
occasionally sent fugitive slaves to work in the Army. One
instance of this phenomenon is found in correspondence
between Commander S. C. Tiowan and Secretary Welles
in September 1861. In it, Tiowan writes that he could
not keep seven fugitives that were taken aboard the USS
Pawnee, so he “forwarded” them “to be landed at Hampton
Roads, supplying them with provisions to last them there,”
implying their final destination would be Fort Monroe or
Fort Calhoun in Virginia.56 In this case, the exchange of
contrabands reflects the close ties between the Army and the
Navy. The general cooperation between the branches helps
to explain some of the overall similarities in their respective
contraband policies.

However, further examining these policies reveals significant
differences, both in form and in function. Though historians
such as James Oakes discuss military emancipation as
a unified phenomenon, a closer examination reveals distinctions
between the branches.57 One of the clearest
distinctions between the overall policies of the Army and the
Navy can be found in the actual language used to articulate
them. Textual differences show how the branches actually
embraced slightly different forms of military emancipation.
While the Army received contrabands and employed them,
the Navy received contrabands and formally enlisted them
into the armed forces. In this sense, the Navy’s version of
emancipation was more aggressive than the Army’s. On
October 11, 1861, Secretary of War Simon Cameron wrote
explicit instructions for enacting the Army’s contraband
policy. He specifically ordered that contrabands should
be received and given tasks but that there was “not to be a
general arming of them for military service” within the ranks
of the Army.58 Just two weeks earlier, on September 25, 1861,
Secretary of the Navy Welles had issued a far more radical
order when he formalized the Navy’s contraband policy. He
authorized the usage of contrabands to “render necessary
and regular services” and mandated that they receive a
“stated compensation” for their labor, much like Secretary
Cameron dictated.59 However, Welles went much further
than Cameron by ordering that the contrabands be enlisted
into the rolls of the Navy, specifically “under the same forms
and regulations as apply to other enlistments.”60 Unlike
in the Army, the Navy endorsed a policy in which contrabands
could enlist and receive a rank very early in the war.61

An even broader, and more significant, difference between
the policies of the two branches can be found on a larger
scale. The Navy not only accepted and enlisted contrabands
earlier, but also did so in greater proportions than the Army.
Numerical studies are scattered throughout the secondary
literature that attempt to pinpoint the percentage of free black
and contraband soldiers and sailors in the Army and Navy
during the Civil War; though their quantitative conclusions
vary slightly due to their methodologies, nearly every
study agrees that the Navy had a significantly higher black
enlistment rate than the Army, particularly early in the war.
Over the course of the war, ten percent of the Army’s recruits
were black.62 In contrast, William Gould IV estimates that
approximately 18,000 African Americans served in the Navy
during the Civil War, constituting roughly twenty percent of
its labor force.63 James McPherson has offered a more precise
figure, claiming that about seventeen percent of enlistees were
African American.64 In any event, the Navy seems to have
used the enlistment of contraband and free black sailors to
constitute a significant proportion of its ranks. These sources
indicate that, though these processes of incorporation may
seem superficially similar, the Navy embraced emancipation
more readily and to a greater extent than the Army.

There are many possible reasons for the Navy’s early and
aggressive use of emancipation relative to the Army. It is
clear that the branches embraced the policy at differing paces
and degrees such that naval emancipation deserves its own
emphasis in the broader study of military emancipation. The
explanation for this phenomenon has three major components
that, though briefly mentioned before, warrant recapitulation.
First, the Navy was constrained by a series of practicalities
that necessitated its embrace of emancipation. As the Navy
grew and reserves of available white sailors dwindled,
contraband enlistment became an increasingly attractive
alternative. Put simply, the Navy required manpower and
services that contraband enlistees could provide as stewards,
sailors, engineers, and pilots. Second, a host of factors related
to the Navy’s institutional history facilitated the usage of
black sailors without opposition from Northern society. For
example, the historical presence of black sailors in the Navy
and the cultural comparisons between sailors and slaves
established a low barrier to contraband enlistment. Third, experiences of the war itself seem to have converted many officers into staunch abolitionists, explaining the eventual embrace of the policy amongst many naval officers. As sailors came into close contact with Southern chattel slavery, they began to embrace naval emancipation as a result of their experiences. For these reasons, which will be explored in further detail, the Navy acted to enlist fugitive slaves long before the Army followed suit.

**PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS OF THE U.S. NAVY AND EMANCIPATION**

Perhaps the central reason that the Navy received and enlisted contrabands so eagerly was that this solved a number of practical problems that bore heavily on the rapidly escalating needs of the service. Over the course of the war, the Navy’s sources of manpower drew thin as many of the nation’s able-bodied and skilled sailors were already engaged in the fighting. At the same time, the number of ships in the Navy grew significantly, from 42 ships in 1861 to 671 ships in 1865. Gould claims that the policy of enlisting contrabands “was established out of purely practical considerations.” In a sense, he correctly identifies the needs of the service as a central factor in the enlistment of contrabands. Of course, other factors also facilitated the Navy’s rapid utilization of this particular source of labor. Still, the Navy experienced a serious need to find fresh sources of recruits.

Furthermore, while fugitive slaves supplemented lagging sources of enlistees, their enlistment also denied a key strategic resource to Confederate forces. Of course, a similar logic applied to the Army’s acceptance and employment of contrabands. For example, Lincoln wrote to General Grant that enlisting former slaves “works doubly” by simultaneously “weakening the enemy and strengthening us.” While this added incentive does not quite explain why naval emancipation was unique, it is an important consideration among the factors that encouraged the policy. As Tomblin notes, while the “Union Navy was hard-pressed to find new enlistees,” it was also “anxious to deprive southern slave owners of their labor force.” Indeed, several developments suggest that naval officers were concerned about the usage of slaves in the Confederate war effort. Steven Ramold notes that Union naval officers were particularly alarmed when they found out that the Tennessee State Militia had approved the arming of free blacks. Early in the war, naval officers feared that Confederates might use slaves to fight. For example, in July 1861, O.S. Glisson wrote (mistakenly) that Confederate troops were “arming the negroes” and that

“**Furthermore, while fugitive slaves supplemented lagging sources of enlistees, their enlistment also denied a key strategic resource to Confederate forces.**”

There were two main causes for this necessity. As Matthew Karp traces, the antebellum Navy had a “leadership that was predominantly southern,” even at the highest levels. In the aftermath of Lincoln’s election, Southern naval figures ranging from high-ranking officials to common sailors resigned in droves, leaving a vacuum that could be filled by the enlistment of black contrabands. As the war dragged on, manpower pools continued to shrink. As Gould argues, the rise in black enlistments correlates with the fact that “white enlistments became increasingly problematic” since the number of potential recruits steadily decreased. Additionally, there was a legislative cause for the Navy’s increasing hardships. The Militia Act of 1862 was primarily intended to authorize the enlistment of African Americans as laborers and soldiers, even though they had been serving as sailors for almost a year. More importantly, the Act established a draft system. In order to incentivize volunteers for the armed forces, the Act offered “twenty-five dollars as bounty.” However, the bounty only applied to enlistments in the Army and not the Navy. This legal quirk meant that at the very moment that the manpower pool was shrinking, fewer potential recruits were joining the Navy. Both of these circumstances depleted the pool of potential sailors, thereby motivating the enlistment of contrabands to counteract this drain.

It is worth noting that the Navy’s manpower problem was acutely recognized by both officers and sailors. Even at the time, officials were aware of the logistical problems posed by the resignations of Southerners. Gideon Welles wrote at length in his diary about “the faithless naval officers who abandoned the Government and took up arms against it,” suggesting that he struggled to recoup the losses incurred by
the Navy as a result of these resignations. More generally, naval officers noted the growing strains on recruitment, which would account for the push towards increased enlistment of blacks. Samuel F. Du Pont specifically highlighted the fact that “there is difficulty in obtaining men in the Northern ports” and called his black sailors “very useful” replacements for white recruits. Sailors also recorded the strains experienced as a result of decreasing white enlistment that counteracted their own deep-seated racial prejudices. As Jeffrey Bolster points out, the antebellum Navy was already a racially mixed institution, but “maritime culture never completely overcame the fissures of race.” Therefore, it speaks volumes about the Navy’s desperation in the early phases of the war that white sailors offered relatively little opposition to the enlistment of black contrabands aboard their ships. Some officers noted the general harmony between the Navy’s white sailors and its contrabands. Admiral Oliver S. Glisson once wrote that his white sailors accepted the contrabands simply because they were “short of hands” and appreciated the added manpower provided by the fugitives. Union sailors expressed similar sentiments. For example, one sailor wrote that he would “just as leaf [sic] have a little white jack as I would black,” justifying their presence with the appropriately nautical sentiment that “any port in a storm” would help with the ship’s operations. The difficulties of recruitment in the wartime atmosphere were widespread throughout the Navy, meaning that the enlistment of contrabands provided an attractive opportunity for officers to supplement their depleted crews.

Another factor that motivated contraband enlistment was that these black enlistees provided useful types of labor, particularly in positions that served other sailors. While the Army could employ women and miscellaneous camp followers to serve as servants, stewards, and laundresses, the Navy had no similar resource. Thus, naval officers and sailors were often willing to accept these enlistees within their ranks because of the services they could provide. In one instance, an officer from the USS Union eagerly asked permission from
Thomas Craven to “ship” a black contraband because he was “a good cook,” evidently possessing a talent that was lacking amongst the ship’s own cooks. In another instance, Ensign William Grattan recorded how black stewards, despite their mistreatment in these positions, were important to ships such as the USS Minnesota. Naval officers frequently received fugitives and enlisted them as recruits specifically because of the skills they offered in these non-combat services.

Of course, these recruits also served many other roles within the Navy. As Steven Ramold notes, the lines between the sailors’ ranks would blur when ships ultimately engaged in combat, since all sailors contributed to the fight in their own designated roles. In this sense, black enlistees in the Navy offered an even greater practical utility than in the Army, where blacks were prohibited from combat roles until much later in the war. Even in other ways, black enlistees performed important services. For example, several black sailors were promoted as non-commissioned engineers on account of their special qualifications for this position. Many of these engineers were able to leverage the practical skills learned during their enslavement to operate the machinery aboard ships at sea. Their officership was partly socially acceptable because engineers were still seen as inferior officers, allowing blacks to attain these promotions. Nonetheless, the ascent of black enlistees to these ranks indicates the valuable services that they could provide. In other ways, contrabands were absolutely vital to the Navy’s efforts in the South. Specifically, contrabands were retained by the Navy to serve as pilots in southern waters. These fugitives, who had often sailed these waters before the war, proved essential to keeping Union ships from hitting shoals and staying beyond the range of Confederate guns. Many officers referenced their reliance on black pilots. In one instance, when seven fugitives were forwarded to Hampton Roads, one was specifically “retained to act as pilot in these waters.” Similarly, this essential service was recognized at the highest levels. Rear Admiral Samuel Francis Du Pont wrote in 1863 that he had made use of “certain contraband pilots” who were “skillful and competent” and deserving of pay as high as thirty or even forty dollars per month, which was more than triple the rate for other contraband enlistees. In addition to their knowledge of southern waters, black enlistees were also important sources of information for the Navy. Black runaways could provide the Navy with information regarding Confederate positions and movements, including the status of Confederate forts that guarded southern waterways. These runaway slaves also gave Union naval officers advice on uncharted river routes and creeks that could be used to transport materiel. One example of the types of information provided by black enlistees comes from possibly the most famous instance of naval emancipation, that of Robert Smalls. Smalls, who had taken the Planter out of Charleston Harbor on May 13, 1862, was shortly thereafter employed by the Navy as a pilot. What is often forgotten is that after being received aboard the USS Onward, Smalls promptly informed Samuel Francis Du Pont that only a few thousand Confederate troops had been left to defend Charleston and that the fortifications on Coles Island were being abandoned. Though this anecdote represents only a single example, it is indicative of the broader practical importance of the services and information offered by black enlistees. These practical services, on the whole, largely explain why the Navy was so eager to use naval emancipation as a means of enlisting contrabands.

INSTITUTIONAL EXPLANATIONS FOR NAVAL EMANCIPATION

However, practical concerns alone cannot fully explain why the Navy endorsed the reception and enlistment of contrabands so much earlier than the Army. Rather, two other factors—the Navy’s institutional history and the personal experiences of its officers during the war—also facilitated the enlistment of contrabands. On account of these factors, the Navy was able to overcome political and social barriers to the enlistment of contrabands much more easily than the Army. Within the category of institutional factors, there are two reasons that the Navy was predisposed to receive and enlist contrabands. First, the Navy had an established tradition of black sailors serving on board ships, stretching through each of the nation’s major conflicts back to the Revolutionary War. Furthermore, sailors were subject to a number of degrading social perceptions that actually facilitated the enlistment of black contrabands. Since the social standards for sailors were already so low, it was feasible for the Navy to receive and enlist slaves. The other main institutional reason for the Navy’s ease in receiving and enlisting contrabands relates to the branch’s operational history. Starting in 1819, the Africa Squadron worked to prevent the shipment of slaves from West Africa. This experience, in turn, would provide the Navy and its officers with a firsthand experience of the brutality of slavery, shaping the branch’s policies and the personal beliefs of its officers. This institutional history, then, constitutes another factor that facilitated the early adoption of naval emancipation.

Institutionally, the historical presence of black sailors in the Navy facilitated the rapid progress of naval emancipation. In fact, the Navy had been enlisting black sailors, albeit mostly free blacks, since the American Revolution. Black sailors fought alongside white comrades in every conflict fought by the United States Navy between the Revolutionary War and the Civil War. In fact, even slaves had occasionally served aboard Navy ships, such as when John Paul Jones brought his slaves, Cato and Scipio, aboard the Continental Ship Ranger during its cruise in 1778. In any event, the traditional presence of black sailors aboard warships certainly facilitated the change in policy that allowed contraband enlistment. In earlier eras, quotas that had limited the rates of black enlistment also indicate the general ubiquity of black sailors. In 1839, for example, the Navy issued an order establishing a quota that no more than five percent of sailors could be African American in response to "frequent complaint[s]
having been made of the number of Blacks...entered at some of the recruiting stations." In comparison, the Army remained subject to the Second Militia Act of 1792, which dictated that only "able-bodied white male citizen[s]" could be "enrolled in the militia." Therefore, the Navy was able to enlist and utilize black sailors in a way that the Army legally could not until the Militia Act of 1862. As Steven Ramold notes, the Navy "quietly added more than nine hundred African American crewmen" in the early phases of the Civil War because it was allowed under the existing regulations.

It was explicitly possible for Secretary Welles to enlist black sailors because, according to Ramold, it "did not violate existing law or represent a change in federal policy." The historical precedent of black sailors serving in the Navy allowed Secretary Welles to offer enlistment to contrabands during the Civil War with relative ease.

Furthermore, the general denigration of sailors in American society also allowed for the recruitment of contrabands during the early phases of the Civil War. The low status of sailors in American culture facilitated Welles' recruitment of slaves by not arousing much opposition within Northern society. As Michael J. Bennett argues, there was a strong antebellum perception that "sailors were, in fact, not much better off than slaves." In fact, many parallels were drawn in popular culture between the lives of slaves and sailors. Herman Melville's 1850 novel *Whitejacket*, which was based on his own service aboard the *USS United States*, may be the most famous depiction of sailors' implicit servitude. In Melville's critique of flogging, he frequently references how the practice "convert[s] into slaves some of the citizens of a nation of freemen." Melville was not the only author to compare sailors and slaves. Written in 1840, Richard Henry Dana Jr.'s *Two Years Before the Mast* also includes a section in which a captain describes himself as a "slave driver" for his sailors, whom he compares to a group of "negro slaves." The contemporary comparisons between sailors and slaves have long been the subject of scrutiny among historians. Harold Langley, in his study of social reform in the Navy, points to several areas in which sailors in American culture facilitated Welles' recruitment of slaves by not arousing much opposition within Northern society.

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Aside from recruitment and perceptions, the Navy also had a history of preventing the proliferation of slavery via the transatlantic slave trade. The Africa Squadron and its longstanding involvement in the prevention of the slave trade evince a historical connection between the Navy and abolitionist causes that simply did not exist in the Army. In 1819, Congress empowered President Monroe to direct "armed vessels of the United States" to make cruises "on... the coast of Africa" in order to prevent "attempts...to carry on the slave trade" by Americans. As Donald Canney traces, this law directly led to the formation of the Navy's Africa Squadron, which took the Navy's "limited, almost casual" presence in stopping the slave trade and created a "formalized systematic unit specifically directed to suppress it." Though the squadron grew considerably between the signing of the Webster-Ashburton Treaty in 1842 and its withdrawal from the African coast in the summer of 1861, it seized only fifty-one slavers during this period. Canney calls their failure to capture more slavers "inexcusable," but there were mitigating factors. After all, at the start of the Civil War, the Navy only had forty-two commissioned ships in all. Rather than fixating on the numerical failures of the Africa Squadron, though, it is important to consider how this focus on halting the slave trade affected the Navy's institutional memory. The decades spent by the Navy in pursuit of slavers added a complementary role to its other major peacetime task of protecting American commerce.

The Navy's Africa Squadron is a factor that uniquely tied the Navy together with slavery for several decades, affecting the opinions and sentiments of naval officers up until the outbreak of war in 1861.

The operations of the Africa Squadron had serious ramifications for the Navy's stance towards slavery by inspiring officers to advocate for abolitionist schemes, seen most clearly in the case of Andrew Hull Foote. His life and career demonstrate how the operations of the Africa Squadron inspired a broader abolitionist attitude within the Navy. Though Foote would prove an imperfect example, his overall abolitionist sentiments show how American officers and sailors were affected by decades of close proximity with the harsh realities of the transatlantic slave trade. Foote spent the majority of the 1850s in the Africa Squadron, where he would write a work entitled "Africa and the American Flag" that called for the abolition of slavery and advocated for colonization. Within the book, he decreed that the "slave-trade became increasingly cruelly and murderously systematic." Foote further claimed that "wherever the slave-trade or its effects penetrated," violence grew among the populace and "prosperity became impossible." In his arguments against the slave trade, Foote went so far as to suggest that there is "a high superiority in these schemes of African colonization" as true "efforts of Christianity." These experiences would affect his later career. During the war, Foote is perhaps most famous for his conduct on the Mississippi River, where he was instrumental in helping General Grant take Forts.
INFLUENCES OF WARTIME EXPERIENCES ON AMERICAN NAVAL OFFICERS

A final factor also helps explain why the Navy was able to use contraband enlistees so easily to overcome its manpower shortages. Over the course of the war, the close contact with the realities of slavery that was experienced by officers and sailors led them to accept contrabands aboard their ships when they otherwise might not have. Like the Navy's institutional advantages, this reasoning also helps to explain the progress of naval emancipation. However, in this case, the experiences of the Navy's white officers and sailors do not provide much of an explanation as to why naval emancipation proceeded so much faster than in the Army. Rather, it works in tandem with the practical needs of the Navy and its unique history to explain the acceptance and enlistment of contrabands. After all, the acceptance of runaway slaves was not necessarily inevitable. As documented in Under the Blue Pennant, white Union sailors were often virulently racist. Robert Schneller argues that “the Union navy treated African Americans as second-class sailors” and, despite their reception of contrabands, white sailors often “continued to regard the blacks themselves as inferior human beings.” For example, in one incident aboard the USS Minnesota, Ensign William Grattan noted that a black waiter was forced by the officer corps to dance around the deck. The prejudice of the Union's white sailors might have posed a stumbling block to the process of naval emancipation. As Bennett suggests, Union sailors could have “refused to recognize their boats, sounded their arrival as a threat to ship security, or returned them to the water,” which would have seriously impeded the emancipatory efforts of superiors like Welles. However, the firsthand experience witnessing the struggles of slaves seeking freedom led some white sailors to respect them. After all, slaves travelled as many as 200 miles to reach Union ships, hoping to find freedom. This experience with the struggles of runaway slaves seems to have made Union sailors sympathetic to the plight of contrabands.

Perhaps the most striking example of the effects of close contact with slavery can be found in the personal transformation of Rear Admiral Samuel Francis Du Pont. As with Andrew Hull Foote, the example of Samuel F. Du Pont provides an individual example of a broader factor that facilitated naval emancipation. Like Foote, Du Pont was a career naval officer. After gaining his commission in 1815, Du Pont spent decades in the service, notably fighting in California during the Mexican-American War. During the Civil War, Du Pont's most significant victory came in his attack on Port Royal, South Carolina. Throughout the war, Du Pont's views on slavery and abolition were clearly affected by his experiences in the South. To borrow from McPherson, though Du Pont had never owned slaves, he was an adamant “defender of slavery” in the antebellum period. However, his experiences with the realities of slavery changed his opinions. As with other Union sailors, Du Pont was deeply moved by the efforts of runaway slaves
to reach freedom. He once wrote that “no danger deters them” and he was impressed that “they encounter[ed] shooting with perfect composure” while running to freedom.132 His experiences led to a profound change in his philosophy. During the war, Du Pont admitted that he was wrong to have once “defended [slavery] all over the world” and that his newfound understanding of the “degradation, overwork, and ill treatment of the slaves in the cotton states” had changed his views.133 This realization led him to gain a greater respect for the efforts and achievements of black sailors, once calling them “very useful” sailors aboard the ships in his squadron.134 Du Pont even noted that he was not alone in his conversion. He wrote elsewhere that, though none of his officers would have voted for Lincoln in the 1860 election, there was “not a proslavery man among them” after their time in the South.135 This personal experience with slavery helps to explain why naval emancipation proceeded so quickly relative to the Army’s. In fact, James McPherson notes that “no comparable group of Union army officers at that stage of the war” had experienced slavery so closely and had their views changed so radically as the officers of Du Pont’s squadron.136 The example provided by Du Pont illustrates the significant role of personal experiences in facilitating naval emancipation.

CONCLUSION

In combination, these factors help to explain the rapid development of naval emancipation long before the Emancipation Proclamation. In many ways, the Navy’s usage of contrabands paralleled the Army’s. After all, a policy for contrabands was first developed by General Butler in May 1861 and would be used by both branches in the early years of the war. Furthermore, both branches used contrabands to provide wartime services such as manual labor for troops on the front lines. In this sense, Oakes correctly emphasizes the broad development of “military emancipation” and “gradual abolition” as “two different policies” in the years before the Emancipation Proclamation.137 Through the efforts of officers, soldiers, and sailors, thousands of slaves who ran to Union lines were unofficially freed well before Congress or President Lincoln made any official policy regarding the matter. However, as this article illustrates, the Navy’s version of this emancipation was both more aggressive and more extensive than the Army’s, with reception and recruitment of contrabands occurring very early in the conflict. Therefore, naval emancipation should be considered as a significant subcategory of military emancipation. In a sense, this newfound understanding extends Oakes’ conception of military emancipation to a maritime context. At the same time, this study reveals unique factors that shaped this phenomenon in a maritime context. While the Army and the Navy would receive thousands of runaway slaves between them, it was ultimately the Navy that took a leading role in this process.

The Navy embraced these developments and adopted the reception and enlistment of contrabands at a pace and scope far greater than the Army. Several factors help to explain why the Navy needed to receive and enlist contrabands and why it was possible to do so during the early stages of the war. At its core, practical necessity played a key role in driving naval emancipation. The Navy needed to bolster lagging enlistment as the war continued. In addition to denying Confederate forces a strategic asset, these contrabands offered valuable services by serving as sailors, stewards, engineers, and pilots. At the same time, the Navy, as an institution, had already been enlisting black sailors and preventing the slave trade, which facilitated naval emancipation. The precedent set by the historical presence of black sailors made the reception and enlistment of contrabands much easier, both legally and socially, in the early phases of the war. Furthermore, the writings of Andrew Hull Foote illustrate how the Navy’s experience in stopping the transatlantic slave trade created sympathy for abolition. Lastly, the personal experiences of sailors and officers in the South dramatically affected their perceptions of slavery. As Du Pont’s letters suggest, many officers were first exposed to the realities of chattel slavery upon reaching naval stations in the South, changing their personal beliefs and opinions. These factors help to explain the trajectory of naval emancipation as a unique component of military emancipation.

This newfound understanding of the phenomenon of naval emancipation has a number of consequences for the historiography of emancipation during the Civil War. It provides a key nuance to the discussion of military emancipation, bringing to light the active role of the Navy and its officers in driving the reception and enlistment of contrabands into the armed forces. This exploration of naval emancipation also yields other important considerations. If nothing else, it reveals the crucial involvement of many individuals, ranging from sailors and officers to squadron commanders and the Secretary of the Navy, in the process of emancipation. In fact, President Lincoln seems to have been notably absent in shaping the Navy’s policy. Craig Symonds even asserts that “there is no evidence that Welles checked first with the president before issuing his orders” that provided for the enlistment of contrabands.138 As this study demonstrates, barring Welles himself, the key actors in this drama were seldom in Washington and were often on the front lines, confronting the issues prompted by the arrival of contrabands. Lincoln had proclaimed on May 19, 1862 that it was only “competent for…[the] Commander-in-Chief…to declare the slaves of any state or States, free” and that it was not a decision that could be “justified in leaving to the decision of commanders in the field.”139 Of course, the great irony of Lincoln’s proclamation is that thousands of slaves were unofficially freed by commanders in the field, both on land and at sea.
There are also other important considerations prompted by the study of naval emancipation. Clearly, naval emancipation was driven by practical realities. Generally speaking, congressional legislation followed precedents that were being set by the Navy. For example, the First Confiscation Act was passed on August 6, 1861, to allow military officers to confiscate property (including slaves) being used in the rebellion. However, both Butler and Welles had already been keeping runaway slaves for months by that point. Similarly, the Militia Act of 1862, passed on July 17, 1862, was supposed to allow the military to enlist African Americans. While the Army did, in fact, wait for this law to begin enlisting runaway slaves, the Navy had been enlisting them since September 1861, nearly a full year earlier. These naval precedents should not disregard intentionalist arguments about emancipation by Republicans in Congress. Rather, they emphasize that naval officers were taking steps towards emancipation long before their actions were technically legal. In any event, the study of naval emancipation emphasizes that matters were often driven by realities on the ground, since officers were forced to react to the influx of runaway slaves throughout the beginning of the war. These considerations demonstrate the value of understanding naval emancipation as a distinct phenomenon, providing nuances to debates and discussions regarding emancipation during the Civil War.

President Lincoln once wrote a letter that extolled the bravery of the Union troops but explicitly paid homage to the invaluable role of “Uncle Sam’s Web-feet.” He noted that the Navy served admirably “on the deep sea, the broad bay, and the rapid river” while also performing vital services “up the narrow muddy bayou, and wherever the ground was a little damp.” Just as Lincoln made sure to remember the Navy’s role in fighting the war, so too it is important to remember its role in emancipating the slaves.
Endnotes


[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] This common refrain even finds itself in much of the secondary literature on the Emancipation Proclamation. Allen C. Guelzo, for example, writes that the Proclamation removed the “shackles from four million black slaves.” However, such analyses overstate the Emancipation Proclamation’s meaning. James Oakes argues that parts of the nation, particularly Republicans, had always insisted that “slavery was the cause of the rebellion and emancipation an appropriate… means of suppressing it.” In fact, the path to abolition began long before Lincoln’s proclamation. See Allen Guelzo, Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation: The End of Slavery in America (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 1; James Oakes, Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865 (New York, NY: Norton, 2013), xxii.

[6] This understanding of a “military emancipation” is most forcefully argued by James Oakes. As he understands it, military emancipation was justified by contemporary understandings of historical precedent and the rules of war. For more on the foundations of this type of emancipation, see Oakes, Freedom National, 37-42.

[7] Dudley Taylor Cornish, The Sable Arm: Negro Troops in the Union Army, 1861-1865 (New York, NY: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1956), 1; Oakes also links abolition and the enlistment of black soldiers, noting that Lincoln also understood the “connection between emancipation and black troops.” In many ways, Oakes’ account of abolition is tied to the enlistment of black soldiers. See Oakes, Freedom National, 380.


[9] Ibid., 391; For the Confederate reaction to this policy, see James Oakes, The Scorpion’s Sting: Antislavery and the Coming of the Civil War (New York, NY: Norton, 2014), 160-162.


[12] For example, the New York Herald reported on General Benjamin Butler’s decision in May 1861 to receive three runaway slaves as “contrabands of war” rather than freeing them. The conservative paper applauded his respect for property rights. See Adam Goodheart, 1861: The Civil War Awakening (New York, NY: Knopf, 2011), 322.


[18] In the early months of the war, due to racial prejudices and legal ambiguities, some officers in both branches returned runaway slaves to their owners. Gould, Diary of a Contraband, 67.

[19] J.C. Chaplin to Louis Goldsborough, 27 October 1861, ORN, I, 6:363-364. Goldsborough’s endorsement notes that there were insufficient rations for the contrabands. Other officers faced similar difficulties. For example, Captain John Marston wrote to Gideon Welles that he had no spare provisions for contrabands. Welles responded that contrabands could be “turned over to the Army for employment.” For more, see Marston to Welles, 28 January 1862, ORN, I, 6:535-536.


[21] As will be seen later, this difference was partially tied to the historical enlistment of black sailors, as thoroughly documented in W. Jeffrey Bolster, Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997). There have been many numerical studies of black naval enlistment in the Civil War. Herbert Aptheker verified an estimate from 1902 by randomly checking several ships’ muster rolls, confirming that crews were 20-25% black during the war. For more, see Herbert Aptheker, “The Negro in the Union Navy,” The Journal of Negro History, 32:2 (April 1947), 179-181. Joseph Reidy has adjusted this figure, concluding that 18,000 black sailors served in the Union Navy, constituting just over 15% of its manpower. See Joseph Reidy, “Black Jack: African American Sailors in the Civil War Navy,” in New Interpretations in Naval History: Selected Papers from the Twelfth Naval History Symposium, ed. William B. Cogar (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1997), 213.

[22] For an extended explanation of the legislative process that shaped these laws and their effects on the progress of military emancipation, see Steven Ramold, Slaves, Sailors, Citizens: African Americans in the Union Navy (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002), 38-51.

[23] The United States Constitution dictates that “No Person held to Service or Labour in one State… [shall] be discharged from such Service or Labour, but shall be delivered up on Claim” (Article IV, Section 2). In turn, the 1793 Fugitive Slave Act established a legal mechanism to enforce the content of the Constitution.
Service of their Masters," approved February twelfth, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-three (Fugitive Slave Act of 1850), U.S. Statutes at Large 9 (1850): p. 464, § 7.

[26] Tomblin writes that though some officers certainly returned fugitive slaves during this early period, it is unclear whether they were driven racial prejudice or a desire "to comply with federal laws, including the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850." See Tomblin, Bluejackets & Contrabands, 11.


[28] In practice, this concern was already largely irrelevant. By the time of the passage of even the First Confiscation Act, slaves were already being accepted by officers in both the Army and the Navy, usually without much consideration of their prior role in the war effort.

[29] See An Act to suppress Insurrection, to punish Treason and Rebellion, to seize and confiscate the Property of Rebels, and for other Purposes (Second Confiscation Act), U.S. Statutes at Large 12 (1863): pp. 589-592. It is worth paying special attention to Section 11, which allows the President "to employ as many persons of African descent as he may deem necessary... and for this purpose he may organize and use them in such manner as he may judge best." In fact, the Navy had already been doing this since July 1861. This legislation serves as another example of the practical policy of military officers preceding the passage of relevant laws.

[30] As Tomblin notes, this feature posed a significant obstacle when naval officers could not determine the loyalty of an escaped slave's master. Furthermore, the ambiguity might have given a pretext for naval officers to return slaves, either on account of racial qualms or limited shipboard resources. See Tomblin, Bluejackets & Contrabands, 61.


[32] Oakes writes that Republicans in Congress "constructed their antislavery policies on [the] expectation" that slaves would run for freedom when given the chance. However, as the timeline of naval emancipation shows, the sequence of events often went the other way, with slaves fleeing their masters prior to the formulation of congressional policy. For his understanding of Republican attempts at legislative abolition, see Oakes, Freedom National, xvii.


[35] Ibid.


[38] Glisson to Stringham, 15 July 1861, ORN, I, 6:9.


[40] Ibid.


[43] Tomblin briefly alludes to the compensation of contrabands as an important step towards their official enlistment. See Tomblin, Bluejackets & Contrabands, 10, 28.


[48] For example, Welles ignored the law and appealed to "every principle of humanity" in his 22 July 1861 letter that authorized the reception of runaway slaves (See ORN, I, 6:10). As always, some cases show the limits of this claim. For example, Louis Goldsborough exercised a careful adherence to the law in the Atlantic Blockading Squadron. Goldsborough instructed his officers to be "very careful that none of the contrabands...come from the State of Maryland or any other State not in rebellion" after several were received aboard the USS Cambridge. See Goldsborough to Parker, 6 November 1861, ORN, I, 6:409.

[49] Presumably, these "bearers of the flags of truce" were either the owners of the fugitive slaves or their appointed representatives. See Commodore Garret J. Pendergrast (USN) to General Walter Gwynn (CSA), 11 May 1861, ORN, I, 4:388.


[51] Christopher Raymond Perry Rodgers to Samuel Francis Du Pont, 19 July 1862, Civil War Letters, 2:164.


[54] Craig Symonds, The Civil War At Sea (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2009), 106.

[55] Ibid., 87.


[57] As a matter of fact, Oakes and other historians seldom mention the Navy when discussing military emancipation. Oakes only briefly mentions that Butler's contraband policy was "soon expanded to the Navy" in the summer of 1861. See Oakes, Freedom National, 100-101.

[58] Simon Cameron to William Sherman, October 11, 1861, ORN, I, 12:221.

[59] Welles to Louis Goldsborough, 25 September 1861, ORN, I, 6:252. Herbert Aptheker points out that this letter was directed at the enlistment of contrabands, since free blacks were already allowed to serve in the Navy. See Aptheker, "The Negro in the Union Navy," p. 175, fn. 21.
As Grattan records in his journal, black stewards aboard the Minnesota were often mocked and abused by the officers. Nonetheless, their service was vital to the operation of ships in the Union fleet. For more on the role of black stewards see Grattan, Under the Blue Pennant, 78.

For more on black engineers during the Civil War, see ibid., 87-88.

Other black engineers had gained experience aboard ships on the Mississippi River and the Atlantic seaboard. See ibid., 89.

For a discussion of the reactions of white sailors to their Black Jacks amongst white sailors. See Bolster, Slaves, Sailors, Citizens, 35.

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[109] An Act in addition to the Acts prohibiting the slave trade (Act of March 3, 1819, Relative to the Slave Trade), U.S. Statutes at Large 3 (1824): p. 532, § 1. As early as 1807, Congress prohibited the "import" of any "negro, mulatto, or person of colour" as slaves, but the law lacked enforcement mechanisms for over a decade. See An Act to prohibit the importation of Slaves into any port or place within the jurisdiction of the United States, from and after the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and eight (Act Prohibiting Importation of Slaves), U.S. Statutes at Large 2 (1807), p. 426, § 1.

[110] Canney, Africa Squadron, 12. For a lengthier summary of the organization and activities of the Africa Squadron, which deserve study in their own right, refer to Canney, Africa Squadron, 1-12. Though the Africa Squadron represented an increasingly formal organization, its overall success is questionable.

[111] Ibid., 222. During this period, the squadron was given a wide array of ships to pursue its mission. For a list of the ships employed by the Africa Squadron, see ibid., 229-235.

[112] Ibid., 223.


[114] The limited peacetime Navy had few functions, mainly serving to protect American commerce. It also oversaw diplomatic missions. For a lengthier description of the antebellum Navy’s responsibilities and organization, see Canney, Africa Squadron, 36.


[117] Ibid., 90.

[118] Ibid., 104-105.

[119] For a tactical assessment of Foote’s role during these assaults, see Symonds, Civil War at Sea, 94-102.


[121] Andrew Hull Foote, Diary of Andrew Hull Foote as quoted in Hoppin, Life of Andrew Hull Foote, 84.

[122] Andrew Hull Foote, (Speech, New Haven, CT, 8 July 1862) as quoted in Ibid., 346.


[124] Ibid.

[125] Ibid., 78.

[126] Bennett, Union Jacks, 159.


[128] Tomblin, Bluejackets & Contrabands, 55.


[130] For a description of the victory at Port Royal, see McPherson, War on the Waters, 37-42.

[131] Ibid., 137.


[133] Du Pont to J.S. Biddle, 17 December 1861 in Du Pont, Civil War Letters, 1:181; Du Pont to Titus Coan, 8 February 1863 in Du Pont, Civil War Letters, 2:422-423.


[135] Du Pont to Sophie Du Pont, 10 April 1862 in Civil War Letters, 1:413.


[137] Oakes, Freedom National, 42.


[140] In fact, some Senators thought the law would allow black enlistment in the Navy even though it was already happening. Senator Saulsbury denounced the law as an “attempt… to elevate the miserable negro… [and] put him in the Army, and to put him in your Navy.” See Senator Saulsbury, speaking on Militia Act of 1862 (S. 384), on 9 July 1862, 37th Cong., 2nd Sess., Congressional Globe 32, p. 3198 (1862).


[142] Ibid.