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"Innumerable Small Crafts": Maritime Work in the Estuarian Gulf, 1865-1900

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“INNUMERABLE SMALL CRAFTS”: MARITIME WORK IN THE ESTUARIAN GULF, 1865-1900

by

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ABSTRACT

Maritime historians have argued for a highpoint in maritime activity during the antebellum years. This peak was fed by Americans travelling on tall wooden sailing ships in international trade, in the whaling industries, and as members of the US Navy. The prowess of the American Merchant Marine faded quickly in the middle of the nineteenth century due to military losses during the American Civil War and due to the rise of steamships and steel hulls. This peak was followed by another lesser peak in the Twentieth Century as American ships caught up with technological changes. World War One provided a temporary boom to the shipping industries which fed European war markets.

This dissertation examines sailors along the Gulf Coast during the nadir period between those two better known eras. It argues that the nadir posited by previous historians is largely illusory. The maritime industries remained active along the coast throughout the late nineteenth century. However, these sailors did not work in the famous blue water trades that fascinated the general public. Instead, they worked in liminal industries that relied on the southern estuary to survive. They fished, coasted, piloted larger ships into port, and oftentimes a mix of all three.

To prosper in these conditions, coastal mariners relied on older communities and older forms of work, even as industrialized shipping and fishing made inroads into the region. Small seaside towns and ports provided subordinate economies to the largely foreign blue water trades. Subsistence fishing and small-scale trading had long been a mainstay of the coastal economy. These did not require the monetary investment nor the risk of larger operations. Coastal denizens could make use of small boats, changing

industries as necessary to adjust for the seasons and the tides. Canneries and railroads put pressure on these communities to extract more resources for the growing American economy. For a time, communities attempted to maintain their ways of work, creating a mixed economy of contract laborers working for more industrialized businesses on shore.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The path to finishing this dissertation has been more circuitous than any coasting voyage. In a project that focuses on collective efforts towards a common goal, it seems only appropriate that I recognize those who helped me make this project possible. First, of course, I would like to thank Max Grivno for chairing the committee. Dr. Grivno has been a constant source of help and inspiration throughout this project. His comments were concise and accurate and helped me see through many of the problems that I created for myself. I would also like to thank the other members of the committee, Dr. Casey, Dr. Haley, and Dr. Stephens for their participation in this project. All four of these professors have helped me grow as a scholar and a historian during my time at USM and I will always be grateful to them. Anything good from this dissertation is due to them. All the mistakes are my own.

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DEDICATION

This book would not have been possible without the constant support of my wife Sophia. She stood by me through my career as a graduate student, as a poor independent scholar, and as a teacher. This dissertation would never have been finished if it were not for her pushing me toward the finish line. I am eternally grateful and hope I can spend the rest of my life making up for it.

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Finally, I would like to thank all of the friends and family that helped make this dissertation possible. Little Linda, who helped me do research in Maryland. Trent Gordon for thinking I am smart despite all the evidence to the contrary. Sammi and Jared who offered to edit when I was short on time. Dr. Bruce Coggin for his constant moral support. Pip and Jeannette for keeping me sane. Michael and Amy Johnson for putting up with me as a student long ago. My work friends at Nolan Catholic High School for believing in me. Chris, Julie, Matt, Tracy, Randy, Steph, Margie, Rina, Dom, and their kids, the list goes on and on and I am grateful for all of them.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

In 1937, an elderly African-American man in Ybor City reminisced about his seafaring youth to a credulous WPA writer. "Uncle Dave" spoke of his youth as a slave in Florida, his family's struggle to make ends meet in Reconstruction Era Key West, and his eventual voyages across the world in the Navy and merchant marine. Dave described a testosterone-fueled world of frequent violence, casual one-upmanship, hard drinking and even the occasional bout of romance. Nearly 3000 miles away, the famous Norwegian sailor and labor leader Andrew Furuseth attempted to hold together the tattered remains of the International Seamen's Union. The fifty-year-old organization had splintered amid disagreements between deep sea sailors, longshoremen, and "coasters." Dismayed at the continual lack of cooperation between maritime workers, the American Federation of Labor took control of the ISU for its own good. Less than six months later, Andrew Furuseth passed away and his body was placed in state at the Department of Labor in Washington D.C.[1]

Though it is unlikely that the two men had ever met, they had both lived in a maritime world that had undergone drastic changes. Between 1850 and 1900 steam supplanted sail as the dominant method of transportation across the water. The sheer tonnage of ships carrying American wares abroad increased by five hundred percent. Sailing ships, once the pride of the American economy and imagination had faded into obscurity. Instead, steel behemoths crisscrossed the Atlantic, bringing thousands of immigrants to American shores and carrying thousands more away. Andrew Furuseth

[1] Interview by J. A. Frost, *Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project, Florida, Vol. 3* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1936), 312.

had been a part of that change, living on the Pacific Coast and working on the large liners that operated there. Dave, on the other hand, had started off life as a Florida shrimper and never worked on the large steam liners that had taken over the maritime economy.

Fewer of those liners flew American flags or berthed American crews. Historians and contemporary onlookers considered the second half of the nineteenth century as a nadir in America's maritime capabilities. Writers and politicians of the time lamented the decline of what had once been a traditional American industry. Some blamed the Civil War, and the actions of privateering Confederates in particular, for the absence of Americans at sea. Others spoke ominously of a British conspiracy to regain control of the United States by dominating its shipping. Some few spoke of the freedom loving American character, which would not be satisfied in the stultifying life of a seaman.[2]

The docks became a "terra incognita" even to those who lived in port cities. Most Americans did not seem to think about the lack of sailors among the native population. Ships brought goods, migrants, tourists, and news on a regular basis, regardless of the sailors' nationalities. Sailors from Norway, Sweden, Ireland, and a plethora of countries spent their hard-earned wages while in port, then soon left on the next voyage to some distant land. Even then, the only people truly concerned with maritime workers were the people who lived around them; Friends and families, employers and merchants, not to mention the lodging house owners and bartenders who made money off incoming sailors.[3]

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[2] Leon Fink, *Sweatshops at Sea: Merchant Seamen in the World's First Globalized Industry from 1812 to Present* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 40; Alex Roland, W. Jeffrey Bolster, and Alexander Keyssar, *The Way of the Ship: America's Maritime History Reenvisioned, 1600-2000* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2008), 193.

[3] *Harper's Weekly Review*, Vol. 15, 1871, 976.

Rather than national heroes or cultural everymen, seamen were cogs in the machine of trade. Corporate mercantile houses, industrialized ship building, and steam driven propulsion all served to relegate maritime workers to the position of an industrial proletariat. Despite the efforts of a few labor minded seamen, maritime workers more or less remained in that position throughout the nineteenth century. The possibility that the nation would emphasize the "coast" of the Gulf Coast largely failed to materialize. What had been a small part of the regional economy remained a small part of the regional economy.[4]

For a time, wind powered vessels managed to hold on to shrinking niches in the coasting trade, fishing and sponging industries, and as pilots. Local captains and their crews remained well known to coastal communities. Lumbering schooners travelled out of Apalachicola, Florida, stopping at Mississippi and Louisiana ports before delivering their cargo to the railroads in Texas. Small schooners, called *canots,* travelled along shallow canals in the Louisiana wetlands. The *canots* visited tiny, almost nonexistent fishing communities before travelling to the New Orleans metropolis. These coastal communities and countless others remained overlooked by most of society for some time, though eventually they too bent beneath the demands of an industrializing American economy. They formed an everyday part of the landscape as they brought their ships, and whatever small cargo they had accumulated, into and out of port. Captains and sailors sold their cargo to their neighbors or to other ships and lived relatively quiet semi-nomadic lives. Their voyages tended to be shorter than their seafaring brethren, days or

[4] Leon Fink, *Sweatshops at Sea: Merchant Seamen in the World's First Globalized Industry from 1812 to Present* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 93.

weeks rather than months or years. They kept regular houses, wives, and families that tied them to the land as much as their work tied them to the water.[5]

The focus of transportation and trade into fewer and fewer metropoli obscures the once complicated interaction between polis and periphery. After a time, small port cities had fed into larger ones. Numerous port cities had their own Mississippi River, directing small trickles of economic prosperity toward the coastline. The flow of traffic down the rivers of the American south did not stop at the sea but continued into the Caribbean basin. Barges coming down the river transitioned to sloops and schooners which journeyed along their leg of the voyage before giving way to deep sea vessels.

Across the United States, once prosperous port cities slowly faded away as steam liners drew business to a select few metropolises. Massive behemoths transporting tens or even hundreds of times as much cargo as wooden vessels, steam liners relentlessly effaced the allure of the sea. Rails and roads connected a terrestrial nation that tended to forget how marine it had once been. Ghost towns dotted the coast for a few decades until sand and storm wiped them away completely. Eventually the long meandering coastline of the United States became a destination for vacation or a playground for the rising middle class. Ships grew fewer and those that persisted redirected their voyages to the ever-growing nodes of select mega-ports. By the early twentieth century, working ships were no longer an everyday site for Americans on the coast.[6]

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[5] Donald W. Davis, *Washed Away?: The Invisible Peoples of Louisiana's Wetlands* (Lafayette: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2010), 155.

[6] Anthony J. Stanonis, *Faith in Bikinis: Politics and Leisure in the Coastal South since the Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2014), 6.

Geography of the Gulf Coast

This dissertation examines the liminal spaces of the Gulf World in the second half of the nineteenth century. It takes the "Coast" in the Gulf Coast as a distinct region with its own community and character. Both character and community were defined by the relationship between the people and the sea. The precise boundaries of the Gulf World are difficult to define. While the coast of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida form the core of the Gulf, the outer regions stretch nebulously north and south. Famous naturalist John Muir described it as a "flat border which sweeps from Maryland to Texas." Other writers limited the Gulf to just the southernmost states, refusing to venture north of Florida. Observed from the sea, however, the Gulf World must include Mexico, Cuba, and possibly other Caribbean islands as well. The lived experiences of inhabitants along the Gulf Coast included regular and frequent contact with The Gulf World was a fundamentally interconnected region that defied national boundaries.[7]

The geography of the Gulf Coast also contributed to the complications between blue and grey water workers. The shoreline of the southern United States was a geography in constant flux "constantly changing position" with the movement of the years. Inlets, bays, barrier islands, shoals, reefs, sandbars, and even more natural occurrences created a landscape that was rarely static for long. The numerous barrier islands made establishing deep water ports difficult while simultaneously permitting a multitude of smaller coasting communities. Such obstacles both inhibited and permitted maritime work, creating hazards for unfamiliar ships, but opportunities for locals. Local

[7] John R. Gillis, *The Human Shore: Seacoasts in History* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 4; John Muir, *A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1916), 2.

and federal governments made regular attempts to tame these natural fortifications, including canal proposals, levees, and manmade storm barriers. Nevertheless, environmental changes on land and at sea made a mockery of these attempts as new islands rose and sank beneath the waves of the Gulf of Mexico.[8]

The Gulf Coast was and is a geography in flux. Irregular storms and hurricanes made a mockery of attempts at precision mapping. Entire cities sank beneath waves, invoking editorials describing modern Atlantises. The Hurricane of 1900 famously bombarded the city of Galveston, but that storm was only exceptional in its ferocity, not its frequency. Galveston's once rival of Indianola was wiped off the map after two separate hurricanes, each roughly a decade apart, collided with the only deep-water port along the Texas Coast. Along the coast of Georgia, a hurricane bombarded Savannah, completely submerging several of its barrier islands and exacting a toll of thousands of dollars in damage and roughly 300 deaths. In 1893, separate storms bombarded the Gulf Coast on both the east and the west, killing thousands in South Carolina and thousands more in the Louisiana bayous. Each time such storms rolled through, both large and small, they adjusted the contours of the coast and forced residents to readapt regularly.[9]

Nor was the weather the only means of massive destruction that came from the sea. Poorly understood diseases such as yellow fever and malaria spelt widespread death among port communities. Communities hastened to prevent outbreaks and hastened even

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[8] *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1876* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1876), 35.

[9] Al Sandrik and Chris Landsea, "Chronological Listing of Tropical Cyclones affecting North Florida and Coastal Georgia, 1565-1899," NOAA Hurricane Research Division, 2003; James E. Hudgins, "Tropical Cyclones affecting North Carolina since 1586: An Historical Perspective," NOAA Technical Memorandum, 2000.

more to prevent word of outbreaks from spreading. If the community failed to keep disease under control, quarantines would fall upon them and their neighbors, bringing about economic distress as well as very real physical distress. An 1882 yellow fever panic caused coastal towns to preemptively declare a quarantine against Brownsville. The citizens of Brownsville insisted that no such outbreak had occurred, but the damage to the city's commerce had already been done. Though of dubious utility at keeping infected individuals isolated, quarantines were effective at destroying the economic viability of ports, which languished for weeks and months until the disease had worn its path.[10]

The changeability of the Gulf Coast geography was not simply a hazard. The people who worked the shores and sea beds along the Gulf of Mexico depended on the regeneration that such storms wrought. Oyster smacks and shrimping boats exploited the new beds created by hurricanes. Wrecking ships pulled derelict vessels off constantly shifting barrier islands, sand dunes, and keys. Sponge boats poled up their yearly harvest. The destruction that each storm wrought also created a short-lived boom for lumber ships, which hauled their vital cargo from point to point along the American coast. Pilots and tugs relied on the fees that larger vessels chose to pay, rather than risk navigating the hazardous coastline into their destinations. A series of interconnected communities relied on the constant changes that had become the hallmark of the Gulf Coast.

Even without the catastrophic events that occasionally ravaged the countryside, coastal inhabitants felt the changeability of their natural environment. Tides and seasons

[10] K. D. Patterson, "Yellow Fever Epidemics and Mortality in the United States, 1693-1905," *Social Science Medicine*, Vol. 34, No. 8 (Apil, 1992), 858; *The Morning News,* August 26, 1888.

directed the efforts of maritime workers toward different goals. Yearly harvests created their own bonanzas as ships mobilized to move the agricultural products from one place to another. Fruit steamers trawled Caribbean islands looking for deals, then sped along to market before their cargo spoiled. Ships from New England found it provident to make voyages down to the Gulf during the frigid winter months. Seasonal fishing created opportunities for part of year, but a savvy ship master recognized when that time had passed. During the off season it might be better to rent out one's ship to other interests, securing a small passive income and laying aside shore time with the family.[11]

A Coastal Community

The constant threat of devastating storms dismayed investors looking for a solid return on their investments in the South after the Civil War. Despite the regular pleas and proclamation of southern boosters, a maritime renaissance never occurred. The ambitions of once great port cities such as New Orleans and Charleston languished, while Northern cities continued to absorb more and more of the country's international trade. Only a few cities, such as Baltimore and Galveston, managed to attract sizeable trade. Most southern port cities sank into a nostalgia laced reverie and failed to come to terms with the rapidly changing national economy.[12]

Nevertheless, the influences of Reconstruction made itself felt in costal economies. Burgeoning maritime industries, including the rising fishing industries,

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[11] *United States Commission of Fish and Fisheries, Part XIII, Report of the Commissioner for 1885* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), 285; Harper's Weekly Review, Vol. 34, 1890, 247; Papers of Lorenzo Baker, 1882-1901.

[12] David McComb, *Galveston: A History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 104-11; Don Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 12. Boosterism in support of trade along the Gulf Coast was rife in Reconstruction era media. See *Proceedings of the Gulf Coast Convention, American Shipping and Industrial League*, 17, 26-30; "Our Shipping Interests," *Weekly Louisiana*, January 14, 1882.

attracted the attention of northern investors. Naturally, those investors had to accommodate the circumstances that surrounded the people on the ground. But even this was not as great a disruption as it was in the agricultural sectors. For decades, the masters and mates of vessels along the American coast had come from New England, while the men before the mast ran the gamut of seafaring ethnicities. Gulf mariners continued to find employment, even as their formal employers changed.[13]

Even as Americans retreated from their dreams of economic domination at sea, they found that they could still find an acceptable niche as officers and engineers. Steam driven leviathans cruised across the Atlantic, complex digestive systems devouring coal for energy and relying on a host of different workers to keep her moving. A hierarchy reflective of that found on shore developed in the steel berths and lounges of steam liners. English and American officers, educated, outgoing, and expert, insisted to any passenger that would listen that they still maintained control over the seas, despite their absence from the work that actually kept the ships afloat.[14]

Below decks, a constructed community formed that defied easy categorization. Sailors constructed temporary hierarchies based on race, class, nationality, and occupation. Captains and officers attempted to assert workplace authority yet had no choice but to rely on the skills of the subordinates for their livelihood and lives. Individual sailors formed tight bonds with bunkmates, relying on one another even more than on the crew at large. These relationships supported the work and workers during the

[13] Letter of Silas Stearns, December 29, 1879. Silas Stearns Papers, M1973-01, University of West Florida.

[14] Entry for March 9, 1846. Haggott Journal, University of West Florida, M193-33SC.

voyage, yet dissipated quickly once the voyage was over. The next voyage beckoned, and a new community formed for those who worked on steam liners.

Those who lived along the coast provided a more stable estuarian community that supported blue water workers. The maritime community provided the ways and means to adapt to the ongoing changes of the nineteenth century. People who lived and worked along the Gulf built a larger community that accounted for the regular ebb and flow of broader shipping trends. This community was resilient by necessity, adapting to the flux of people, the capriciousness of the environment, and changing industries. This community persisted due to the stability of brown water work but was fed by blue water work. The main inflow of wealth was due to broader trends in the national economy, but the local influence of those who lived and worked by the shore proved surprisingly enduring.[15]

This coastal community crossed the boundaries between land and sea, blue and brown water, and national and international trade at regular intervals. Their stories complicate our understanding of the nation building project after the Civil War. Blue water sailors along the Gulf Coast existed as outsiders on the inside. They were almost always foreign born, rarely citizens, and few had permanent connections among the American citizenry. Despite their outsider status, they had regular contact with a related subset of the population, coastal sailors, what might be considered insiders on the outside. These men, also sailors though in different disciplines, formed the webbing that bound the maritime community together. They typically lived on the American coast for

[15] Johanna De Schmidt, "This Floating Little World of Ours: Shipboard Periodicals and Community-Building in the 'Global' Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Global History*, Vol. 11, Issue 2, July 2016, 229-250. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740022816000073

months or even years at a time. They formed more permanent bonds with their employers and compatriots. Despite their stationary lifestyle, they had frequent contact with international voyagers. Their actions defied federal and state attempts to regulate the American border and proved a constant thorn in the side of the growing, yet still nascent, American imperial endeavor.

Historiography

Thus far no historian has produced a dedicated work examining post-bellum sailors along the Gulf Coast. Consequently, this project brings together multiple historiographies that inform the topic. Maritime history and southern history are still in the early stages of synchronization. Ongoing examinations of the South in the nineteenth century tend to focus inland, especially after the Civil War. The common narrative declares that the United States was focused on internal improvement. While this is broadly true, the coast still experienced the Greater Reconstruction occurring in the 1860s and 1870s. The complexities of the American Gulf and the complexities of Reconstruction require a nuanced approach to seamanship along the periphery.

The historiography concerning American seamanship is vast, forming part of the larger historic turn toward the Atlantic world. This historiography tends to focus primarily on colonial and antebellum maritime labor; the so called "golden age" of American seamanship. Maritime labor was understood as a deeply "American" activity throughout the Golden Age. Peter Linebaugh and Markus Rediker's seminal work *The Many Headed Hydra* explores the working relationships between sailors and freedom throughout the long eighteenth century. A multiethnic class of sailors created the

bulwark necessary for the rise of global capitalism, even as small subsets worked to create a liberated alternative.[16]

Maritime laborers contributed a prominent role in the fight for independence. A rough egalitarian spirit pervaded the docks of the eighteenth century that often stood at odds with the higher more restrained ideals of the American elite. Mob mentality ruled port cities as everyday citizens made their bid for their version of freedom and equality. It is no coincidence that the rowdiest demonstrations for independence, most notably the Boston Tea Party, occurred on the docks rather than in the fields.[17]

W. Jeffrey Bolster's *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* analyzed the role of the sea in the formation of African-American communities and labor during the early republic. Bolster has argued that maritime labor was an opportunity for African Americans, providing wages competitive with other forms of labor available to them, the opportunity to travel and create a community in different ports, and opportunities for African-American men to assert themselves. Nevertheless, racial boundaries never disappeared from maritime work and Black seamen were as likely to encounter difficulties as opportunities. The realities of shipboard life contrasted with the potential opportunities of life at sea to create a tempting but threatening option for free people of color.

Bolster's work focused largely on the North Atlantic, excluding the slave south from his analysis. The presence of enslaved laborers on shore and at sea created a set of

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[16] Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2000), 327-329.

[17] Paul Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront: American Maritime Culture in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), xii.

circumstances outside the bounds of his study. It has fallen to later historians to explore the maritime world of the Slave South. Thomas C Buchanan's *Black Life on the Mississippi: Slaves, Free Blacks, and the Western Steamboat World* demonstrated the complexities of mobile labor in a slave society. Both slaves and free Blacks worked on steamboats along southern rivers, forging a community that supported African Americans even as it contributed to the explosion of slavery in the western states. Buchanan limited himself to the river system of the south, however, most notably the mighty Mississippi. Focusing on so called "brown water" workers, rather than their compatriots who lived and worked on the oceans and seas of the Atlantic World.

Southern historians have long recognized the complexities of the antebellum world. No longer do cotton plantations dominate the historiography. Historians now recognize the antebellum maritime South as a crucial part of the region's history. Coastal laborers in the antebellum south labored under the yoke of slavery, experiencing a curious combination of enslavement with mobility. One historian deftly encapsulated the complexities of antebellum maritime life, stating that, "Slavery always frayed at the sea's edge." In the port cities along the American coast free and enslaved laborers crowded side by side, oftentimes competing for the same jobs as stevedores, pilots, boatmen, and fishermen. They worked in vital support capacities as sailmakers, blacksmiths, coopers, and a host of occupations necessary to keep the maritime world alive.[18]

These African Americans regularly absorbed the complexities of the Atlantic maritime world. They lived a life of isolated connectivity with outside communities in

[18] David S. Cecelski, *The Waterman's Song: Slavery and Freedom in Maritime North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 37.

other port cities; distinct but affixed to each other. This network carried revolutionary ideals from the Future United States to French Haiti. Buoyed by Black sailors, this community was a powerful force for freedom and abolitionism before the Civil War. It persisted into the twentieth century, providing the fundamental labor necessary to the political movements of Marcus Garvey and Pan-Africanism. The existence of a Trans-Atlantic or Trans-Caribbean African world makes its appearance time and time again.[19]

Most recently, a collection of articles edited by Timothy D. Walker in *Sailing to Freedom* has explored the role of the sea in the famous underground railroad. The authors in the collection all show that successfully escaping slavery oftentimes depended on access to the water. The collection demonstrates time and again that self-emancipating African Americans made use of ships and sailors to make their way to the free states of the North. Massachusetts most notably served as a haven for them since it combined a well-established maritime tradition with an equally well-established tradition of anti-slavery. Much like other scholars, however, this work limits itself to the upper Atlantic. The collected studies therein venture no further south than Charleston, South Carolina, leaving the Gulf Coast entirely untouched.

The golden age of American seamanship was an era replete with American flags and American sailors. As Brian Rouleau demonstrates, American sailors served as informal diplomats throughout the world. For many people, American sailors were their first points of contact with the recently born republic and shaped the world's

[19] Frank Andre Guridy, *Forging Diaspora: Afro-Cubans and African Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 4; Frederick Douglass Opie, *Black Labor Migration in the Caribbean Guatemala, 1882-1923* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009), 3.

understanding of what it meant to be an American. The image of the manly American seaman was an attractive one, both at home and abroad. Americans understood themselves as inheritors of a long seafaring tradition and looked forward to expanding American influence across the seas. Young men looked with anticipation towards billowing sails and fathers saw maritime work as appropriate for their sons and heirs.[20]

In some sense these motivating influences became reality. By 1850, the United States had established itself as one of the preeminent shipping empires of the world. Hundreds of thousands of young men travelled in the merchant marine, the fisheries, and the whaling vessels. More American hulls floated on the seas than any nation. Only the vast shipping fleets of Great Britain compared, and many Americans were confident that they would soon overcome even that economic giant. Yet, in a remarkably short time, the once mighty American fleet faded away to almost nothing. American boys no longer gazed with wonder toward the seas but turned their eyes inward to other professions and lifestyles. Between 1850 and 1898 the number of American ships at sea decline precipitously. The wooden hulls, built of American timber and once the pride of American boosters, rotted and were rarely replaced. American ships had carried American goods to every port in the world. At its height, nearly seventy five percent of American trade goods travelled in American bottoms. By the turn of the century that number had decline to a mere nine percent.[21]

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[20] Brian Rouleau, *With Sails Whitening Every Shore: Mariners and the Making of An American Maritime Empire* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 7-8.

[21] Alex Roland, W. Jeffrey Bolster, and Alexander Keyssar, *The Way of the Ship: America's Maritime History Reenvisioned, 1600-2000* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2008), 428-430.

The transnational turn in Atlantic history has not ignored the American South. Historians have begun to understand the Gulf Coast as a part of a larger Gulf World. Residents of this world were quite aware of their counterparts in other nations. Revolutionary thinkers from nearby areas communicated their theories with each other, soldiers of fortune travelled from nation to nation, the success of failure of political movements sparked movements in neighboring countries. Government representatives asserted themselves in the name of increasing national or imperial authority. The political shifts of the mid nineteenth century, especially regarding slavery and emancipation rolled across the western hemisphere in a wave of revolutionary sentiment. Elites across the Caribbean conferred on the development of the region, learning from both successes and failures.[22]

Meanwhile, American, Spanish, and British merchants created an economic web that both defied and depended on political ties. After the Civil war, American financiers turned southwards, creating inroads into colonial Cuba, independent Mexico, and the emerging republics of Central and South America. Railroads, steamships, and banks reorganized the Atlantic economy into one under the control of an elite class of financiers who operated in conjunction with shifts in international politics. These new political ties often ignored local influences and local residents, leaving a legacy of conflict that would persist into the twentieth century.[23]

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[22] Gregory P. Downs, *The Second American Revolution: The Civil War-Era Struggle over Cuba and the Rebirth of the American Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 7, 74. Matthew Pratt Guterl, *American Mediterranean: Southern Slaveholders in the Age of Emancipation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 80.

[23] Jason Mason Hart, *Empire and Revolution: The Americans in Mexico since the Civil War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 46-62.

Despite these changes, Americans were slow to give up their seafaring self-image. Onlookers made constant claims that Americans were no longer going to sea, yet American writers consistently self-inserted their national identity into nautical considerations. "English, American, and Norwegian" sailors were included together as having equal claims to the seafaring profession, even when no actual American's appeared on crew lists. As early as 1850, American consul in Chile noted the "small number of American seamen" found in that port. The disconnect between identity and reality was a fundamental part of sailor's claims to national participation in the 1880s and 1890s when the nation began once again to consider Caribbean expansion.[24]

The Spanish-American War proved a revitalizing influence on the American merchant marine. In the two decades that followed a new generation of American went to sea in a short-lived silver age. Shielded by protective legislation which mandated that domestic shipping could only be carried out on American ships, young sailors married themselves to the imperial mission. They moved between the United States and its newly acquired colonies in the Pacific. A new wave of organization and reform heralded the new century, even as sailing vanished permanently from the American mindset.[25]

This dissertation connects two eras of American seamanship. It takes the decline of the golden age of American seamanship as its starting point and ends with the revitalization of the merchant marine following the Spanish-American War. Those who lived along the Gulf Coast were finding their way through an era of change that would

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[24] *Harper's Weekly Review*, Vol. 15, 1871, 976; Quote from Brian Rouleau, *With Sails Whitening Every Shore: Mariners and the Making of An American Maritime Empire*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 196.

[25] Leon Fink, *Sweatshops at Sea: Merchant Seamen in the World's First Globalized Industry from 1812 to Present* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 138.

largely forget about them. Their ubiquitous presence was both a blessing and a curse, temporarily shielding them from broader changes even as those changes eventually led to their extinction.

This dissertation relies on two separate frameworks to explore liminal maritime life. First, it posits the existence of a coastal community that tied the emerging Gulf World together. All too often maritime historians have focused on the marine community at sea, neglecting the community along the coast. Rather than focusing on the small minority of sailors who worked in international trade, this dissertation focuses on those sailors who lived and worked in a liminal geography. This dissertation also shows how that community reacted to the broader economic and technological changes of the late nineteenth century. If sailors were not isolated aboard their ships, neither were they isolated from the region at large. Gulf workers were affected by the massive changes sweeping the United States. Workers came to terms with industrial technology and work techniques but did so on their own terms. The Gulf Coast came to embody a curious mix of innovation and recidivism.

Throughout the late nineteenth century, new technologies made their presence felt along the Gulf. Assorted businessmen introduced a host of innovations designed to maximize profit and productivity. When it came to maritime work, larger steel hulled ships, employing first side wheel, then later rear wheel, then finally screw propulsion systems. Steam engines decreased the amount of time that maritime voyages made and decreased the number of ships at sea at any given time. By the end of the nineteenth century, new ships possessed electricity, complicated ventilation systems, and even refrigeration. Local workers had to adjust to new industries and new methods of work, a

difficult task at the best of times. By examining the local marine network of the Gulf Coast, I expose the long-submerged continuities and changes in the liminal coastal communities. Regional trade and niche industries provided continuity between the golden age of the 1850s and the silver age of the 1900s. The larger economic revolution occurring at sea and on land made itself felt, but local influence shielded workers for a short time. Those local influences were possible because of deep ties between ship and shore.[26]

Fading skills found a temporary refuge along the Gulf Coast, where once precious sailing abilities remained valuable despite the ongoing superiority of steam technology. Aging sailors looked for local employment rather than embarking on monthslong international voyages. The fishing, oystering, and sponging smacks and schooners that dotted the Gulf Coast still needed workers capable of handling them. Coasting vessels still relied on capable crews to chart meandering barrier islands and inlets. Pilots needed crews familiar with barrier islands and seasonal weather. There were opportunities for sailors to work and live along the Gulf even in the face of an increasingly centralized set of industries. Seamen, ship owners, and ship masters made continual adjustments in the small-scale economy of the Gulf Coast but did so using techniques that were familiar to them, recreating older social mores in new settings. Northern businessmen lamented the fact that captains resisted their organizational influences, preferring to gather recruits on their own rather than hire through the company. Captains insisted on being paid in shares

[26] Robert Gardiner, *The Advent of Steam: The Merchant Steamship before 1900* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1993), 166-173.

rather than submit to the indignity of wage labor. Able sailors jealously guarded their employment from outsiders.[27]

At the turn of the twentieth century, Gulf mariners persisted in defending their shrinking economic sphere. Coasting faded away in the face of growing rails and larger ships. Fishing remained an important economic resource but employed fewer sailors each year as exhausted fisheries took their toll. Many sailing vessels had little choice but to shift tack, turning towards work as pleasure vessels for tourists, or getting rid of their ships entirely. Coastal residents began to compete for space and resources with new industries that lived by the sea rather than on it.[28]

Chapter Outline

Throughout the late nineteenth century, politicians and pundits regularly mourned the decline of the American seafaring population and the recognition of a fundamentally "foreign" maritime workforce. In reality, Americans had never been a demographic majority at sea during the nineteenth century, aboard American flagged ships or otherwise, though American sailors had been the largest nationality aboard American ships. Even so, American sailors and American ships did represent a smaller subsection of the shipping trade in the year surrounding the American Civil War.

Onlookers were quick to blame the sectional conflict for this decline. Notably, they blamed Confederate privateers for sinking or capturing Union ships throughout the

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[27] *Report of the Commissioner for 1885*, United States Commission of Fish and Fisheries, Part XIII (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1886), 282; Paul Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront: American Maritime Culture in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 29.

[28] Anthony J. Stanonis, *Faith in Bikinis: Politics and Leisure in the Coastal South since the Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2014), 17.

conflict. Owners frequently sold their ships to foreign investors rather than risk the possibility of a total loss at the hands of Confederate steamers. Other observers claimed that the Union had drafted the remaining vessels into the Union Navy, which had lacked the necessary ships to blockade the long meandering southern coastline. Government service exhausted these ships and left them in an unfit condition at the termination of the war.

Observers made similar claims regarding the seafaring population itself. Many members of the American merchant marine joined up with the Union Navy, and a smaller number joined the Confederacy. After the war, rising wages in the United States and an increasingly industrial economy contributed to the ongoing lack of Americans at sea. Maritime work was no longer romantic, nor attractive. When compared with opportunities on land, marine work was low paying, dangerous, and more limiting than comparable terrestrial labor. This was especially true in international trade. Movement between nations allowed captains to take advantage of fluctuating labor demands. It was far cheaper for shipmasters to wait until they had docked at a European port to sign on new recruits, rather than compete with the American labor market. Those workers became trapped inside their own places of employment, unable to negotiate for better wages, unable to quit, and forced by law to continue serving their master.[29]

Seamanship was an increasingly foreign skillset, one that Americans were unwilling or unable to compete with. This ongoing demographic shift provided an opportunity for Americans to project their national anxieties after the Civil War. The

[29] Brian Rouleau, *With Sails Whitening Every Shore: Mariners and the Making of An American Maritime Empire*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 199; *Sailor's Magazine and Seamen's Friend*, Vol. 40, September 1867, 37.

transition of the maritime industry from a traditionally American enterprise to an essentially foreign one made opened up a new set of rhetorical possibilities. Americans began to understand the maritime world as a mysterious enterprise ripe for American "improvement." Reform efforts began to reclaim the maritime industry, in spirit if not in nationality. These reform efforts began with its roots in Protestant Christianity, but soon diversified into collectivized labor and political reform.[30]

Along the Gulf Coast, however, the maritime community adapted to the demographic changes of postbellum America. For those who lived along the coast, maritime work remained a necessary and occasionally laudable endeavor. Marine industries persisted even in the face of national decline. If fewer natural born Americans went to sea, that number was augmented by immigrants. If seamanship was no longer a proper Anglo-Saxon discipline, it was still valuable to African Americans and Northern Europeans. If the American flag was no longer seen in every foreign port, every foreign flag would continue to be seen in American ports. For those who lived and worked by the sea, life continued much as it always had.

Chapter one explores this community that developed alongside broader international changes. The Gulf community defied easy categorization, containing members both foreign and domestic. Coastal southerners had maintained access through the nation's borders throughout the nineteenth century. Geographic proximity with the Caribbean helped, as it was easy for travel minded southerners to jaunt to nearby territories. Intercultural encounters were common even for those who stayed within the

[30] Roald Kverndal, *Seamen's Missions: Their Origins and Early Growth* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1986), 554.

bounds of the United States. Census records along the Gulf show remarkable diversity even outside the entrepots provided by major cities.[31]

This chapter examines the major maritime industries along the Gulf Coast. It shows that terrestrial work, fishing, coasting, and blue water trade interacted with each other regularly. In fact, the distinction between the categories was often unclear. Fishermen worked as longshoremen, longshoremen took on voyages as coasters, steamship sailors deserted to work as fishermen. The nuances of work on the coast were practically innumerable. These interactions occurred while underway and while in port; sailors jumped between ships, swam to nearby islands, or simply walked away from their vessels into the welcoming anonymity of port life. All of these actions were facilitated by southerners willing and able to succor mariners.

Chapter two explores the disruptions of the coastal community, casting social ties into harsh reality. Irregular storms, shipwrecks, unsafe ships, and other disasters placed mariners and terrestrial residents in personal and economic danger. Large scale disasters such as storms and hurricanes created the most observable instances of the coastal community. When storms swept through the shoreline, they left destruction of property and personage in their wake. Ships capable of weathering the storms went out to rescue those in distress, putting the ships and their crew in harm's way for others. After the storms were over, trading vessels travelled to nearby ports to gather aid, relying on economic and social ties to provide relief. At these times the maritime community came together to aid members of their own community. Those outside the reach of destruction

[31] Matthew Pratt Guterl, *American Mediterranean: Southern Slaveholders in the Age of Emancipation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 877.

could and did donate their own time and material wealth to help people elsewhere on the Gulf.

Shipwrecks also highlight the reaches of the Gulf community. Ships and sailors had a long tradition of aiding their fellows in need. The meandering barrier islands, shifting estuaries, and shallow canals all presented hazards for those sailing along the coast. Not even the largest steamship was immune to these dangers. When shipwrecks occurred, there was no option but to rely on strangers for the safety of the vessel, its crew, and cargoes. The federal government did its best to establish relief stations, but these were intermittently placed and incapable of stretching across the entire South.

Disasters were also opportunities for profit, however. As coasting and fishing ships faced increasingly small margins, they looked to take advantage of any opportunity that presented itself. Wrecks and storms wrought destruction, but they also provided profit in the forms of salvage and wrecking. Salvage provided essentially free, though irregular, sources of profit. Salvage, such as the bales of cotton carried in the *Alice Vane* in 1879, was carefully examined by port inspectors, but as long as no other owner came forward the ship that claimed salvage received the bounty. In the *Alice Vane's* case, salvage netted a clear profit for the small schooner, with the state taking fifty percent of the proceeds. Helping wrecks was an industry in itself. Beached vessels unloaded their cargo into smaller nearby vessels in the hopes that the ship would float off when high tide arrived. For their assistance, wrecking vessels received a portion of the cargo's value. Wreckers were despised by trading vessels, but when disaster struck, stricken ships had little choice but to accept costly assistance.[32]

[32] Harry M. Davis v. Twelve Bales of Cotton. Admiralty Court of Key West. RG21, M1360.

Chapter three explores the racial contours of life on the Gulf Coast. The Gulf Coast has long been the South's melting pot, standing in sharp contrast with the sharp racial distinctions of the agricultural sector. Scholars have labeled the "creole Coast," stretching from the Chesapeake Bay to the Texas Bend. Along this line, American prejudices mixed with Caribbean influences, dating back to the colonial era. Jim Crow had difficulty deciphering the racial complexity along the coast.[33]

A complicated tapestry of ethnic backgrounds has also long characterized maritime labor. The nexus of these two traditions in the Gulf led to remarkable flexibility and opportunity. However, local residents were not immune from broader reinterpretations of race and ethnicity after the Civil War. The developing American zeitgeist reinterpreted the maritime melting pot in negative terms. Maritime labor had once been a properly masculine enterprise. It was entirely appropriate for fathers to prepare their sons for a life at sea. As fewer Americans went to sea, those jobs were filled by other nationalities and ethnicities. Rather than change their understanding of other races, instead Americans changed their understanding of maritime labor. American views of seamanship plummeted. The lack of Americans at sea invited racialized interpretations of the changing industry that justified their own absence. The fact that the traditionally American sailing vessels were also becoming a thing of the past permitted Americans to juxtapose a rosy past against a steely present.

The ongoing triumph of steam locomotion lent itself well to a racial hierarchy. Common thinking held that the clearly delineated positions aboard steamships were

[33] Terry G. Jordan-Bychkov, "The Creole Coast," in *Homelands: A Geography of Culture and Place Across America* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2001), 73-82.

suited to particular races. What one might consider "white collar" positions such as pursars, stewards, and quartermasters were usually granted to those with American or English backgrounds. In keeping with this hierarchy, skilled engineering positions fell to those from a similar background, like the Irish and Scottish. More plebian positions, such as seamen and ordinary seamen were occupied by the Northern European plurality. African Americans and people of color found themselves unable to rise above the lowest stations aboard steamships as barbers, cooks, and servers.

The international milieu at sea allowed frequent exceptions to this hierarchy, as ships entirely crewed by African Americans attest. Seasonal labor created temporary opportunities for African Americans. They chartered vessels and crewed them with their own compatriots, gaining a taste of mobility both social and geographic. Even under those circumstances, however, people of color had difficulty in rising to the position of full-time officers. Those that did adopted the racial hierarchy themselves, treating themselves as exceptions to an unquestionable rule.

The sailors who participated in that industry found that they had to renegotiate their own racial status, oftentimes in the few days or weeks that they had while on shore leave. Though African Americans maintained a visible presence, sailors increasingly hailed from northern Europe, complicating the racial tableau. Scandinavians, Norwegians, and others found themselves in the position of both privileged and oppressed, as they were white, but not Anglo-Saxon, hampering their own attempts to claim racial equality in the United States.

Chapter four addresses the ways in which sailing adapted to an industrializing Atlantic World. In some regards the seafaring workforce had consistently been on the

cutting edge of technology, but the transition from sail to steam was unprecedented. Sailors who had been at the apex of their craft, after attaining decades of practical experience, lost their hard-won positions as the ships they had served on fell out of service and no new ships replaced them. Newer steam ships sought out younger men for skilled positions and cheaper men for unskilled work. Many inside and outside the shipping industry struggled to unite the demands of steam navigation with an older seafaring tradition.

Traditional hiring practices conflicted with burgeoning managerial tactics along the coast as maritime workers, and even some shipmasters, encountered corporate acquisitions. For their part, new business owners and entrepreneurs found it difficult to convince stubborn sailors and shipping masters to incorporate newer ideas. Throughout the post-bellum years, the Gulf remained a bastion of antebellum hiring practices, relying on word of mouth, personal relationships, and even casual criminal connections. Captains continued to recruit their own crews, sailors showed preference for which ships they signed on with, and crimps and boardinghouse keepers maintained such a presence that the Sailor's Union lamented the impossibility of organizing in the South.[34]

Even so, these older labor practices necessarily relied on the immigration of new mariners into the region. Transatlantic vessels recruited sailors at low rates in Europe before embarking across the Atlantic. The difficulty of work, combined with the low pay, created a near constant temptation to desert. Captains even made a habit of encouraging desertion to avoid paying wages at the end of the voyage, effectively

[34] *Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Convention of the International Seamen's Union of America*, V. 6, 1902, 12.

abandoning their crews in foreign nations. After the deed was done, deserters had to find some way to continue living. The available work along the coast provided deserters and transient laborers with an irregular source of income. Foreign labor became a staple of local maritime industries.[35]

Chapter five examines the difficulty of creating and enforcing national boundaries along the Gulf Coast. Long considered a hard line of national authority, in reality, the coast was a permeable membrane that allowed entry and exit from the United States with ease. Chapter five highlights the point by focusing on smuggling along the Gulf Coast and Caribbean in the postbellum years. The high tariffs and preoccupation of the federal government created a set of circumstances ideal for illegal trade, especially in desirable consumer goods.

Ships along the Gulf Coast participated in graft and smuggling frequently. Smuggling was not limited to a single class of ship nor class of person. It occurred on steam liners, small coasting schooners, and even individual boats. Smuggling did not just occur on these disparate vessels, it relied on them. Deep water smugglers needed local expertise to move their products in a timely fashion. Sedentary workers involved in the trade gave it a sense of security, since those men more easily established long term shore-bound relationships. Those relationships went both ways, however, and the shared experiences between deep water sailors and coastal sailors as maritime laborers created common bonds.

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[35] W. Wyman, "Hardships of the Coasting Trade, and Particularly of the Chesapeake Bay Oystermen," 276; P. H. Bailhache, "Report on the Hygiene of the Merchant Marine with Recommendations," *Annual Report of the National Board of Health for 1879* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1879), 266.

The complicated web that formed the black market was highly alluring given the more general corruption of the Gilded Age. The subtle distinction between smuggling and legitimate trade was often lost on captains both foreign and domestic. The exchange of gifts with customs agents, who would then go out of their way on behalf of friends and acquaintances, was an everyday aspect of nineteenth century business. The insistence of an increasingly bureaucratized government to apply the law rigidly and without favor was the interloper in these spaces. Even the most law abiding of customs officer struggled to rationalize their duty to the government with the moldable realities of life on the coast.

The conclusion explores the end of decline of the coastal world during and after the Spanish American War. Even as its merchant marine and domestic fisheries declined, the United States began to flex its diplomatic muscles. These efforts culminated in the Spanish American War, but numerous Latin American interventions and even more minor diplomatic incidents preceded full blown imperial warfare. The coast and its inhabitants felt the impact of these disputes even as they participated in them. Their presence in American port cities raised importance questions regarding citizenship and the control of American borders. As necessary as they were to the United States' export economy, they were also walking invitations for imperial conflicts. Events as small as barroom brawls took on greater significance given the presence of foreign-born sailors and foreign flagged ships. Imperial representatives, most notably local consuls, found themselves juggling these isolated disputes on a regular basis.[36]

[36] Brian Rouleau, *With Sails Whitening Every Shore: Mariners and the Making of An American Empire* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 196-199.

Fisheries and fishermen appeared frequently in this context as the United States came into conflict with other nations at sea. The United States, Great Britain, and other Atlantic nations attempted to parcel up the ocean to define clear usage rights and boundaries. Fisheries and shipping lanes were both diplomatic claims and diplomatic sites. In reality, a prosperous fishery was attractive regardless of nationality. Fishing ships indulged in minor violations of sovereignty and authority on a regular basis. Smaller ships flocked to such locations, both competing and cooperating in the pursuit of their smelly goals. While these incidents were never worth going to war over, they heralded problems to come.[37]

The outbreak of the Spanish American War disrupted coastal communities reliant on informal trade and communication. The war temporarily divided communities separated by borders more than water. Trade ships and fishing vessels who had departed before the declaration of war were detained by admiralty courts without even knowing that war was occurring. For the duration of the conflict, the small-scale trade and communication between the Gulf Coast and Cuba was cut off. Sailors along the Gulf no longer had easy access to another important Gulf territory. It was unclear how they would reestablish those relationships when and if the war came to a close.[38]

Conclusion

The end of the Spanish American War and the acquisition of overseas territories created a renewed focus on the role of the American merchant marine. American

[37] Scott Mobley, *Progressives in Navy Blue: Maritime Strategy, American Empire, and the Transformation of US Naval Identity* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2018), 135.

[38] United States v Spanish Schooner *Antonio Suarez*, Admiralty Court of Key West, RG21, M1360; United States v Spanish Smack *Lola*, Admiralty Court of Key West, RG21, M1360.

shipping received a temporary boost in two separate waves after 1898. The Spanish American War had thrown the merchant marine back into the spotlight. The merchant marine had proved less than useful during the conflict, despite strident claims that the coast was the training ground of the Navy. Furthermore, the demands of an American overseas empire created a renewed focus on maritime power, with Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines now officially contained within the United States borders. Americans began listening to long ignored labor activists and mercantile boosters. The outbreak of World War One created a crisis that the American merchant marine was ill equipped to confront. Successive waves of Progressive legislation designed to revive American shipping passed through Congress in 1915 and again in 1920.[39]

Political legislation had little impact on those living along the Gulf Coast, however. Transportation changes continued to isolate coastal communities as larger megaships absorbed greater shares of trade. Regional trade in the Caribbean basin languished and the web of connections between coastal communities faded. Despite this decline, however, the maritime industries that sustained the small communities that dotted the coast continued their work. As the transportation industry vanished, other maritime industries persisted. Small towns and villages relied on fishing much as they had in the 1800s. Fishing along the Gulf Coast grew into one of the major industries until the Gulf Coast supplied nearly fifteen percent of the nation's seafood and twenty two percent of the nation's aquaculture.[40]

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[39] Alex Roland, W. Jeffrey Bolster, and Alexander Keyssar, *The Way of the Ship: America's Maritime History Reenvisioned, 1600-2000* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2008), 222, 247-251.

[40] National Marine Fisheries Service, *Fisheries of the United States, 2020* (U. S. Department of Commerce, NOAA Current Fishery Statistics, No. 2020), 8, 17. https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/sustainable-fisheries/fisheries-united-states.

However, the fishing industry increasingly took a back seat in comparison to a new industry that would come to characterize the Gulf Coast in the twentieth century, tourism. Ironically, the monopolization of transportation by larger railroad and steamship companies facilitated the tourist industry, creating cheaper and faster means of travel to the coast. Charter fishing, yachting, private ferries, and other activities transformed the Gulf South into a national playground. By the mid twentieth century, tourism would rival traditional southern industries. By the 1920s, millions of Americans "found it absolutely necessary to go South every winter." In keeping with coast's peculiar geography, this tourist mecca was still a transnational region that extended into the Caribbean, including "Texas, Mississippi, Louisiana, Georgia, the Carolinas, Bermuda, Cuba, and even Mexico." Despite all the changes of the nineteenth century, the world of the Gulf South continued to defy clean definition.[41]

[41] Brown. J. Lewis, "Why Men Migrate," *Outlook* (17 December 1924), 642; Harvey H. Jackson, "The Rise and Decline of the Redneck Riviera: The Northern Rim of the Gulf Coast since World War II." *Southern Cultures,* vol. 16, no. 1 (2010): 7–30. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26214255.

CHAPTER II – EVERY MAN AN ISLAND: THE MARITIME COMMUNITY OF THE POSTBELLUM GULF COAST, 1865-1880

In the Chesapeake, an oyster schooner dredged up several bushels of oysters off the bottom of the bay. Off the coast of Pensacola, a crew of African Americans dropped their lines in the water, hoping to catch enough red snapper to feed their families. The fishing ship was usually operated by pilots travelling to incoming merchant vessels, but in the off season, the pilots were happy to rent their vessels out to African-American fishermen. In Galveston, eleven schooners arrived with lumber, railroad ties, and even an entire locomotive, all working in service of an industry that would eventually put them out of business. In New Orleans, a Spanish ship arrived from Havana in ballast, stopping temporarily on her voyage to other ports. While in the city, the captain would hire new crew to replace those who had deserted or fallen ill.[42]

All these men worked and lived as a part of the maritime community along the Gulf Coast. The Gulf maritime community was an amorphous, but persistent, set of social, economic, and cultural ties that bound brown and blue water workers together. This chapter demonstrates the connections among these disparate workers, showing that sailors in different regions and in different lines of work were not wholly separate from each other. Men who worked in fishing were acquainted with those in the coasting trade; men in the coasting trade encountered deep water vessels; deep water vessels relied on local pilots and tugs to arrive safely in port. Oftentimes the men who worked in one

[42] W. Wyman, "Hardships of the Coasting Trade, and Particularly of the Chesapeake Bay Oystermen," 276; *Report of the Commissioner for 1885*, United States Commission of Fish and Fisheries, Part XIII (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1886), 285; *Galveston Daily News,* June 15, 1880.

industry would transition to another, making the community even more tightly bound. These connections, along with a host of others, formed the ties that bound the coast together.[43]

The maritime community consisted of those who toiled on the water or worked on the shore for those who toiled on the water. It was an amorphous and shifting community by nature of the work. The changes of the seasons influenced the direction of trade. In the South, the winter months were the peaks months, while the summers languished. Ships from the Caribbean arrived mostly in November and December, hoping to avoid the deadly heat and noxious humidity. Similarly, fishing seasons varied from fish to fish and location to location. Part time fishermen also worked in the winter when their fields were barren. The geographic variability of the coast contributed to mobility of the labor force that worked on it.

Fishermen

Fishermen represented the most common form of maritime work along the Gulf. People living along the coast relied on the sea for their meals. In the decades between 1865 and 1900, fish was primarily a means of providing sustenance, disconnected from broader market changes. Aquatic reserves of crab, shrimp, and fish close to the shoreline were an ever-present resource for coastal denizens across the South, from Texas to

[43] Lydia Carol-Decker, "Maritime Culture: A Sociological Perspective," *The International Journal of Maritime History*, Vol. 30, Issue 2 (May 2018), 312; Fernand Braudel's famous *La Mediterranée* proposed a fundamental Mediterranean economic and cultural unity in the sixteenth century. His conception of the sea as a human unit remains a fundamental consideration in the field of Mediterranean history. Recent scholarship continues to grapple with his theories even as it moves beyond his original scope. Sian Reynolds, Ed., Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (New York, Harper and Row, 1972), 276-282; Gabriel Piterberg, Teofilo F. Ruiz, and Geoffrey Symcox, *Braudel Revisited: The Mediterranean World, 1600-1800* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 5, 229.

Maryland. Though men dominated the offshore fishing industry, children and women engaged in crabbing and shrimping near the shore to make side money by selling them to local markets. Cottage industries dotted the meandering Gulf coastline, seeking out small catches for personal meals, or small amounts of money. Fishing vessels ran the gamut from single one- or two-person boats to large-scale deep-sea fishing vessels, complete with increasingly complicated machinery. This variation reflects the complexities of maritime work along the coast, as individuals all employed in the fishing trade might be performing different work.[44]

Fishing vessels of almost every stripe were ubiquitous along the coast. There were few locations across the South that did not play host to some form of fishing, but onlookers rarely considered fishing when observing maritime matters. Fishing was not romantic, and for most onlookers, not interesting. In Louisiana, the wide marshland south of New Orleans was home to thousands of estuarian inhabitants relying on oyster, shrimp, and other fish for survival. These independent fishermen lived largely out of sight, voyaging to the large city only a few times a year. In Apalachicola, an entire fleet of sponging vessels "were not entered upon the customs house books." Nevertheless, for the coastal community, fishing was an important node, providing a crucial service to dwellers on both land and sea.[45]

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[44] Letter of Silas Stearns, Nov. 13, 1880, University of West Florida, Silas Stearns Papers, Box 2; George B. Goode, *ed., The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), Part 5, vol. 2, 645, 804.

[45] Brian Rouleau, *With Sails Whitening Every Shore: Mariners and the Making of An American Maritime Empire*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 199; George B. Goode, *ed., The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), Part 5, vol. 2, 824.

Along the Gulf Coast, commercial fishing was largely limited to four areas in the late nineteenth century: mollusks, crustaceans, true fish, and sponges. The market demand for these products was mostly limited to nearby southern cities and Caribbean ports, where they were sold directly to merchant houses or hocked in the streets for individual consumption. In the twentieth century, shrimping would become an important industry, but it remained largely nascent throughout the Gilded Age. Some shrimping vessels did work outside the major ports, but shrimp were primarily used as bait for more attractive catches. By the 1890s, however, shrimping vessels began plying the coast of north Florida and Alabama. Other fishing occurred, especially sport fishing, done by wealthy locals and tourists, but they were not systematic endeavors. Parts of the Gulf coast developed fisheries that became synonymous with their geography. Sponges along the west Florida coastline were "what the oyster is to Chesapeake Bay, the salmon to Puget Sound, or the lobster to New England." These industries defined the area in which they occurred, though they never dominated enough to become coastal monocultures. The four major fishing industries overlapped at times, especially along the Florida coast, where all four categories had a presence.[46]

For the most part, fishing vessels limited their work to specific locations, rather than travelling on longer voyages. Ships out of Key West rarely travelled more than ten miles away from their port of call. Consequently, fishermen formed closer ties with the shoreline. Oystermen worked the oyster beds near their home ports, most famously surrounding the Chesapeake Bay. It is difficult to estimate their time on land vs. their

[46] George B. Goode, *ed., The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), Part 5, vol. 2, 803; Kirk Munro, "Sponge and Spongers of the Florida Reef," *Scribner's Magazine* (1892), vol. 12, 639.

time at sea, but government reports claimed that oyster workers averaged three or four days a week on shore. Some oyster crews travelled from as far away as North Carolina, but most vessels found such long commutes unnecessary. Sponging vessels also maintained proximity to local sponge beds which existed almost exclusively along the west coast of Florida. Mullet and snapper fisheries travelled on longer voyages, but they occasionally established base camps along the shoreline for smoking and salting. These workers helped make up the estuarian maritime population of the Gulf Coast. They worked at sea but were not as isolated as their deep-water counterparts.[47]

Privately owned fishing vessels remained a common sight along the coast throughout the late nineteenth century, rather than those owned by fishing corporations. Small scale fishing had long dominated the Gulf coastline, as opposed to commercial fishing, such as that in New England. Fishing work was increasingly a permanent occupation more than a transient one, at least for the masters and mates. For decades after the Civil War, these independent fishermen continued to practice their craft, hiring their own crews, directing their own voyages, and choosing their own markets for their wares. Oftentimes the men crewing the ships were part owners themselves and entire fishing families were common.

Among privately owned fishing vessels, payment to those who had an interest in the business was commonly made in shares or "lays" rather than in wages. The precise

[47] The image of sailors as an isolated and vulnerable class of workers was a popular one among contemporaries. "An American Act for the Protection of Seamen," *Sailor's Magazine and Seamen's Friend*, Vol. 43, September 1871, 257; Silas Stearns, "Fisheries of the Gulf of Mexico," *The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), Section II, 539; Paul Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront: American Maritime Culture in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 74.

value of the catch was unknowable beforehand, so it was simpler to divide up the proceeds after it had been sold. Fishermen sold the catch at standard market rates, deducted expenses, then shared what remained among the crew. In Texas, at least, the captain received no larger share than any other crewmember, and the same likely occurred at times in other states. The share or "lay" system of organization was an older one that nevertheless persisted even in the face of increasing industrialization along the Gulf. Even as the value of fishing began to stabilize, independent fishermen "clung tenaciously to the methods of their fathers" over wage labor. Even after the turn of the century, the International Sailors Union noted that mariners along the Gulf Coast stuck to the old ways, despite the overarching changes to the American economy.[48]

Payment methods differed between skilled and unskilled fishermen. Officers and those with special abilities were more likely to receive shares rather than set wages. Costal investors speculating in burgeoning fishing opportunities looked to attract skilled fishermen, frequently from New England. These specialist workers received shares in exchange for their knowledge. Specialized workers were more likely to work multiple voyages, attaching their careers to a particular vessel or firm, and potentially rising through the ranks. In the growing Pensacola fisheries, captains and mates continued to receive shares of the ships' profits, but common sailors had little choice but to accept set wages.[49]

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[48] Charles H. Stevenson, "Report on the Coast Fisheries of Texas," *Report of the Commissioner for 1889 to 1891* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1893), 378; George B. Goode, *ed., The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D. C: Government Printing Office, 1887), Part 5, vol. 1, 571*; Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Convention of the International Sailors Union of America* (Milwaukee, WI: 1902), 14.

[49] George B. Goode, *ed., The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), Part 5, vol. 1, 589.

Of course, the wages owed to fishermen were frequently spoken for before they could be claimed. Ready money was a scarcity for fishermen as for other seasonal laborers. Fishermen frequently had little choice but to purchase their tools on credit from the ship owner, which the shipowner usually repaid to himself. Furthermore, profits were only divided after bills, duties, tonnage fees, and taxes had been removed from the general fund, leaving little for the ordinary sailors. Despite the success or failure of individual voyages, "the fishermen always come out in debt." The parallel to sharecropping is obvious, but in reality, the maritime industries had utilized such unbalanced payment methods for decades.[50]

The fishing industries along the Gulf adapted to the ongoing changes of the Gilded Age as best they could. Mullet, oysters, and snapper were traditionally the food of coast dwellers only, but they began to appear in landlocked metropoli across the South. Technological innovations in ice production, canning, and the ever-increasing reach of railroads helped grow the Gulf Coast fisheries. Canneries in Galveston, New Orleans, Mobile and elsewhere helped preserve seafood long enough to reach the interior. Firms built icehouses directly into the vessels to keep fish from spoiling on longer voyages. Ice packed hogsheads kept unsalted fish fresh, while regular railroads moved the foodstuff into the interior, "by express train to Savannah" before moving on to other destinations. Louisiana and Alabama fishermen increasingly sold their wares at the nearest railroad

[50] George B. Goode, *ed., The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), Part 5, vol. 1, 571.

hub, rather than transport their catches back to their home ports. Consequently, the value of fish from the Gulf increased by nearly twenty five percent between 1860 to 1880.[51]

Oystering was a prevalent form of fishing along the length and breadth of the Gulf Coast. Oysters were found on every "Stake or bit of sunken log" off the Florida coast and even west Florida, around Apalachicola was "favored by the proximity of good beds of oysters." Further west, in Louisiana and Texas, oystering was less common, at least for commercial consumption, but the industry still employed "a large number of men." Most of the ships along the Texas coast were registered in New Orleans, obscuring their presence in the Lone Star State. The industry petered out along the meandering Texas coastline, but ships still found the time to look for the valuable mollusk as local newspaper mentioned foundered oyster ships in the wake of a storm. The Chesapeake Bay was the most famous oyster bed in the South, but it was common for oyster ships to be found outside almost every port across the South. Dredging for oysters, using heavy metal nets to scrape the seabed, occurred almost entirely in the Chesapeake. Elsewhere, oystermen used long tongs to pluck oysters from above. Oystering remained profitable in Louisiana, along the southern bayous. Eastern Europeans dominated the local industry, creating artificial oyster beds as well as tonging wild oysters.[52]

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[51] *Report of the Commissioner for 1885*, United States Commission of Fish and Fisheries, Part XIII (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1886), 282, 285; George B. Goode, *ed., The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), Part 5, vol. 1, 579.

[52] George B. Goode, *ed., The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), Part 5, vol. 2, 512; Silas Stearns, "Fisheries of the Gulf of Mexico," *The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), Section II, 579; *Galveston Daily News*, April 25, 1877; Milos M. Vujnovich, *Yugoslavs in Louisiana* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 2000), 108.

When oystering ships pulled their harvest to the Gulf shoreline, dockworkers loaded them onto carts for processing. Canning oysters first developed as early as 1812 but did not become a popular method of storing oysters until the Civil War when Baltimore businessman Isaac Solomon adopted the technique. Using women and children as unskilled laborers to shuck the oysters by prying knives between the two shells. Steaming the oysters occasionally loosened the grasp of the meat, but this was by no means a foolproof system. Regardless of technological advancements, the work was dangerous and time consuming. From Baltimore, canning factories spread along the lower ends of the Gulf Coast, reaching Mississippi and Louisiana by the 1890s. Canning factories opened in Mobile, Biloxi, Bay St. Louis, and Barataria Bay.[53]

The Florida reefs hosted the sponging fleets which, like oystering limited themselves to proximal locations. In Florida, sponge fishing schooners operated as mother ships, depending on small boats which the larger vessels carried to their destination. Proper 50-ton schooners towed as many as eight or ten of the smaller boats and employed crews of nearly twenty. Upon arriving at the reefs, the crew split up into duos and trios and began collection, leaving only the captain and perhaps the cook aboard the larger vessel. Unlike Mediterranean spongers, the primary competition on the market, Florida spongers did not dive for the sponges themselves. Instead, glass bottomed buckets provided makeshift goggles while the fishermen employed long wooden poles, occasionally fifty feet or more, to collect the valuable outcrops. At the end of each day the ships made for the shoreline where they created temporary camps to

[53] Deanne Love Stephens, *The Mississippi Gulf Coast Seafood Industry: A People's History* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2021), 36-40; Donald W. Davis, *Washed Away?: The Invisible Peoples of Louisiana's Wetlands* (Lafayette: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2010), 325.

process the sponges. The sailors cleaned the sponges thoroughly, washed them, and strung them along the shoreline to dry. After a decent load of sponges had been gathered, part of the crew stayed behind to watch their bounty, while the rest continued on their voyage. The speed with which the crews processed the sponges was just as important as the speed with which they gathered them. Both gathering and processing sponges were valuable skills in Key West.[54]

Alongside the sponging and oystering industries, true fishing came into its own after the Civil War. Commercial fishing had been largely nonexistent before the 1840s, though New England ships occasionally travelled to the coast of western Florida in search of shad, grouper and other game fish. The fishing grounds were largely left alone during the Civil War but came into their own in the decades following. In 1868, Captain "Dave" McClusky discovered shoals of red snapper off the coast of Campeche. This discovery, along with the post-war need for an economic recovery spurred a booming Gulf fishing industry. Government reports claimed that fishing along the Gulf doubled during Reconstruction, largely because ever increasing numbers of southerners engaged in the industry. Some few northern businessmen detected the opportunity for profit along the Gulf. A Maine businessman named Silas B. Stearns moved down to Pensacola in 1875, working as a bookkeeper for the Warren and Co. fishing firm before starting his own rival business. In conjunction with a partner, he founded the Pensacola Ice Company, which hired local fishermen as well as arranged for their catches'

[54] George B. Goode, *ed., The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), Part 5, vol. 2, 822; Kirk Munro, "Sponge and Spongers of the Florida Reef," *Scribner's Magazine* (1892), vol. 12, 639, 645.

transportation into the interior. The two companies dominated the red snapper industry along the Gulf, employing more than fifty percent of vessels engaged in the trade.[55]

Mullet, a catch all term for several species, provided a source of income across the entirety of the Gulf Coast. The fish were common from Cape Hatteras to the coast of Texas. Mullet were always present near the shore, though peak fishing season was in the late fall and early winter. In contrast with New England fishing, or with the oystering trade, mullet fishing did not rely on complicated machinery, either on ship or on shore. During peak fishing seasons small ships and boats engaged in siene fishing or line fishing in inlets and bays across the South, dragging simple nets as the ship trawled. This method was not as productive as others, but it was easy to learn and easy to put into practice. Almost any ship could carry siene nets and almost any crew could learn the process with some expert supervision.[56]

Gulf coast fishermen could not choose to be picky in their wares. Consequently, Gulf fishing vessels tended towards generalization rather than specialization. Siene fishing tended to catch whatever variety of fish lived in those waters. Along the Florida coast at Ochlocknee Bay sponging ships engaged in mullet fishing for a few weeks or months a year. Outside Pensacola, oystering vessels transitioned to red snapper fishing during the off season. Some ships were even more sporadically employed in the industry, skipping entire fishing seasons when they could find other cargo. Galveston was one of the few ports with a major shrimping season, which ran for roughly six months. For

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[55] George B. Goode, *ed., The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), Part 5, vol. 1, 560; Obituary of Silas B. Stearns, October 16, 1888, University of West Florida, M1973-01, Silas Stearns Papers, Box 2.

[56] George B. Goode, *ed., The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), Part 5, vol. 1, 557, 558, 561, 566.

those six months "very little other fishing" went on as nearly sixty ships trolled the sea beds.[57]

In the various fishing industries, many fishermen were not full-time fishermen at all, which made siene fishing more practicable than more complicated methods. Nearly all of the fishing industries worked seasonally, reflecting the maturation of the individual species. In North Carolina, one inspector described local oyster workers as "partial fishermen," who made less than have their living on the sea. In another instance, a keeper of a lifesaving station juggled three jobs, fishing and farming, the "former in fall, winter, and spring," as well as his job with the Life Saving Service. The keeper fished both near the shore in the Currituck Sound as well as on longer voyages offshore. A report on fishing along the Texas coast noted that fishermen and truck farmers intermingled regularly in Galveston as both groups brought their wares to market via water. So many sailboats arrived in Galveston that the writers referred to them as a "mosquito fleet."[58]

Along the coast, southern costal farmers and laborers engaged in mullet fishing during their off season, as a means of sustenance or for local sale. Farmers and laborers hired mullet ships and their captains to take them out to the shoals. They assisted the

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[57] George B. Goode, *ed., The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), Part 5, vol. 1, 562; George B. Goode, *ed., The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), Part 5, vol. 2, 807; *Report of the Commissioner for 1885*, United States Commission of Fish and Fisheries, Part XIII (Washington D. C., 1886), 285; Ernest Ingersoll, "The Oyster Industry," *The History and Present Condition of the Fishery Industries* (Washington D. C.: Tenth Census of the United States, 1881), 189.

[58] George B. Goode, *ed., The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), Part 5, vol. 1, 562; *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1878* (Washington D. C., 1878), 87; Charles H. Stevenson, "Report on the Coast Fisheries of Texas," *Report of the Commissioner for 1889 to 1891* (Washington, D. C., 1893), 403.

captain by catching, dressing, and salting the fish, serving as "green hands" for the duration of the voyage. Upon returning, the farmers were paid in a percentage of the fish caught and processed, rather than in wages. The shipowner kept the lion's share, travelling to one of the major ports to sell his catch. Similarly, farmers and others worked in Maryland as temporary oystermen, not on the larger dredging boats, but as part of small tonging crews. They rarely spent extended time at sea during the cold Maryland winters but did make day trips to the oystering grounds.[59]

Fishermen of various categories were metaphorically attached to the land, though they worked at sea. Most fishing vessels were small, incapable of carrying large stocks of supplies and lacking the resources for extended voyages. Coastal fishermen returned home to their homes along the beaches or in port to spend time with family and friends. This secured them to a terrestrial social network. For the smallest of fishing vessels, fishing was a purely daytime affair, with every night spent safely in port. Most other fishermen engaged in voyages ranging from a few days to a handful of weeks, with few fishing for longer than two to three months.[60]

The very work of fishing helped blur the distinction between land and sea. Though fishing was a maritime industry, part of the working process included extended time ashore. Mullet fishers set up base camps along the shoreline to smoke or salt their catch before shipping it abroad, for instance. Spongers processed their catch on the

[59] George B. Goode, *ed., The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), Part 5, vol. 2, 634; U. S. Census Bureau, *History and Present Conditions of Fishery Industries* (Washington D. C., 1881), 162; Ernest Ingersoll, "The Oyster Industry," *The History and Present Condition of the Fishery Industries* (Washington D. C.: Tenth Census of the United States, 1881), 189.

[60] Silas Stearns, "Fisheries of the Gulf of Mexico," *The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), Section II, 538.

barrier islands and sand bars that dotted the Florida coast, laying their cargo in "Crawls," as they were called, to age while the ship continued its work. The process of sponging included softening and stripping the sponges before they could be dried and packed. Only after this was accomplished would the ships deliver their cargo to wholesalers.[61]

Other fishing ventures provide yet another example of coastal work connecting the terrestrial and maritime communities. Fishing required both skilled and unskilled labor. In the decades after the Civil War, unskilled labor abounded along the southern coastline. Local farmers spent some of their time at sea, though they were by no means dedicated maritime workers. Many of the farmers lived miles from the shoreline, travelling with friends and relatives in groups "of four to thirty" to the seashore under the leadership of whatever captain had negotiated their labor. While on these short-lived voyages, the erstwhile farmers interacted with mariners, not only the captain, but also his dedicated professional crew. The professional mariners were experts in their craft, comprising some of the most "best surf-men along the entire coast." These professional crewmembers were as varied a lot as any other, but frequently consisted of "Cubans, Spaniards, Bahamians, and Creoles" along the Gulf Coast. For these outsiders, fishing was still a temporary profession, as many reportedly returned to their homelands when the season was over.[62]

As fishermen exhausted the local fisheries, they had little choice but to look farther afield for opportunities, becoming more geographically mobile. Independent

[61] George B. Goode, *ed., The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), Part 5, vol. 2, 826.

[62] George B. Goode, *ed., The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), Part 5, vol. 1, 562, 563, 566, 589.

fishing ships became a shrinking minority in the face of growing fishing firms. By the end of the nineteenth century the mullet fisheries had become so exhausted that fishermen were travelling to the coast of Mexico, the schools nearby having vanished. These ecological changes created a feedback loop that led to larger and more industrialized fishing vessels. Fishing steamers travelled faster and made larger catches. These industrializing changes were not limited to the Gulf Coast. Fisheries across the United States began to decline in the late nineteenth century. Off the coast of Maine, Menhaden had entirely vanished by 1880, with widespread ecological repercussions. Regardless of their precise geography, both small scale fishermen and industrial vessels competed for an increasingly small catch.[63]

Sponging and oystering remained more sedentary, but they too were affected by the environmental depletion occurring along the Gulf. Sponging was probably affected the least, as the sponge bays recovered quickly in only a few years' time. Even so, over-sponging was evident by the mid-1880s. As in the other fishing industries, sponging ships had to travel further to find their cargo. The sponging fleet in Key West split into two categories, the "Bay fleet," which took longer voyages, and the "reef fleet," which stayed closer to home. The Bay ships were larger and spent several months at sea, while the reef fleet returned each week or two. Oystering took longer to become mobile, but companies found fertile fields in Carolina estuaries. "Seeding" oysters was a way to create artificial oyster beds, creating some consistency for oyster companies. That being said, demand was still higher than production. As early as 1880, government inspectors

[63] W. Jeffrey Bolster, *The Mortal Sea: Fishing in the Atlantic in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 164, 171.

reported depletion of the oyster beds off the coast of West Florida. At the same time, oystering in Louisiana also took longer voyages, occasionally more than one hundred miles, to find oysters large enough to sell.[64]

The fishing industries along the Gulf were distinct, but they shared certain commonalities. The work was done in a limited geographic area, the ships were typically smaller vessels, as were the crews, and voyages were quite short. These commonalities meant that fishermen were more sedentary than maritime workers involved in trade and transportation. Typically, fishermen travelled from their home to the fisheries and back without stopping at outside ports. Nevertheless, there was overlap between the fisheries and those involved in other forms of commerce.[65]

Pilots, Tugs, and Lighters

Pilots also joined sea and shore together. They were the most stationary of maritime workers, even more than fishermen, but played a critical role in facilitating trade and transportation. These workers helped guide deep water vessels into port, relying on their own ships and crews to convey them to potential customers. They played an important role, one that was noted by those living on both sea and shore. Wise captains employed pilots to bring them into port unless the captain had regularly travelled the same circuit. Spendthrift captains did without them whenever possible, occasionally inviting misfortune and disaster. Consequently, wise merchants and insurance agents

[64] George B. Goode, *ed., The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), Part 5, vol. 2, 431, 824; Kirk Munro, "Sponge and Spongers of the Florida Reef," *Scribner's Magazine* (1892), vol. 12, 639; *Harper's Weekly,* Vol. 27, 1883, 504; Milos M. Vujnovich, *Yugoslavs in Louisiana* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 2000), 109.

[65] *Report of the Commissioner for 1885*, United States Commission of Fish and Fisheries, Part XIII (Washington D. C.:" Government Printing Office, 1886), 282.

refused to underwrite ships that did not employ a pilot, deeming that they were vital in protecting their interests on board.[66]

Pilots were regulated by most states, much like officers and engineers. An applicant could expect to prove his expertise to a board of Pilot Commissioners, which included the expert opinion of "old sea-dog pilots selected for their peculiar aptness in tripping up possibly unworthy applicant." Even successful applicants only moved up one step from apprentice to journeyman. A pilot could only advance again after an additional two years piloting lighter draft vessels into and out of port. Being a pilot was not a task undertaken by the ignorant. One newspaper noted that pilots "do not grow, they are made." The "rights of innumerable interests, the vagarious of tide and current, the ever-changing character of obstruction or open ways, all require special training and years of most arduous acquirement." These skills were simply not open to anyone who had not spent considerable time at sea in general and in one port in particular. Pilots could be called on day or night and were expected to spend their time aboard their vessel while on call, alert for any incoming vessel.[67]

The crews of pilot boats resided in the city permanently, taking only short voyages to deposit the pilot aboard larger vessels. The pilot crews were necessarily experts in local conditions. Along the Gulf Coast, some pilots served three years apprenticeships before gaining their license. This apprenticeship was necessary regardless of prior experience in the maritime industries. Such men became experts on the contours of the Gulf Coastline, which made them valuable to anyone desiring a

[66] *Annual Report of the US Revenue Marine Service* (Washington D. C., 1872), 18.
[67] *Huntsville Gazette,* August 13, 1887.

careful examination of the coast. Because of their sedentary work, pilots developed expert knowledge of local conditions. Their opinions on local maritime matters were sacrosanct and held in high regard even by government officials. One report made special note that local pilots admired the actions undertaken by men rescuing a wrecked schooner as proof of their valor. Even the United States Revenue Service noted that pilots possessed knowledge that could only be otherwise gained by forcing officers to reside in a single port for years at a time. Men in such circumstances would form "extended and intimate acquaintance with the people of the locality." To the Revenue Service this was a problem since they were unwilling to station sailors in a single area for several consecutive years, but to pilots along the Gulf it was an economic necessity.[68]

Pilots were an essential part of the coastal community, but the nature of their work helped create a subcommunity of pilots in port cities. The pilots of Port Eads resided in Pilottown, strung out along one edge of the Mississippi river and complete with a school and a boarding house. The location was chosen due to a deal between river pilots and bar pilots. River pilots laid claim to all the work north of the villages, while bar pilots got all the work to the south. The Pilots of Port Eads claimed special notoriety in 1898 when the small town boasted the first female pilot in the South. The newly certified pilot, Mary Doullut, was the wife of a captain, shipbuilder, and lumberyard owner. The woman became a pilot specifically so she could steer her husband's lumber vessels into port. The pilots of Galveston formed a "close corporation" as a result of their work together. An 1880 petition posted in the local newspaper protested the creation of a

[68] *Galveston Daily News,* August 3, 1879; *Annual Report of the US Revenue Marine Service* (Washington D. C., 1872), 18; *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1882* (Washington D. C., 1882), 202.

new quarantine station. The signees consisted of thirty-two members of the Galveston community. Five of those listed "pilot" as their occupation with four of them keeping addresses in *Heller's City Directory.* The remaining twenty-seven signatories claimed affiliation with various schooners that plied the water around Galveston, but only seven appeared in the directory. The remaining majority were likely ships that spent time in Galveston but did not reside there, in distinct contrast with the pilots. Similarly, in Florida, the pilots of Pensacola all lived in the same neighborhood, Barrancas, and spent their free time "frequently carousing" with other pilots. The residency of pilots outside Jacksonville attained its own name, Pilot Town. Oftentimes pilots were older than their more migratory brethren. Such was the case with Captain Rufus Jamison, a Maine seafarer who spent his younger years coasting and blockade running during the Civil War, before settling down in the piloting trade for the last twenty years of his life.[69]

There was a temptation to use piloting licenses as a means of political partisanship. The expertise that piloting required helped insulate them from such abuse. The residents of Galveston made this clear when Texas Governor Richard Hubbard attempted to appoint a branch pilot without the approval of the Commissioners' Board. The candidate in question, Captain Johnson, was a resident of Galveston and "familiar with the bay" but he did not have the approbation of the board. Members of the Commissioners' Board openly claimed that "some political pressure" had led to the

[69] *Galveston Daily News*, February 13, 1878; *Galveston Daily News,* May 1, 1880; *Galveston Daily News,* February 13, 1883; *The Times-Picayune,* June 5, 1898; *Annual Report of the Supervising Surgeon General of the Marine Hospital Service of the United States, 1884* (Washington D. C., 1884), 113; George B. Goode, *ed., The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), Part 5, vol. 1, 591; Donald W. Davis, *Washed Away?: The Invisible Peoples of Louisiana's Wetlands* (Lafayette: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2010), 281.

appointment. New Orleans pilots underwent similar suspicion. The Times Democrat questioned the "special fraternity" of pilots, who the paper suggested, protected their employment to the detriment of the captains and owners.[70]

Pilots, by their very nature, spent a great deal of time without particular work to do, waiting for incoming vessels to cross the horizon. It is not surprising that they also blurred the line between professions. Pilots anchored their boats to barrier islands while they waited for incoming vessels. At times, they wiled away the day in their own small fishing bringing "large loads of fish" to their homes when they returned in the evening. Several pilot ships out of Pensacola had their own arrangements with fish dealers or with the Navy yards, securing regular buyers for their catches. Other pilots invested in more lucrative ventures. Captain Andrews of Galveston worked as a bar pilot in that city for several years, while also being a part owner of a steam tug, the *Ivy* was also owned by another local captain and an engineer. The *Ivy* met an unfortunate end in New Orleans where it collided with a British steamer, which was ironically being piloted by a New Orleans pilot. Captain Andrews survived the collision, though his son, who was working on board the tug, tragically drowned.[71]

Lighters did the job of unloading vessels that could not reach the wharves. Local expertise was essential here as well, navigating around obstacles near the harbor. A "party of grateful shipmasters" thanked one particularly agile captain whose "knowledge of the channels, bar and roadstead" allowed him to load cargo into several different

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[70] *Galveston Daily News,* February 3, 1878; *Galveston Daily News*, February 5, 1878; *Times-Democrat*, March 29, 1881.

[71] Silas Stearns, "Fisheries of the Gulf of Mexico," *The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), Section II, 567; *Galveston Daily News*, May 29, 1887.

vessels in the middle of a particularly dense fog, saving the merchant ships precious time. The masters also complimented the "courteous manner" in which the lighter captain did his job. Lighters also worked hand in hand with pilots. Pilots were typically the first local to reach an incoming ship, and therefore the first one to recommend lighters, and stevedores to captains eager to unload their cargo. In Pensacola Bay, pilots even began racing to get to incoming ships first in order to lock down potential customers. This sharpened their sailing skills and gained customers. Some of the pilots began utilizing custom made boats, as "the gains of success were so large that it became no object to spare money."[72]

Few of the ports along the Gulf Coast provided convenient access for deep keeled ships. Galveston, New Orleans, Mobile and Savannah all struggled to dredge deeper canals to attract the large trans-Atlantic steamers. Lighters and tugs all proved utterly necessary to keep trade moving in and out of port. In Mobile, lighters travelled twenty miles or more to bring their cargo to the large ships anchored offshore. Captains rarely seemed to mind the necessity. Lighters allowed the larger ships to avoid port dues and made desertion more difficult. The price of lighters was typically low, twenty cents per bale of cotton, for instance. Perhaps most importantly, lighters saved captains valuable time moving in and out of port. Consequently, lighters were ubiquitous in southern ports, tying sea and shore together.[73]

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[72] *Galveston Daily News,* February 7, 1879; *Report of the Commissioner for 1885*, United States Commission of Fish and Fisheries, Part XIII (Washington D. C., 1886), 285.

[73] Edward King, *The Great South: A Record of Journeys* (Hartford, Connecticut: American Publishing Company, 1875), 323.

Coasting

Coasting split the difference between sedentary fishing and international deep-water trade. Their regional trade was an economic necessity in the face of growing steam liners, but also a social boon to those living and working in smaller ports. Much like fishermen and pilots, their captains and crews were part of the local port communities, but like deep water sailors they were engaged for longer voyages and spent time in multiple ports. Coasters spent their working careers socially and geographically bordering the United States.

In 1877, a small coasting schooner, the *Kate Gandy,* sunk just outside the port of Galveston. Its belly held a load of timber from Florida destined for the Gulf, Colorado, and Santa Fe Railroad. The captain and crew valiantly tried to save both the vessel and their cargo, but to no avail. The crew and passengers all managed to survive by using the lumber as makeshift rafts, floating toward the shoreline. In a curious twist of fate, the crew were succored on shore by none other than the ship's part owner who happened to live nearby. The sailors of the ship ended up staying in their employer's house for several days. It was pure coincidence, but it reveals the close relationship between commerce and community along the Gulf Coast. Coasting provided a critical linchpin that helped form, and was formed by, that community.[74]

Historians and contemporaries acknowledged the existence of a working coastal community, distinct from the more isolated community of deep-water mariners. The earliest laws of the United States noted the distinction between coasting and blue water travel, with the earliest laws differentiating the two dating to the 1790s. Though coasting

[74] *Galveston Daily News*, August 17, 1875.

was technically only supposed to include those vessels sailing between American ports, the reality was far more complicated. Coasters had little difficulty in regional travel across the Caribbean. Coasting schooners were "in the coasting trade today and in the foreign trade tomorrow." The letter of the law also stated that officers aboard American vessels must be American citizens. Protectionist laws like this were intended to keep an American presence at sea, creating some continuity among the coasting population. The captains and mates were frequently the only ones that engaged in multiple voyages together, developing tight working relationships, if they were not business partners or even relatives.[75]

Coasting work remained based on personal networks, and therefore older traditions still prevailed. The work of coasting in a limited geography limited the availability of potential workers and potential customers. In Galveston and other cities, independent captains found it increasingly difficult to make ends meet. Increasingly, coasting ships were bought up by larger shipping companies. However, captains did not leap headfirst into the world of corporate capitalism. Instead, they held onto older business strategies even as they nominally accepted employment. Captains insisted on maintaining their control over the day-to-day affairs on board their vessels at sea as well as in port. Captains selected their own crews from the available population rather than delegating that task to their charter companies. Along the Gulf Coast, captains and masters still preferred to find their own crews, even if their ships were regularly

[75] Walter MacArthur, *The Seaman's Contract, 1790-1918,* pgs. 5, 47; *Annual Report of the Supervising Surgeon General of the Marine Hospital Service of the United States, 1875* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1876), 234; *Report of the Merchant Marine Commission: Together with the Testimony Taken at the Hearings, Vol. 3* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1906), 1788; NO-190, Shipping Articles, 1840-1872, FTWNARA, RG 36, Records of the US Customs Service.

employed by larger companies. Masters chartered for six months or even a year still desired to maintain personal control over recruitment.[76]

Coasting vessels maintained other older traditions, such as pre-voyage advances and shares rather than set wages. Larger steamship companies had drifted away from these traditions. This was partially because steamships spent less time in port. Consequently, the employees spent less time spending money in port. Steamship companies went out of their way to isolate sailors aboard larger vessels. Furthermore, the corporate structure of large steamship companies also made for simpler bookkeeping if the employees were paid regularly. Sailing vessels, on the other hand, spent more time in port, especially if the wind turned awry. In such cases sailors might have extra days or even weeks on shore, waiting for their chance to cast off.[77]

Coasters took advantage of the blurred boundary between shore and sea when they could. The barrier islands, bays, and marshes that characterized the Gulf Coast were notoriously porous. In Louisiana coasting vessels broke through the marshes or took advantage of small canals to access interior trade. The small canals, called *la cordelle* relied on donkeys, mules, or even longshoremen to pull the large vessels from lake to lake. Once arrived, the coasting vessels could load up on valuable sugar and molasses while selling what cargo they had before returning to the sea proper and voyaging on.[78]

Steamships also travelled along so called "rails at sea" travelling only to larger metropoles, with few stops at smaller ports along the way. For a time, coasters filled in

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[76] *Report of the Commissioner for 1885*, United States Commission of Fish and Fisheries, Part XIII (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1886), 282.

[77] *Sailors Magazine and Seamen's Friend*, Vol. 48, 33.

[78] T. B. Thorpe, "Sugar and the Sugar Region of Louisiana," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, vol. 7, 1853, 746-767.

the gaps created by steam lines. Large ports served as nodes attracting the commerce of smaller ports. It was more efficient for small towns to send their merchandise to a primary port. The work of transporting goods and people from these smaller ports fell to coasting vessels. In the case of some locales, these coasting vessels had little competition from larger ships for quite some time. In the 1870s, between thirty and sixty schooners were engaged in regular trade between the small Louisiana community along Lake Charles, and the primary port in Galveston. Even internationally, several islands along the Bahamas, for instance, relied on coasting vessels for trade and communication until well into the 1890s.[79]

Coasting work was not simply its own niche, however. The various maritime industries overlapped with each other. The coastal fisheries provided the nursing ground for coasting. Notoriously finicky sailing vessels, such as those employed in the Gulf fishing industry, required experienced hands to operate them. A young African-American man in Reconstruction Florida began his maritime career by pestering Key West sponging vessels to give him occasional work and starting his career at sea. The skills that young men acquired in one job could frequently apply to other areas of maritime work, including a stint in the Navy before working in the merchant marine. The work of sailing was a skill that could be used on other vessels. One report even suggested that steamship sailors deserted to go work in the coasting industries.[80]

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[79] "Trade and Industries of the Bahamas," *Miscellaneous Documents of the House of Representative for the First Session of the Fifty Second Congress, 1891-1892* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1892), 636; *Galveston Daily News*, November 14, 1879.

[80] Interview by J. A. Frost, *Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project, Florida, Vol. 3* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1936), 312; Writers and politicians referred constantly to a connection between the merchant marine and naval enlistments. See the Proceedings of the Gulf Coast Convention, American Shipping and Industrial league, 1887, 26; *Harpers Weekly*, 1891, Vol. 35, 446.

Coasting was a part time job, making up some of the deficit during the off seasons for fishing. Fishers, spongers, and other workers of the sea often went to work on short coasting voyages for a limited duration. During the frozen winter months, mariners from the northern states occasionally travelled all the way to the Gulf Coast to work in warmer climes. By the turn of the century, veteran sailors from the Great Lakes journeyed to the small port of Scranton, MS, working in the lumber trade while the lakes froze over. Even those who worked near the water rather than on it occasionally ventured into coasting. Longshoremen, who interacted regularly with sailors, were occasionally persuaded during hard times to work on coasting vessels, though they seemed to have preferred their landbound occupation when possible. The reverse was also true, though the more organized longshoremen typically closed ranks against this sort of invasion. For men who wearied of a migratory lifestyle, coasting provided a gateway to more stable forms of marine employment, such as that offered aboard tugs and pilot boats.[81]

Just as the transferable skillset that mariners developed helped blur the boundaries between fishing, piloting, and shipping, the vessels themselves were also multipurpose. Larger ships served as fishing vessels but also trade vessels. Other captains involved in the coasting trade hired fishing boats directly. The shore-bound boats sold their harvest directly to the coasting vessels, with some "running to the larger markets of Florida, while others go directly to Havana and other points in the West Indies." Domestic trade

[81] *Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Convention of the International Seamen's Union of America* (Milwaukee, WI, 1902), 12; P. H. Bailhache, "Report on the Hygiene of the Merchant Marine with Recommendations," *Annual Report of the National Board of Health for 1879* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1879), 266; Letter of J. H. Merryman, FWNARA, RG 36, Records of the US Customs Service, Letters Received, 1804-1899, Box 20; T. H. Glenn, *The Mexican Gulf Coast on Mobile Bay and Mississippi Sound* (Mobile, AL: Graham and Delchamps, 1893), 43.

followed a similar pattern. Northern coasting vessels looking for cargo knew to head south to trade with local fishermen. As they approached the oystering grounds of Maryland and North Carolina, coasting schooners hoisted an "empty bucket or a small flag" upon arrival, a clear sign that she was ready and willing to purchase the oysters that smaller ships brought to her. Before long the hold of the larger vessel was full, and she sailed off toward the northern cities to reap the reward and begin the process anew. The oyster schooners themselves were theoretically limited to working the oyster bays for only a few months out of the year. In the off season, the ships would be set out to running fruits and vegetables up and down the eastern seaboard. Louisiana oysters followed a similar pattern, transporting fruit and other "country produce" from the coastal plantations in the summer and oystering in the winter. In Galveston local freight ships would make several fishing trips during the slow months to catch red snapper. The rhythm of the seasons affected those at sea, as a clever captain would be aware of what crops were coming in.[82]

The lines blurred further when the trade in question consisted of fish, one of the coast's largest products. Fish were marketable products and independent fishing vessels had to consider market variations in their choice of destination. Contracted vessels took their cargo directly to a specific port, accepting a pre-set rate on their catch, but

[82] P. H. Bailhache, "Report on the Hygiene of the Merchant Marine with Recommendations," *Annual Report of the National Board of Health for 1879* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1879), 266; *Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Convention of the International Seaman's Union of America*, 1902, 22; W. Wyman, "Hardships of the Coasting Trade, and Particularly of the Chesapeake Bay Oystermen," 275; *Galveston Daily News*, January 19, 1878; George B. Goode, *ed., The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D. C.: Commission of Fishery and Fisheries, 1884-1887), Part 5, vol. 1, 566; U. S. Census Bureau, *History and Present Conditions of Fishery Industries* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1881), 160, 162, 198; Charles H. Stevenson, "Report on the Coast Fisheries of Texas," *Report of the Commissioner for 1889 to 1891* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1893), 401.

independent vessels had the ability to set their own priorities. Oyster ships from New Orleans, called "freight boats" by the oystermen themselves, purchased oysters from the fishermen along the bayou as long as the market could support bear, but when the price dropped enough, roughly to fifty or sixty cents per barrel, the "oystermen stop running until a rise occurs." During that time the ship might be put into dock or find alternative avenues of income. Sponge fishers made their own calculation, despite enjoying a more captive market. Sponge vessels "eagerly hail outward-bound vessels" on their voyages back to the Florida coast with constant queries for market prices. A subsection of fishing vessels ventured into international trade, deciding that their cargo would be better received in Cuba. Smacks along the Florida coast made "twelve or fourteen trips a year" to Havana, providing snapper or grouper to the plantations. For some few, selling fish to Havana became the backbone of their business, contracting with Cuban businesses for fifty cents per fish, nearly double what they were worth in the US. On their return, they loaded up with Havana brandies, wines, and spices to sell in Key West.[83]

In the tightly knit world that coasters occupied, the lines between commerce and community frequently blurred. While some coasting vessels limited themselves to a regular route and cargo, others looked for more diverse opportunities. Most ships took on passengers as well as cargo at each stop. At times, passengers promised to work as well as pay their fare. Captains listed those passengers as crew members for legal purposes,

[83] George B. Goode, *ed., The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), Part 5, vol. 1, 589, 592. George B. Goode, *ed., The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), Part 5, vol. 2, 459; Kirk Munro, "Sponge and Spongers of the Florida Reef," *Scribner's Magazine* (1892), vol. 12, 646; *Annual Report of the National Board of Health* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1879), 393; Milos M. Vujnovich, *Yugoslavs in Louisiana* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 2000), 109.

evading local inspection. The cargo that coasting schooners carried naturally varied from place to place or even from voyage to voyage. Lumber was a regular standby for coasters looking for work, as the railroad boom proved a constant need for supplies. Beef and livestock, oil cakes, salt, fruit, sugar, and of course, cotton could all provide potential sources of profit. Over the course of a single year, a Galveston coaster, the Verbena, carried all of the above, while limiting itself only to Texas and Louisiana ports.[84]

Many coasters worked on the narrowest of margins, where delay or damages equaled economic disaster. "Innumerable small crafts coming from the bayous, rivers, and bay coasts from other small ports" carried whatever diverse cargo they believed they could sell. These small-time merchants and would be captains gambled that they could make enough profit to support themselves and their crew. Many of them could not even afford to hire tugs to bring them safely into port. Nevertheless, they served an important purpose, giving to the city "varieties of fruits and products that are essential to domestic life."[85]

The competition for coasting work primarily came from other coasters. As work became scarcer, coasting ships competed more for what cargo was available. In a few instances, coasting vessels tailed each other, "under the excitement of competition," looking to take advantage of any opportunities that arose, while depriving rival vessels of their cargo. Sometimes one ship's disaster was an opportunity for profit as well. Wreckers along the Florida coast made a business out of tending to stranded vessels, but

[84] Letter of Special Deputy Collector, FWNARA, RG 36, Records of the US Customs Service, Miscellaneous Letters sent by the Collector of Customs, 1890-1891, Box 19; The arrival of vessels and their cargo were regular features in portside newspapers. See *Galveston Daily News*, April 12, 1874, June 4, 1874, October 25, 1874, and December 11, 1874.

[85] *Galveston Daily News,* May 1, 1880.

such practices were common elsewhere along the Gulf Coast. Even smaller vessels had to rely on the kindness of strangers when they got stranded, and those good Samaritans would take a cut of the cargo. In addition to wrecking, salvage cases regularly appeared before the courts as coasters spotted abandoned or lost cargo along the coastline. If no owner could be proven, the courts of would sell the salvage with fifty percent of the proceeds going directly to the coasters, which was typically divided amongst the crew. Most ships along the coast kept an eye out for floating salvage as an opportunity for free profit. If sailors discovered larger caches of salvage than they could handle in one load, they would call in ships that they were friendly with so that others could benefit from the bonanza. Pilot ships off the coast of New Orleans divided and salvaged twelve bales of abandoned cotton. An unidentified bark also got in on the action. In a more dramatic particular case, a vessel sailed two hundred miles of course to collect bales of cotton floating off the Bermuda Islands.[86]

Coasters were part of a broader community that reflected their work and their backgrounds. In point of fact, coasters served as one of the lynchpins of the maritime community, linking land and sea together. Coasters spent more time in fewer ports than their deep-water brethren and created long term relationships. Despite the refrain from reformers that sailors were an at-risk population that was constantly being taken advantage of, the reality was more complicated. Coasting sailors were much more likely to have a "home port" that they returned to on a regular basis, even if they had not been

[86] Journal of Lorenzo Baker, 1883-1899; Wrecking cases are frequent along the Florida coasts. See Samuel Malone v American Ship Pedro, 1878, Absalom Albury v Spanish Schooner Anita, 1888, Adolphus Russell v Steamship Tregurno, 1892, Admiralty Court of Key West; Harry M. Davis v Twelve Bales of Cotton, 1879, Admiralty Court of Key West. RG21, M1360; *Galveston Daily News,* January 18, 1876.

born in that port. They left families and friends behind and spent their hard-earned wages on keeping those connections alive. One businessman felt confident in stating that the regular crews coasting between Texas and Louisiana were "mostly citizens of Galveston."[87]

The geography of the Gulf helped inculcate other relationships. The whims of nature paid little heed to shipping timetables. Smaller sailing vessels waited hours, days, and sometimes even weeks for favorable winds to assist them in leaving port. The barrier islands and shallow waters oftentimes forced captains to hire pilots to bring the larger craft into port, even if they were not required to do so. Pilot vessels had their own crews, typically made up of veteran sailors, who all lived locally. In fact, the pilots formed their own communities, living in tight knit groups. The ease with which they moved from ship to shore proved a regular hassle and made quarantines nearly impossible to enforce. Health inspectors blamed such movement for a yellow fever outbreak, though it would have been impossible to stop such movement. The pilot in question travelled to the infected vessel to "procure liquor."[88]

Even when they were not working, coasters maintained long term connections. They were much more likely to sleep as guests with other local sailors than in boarding houses, for instance. They had connections with local neighborhoods and spent their free time in pursuits outside the stereotypical drinking and carousing. These connections caused occasional difficulties for captains who could not keep their crew. Coasting

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[87] *Galveston Daily News*, August 22, 1879.

[88] *Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Convention of the International Seaman's Union of America*, 1902, 22; William Martin, "Report on the Yellow-Fever Epidemic of 1882 at Pensacola, Florida," *Annual Report of the National Board of Health for 1883* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1884), 113.

sailors could find alternative sources of income, either on other ships or on land. In one instance, a captain reported one of his sailors missing only to find that the man in question had taken alternative employment in an ice cream parlor.[89]

Some sailors stayed in sailors' boarding houses, institutions generally decried as houses of sin and criminality. Reformers and government officials insisted that vile boarding houses posed a moral and frequently legal problem, kidnapping and shanghaiing innocent sailors. The solution was more regulation and more morality. The men themselves, however, disagreed. The disdain that sailors had for reformers was evident. So called "holy joes" dictated a lifestyle that was simply unrealistic to the sailing community. What reformers failed to note was that sailing boarding houses were part of the broader maritime community as well as part of the everyday city life. For instance, Robert Webber of Galveston not only owned one of the sailor's saloons, but also owned the wharf they docked at and served as a city jailor, a wise connection for a sailor to cultivate. Another popular sailor's boarding house in Galveston, the Old Dublin House, advertised a dance and raffle to the community at large, with the winner receiving a "fine French clock." Sailors not only met with each other, but also with permanent residents, lining up work and companionship while on shore.[90]

These terrestrial communities were not just social, but economic necessities for both captains and men. The ties between mariners and landsmen could become quite tight and those interested in maritime matters frequently shared news. In the salvage case

[89] Robert D. Murray, "Yellow Fever at Key West in 1875," *Annual Report of the Supervising Surgeon-General of the Marine Hospital Service of the United States for Fiscal Year, 1875* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1876), 129.

[90] *Coast Seaman's Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 12, 3; *Galveston Daily News*, January 10, 1874; *Morrison and Fourmy's General Directory of the City of Galveston*, 1886-1887.

cited above, the captain of the ship had heard about the bales of cotton while in port at Key West. When successful salvage and wrecking voyages occurred, word of the incoming bounty spread as the state prepared to auction off the unclaimed goods. Word of successful wrecking ventures even attracted Native American traders from the Everglades "to secure a portion of the plunder." Word of mouth carried news of other opportunities as well. Coasters decided on where to journey based as much on news from other coasters as any newspaper. Nor was the sharing information limited to just coasters. Merchant ships advised fishing vessels where to find abundant fishing grounds.[91]

In addition to terrestrial communities, sailors formed maritime communities, based on their shared experiences. The view of sailors as members of a temporary, but isolated community while at sea is a misleading one. While sailors did spend much of their time aboard a ship underway, there were still opportunities to interact with the outside world. These opportunities were even greater for sailors engaged in coasting rather than trans-oceanic travel. Coasters were rarely more than a few days or weeks on the outside without some outside contact. Ships coming into or leaving port were swarmed by smaller boats, looking for trade, or providing transport for "friends and strangers." Coasters travelled near enough to the shore that one vessel, the *W. A. Watson* was able to ask people on shore for directions to the nearest port.[92]

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[91] Harry M. Davis v Twelve Bales of Cotton, 1879, Admiralty Court of Key West; *Weekly Floridian,* December 01, 1887; Capt. J. W. Collins, "The Gulf Fishing Grounds and Fisheries," *United States Commission of Fish and Fisheries, Part XIII: Report of the Commissioner for 1885* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), 279.

[92] Letter of James Grey, Dec 12, 1891, FWNARA, RG 36, Records of the US Customs Service, Transcripts of Miscellaneous Letters, 1891-1893, Box 2; Lafcadio Hearn, *Two Years in the French West Indies*, 1890, 35; *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1881* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1881), 167.

Interactions with vessels underway provided limited opportunities for communication and trade as well. The proximity of other coasters, fishing, sponging, and oystering vessels, and even larger ships working in foreign trade all came into contact at one point or another. This fact was part of the ubiquity of coasting and part of what made coastal sailors so hard to track. Sailors could and did jump from one ship to another, taking advantage of temporary proximity for their own diversion and profit. This nearly led to disaster in an instance inside the Galveston harbor when six sailors overturned their boat while travelling from an English bark to a local fishing smack. A local captain happened to witness the scene and quickly sent his yawl to their rescue. The practice of trading with other ships was so prevalent that even border enforcers threw up their hands at the practice, noting that it was nearly impossible to prevent such activity.[93]

The efforts of the United States to police its borders also created opportunities for sailors to develop broader relationships. The United States and other nations deployed irregular quarantines to try and stop the spread of infectious diseases such as yellow fever. These quarantines were widely decried by merchants and businessmen who depended on speedy trade, but the halt in shipping provided opportunities for sailors faced with unexpected leisure time. During quarantines sailors were left to while away their time as best they could. They gathered up in boats for fishing or went hunting, joined by crewmembers from other ships. Along the Gulf Coast quarantined ships were held at barrier islands, within sight of land and occasionally cities. The temptation to hop

[93] *Galveston Evening Tribune*, November 15, 1886; Report of Operations at Key West Quarantine, *Annual Report of the Supervising Surgeon General of the Marine Hospital Service of the United States for the Fiscal Year 1895* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1896), 287; Report to Collector, February 5, 1869, FWNARA, RG 36, Records of the US Customs Service, Letters Received, 1868-1885, Box 3; *Galveston Evening Tribune,* November 15, 1886.

across the intervening distance was always present, as one quarantine officer stationed off Pensacola complained bitterly. Incoming sailors made a habit of stealing quarantine boats to have a drink in the city, violating the law with abandon.[94]

Even criminal activity reflected the communal ties that sailors developed. Along the coast, acts of rebellion, such as desertion, still depended on broader social networks if they were to succeed. An examination of desertions in the city of New Orleans for the years 1870 and 1880 reveals that sailors largely deserted in groups rather than individually. In 1870, only fourteen sailors deserted on their own. At the same time, groups larger than three accounted for more than fifty five percent of desertions. The deserters often showed equal measures of determination and ingenuity when jumping ship. In 1880, for example, four sailors abandoned the British ship, *Undaunted*, then anchored at Ship Island. According to a newspaper report, the men fashioned a "raft out of plants, stole a boat from the vessel and "vamoosed." In 1889, a group of six sailors all deserted while docked in Galveston at the same time, hiding out in a nearby warehouse for more than a week before looking for new work. Along the coast it was entirely possible for crew members to steal lifeboats to desert, confident that another ship would pick them up in short order.[95]

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[94] William Martin, "Report on the Yellow-Fever Epidemic of 1882 at Pensacola, Florida," *Annual Report of the National Board of Health for 1883* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1884), 74; Report of Operations at Key West Quarantine, *Annual Report of the Supervising Surgeon General of the Marine Hospital Service of the United States for the Fiscal Year 1895* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1896), 287; *Diary of William Henry Davison, 1834-1916*, University of West Florida, M1968-11, 3, 19, 62.

[95] Report of Operations at Key West Quarantine, *Annual Report of the Supervising Surgeon General of the Marine Hospital Service of the United States for the Fiscal Year 1895* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1896), 287; NO-190, Shipping Articles, 1840-1872, FTWNARA, RG 36, Records of the US Customs Service; *Galveston Evening Tribune*, November 5, 1889; *New Orleans Times Picayune*, May 18, 1880.

Conclusion

Fishing, piloting, and coasting sustained the coasting community during the late nineteenth century. In the face of industrial changes sweeping the nation, coasting communities maintained their existence by adapting older ways of work to new circumstances. Fishing vessels continued to work for sustenance, but also sold their cargo to industrial canneries. Piloting ships continued to escort vessels into port while indulging in side businesses to maintain themselves. Coasting ships fed ongoing railroad development, made irregular stops at small ports, and kept the web of small-scale trade alive.

The disparate coastal communities across the Gulf were still tied together by the motley sailing population. In 1900, the United States produced more coasting watercraft than any other variety, though steam ships had overtaken sailing ships in blue water endeavors. These smaller coasting craft dealt in small scale trade and transportation. As the United States claimed its status as a maritime empire, coasters still cruised along the Gulf. Even so, the age of coasting was reaching its end. Increasingly, independent coasters and fishers were cut out of a transportation network dominated by rails. Instead, ships along the coast took on corporate ownership, or were chartered by hunters and fisherman looking for adventures. As the twentieth century dawned, the world of coasting began to fade away.

CHAPTER III – DEALING WITH DISASTER: THE COASTAL COMMUNITY, HURRICANES, SHIPWRECKS, AND DISEASES, 1876-1900

Disasters occurred irregularly along the Gulf Coast. Hurricanes, tropical storms and depressions, shipwrecks, and epidemic diseases all plagued the coastal community. These disasters could affect a ship, a neighborhood, a city, or even an entire coastline. When disasters struck, they left physical, emotional, and economic devastation in their wake. In the face of such catastrophes, members of the coastal community came together to overcome the problem at hand. They supported each other, employed their ships with and without profit, or simply asked others for aid. The regular interaction between maritime work and terrestrial work, as well as the interactions between local citizens and outsiders as disasters forced disparate groups together. How communities responded to disaster shaped the contours of the community. By giving and refusing aid, coastal people decided who was part of their community and who was not.

Disasters did not simply outline the contours of maritime sociality. They also reveal the complex interactions between business, technology, and government regulation along the Gulf Coast. At times, these three forces worked together to ensure the safety of American commerce. After every disaster, onlookers scrambled to prevent further instances of disruption. Onlookers proposed a host of solutions including safer ships, extensive, and expensive, public works projects, and regulation on how businesses operated, all in an attempt to protect the coast. The federal government increased its control over national boundaries during the Gilded Age as it struggled to negotiate between local influences in the face of intermittent catastrophes. At the same time, steamships increasingly edged out older wooden hulled vessels. Southern businessmen

took advantage of both, while still making the most of the gaps in the national border and older traditions of seamanship.

Storms and Hurricanes

Storms were undoubtedly the most common disaster to disrupt the coastline. The Hurricanes were especially feared, but even lesser storms could spell trouble for those who lived in and near port cities. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration notes ninety-two hurricane landfalls between 1851 and 1900. Though some years managed to avoid hurricanes entirely, most years witnessed at least one, and many saw two or more. Lesser storms were not as carefully tracked, but at least 95 tropical storms impacted the coast in the same time period. Storms that do not meet the qualifications for tropical storm status go uncounted but could bring just as much destruction to a more limited locale than a hurricane or tropical storm.[96]

Storm destruction included both ships at sea and the dockside buildings and resources that they depended on. Buildings close to docks were not known for their enduring build. In fact, most southern port cities understood the docks as the shabbiest buildings in the area. When storms passed through, they created unusually large tides that damaged ships and buildings alike. Even the urban landscape could change in the wake of a vicious storm. The first effective storm levees did not yet exist and would not

[96] Continental United States Hurricane Impacts/Landfalls, 1851-2021, Accessed November 1, 2022, https://www.aoml.noaa.gov/hrd/hurdat/All_U.S._Hurricanes.html; Continental United States Tropical Storms Impacts/Landfalls, 1851-1970, 1983-2021, Accessed November 1, 2022, https://www.aoml.noaa.gov/hrd/hurdat/uststorms.html.

be employed widely until the first decades of the 1900s. Throughout the nineteenth century, southern ports were keenly vulnerable to natural disasters.[97]

Storms along the Gulf created times of cooperation across the maritime community. In the face of natural disasters, maritime workers set aside their differences and competitions. Those who were anywhere near a port rushed to make berth, hoping that they would have the time to secure the ship and get on shore before the situation became dire. Even if they arrived safely, their livelihood was still in danger, as there was no guarantee that the ships would not be dashed apart while in port. The habit of captains berthing near barrier islands did not make the situation safer, as it was easy for storms to push ships aground. In one instance, eight out of nine vessels anchored to the same barrier island were destroyed in a single storm. An 1879 hurricane swept up the Atlantic coastline, causing massive destruction stretching from North Carolina to Pennsylvania. The storm sunk or stranded numerous oyster boats in the Chesapeake in addition to large steamer, with the loss of all on board. The same storm also swept a schooner from its berth and beached it among a nearby forest.[98]

Storms also changed the geography of the Gulf. These changes were occasionally positive, more frequently negative, but always forced locals to adapt to new conditions. An 1875 storm cut a bar outside of Galveston harbor in half, simultaneously cutting a channel that turned out to be extremely useful for ships arriving in harbor over the course of the next decade. Further east, a storm cut through Chandeleur Island off the coast of

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[97] Anthony J. Stanonis, *Faith in Bikinis: Politics and Leisure in the Coastal South since the Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2014), 67; *El Paso Daily Herald*, October 9, 1900.

[98] *Savannah Morning News,* August 21, 1893; *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1879* (Washington D. C., 1879), 20.

Mississippi. This was problematic not only for locals, but for the nation, as Chandeleur Island held the local quarantine station. Quarantine moved to Ship Island, though authorities held this to be a distant second as Ship Island was in easy proximity to Mississippi resorts. Furthermore, numerous small boats and tugs passed close by, potentially rendering quarantine pointless. In one of the most famous instances of destruction, two storms a decade apart in 1875 and 1886 storm completely demolished the town of Indianola, once the primary Texas port for the Morgan Line. After the 1886 hurricane, there was not a single building left standing and even the lighthouse was swept out to sea by the cyclone.[99]

The effects of storms caused economic disasters in southern cities. An 1867 storm destroyed all but one of Galveston's wharves, sinking several ships and driving nearly twenty of them aground. An 1875 storm struck the Texas coastline, destroying 21 ships and "a large amount of property in… in several coast towns." The 1879 hurricane damaged numerous Atlantic cities from the Carolinas through Baltimore and into the northern states with "innumerable buildings racked and overthrown." Hundreds of people in Sabine Pass, Texas, were left after a storm in 1886 left most of the town destroyed. Locals did what they could to raise money, or at least provide aid, but the coastal community was limited in what it could and could not provide. In the wake of an 1893 storm, Beaufort, NC suffered "almost total destruction" of its shipping fleet. In the aftermath of a storm, residents of port cities could find themselves entirely destitute, stripped of all their worldly possessions. Months of rebuilding and thousands of dollars

[99] *Galveston Daily News*, February 9, 1887; *Annual Report of the Supervising Surgeon General of the Marine Hospital Service of the United States, 1893* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1893), 292.

had to be reinvested in the city's docks before commerce and prosperity could return. Storms were partially responsible for the Gulf Coasts' lack of investment throughout the late nineteenth century. Investors and boosters hesitated to pour their money into cities that could be swept away in the next hurricane. Nevertheless, boosters insisted that the Gulf could be rendered safe with "proper engineering, backed with sufficient pecuniary aid" as a commentor in the *Galveston Daily News* shrilly proclaimed.[100]

Occasionally ships went to heroic lengths to protect others during storms. When storms and hurricanes rolled through port cities they almost inevitably left boats and ships in distress. At these times ships and sailors still in a condition to provide aid donated their assistance free of cost. Disabled vessels could only be rescued by other ships, tying the community tighter together. Local owners and shipmasters occasionally posted their thanks in local newspapers, announcing the service that their colleagues had performed on their behalf. During a storm in Galveston in 1877 two schooners put themselves in danger to create a breakwall for a small fishing boat with only two passengers, blocking the wind and waves. They escorted the boat, which contained a local captain, to the docks before separating. The small boat still struggled to reach the wharves, but the efforts of the larger vessels gave it the opportunity to reach safety.[101]

The pilot boat *Edna*, purchased by the Galveston Branch Pilots Association, rescued the schooner *Eagle* after the latter capsized on the Galveston harbor. The *Eagle*

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[100] *The Weekly Floridian,* October 21, 1886; *Galveston Daily News,* September 16, 1875; *Galveston Daily News,* November 1, 1886; *Savannah Morning News,* August 21, 1893; *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1876* (Washington D. C., 1876), 90; *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1881* (Washington D. C., 1881), 48.

[101] *Galveston Daily News*, April 25, 1877; *Galveston Daily News*, September 23, 1877; *Galveston Daily News,* March 28, 1876; *Galveston Daily News*, November 18, 1875; *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1878* (Washington D. C., 1878), 90.

was involved in the coasting trade, delivering various cargoes from Corpus Christi and other Gulf ports, in this instance a load of lumber. The pilot boat towed the capsized vessel into port and turned her over to the captain and his son without charging any salvage fees. Rather than seek the gain by claiming salvage the *Edna* instead chose the more generous option on behalf of a local captain. The captain and son, for their part, had abandoned the stricken vessel, leaving it open to potential salvagers, and were rescued by a different vessel, the bark *Douglas Campbell*, before being transferred to the *Edna* for delivery back to shore. The owner of the ship found that "friends in Galveston" took on the burden of refitting the vessel after the storm had passed.[102]

The smaller ships and boats that made up the majority of vessels along the Gulf were particularly vulnerable to storms. Smaller vessels lacked the ability to "batten down the hatches" as they frequently had no hatches. The smallest fishing and oystering vessels did not even possess multiple decks in which to take shelter. They also possessed smaller anchors and could not secure themselves as easily. Storms that mildly inconvenienced larger vessels posed serious dangers to smaller ships and boats. Larger coasting schooners frequently had rooms and holds that could provide shelter but waiting out a storm was still a chancy endeavor at best. The best hope that any vessel had was to make for the nearest port. Even though ports did not provide perfect protection, they were still a better alternative to the open ocean. At times, even this protection was not enough. The 1886 storm responsible for destroying Indianola also bombarded Galveston, causing widespread damage. Among the casualties were more than twenty small ships

[102] Bill of Sale of the Schooner "Edna C," Rufus Jameson papers, MS87-0001. Rosenberg Library, Galveston, Texas; *Galveston Daily News*, April 25, 1877; *Galveston Daily News,* May 1, 1877.

that had been previously docked, including many owned by sailor's saloon owner Robert Webber.[103]

Ships at sea had no choice but to weather the storm if they could not find port. In some ways, smaller draft vessels were lucky since they spent more time closer to the coastline. Coastal vessels could anchor in the relative protection provided by rivers and streams or hide behind convenient barrier islands. Sheltering in rivers and bays was a far preferable alternative to the open ocean, though it still carried risks. Even larger vessels could travel up streams and rivers if they were deep enough, though this was a chancy endeavor. The smallest misjudgment could leave the ship stranded, costing days and weeks of valuable time to pass by and almost certainly sinking any possibility of a profitable voyage.

For the crew, and occasionally even the passengers, the struggle for survival could mean entire days of constant work. Sailors had little choice but to continue working, making constant adjustments to survive the wind and waves. Storms presented one of the most dangerous occupational hazards. Sailors or passengers blown overboard faced a near certainty of drowning. Lashing oneself to one's post was a common technique to prevent being blown overboard, but it was by no means full proof. Fatigue and exhaustion could be as deadly as a lightning bolt. The sailors of the *City of Mexico*, a steamship plying the Atlantic coastline, had no choice but to keep its sailors at their post for more than 36 hours during a storm off the coast of South Carolina. Long hours were

[103] *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1882* (Washington D. C., 1882), 26; *Galveston Daily News*, August 21, 1886.

hardly unusual for mariners, but the stressors of working during a storm increased the danger exponentially.[104]

From time to time, even ships that wished to help endangered vessels encountered situations too dangerous to risk themselves. Tugboats and coasting vessels, due to their constant presence on the coast, were usually among the first to encounter wrecked vessels. If possible, they would render assistance, but ongoing storms or rough seas could easily force the smaller ships away. The *City of Savannah* encountered just such a problem when a tugboat from Port Royal, South Carolina discovered the wrecked and collapsing steamship. The tug attempted to come alongside and evacuate some of the passengers but was unable to get close enough due to the breakers surrounding the stricken vessel. Similarly, a Texas ship lost its mast during a gale and was floating helplessly as the storm raged. A nearby pilot ship noticed the trouble, but the sea was too rough for them to get close enough for aid. All the pilot ship could do was alert local authorities once it made port.[105]

Storms caused trouble even for ships that managed to pass through unharmed. One vessel, the *R. W. Brown*, bound from Pascagoula for Hatteras with a load of lumber, had the misfortune to be blown off course by a storm. The ship arrived eventually in Key West, but the captain decided to cut his losses and sell the cargo for what he could. Unfortunately for him, the captain was unable to meet the price that he had anticipated, as lumber was readily available in Key West. The voyage made a loss, and the crew were dismissed without pay nor with a means of passage back to Pascagoula. The crew rallied

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[104] *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1876* (Washington D. C., 1876), 9; *Savannah Morning News,* August 21, 1893.

[105] *Savannah Morning News,* August 21, 1893.

and took the captain to court, eventually receiving a judgment in their favor. The crew received their wages but were still stranded in Key West without a means to return to their home port.[106]

Surviving a storm was not the end of the tragedy. The aftereffects of storms and wreckage made themselves felt long after the crisis had passed. Sailing vessels, which remained the rule among smaller Gulf ships in the Gilded Age, were particularly vulnerable to damage. Those vessels could survive a storm intact but suffer the loss of one or more masts. Should such a situation occur they would drift helplessly until another vessel noticed them. Of course, coasting vessels tended to stay near the coast, but the possibility of swimming to shore in such rough seas was a vanishingly remote one. Exhausted sailors could not fight against the tides and small boats easily overturned as they made their way towards shore. Tempting as it may have been, trying to make for the shore was a dangerous proposal.[107]

If survivors were lucky, they would reach safety in the hands of a generous community on shore. The Survivors of the wreck of the *Metropolis* found safety on shore in the houses of two nearby farmers and fishers who had built houses near the sound. The locals did their best, but freely acknowledged after the fact that the large steamer had "a great many more people" than he could possibly shelter in his home. Others chipped in, including the owner of the Lighthouse Club, a hunting club which managed to shelter nearly sixty of the survivors. The captain, purser, and a lucky few managed to spend the

[106] Emery A Smith Et Al v American Schooner R. W. Brown, 1875, Admiralty Court of Key West.

[107] *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1876* (Washington D. C., 1876), 9.

night indoors, while the unlucky had little choice but to spend the night near fires lit on the beach. The number of survivors put a serious strain on local supplies, leading to the beach-bound survivors going without food for two days.[108]

In many ways, the survivors of the *Metropolis* were exceptionally lucky. The shoreline did not always represent safety for shipwreck survivors. The long Gulf coastline was only sparsely populated by towns and ports. There were certainly occasions where lifeboats or strong swimmers could make it from ship to shore, even during a storm. But unless the storm happened while a ship was near a port or town, the crew were not any safer upon reaching land. Unlucky sailors far from civilization could easily find themselves "delivered from the perils of the sea only to encounter on land the possibility of death by starvation and thirst." The eastern coast of Florida was especially noteworthy in this regard. Stranded crews could walk along the coast for miles before finding aid. One ship, the *Alexander Nickels* lost half of its nine-person crew in a hurricane before being driven ashore. The survivors, already exhausted by their labor, had little choice but to abandon the wreck and search for aid. They searched and sheltered near the remains of their vessel for days before aid reached them. The survivors took a week to recover from the ordeal before they could travel to Key West.[109]

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[108] *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1878* (Washington D. C., 1878), 94.

[109] *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1876* (Washington D. C., 1876), 36; *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1878* (Washington D. C., 1878), 72; *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1879* (Washington D. C., 1879), 18.

Shipwrecks

Shipwrecks along the Gulf Coast were a common occurrence among both larger steam vessels and smaller wooden ships. Storms oftentimes caused the most common disaster at sea, shipwrecks, but more common was shipwrecks caused by mistakes from the men aboard. The possibility of a ship running up on a sandbar, reef, or other obstacle was ever present. When this occurred, it created a crisis for all involved as the damage to the vessel and the crew could be even worse than while they were at sea. Storm surges and waves could batter a wooden ship to pieces in short order. If the crew were lucky, they would be stranded, if unlucky they could be swept out to sea. Wrecked ships and other ships in distress relied on the aid of nearby vessels. Accidents could and did happen to any ship at sea, whether a deep-sea steam liner or a small fishing vessel. In extreme cases, the wrecked ship was simply abandoned and left to the mercy of the tides and time. By the 1890s the number of wrecks along the coast had increased enough that the wrecks themselves posed a danger to commerce. The Revenue Marine Service assigned the USS *Yantic* the task of patrolling the coastline and destroying wrecked vessels via torpedo, rendering the area safe for other vessels.[110]

Other than storms and hurricanes, the most common causes of shipwrecks were poor maintenance and overloading. Vessels suffering from poor maintenance could go down at any time. Sailor's rights activists made noted regularly that unsafe ships went to sea constantly. Coasting vessels were no exception. A national health report claimed that the ships plying the lumber trade near Pensacola were barely seaworthy. Insurance

[110] *Harper's Weekly,* v. 36, 1892, 35; *Annual Report of the National Board of Health* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1879), 266.

policies made the owners indifferent to their loss and the loss of the crew. Instances of unexplained shipwrecks abound in government reports. The *O P Binns* sailing out of Charleston, South Carolina sank in the night with no immediate cause, surprising the crew, who clung to the rigging. A local pilot discovered the situation the next day when he sailed out guide the ship out of port. Rather than guide the ship to sea, the pilot became a rescuer, taking the crew on board and directing them toward shoreside aid. The increasing competition for cargo pressured captains to make the most of every voyage, occasionally with disastrous results. The *Daniel Goos,* transporting railroad ties along the Texas coast, discovered to its misfortune that the weight of its cargo was more than the ship could bear in rough seas. While *en route* to Corpus Christi, the captain discovered a slow leak in the hull. In conjunction with the cargo, the situation swiftly became an emergency. Semaphore signals reached a nearby pilot but were misunderstood, leaving the vessel without aid. In desperation, the captain attempted to purposefully beach the vessel. While only an eighth of a mile from the shoreline, the vessel fell apart, killing half the crew and the captain's wife and six-month infant child. A different vessel along the Texas coast, also loaded with railroad ties, attempted to dump part of the cargo to save the ship when they too discovered a leak. This had the effect of keeping the ship afloat for an additional twenty-four hours, but eventually the crew made a similar decision to purposefully run the ship aground. The crew of the latter vessel were lucky as members of the Life Saving Service happened to be nearby the scene of the accident and lent assistance.[111]

[111] *Annual Report of the National Board of Health* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1884), 112; *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1881* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1881), 48, 126; *Annual Report of the United*

The danger that shipwrecks and disasters posed to the economic efforts of the United States demanded some kind of organization. Individual states created Life Saving Services to patrol the coastline for wrecks in the antebellum era with noted effectiveness in New Jersey and New York. The federal government made its first effort in that direction in 1848, but the Life Saving Service languished for several decades due to the ongoing sectional crisis. It would fall to Sumner Kimball, head of the Treasury Department's Revenue Marine Division to reorganize and professionalize the endeavor. His initial efforts led to the creation of six districts along the Atlantic coastline, each one charged with maintaining stations at busy intervals. Kimball planned an additional five districts to carry the organization across the country and Great Lakes. The United States Life Saving Service was created in 1872 to protect sailors and shipping along the American coastline, with Kimball as its first Superintendent. Its operations along the Gulf Coast were limited but grew slowly in the late nineteenth century. The service initially created a dedicated district only along the east Florida coast described as "a waste and desolate region." The rest of the Gulf was left to fend for itself, despite the traffic that passed through the area. By 1884, the service dedicated a district to the Gulf, though in reality this included only the coast of Texas and only four lifesaving stations, at San Luis, Saluria, Aransas, and Brazos de Santiago. Consequently, coverage was scant even where Life Saving stations existed. Officers were stations only in the wintertime, typically from November to April. Given that prime fishing and shipping months fell

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States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1882 (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1882), 205; *Galveston Daily News,* February 4, 1881; *Galveston Daily News*, February 9, 1881.

outside the terms of active service, the Gulf was almost entirely without representation from safety officers.[112]

The men of the Lifesaving Service were members of the coastal community themselves. They were "poor fishermen, who live scantly" but retained an expert knowledge of the surrounding coastline. "Surfmen," as they were called, combined multiple means of employment to scrape by, eking out a slight salary from their duties in Life Saving Service as well as their work in fishing and farming. In more dangerous areas surfmen received a set salary, while others were paid a flat ten dollars per rescue. Surfmen were typically older mariners, no longer able to stand the long hours that maritime work required, but still knowledgeable in maneuvering through wind and waves. They had little choice but to continue working, since many depended on the work to sustain them in their declining years. Their primary duty consisted of rowing small boats out to stranded vessels to provide aid or evacuation, depending on the circumstances. If evacuation was necessary, they helped provide for the rescued crew at one of the lifesaving stations.[113]

This created a measure of safety for wrecked vessels in the vicinity of the lifesaving stations. The eastern coastline of Virginia and North Carolina were well protected, as was Florida. Within a few years, Texas also boasted a number of refuges capable of sheltering wrecked sailors. The rest of the Gulf, however, remained notably

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[112] Dennis L. Noble, *Gulf Coast and Western Rivers: A Brief History of U. S. Coast Guard Operations* (U. S. Coast Guard Bicentennial Series, 1990), 5-8; *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1876* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1876), 6, 7, 36.

[113] *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1876* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1876), 68.

without protection. The prevalence of smaller vessels along the coast partially mitigated this gap, however. Fishing and coasting vessels had an intimate knowledge of the coastline that allowed them to do double duty as rescue crews even if they were not formally members of the Lifesaving Service. Captain Malachi Corbell was able to attain steady employment as a lifesaving-house keeper by embarking a daring rescue several months before his appointment took place. In another instance, an African American living on the coast rescued the crew of a French brig, saving eight out of the nine survivors. He took care of them for several days before escorting them to Titusville, nearly sixty miles away. In the case of the wreck of the steamer *Metropolis* off the North Carolina coast, local fishermen were responsible for discovering the ship while out in a fog. They sent word of the wreck to the closest neighbor before beginning rescue attempts, which they kept up for several hours before official help arrived. All told, they helped rescue nearly a hundred people from the steamer before the wreck broke apart. In a dramatic example of coasting's role in rescue, a North Carolina schooner pulled up alongside an Italian bark while a storm raged around them. The schooner rescued the crew of fifteen while "taking advantage of the flood tide." The Italian ship lost no crew because of these actions, though the vessel and cargo were a total loss.[114]

Local vessels, with their expert knowledge and frequent voyages, also played hero for vessels stranded near ports. A pilot ship off the coast of Texas rescued a schooner near Port Aransas in 1882. That same year a pilot off the coast of North Carolina rescued

[114] *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1878* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1878), 51, 72, 87; *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1881* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1881), 116.

a crew of sailors adrift in a small boat, their ship having sunk off the coast the night before. In the latter case, the sailors were doubly lucky, as their presence had gone unnoticed by lifesaving crews due to the rough seas. In a double rescue, the pilot boat *Mamie Higgins* of Galveston sailed out to rescue a tugboat, which had blown its cylinder while towing another vessel. The *Mamie Higgins* brought both the tug and the scow it was towing safely into harbor. At times, the relationship between the lifesaving service and local pilots went both ways. A lifesaving house keeper in 1884 found the *L. Chew* signaling for a pilot to enter a nearby bay. As there were no pilots for that particular bay, the keeper paddled out to the ship himself and led it into the bay. When personal or business contacts were involved, the community could be remarkably helpful. When a schooner capsized off the Galveston coast, local pilots came in and rescued the vessel and crew. The captain of the schooner, Jason Root, posted an article in the newspaper thanking the pilot ship for its service. Root also thanked the "many friends in Galveston who have kindly volunteered assistance in refitting" the ship.[115]

A dramatic incident outside Brazo Santiago illustrates the willingness of coastal residents to provide aid if they could. Three weeks after the lifesaving season ended, the *Theresa G*. became stranded in a gale and signaled for aid. The local lighthouse keeper called for volunteers to rescue the ship, but none arose. Even the local pilot declared the seas too rough to make a successful rescue. The keeper eventually found volunteers from the crews of two separate coasting schooners harbored in port. The makeshift lifesaving

[115] *Galveston Daily News,* May 1, 1877; *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1882* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1882), 213; *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1884* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1884), 98; *Galveston Daily News,* March 22, 1888.

crew spent an hour and a half fighting against the waves and wind before reaching the target. The group spent the night providing what aid they could, pumping the bilges throughout. The following morning the group returned to shore and called for a steamship to tow the *Theresa G.* to safety. Their mission complete, the volunteers returned to their separate vessels after a congratulatory meal.[116]

In another instance, the crew of an oysterboat encountered a wrecked coasting schooner off the coast of North Carolina. The oystermen had not been able to rescue cargo or personal property in their small vessel, but offered what aid they could. The oysterboat transported the crew of the ship to the shoreline where they constructed a camp to recover while they waited for more aid. The vessel proved a total loss, but the crew were saved thanks to local workers. A similar event occurred off the coast of Texas that same month when the Mississippi steamer *Zenobia* ran aground on a sand bar off Port Aransas. A nearby schooner was able to come aside and lighter the *Zenobia* enough that she was able to get off the bar and continue on her voyage.[117]

Even if the ship was relatively unharmed, a beached vessel presented a prolonged problem. The changing tides could occasionally provide the necessary lift to get a ship on its way, creating only a delay in the intended voyage. Of course, the delay might not be short, as the schooner *Ajax* discovered when it ran aground near Indianola, Texas. The captain refused to hire outside help and instead attempted to move the ship a few feet at each high tide using a network of chains and anchors. The plan eventually worked,

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[116] *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1882* (Washington D. C., 1882), 227-228.

[117] *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1881* (Washington D. C., 1881), 173, 174.

though the ship was beached for twenty-six days. The captain suggested, however, that his ingenious plan had saved the owners $3000 in wrecking fees. Another ship on the Texas coast was luckier. The lumber cargo that they were transporting to Corpus Christi was dumped. Another ship on the Texas coast suffered a significant delay when the ship was stranded in a storm three miles off the coast. Eventually the storm pushed the vessel toward the shore, allowing the crew to reach safely in small boats, but stranding the ship itself. The captain negotiated with a wrecking company, but the wrecking ships were also unable to reach the vessel in the rough seas. After four days of delay, the captain was able to dump $1300 in cargo, allowing the vessel to float free.[118]

Stranded sailors found that they had lost their homes, their jobs, and frequently their possessions all in one go. Sailors' possessions were all they had in the world and took on value in excess of their material worth. Crimps and boardinghouse keepers were well known to manipulate sailors by holding onto their trunks as a form of blackmail. The loss of their goods in disasters was a devastating blow, though possibly malleated by their survival. Even so, stranded sailors had no choice but to hope that the maritime community would be generous to them. Reform societies, most notably the Women's National Relief Association, provided lifesaving stations with boxes of clothing for shipwrecked sailors, but this small act of charity in no way made up for the loss of one's personal possessions.[119]

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[118] *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1881* (Washington D. C., 1881), 146; *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1882* (Washington D. C., 1882), 173.

[119] *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1884* (Washington D. C., 1884), 59.

Other members of the maritime community understood the value that a sailor's possession had. Wrecking ships, lifesaving crews, and good Samaritans occasionally made extraordinary efforts to save the crews' personal property. The highest priority went to saving lives, but personal effects and moveable property took a close second. Lifesaving crews occasionally made multiple trips out to stranded and storm wracked vessels specifically to rescue the property. The schooner *Mary L. Vankirk* beached in a storm, compelling the lifesaving crews to rescue the crew while the storm was ongoing. Once the seas had calmed, the lifesaving crew went back the next day, "saving their effects." In another instance, the lifesaving station which rescued the crew of the *Dolly Varden* made several voyages back to the stranded vessel to rescue as much property as they could. The ship itself and most of its cargo were lost, but the crew members regained their effects. The lifesaving crew also mentioned that the rescued men would have been in a difficult position without aid as there was no other help for miles around. The schooner *Susanna,* also along the Texas coast, got lost in a heavy fog as it was leaving Port Aransas for Galveston. The ship struck the side of the channel in the fog, and swiftly began sinking. Shoreside crews rowed out to check on them and found the ship was badly bilged. The captain made the decision to abandon the vessel but implored the rescuers to take "sails and rigging and everything else that could be saved." The moveable property was transported to another vessel nearby that was also bound for Galveston. In another instance the sailors themselves went out of their way to rescue their own effects by carrying them in their arms as they were rescued.[120]

[120] *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1882* (Washington D. C., 1882), 168, 171, 178-180.

In 1882, a lumber schooner, the *Martha Collins,* beached near Ocean City, Maryland. The captain of the ship believed that the tide would lift the ship off the bar and neglected signaling distress for quite some time. By the time he did so, the ship was in no condition to be saved. The crew of five, excluding the captain, packed most of their baggage in one boat while the majority of the crew fled in another. The two small boats rowed for three miles before reaching land, but their personal effects were rescued. The result of the captain's miscalculation meant the loss of the ship, but the movable cargo and rigging were saved after the fact. A similar event occurred off the coast of North Carolina with the sailors of the *Luola Murchison* bound for Savannah. The schooner was struggling against a storm and signaled to life-saving station for aid. The lifesaving crew discovered, upon arriving, that the captain and crew had the situation in hand but desired the life-saving crew to save their possessions, not the crew. The boats from two stations obliged them and landed the personal goods on the beach. Unfortunately, the storm worsened, and the crew of the *Murchison* abandoned ship, but thanks to their prudence their property was saved. Less than a week later, another storm ran the *Mary L. Vankirk* aground less than half a mile from the nearest life saving station. The ship was flooded and actively sinking when it wrecked, driving the hull deep into the beach. Again, the crew survived but the ship was lost.[121]

Occasionally, assistance from the Gulf community transcended national boundaries. This was easily accomplished at sea, where ships of different nationalities were common, but it also occurred near shore, where the borders were more regulated.

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[121] *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1882* (Washington D. C., 1882), 171, 193; *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1884* (Washington D. C., 1884), 108.

Flood tides near Brazos Santiago trapped an Alabama lumber schooner and threatened to flood the ship. Aid came not only from the Life Saving Service, but from nearby Mexicans as well. Both came to the aid of the trapped schooner and directed her safely into port.[122]

When the situation was truly desperate the coastal community went to extraordinary lengths to provide aid. A Spanish ship, the *Triunfo*, bound from Cuba, sprung a leak and beached herself in 1884. The crew was sent on to Key West, where they were housed by a local woman, meanwhile the captain coordinated with wreckers for the recovery of his ship and cargo. As it was immediately apparent that the ship was lost, the wreckers donated their service without charge to rescue what they could from the stricken vessel. The generosity of the Floridians was especially marked since the ship was not flying the US flag. Furthermore, none of the crew spoke any English, making them easy prey for the unscrupulous.[123]

Such generosity was noteworthy precisely because the Floridians donated more time and effort to the crew of the *Triunfo* than usual. The seafaring community was often generous but was not always willing or able to provide aid without asking for remuneration, which was partly why the Life Saving Service existed. Captains aboard wrecked vessels could occasionally employ wreckers to help save the cargo and frequently the ship. The hope was that unloading the cargo would allow the ship to lift off whatever bar, reef, or obstacle it had struck and afterward continue on its journey. In

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[122] *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1882* (Washington D. C., 1882), 196.

[123] *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1884* (Washington D. C., 1884), 138.

one instance, a ship from South Carolina ran aground and deliberated for several days on whether to hire wreckers or hope that the tides would do the work for them. Eventually the captain agreed to hire wreckers to unload the cargo of timber, but after another day of effort gave up the ship as a total loss.[124]

Encountering a stranded ship created a flashpoint between vessels. Negotiation regarding the status of the ship, its crew, and its cargo immediately proceeded. Captains and crew both participated in this process, assessing their own needs and the needs of the ship. The two groups shared an understanding that aid was warranted, but not necessarily assumed. At times ships offered aid freely, especially to save lives. Saving cargo was a less certain endeavor. The schooner *Stony Brooks* was exceptionally lucky when the ship foundered against a barrier island near Galveston. Another coasting schooner from the same port appeared nearby, allowing the stranded captain to transfer "papers, clothing, cabin furniture, and all valuable movables" from one ship to the other. The schooner was a total loss, but "the greater part of the cargo was saved." A ship out of Pascagoula, Mississippi bound for Cuba was caught in a hurricane in 1875, leaving the ship dismasted. The ship drifted for nearly six days before a British vessel caught sight of her off the Grand Caymans. The loss of the stricken ship was problematic, but the rescuing vessel did not possess the ability or the time to help re-mast a rival. After discussion between the two crews, the ship, which contained a load of lumber, was abandoned, and burned to the waterline. The crew of the coasting vessel was deposited at the next port of call, Galveston, Texas. The reasoning put forward by both captains and crew for

[124] *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1881* (Washington D. C., 1881), 128.

abandoning and burning the ship was that the vessel would have been a hazard to other ships entering Gulf ports.[125]

Local citizens, municipal organizations, and even entire governments made note of the maritime community's generosity. Disasters help show the international aspects of the Gulf community. United by the common experience of maritime labor, ships of different nationality made no bones of helping each other in times of need. This tradition was most famous among deep sea vessels but applied to smaller ships as well. The instances of fishing or coasting vessels aiding ships from other nation or frequent. These small instances became diplomatic affairs as captains requested that their rescuers receive some small consideration or award for their aid. The city of Galveston delivered a gold watch to Captain R. Irvine after he rescued a bevy of sailors from the *Virginia Dare*, which sank just outside the city. In another instance, the wreck of an Italian bark, the *Nuova Ottavia,* along the North Carolina coastline led to the deaths of an entire life saving crew. In recognition of their service, the nation of Italy offered thanks to the deceased and a gift of $408 in gold for the surviving families. In a third case, a British consul gave thanks and presented medals of recognition to an American crew which had rescued the survivors of a British shipwreck of the coast of Cuba.[126]

Disasters exacted a heavy toll on coastal communities, but they also created opportunities for those clever, and cunning, enough to reap a profit. The Life Saving

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[125] *Galveston Daily News*, October 31, 1876; *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1881* (Washington D. C., 1881), 127.

[126] *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1876* (Washington D. C., 1876), 14; Report of Consul for Santiago De Cuba, October 17, 1855. RG 59, Department of State Records, Despatches from United States Consuls in Santiago de Cuba, 1799-1906. Washington: National Archives, National Archives and Records Service, General Services Administration, Reel 5.

Service noted that loss of life occurred less frequently along the Gulf than in other regions, with the exception of "occasional hurricanes." Far more commonly, however, the vast shoals of the Gulf caused ships to run aground with "considerable loss of property." In 1885, the Life Saving Service recorded 24 wrecked ships along the Gulf, estimating property losses at close to $150,000. A more expansive report from the Salvage Court of Key west estimated that 533 vessels were lost between 1853 and 1883. The report went on to suggest that losses amounted to nineteen million dollars. Coasting ships kept careful watch for lost or abandoned cargo. Ships could claim anything they found as legitimate salvage, gaining an easy profit for their time. Those living on the coast recognized the possibility of profit due to disasters. A North Carolina citizen made a habit of trawling the shoreline "after a blow" to look for "any vessel or stranded property" that might happen by. This habit led to the discovery of the *Metropolis,* which had struck aground during the previous night's storm.[127]

Even those sailing for pleasure were aware of the potential for profit. Edward Robinson, a sport fisherman from Maryland, travelled to Georgia in 1899 to go on a fishing trip aboard a schooner owned by Savannah businessman Pascal Strong. The pair spent several days fishing and hunting with mixed success. In the meantime, they heard from local African Americans that "some fine lumber" had been salvaged after the last hurricane. The schooner set out in search of the lumber, and hopefully an easy profit. Unfortunately for them, rather than profit from someone else's misfortune, they nearly became a disaster themselves when the ship ground itself ashore on Ossabaw Island. The

[127] *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1876* (Washington D. C., 1876), 36; *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1885* (Washington D. C., 1885), 316; *Galveston Daily News,* May 28, 1883.

crew was able to float the ship free during high tide, but they never did find the rumored lumber.[128]

Those who most obviously profited from maritime disasters were the crews of wrecking vessels. Lightly drafted sail and steam ships removed cargo and crew from stranded vessels. If the stricken vessel was lucky, the difference in weight allowed it to drift free from the shoreline. In exchange, the wreckers were paid a percentage of the ship and cargo's total value. A single wrecking case, that of the Bark *Prairie Bird* resulted in a profit of $14,000 gained for the three wrecking ships. At times wrecking vessels were the only possibility of saving a ship's cargo and crew. The lack of alternatives gave wreckers a frequent leg up in negotiation, which did nothing to endear them to itinerant captains. Negotiations between wreckers and shipwrecked captains could become quite acrimonious, but the advantaged wreckers usually had their way. The captain of the schooner *William Allen*, wrecked in 1881 off Chincoteague Island on the Virginia coast, took three days before negotiating the rescue of his vessel out of refusal to meet the wreckers' terms. He hoped that the tides would eventually raise his ship, but eventually recognized the futility of that hope. He eventually agreed to the wrecker's terms and was able to continue his voyage. For those three days, his crew rested in a nearby life-saving house before continuing their voyage.[129]

Wreckers provided a vital but suspect service. Critics accused them of engaging in piracy, smuggling, stealing, and using false lights to guide ships to wreck purposefully.

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[128] Edward A Robinson, "A Trip to Georgia," *Forest and Stream*, March 18, 1899, 202.

[129] *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1881* (Washington D. C., 1881), 169; A. F. And C. Tift v. American Bark *Prairie Bird*, 1880, Admiralty Court of Key West.

Such accusations rarely had evidence to support them. The Admiralty Court of Key West insisted as early as 1828 that any case involving wreckers automatically stand before the court. Strict regulations and stricter attention seem to have kept wreckers on the straight and narrow. Naturally, larger vessels required more wreckers to aid them. The nature of their work led to alliances between wreckers in both the short and the long term. In the short term, wrecking ships might meet and agree to split the profits from a single wrecked vessel, such as those who aided the steamship *City of Waco* which wrecked off Galveston in 1875. Thirteen different wrecking vessels worked to save the larger ship. The size of the wrecking vessels involved ranged from nine tons to seventy-eight tons. Other times, wreckers arranged long term partnerships. Dedicated wrecking companies existed along the Florida and Texas coasts, as well as in the Bahamas. These companies created their own deals with local fishing vessels who served as scouts for the companies. Much like lightering, standard practice held that the first wrecker to board a wreck gained undisputed control and first right of salvage.[130]

The multiple purposes of vessels along the Gulf also demonstrate the potential profit that surrounded disasters. Obtaining a wrecking license was a viable option even for small fishing vessels, though any sign of dishonesty or abuse was grounds for revocation. Fishing vessels along the coast also served as impromptu wrecking vessels when the opportunity arose, with roughly half of the ships employed in fishing for the Havana market also maintaining a wrecking license. The trade in wrecking was certainly more valuable than fishing, but less reliable, and so ships watched for prospects of both

[130] *Galveston Daily News,* October 28, 1888; Silvanus Pinder et al v. the American Steamship *City of Waco*, 1875, Admiralty Court of Key West; "Key West and Salvage in 1850," *The Florida Historical Society Quarterly* 8, No. 1 (1929), 47–63.

varieties. Opportunities for wrecking provided easy profits, tempting fishermen to abandon previous pursuits. "Falling in" with a wrecked vessel could persuade fishing ships involved in the Cuban trade to "miss a trip while attending it." Since the ships only made twelve or fourteen such voyages a year, the value of wrecking outpaced that of hocking fish off the coast. Charles Nordhoff, the noted journalist and maritime writer, claimed that a fishing smack full of oranges dumped its cargo into the water in its haste to join the throng of ships engaged in salvaging a wrecked steamship.[131]

Despite the danger along the coast, most ships were able to limp on to port after an accident. Only one ship was totally lost on the Gulf Coast in 1885, five in 1891, and seven in 1900. The rest were partially damaged but able to recommence their journey. The crews could continue on their way with, though usually with added duties in the form of bailing and pumping leaking hulls. Nevertheless, the potential for a vessel to wreck along the shoals and reefs of the Gulf Coast was ever-present. At the least, this would mean a lengthy delay, or at the worst, the loss of ship, cargo, and possibly crew. Government officials acknowledged the economic peril represented by the unconquered coastline. By the turn of the century, the number of life saving districts along the Gulf Coast had expanded from two to four, the number of stations along the Texas coast had grown from four to eight, and the number of ships wrecked along the coast had been cut in half. At a time when the US produced more coasting vessels than any year previous,

[131] George B. Goode, *ed., The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), Part 5, vol. 1, 592; C. Nordhoff, "Wrecking on the Florida Keys," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, v. 18, 1859, 578, 582, 584.

the Life Saving Service paid unprecedented attention to protecting those vessels and the commerce they represented.[132]

Quarantines and Diseases

While storms and shipwrecks caused fearful disasters, they were at least isolated events. A storm could blow through or a ship sink, but once the crisis had passed, life could continue as usual. For denizens along the Gulf, disease presented a far more threatening specter, one that never entirely vanished from the public eye. The most dreaded disease of all was yellow fever, colloquially known as yellow jack. The epidemic plague swept across the South, leaving death and economic destruction in its wake. Symptoms of yellow fever included chills, fever, headaches, muscle spasms, nervousness, and jaundice. Serious cases included coma and vomiting. The latter resulted in the infamous "black bile," internal bleeding which presented itself as dark colored vomit. Once the final symptoms set in death was usually inevitable. Of all those who caught the disease, between twenty and twenty five percent perished, literally decimating some towns. For those who survived, a lengthy convalescence hampered them for months and complicated could easily result in death after the fact.

Yellow fever was a fact of life along the Gulf, one that discouraged investment in coastal cities as much, if not more, than hurricanes. The city of Galveston alone suffered yellow fever outbreaks in 1839, 1847, 1853, 1858, 1859, 1864, 1867, 1870, 1873. New Orleans suffered an even greater frequency, with nearly yearly outbreaks between 1817 and 1905. Pensacola witnessed intermittent outbreaks in 1863, 1867, 1873, 1874, and

[132] *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1885* (Washington D. C., 1885), 316; *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1900* (Washington D. C., 1900), 12, 329.

1882. Southern states were constantly concerned about the possibility of an outbreak, which could occur at any time outside of winter. All told more than 41,000 people died in Louisiana alone during the intervening years.[133]

The discovery that yellow fever spread through mosquitos would not be made until after the Spanish-American war. In the decades before, physicians espoused a variety of theories, including miasma theory, which held that rotting plant and animal matter caused the plague. Proper sewage and garbage disposal were the resulting solution, though both remained scanty in the South, with most cities maintaining "defective sewerage, imperfect scavenging, polluted water supply, neglected cloacae, and *invidia absit*." Alongside miasma theory, so-called "importation theory" was the predominant means of understanding how yellow fever- arrived in the US. Some person, knowingly or otherwise, must introduce the disease each time there was an outbreak. When yellow fever appeared, locals almost always blamed recently arrived sailors or passengers. According to both theories, southern port cities were extremely vulnerable.[134]

Notoriously unhealthy, not to say filthy, ships bore suspicion for spreading the disease. Government reformers constantly noted a lack of hygiene in the forecastle, describing the vast majority of ship holds as dank, dark, and unhealthy. There was plenty of reason for concern. The Marine Hospital at New Orleans treated sailors suffering from a plethora of ailments. Most frequently, sickness was either a result of overwork or

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[133] David G. McComb, *Galveston: A History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986.), 93; *Infectious Diseases in Louisiana* (Louisiana: Office of Public Health, 1934), 3.

[134] David G. McComb, *Galveston: A History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986.), 93; *Harper's Weekly*, Vol. 22, 1878, 642; *Annual Report of the Supervising Surgeon General of the Marine Hospital Service of the United States, 1874* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1874), 228.

overplay. Venereal diseases were the most common disease treated at the hospital. Infectious diseases became worse when sailors hid them to keep working. Incapacitated sailors put an extra strain on the rest of the crew and the "attendant abuses" that other sailors unleashed on the sick pushed ill sailors to keep working despite ill health. A Finnish sailor admitted in 1882 that he had been sick for fourteen months before the worsening disease finally forced him to seek treatment. It was only a bloody hemorrhage at sea that convinced the sailor, and his captain, to drop the man off in New Orleans. The Finnish sailor recovered, but others were less fortunate. A sailor in the hospital at the same time hid his sickness for two years before dying in the hospital.[135]

The porousness of the Gulf coastline made it natural to place suspicion on ships from outside the country. Spanish ships bore particular suspicion, not least because yellow fever was a near constant presence in neighboring Cuba. An 1874 outbreak in Pensacola blamed a Spanish ship for spreading the disease, despite the fact that she was docked alongside ships from several other nationalities and tropical destinations. Though there was no real way of knowing which ship the disease came from, inspectors eventually decided that the Spanish ship was to blame. An 1883 outbreak in Pensacola concluded that the disease had spread because of pilot had sailed out to escort a Spanish vessel and returned with the disease in tow. A Pascagoula newspaper blamed the *St. Michael,* which had last stopped in Havana and hired local sailors some days before. Even when no Spanish ships had arrived recently, the proximity between the Gulf and Cuba meant that there was almost always a ship of that had conveniently arrived from

[135] *Annual Report of the Supervising Surgeon General of the Marine Hospital Service of the United States, 1874* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1874), 127; U. S. Marine Hospital Record Books, 1879-1890, Vol. 1, Tulane University, Manuscripts Collection 757, 144.

Havana. Havana bore the ultimate stigma as the source of all yellow fever, with one physician referring to it as the "great nidus."[136]

Yellow fever caused as much damage economically as it did medically. The panic that yellow fever engendered led physicians and local leaders to downplay or even deny the presence of the disease. When a yellow fever outbreak occurred citizens of means immediately fled the area to healthier climes. Business came to a screeching halt, and most ships would immediately head toward other ports if they had any options. An outbreak of yellow fever in 1875 led the Navy to remove its fleet from Key West for fear that the disease would spread to the troops. The Navy withdrew its ships three states away to South Carolina before they felt secure. Their evacuation cut off "a considerable income to the city." The damage could easily spiral across the region, injuring cities far away from the source of the disaster. An 1888 yellow fever outbreak in Florida created fish shortages in Savannah, with less than half of the necessary barrels arriving on any given day. The economic danger to those living in port cities was enough for physicians to deny that the disease existed, diagnosing the disease as cholera, dengue fever, or *chagres* fever instead of the dreaded yellow jack. An 1882 outbreak of yellow fever in Brownsville led the governor of Corpus Christi to issue a quarantine against all travel between the two cities. The citizens of Brownsville sent a telegram denying that the disease existed in the city at that time even as government inspectors were actively confirming cases. That same year, the citizens of Pensacola denounced a supervising

[136] *Annual Report of the Supervising Surgeon General of the Marine Hospital Service of the United States, 1883-1885* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1885), 54, 56.

physician until the plague had spread further than an early quarantine could stop. In all cases, denying the existence of the disease hindered disease prevention.[137]

The question of who had authority to establish quarantines bedeviled local, state, and federal authorities in the late nineteenth century. Individual ports maintained their own boards of health, states had their representatives, and the federal government increasingly took on the responsibility of establishing quarantines as the decades went on. At times ships from only particular ports had to stay in offshore quarantines. When these measures failed, as they so often did, the ports themselves would go into quarantine. Bitter southerners resented attempts on the part of the national government to usurp their authority over health crises. In the touchy years following Reconstruction, the federal government tended to agree, creating a half-hearted bill that would "efficiently supplement" local quarantines rather than "interfere with or cripple" them. This supplement consisted entirely of quarantine stations on barrier islands and inspections by the Revenue Service. Preventative measures on land were left entirely in the hands of local authorities. Nevertheless, national quarantine efforts were explicitly focused on the Gulf Coast in cooperation with "the unceasing vigilance of the state board of health."[138]

Prevention being the best cure, the government established quarantine and inspection stations along the Gulf. Incoming ships were held at convenient barrier islands where they had no choice but to delay their voyage while they waited on a clean

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[137] *Annual Report of the Supervising Surgeon General of the Marine Hospital Service of the United States, 1883-1885* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1885), 53; *Annual Report of the Supervising Surgeon General of the Marine Hospital Service of the United States, 1889* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1889), 72; *The Morning News,* August 26, 1888.

[138] *Annual Report of the Supervising Surgeon General of the Marine Hospital Service of the United States, 1883-1885* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1885), 47; Dennis East II, "Health and Wealth: Goals of the New Orleans Public Health Movement, 1879-1884," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (Summer, 1968), 258-265.

bill of health. Disinfecting efforts included fumigation, but mostly relied on the oldest remedy, time, to keep the United States safe. The length of the quarantine depended on the nature of the disease. For yellow fever, ships typically waited for two weeks. In 1892, fears of an Asiatic cholera epidemic led President Benjamin Harrison to quarantine foreign vessels for at least twenty days and possibly more if local authorities deemed it necessary. For however long it took, sailors were effectively on vacation. During that time, they swam, fished, hunted, and generally relaxed, mixing with sailors from other ships regardless of nationality. Captains also spent their social time with each other, though they were choosier in their company. Some dined with quarantine officials, hoping that a pleasant meal, convivial drinks, and a bribe would allow the ship to pass through inspection. The ties that sailors made while in quarantine could prove lasting. A Spanish ship, the *Saleta,* and an Italian ship, the *Vincenzo Accame*, grew quite close while in quarantine, with the captains and mates continuing to dine with each other even after their ships had arrived in Pensacola.[139]

When towns and cities quarantined, there was no choice but to rely on each other. Those left on shore had to find some way to scrape by. With outside trade shut off, local fishermen occasionally found that the value of their cargo doubled or tripled. Industries that did not rely on the sea were affected. The city of Tampa was reliant on the tobacco industry, mostly worked by ex-pat Cubans. When yellow fever appeared in 1884, other cities of the South immediately quarantined Tampa, which "seriously imperiled" the cigar making industry. Luckily, the outbreak proved to be mild, but for some time the city was

[139] *Annual Report of the National Board of Health* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1884), 74; *Diary of William Henry Davison, 1834-1916*, University of West Florida, M1968-11, 3-4.

"threatened with having several hundred cigar-makers out of employment. Only ongoing public works development saved the local Cuban population from "having to apply to charity" suggesting that this was necessary in other years.[140]

Of course, the quarantines were notoriously ineffective. David S Barnes has argued that nineteenth century quarantines concerned themselves more with "infectious" cargo rather than healthy passengers and mariners. To that end, quarantines often overlooked apparently healthy individuals. Even when they were thorough, the double task of isolating the sprawling cities and patrolling the open ocean was beyond the reach of the individual states and frequently beyond the task of the central government. Quarantine vessels stopped and hailed incoming ships to search them for signs of disease and direct them to quarantine stations at appropriate seasons. The varying condition and size of quarantine ships made this task even more monumental. Quarantine ships were just as likely to suffer from disaster as any other. In a confluence of problems in 1884, the quarantine sloop *Two Sisters*, operating off Brazos Santiago Pass, had no choice but to call for distress as a storm struck in the middle of its errand at quarantine, leaving it helpless with a flooded hold and a collapsed mast.[141]

Sailors and their supporters were certainly not spared from the danger of yellow fever. Though physicians misunderstood the role that ships played in germinating the disease, sailors were still potential victims. Entire crews were laid low by the disease.

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[140] *Annual Report of the Supervising Surgeon General of the Marine Hospital Service of the United States, 1875* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1876), 139; *The Morning News*, August 26, 1888.

[141] David S. Barnes, "Cargo 'Infection,' and the Logic of Quarantine in the Nineteenth Century," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, Vol. 88, No. 1 (Spring 2014), 76; *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1884* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1884), 95.

Sailors in port could occasionally rely on the marine hospitals for aid, but fishermen and local mariners were denied access to these institutions for quite some time. When disease struck maritime workers, they turned to the community at large for aid. Sailors slept in the houses of locals, frequently those who shared the same ethnicity. When captain Bartoro of the *Vincenzo Accame* fell ill, he was kept in the house of a Mrs. O'Neal, a local widow who lived nearby. When Captain Bartoro died, sailors from more than nine Italian ships in port all attended his funeral, with several of the ships producing victims in the days that followed. Frank Dool another Italian in Pensacola and a runner who supplied meat to the Italian ships, fell ill shortly after. Dool's house was a gathering point for Italians, where resident Italians and Italian sailors gathered together. The 1884 outbreak spread across the Italian community through a chain of household visits and nearby relatives, with sailors, fishermen, oystermen, and terrestrially employed Italians all contracting the disease. The health report that followed the outbreak noted that the Italian population of Pensacola was constantly visiting each other "both ashore and on board." All told, 26 vessels of various nationalities suffered yellow fever outbreaks during the course of the 1884 outbreak.[142]

While some coastal residents fought against the spread of epidemic diseases, others bristled at efforts to stem their transmission. Breaking quarantine was a common enough practice among those who lived by the sea. Quarantine stations were usually close enough that sailors could row small boats to reach shore. These boats were either their own from their home vessel, or occasionally stolen from the quarantine station

[142] *Webb's Pensacola Directory* (New York: Wanton S. Webb, 1885), 96; *Annual Report of the National Board of Health* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1884), 74-78, 94.

itself. Fruit ships selling to the local Key West market were crewed by locals and it was impossible to stop them from returning home, either in boats or simply by swimming to shore. Ships of the Morgan Line, operating along the Texas and Louisiana coasts, were exempt from stopping at quarantine stations. In a more specific existence of quarantine evasion, several sailors in the Pensacola quarantine stole the guard boat so they could go to town to see their "amigos." They returned the next day, apparently not concerned with the risks that they had just taken. A local quarantine officer noted, in all fairness to the sailors, that quarantine employees were just as likely to absentee themselves from their ostensibly critical job to go on a bender or sell "salvage" collected in the course of their duties. Legally, the sailors were in the clear. Even as late as 1889, there was no federal law to prevent any crew or passengers from absconding from quarantine. Captains were held liable for breaking quarantine, but common sailors were not.[143]

Quarantines created literal captive markets and ships with goods to sell were well positioned to take advantage. Smugglers broke into quarantine to sell their illegal wares. Usually law-abiding ships, such as fruit steamers sailed past the invisible boundary line to peddle their wares. In both 1888 and 1889, federal inspectors blamed fruit steamers for introducing the disease. Under ordinary circumstances, fruit steamers were excepted from quarantines, so that their wares could reach market before they went bad, but city-wide quarantines had already been declared in those instances. Other crews were more circumspect, selling their goods to local boats and ships that acted as liaisons between

[143] *Diary of William Henry Davison, 1834-1916*, University of West Florida, M1968-11, 3-4; *Annual Report of the Supervising Surgeon General of the Marine Hospital Service of the United States, 1889* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1889), 113; *Annual Report of the National Board of Health* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1879), 396, 406.

quarantined port cities and in transit ships. The ships faced few consequences for violating national boundaries, and locals were hardly inclined to betray those who had brought them badly desired products. Locals who worked on the water contributed to the problem as well, breaking quarantine in the other direction. Yellow fever broke through quarantine in 1875 when a pilot took his ship out to "procure liquor" from a nearby vessel. The pilot then shared his bounty with neighboring pilots, inadvertently bringing the disease ashore.[144]

For their part, captains disregarded most efforts at establishing public health. Captains refused bills of health that might slow down entry into clean ports and made conscious decisions to risk the public health in favor of their own timetables. Ships ignored the possibility they might spread epidemics, while simultaneously abandoning ill sailors as soon as they arrived in port. Such abandoned sailors had to find help where they could and risked transmitting their sickness to others. Any ship under economic pressure would be tempted to do so and think little of it. In one curious turnabout, an American ship abandoned a sailor with yellow fever in Matanzas, Cuba, reversing the commonly held path of infection. Sailors tended to conceal sickness themselves, knowing that they faced abuse from officers, if not their comrades, if they were unable to work. Time and again, failed attempts at quarantines traced back to ships that chose to ignore or conceal sickness aboard. At times, ships would ignore quarantines, sailing to

[144] *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1888* (Washington D. C., 1888), 25; *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1889* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1889), 131; *Annual Report of the Supervising Surgeon General of the Marine Hospital Service of the United States, 1884* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1884), 105; *Diary of William Henry Davison, 1834-1916*, University of West Florida, M1968-11, 1.

different ports rather than submit to the delays. In this way, entire crews were incapacitated by disease upon arrival in port. Shoreside doctors and officials had to decide whether to treat them then and there or risk the integrity of the ship and the lives of the crew by demanding that they return to the infected port.[145]

The potential solutions to yellow fever outbreaks were a constant source of obsession for southerners. A government employed physician claimed that the transition of coasting vessels from wooden hulls to steel hulls provided the side benefit of preventing yellow fever, which he claimed was germinated in rotten wood. Newer ships had the added benefit of improved ventilation systems and claimed to attract a higher quality of sailor. These efforts did not stop the spread of yellow fever in the nineteenth century, but they did demonstrate a commitment to protecting the southern coastline and economy.[146]

Conclusion

Whether the tragedy in question was violent storms, shipwrecks, or virulent diseases, recovery was a long difficult process. Aid took time to reach ravaged cityscapes, abandoned sailors scraped by on the charity of strangers, and stricken towns endured quarantines until the authorities deemed the locale safe. The process of recovery forced coastal denizens to rebuild their businesses, homes, and ships. For transient

[145] US V. Graffan, NARA, RG 21, US District Courts, New Orleans Circuit Court General Case Files, 1837-1911, Box 117, Case #2161; Report of Consul for Santiago De Cuba, January 8, 1863. RG 59, Department of State Records, Despatches from United States Consuls in Santiago de Cuba, 1799-1906. Washington: National Archives, National Archives and Records Service, General Services Administration, Reel 5; *Annual Report of the National Board of Health* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1879), 69; *Annual Report of the National Board of Health* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1884), 76.

[146] *Annual Report of the National Board of Health* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1884), 112.

sailors, the process of rebuilding occasionally was as simple as signing on with another ship. For those who spent more of their time in a limited geography, however, recovery was rarely so simple. The survivors of the 1886 hurricanes that destroyed Indianola arrived the next day in Galveston as refugees, lucky to be alive. The survivors formed a relief committee but were open about the long odds required to rebuild. Rebuilding the town would cost the Morgan Line much more than moving their terminus twelve miles to Lavaca. A month later, another storm slammed into Indianola, all but sealing its fate. Galveston residents did what they could to help the hapless residents of Indianola. Eager to help, local newsboys performed a minstrel show that raised $15 toward disaster relief.[147]

Though it would be an overstatement to point to natural disasters as the cause of the coastal community's decline, a series of disasters, all occurring in the 1890s, took a toll on the broader Gulf World. In 1893, the Sea Islands Hurricane buzzsawed up the Atlantic coast. Though the storm was felt as far north as New York, it particularly devastated the low-lying sea islands of Georgia and the Carolinas. The largely African-American communities that lived there lost much of what they had gained over the past several decades. The hurricane triggered a migration of people away from the islands in the years that followed. Back-to-back yellow fever outbreaks also disrupted the Gulf coastline in 1895 and 1897. Both instances led coastal dwellers to flee inland, if they

[147] *Galveston Daily News,* August 22, 1886; *Galveston Daily News,* August 25, 1886; *Galveston Daily News*, August 31, 1886.

could, to evade the disease. Those who stayed behind faced quarantines and economic shutdowns.[148]

Of course, no disaster gained quite as much attention as the Great Galveston Hurricane of 1900. The deadliest natural disaster in American history spiraled across the coast of Texas from the southeast on September 8, killing 8,000 people. Coastal towns in the Lone Star State all took damage, but Galveston, often regarded as the South's rising great port, took the most damage. Property damage to the city ran north of $17,000,000. Sixteen ships had been in harbor at the time of the storm, all destroyed, not including smaller tugs, schooners, and boats. Barges arrived to take refugee Galvestonians to nearby Houston. Many left the city in the wake of the storm, destitute and homeless. The city would eventually recover, but it would take an additional twelve years before "the Oleander City" would surpass New Orleans as the second largest port of the United States.[149]

During the late nineteenth century, dealing with environmental problems helped unite the coastal community into a distinct unit. The shared experiences, intermittent aid, and even the forced travel caused by disasters had been a part of the Gulf experience. After the turn of the century, technological changes, new government regulations, and the changing coastal economy contributed to the decline of widespread disasters along the Gulf. Though storms continued to rage, deeper keeled steam liners had less to fear. Port

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[148] Caroline Grego, *Hurricane Jim Crow: How the Great Sea Island Storm of 1893 Shaped the Lowcountry South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022), 229; Mariola Espinosa, "The Threat from Havana: Southern Public Health, Yellow Fever, and the U. S. Intervention in the Cuban Struggle for Independence, 1878-1898," *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 72, No. 3 (Aug., 2006), 545.

[149] David G. McComb, *Galveston: A History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 133; Patricia Bellis Bixel and Elizabeth Hayes Turner, *Galveston and the 1900 Storm* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 166.

cities were more protected, though never entirely protected, by carefully constructed levees along the waterfront. Shipwrecks were still a possibility, but the decline of smaller ports directed traffic to fewer destinations. These destinations used industrialized techniques to dredge deep channels that guided ships safely into harbor. Disease control continued to concern the nation, but the "great difference in the commercial marine of the present day" meant that sailors spent less time in infected ports, and by the current way of thinking were less likely to introduce diseases back home. The end of yellow fever as a prominent threat was due to the changes reshaping the Gulf as much as it was to the discovery of its true spread through mosquito bites. While disasters continued to occur along the Gulf, their frequency declined, making the Gulf a safer and more hospitable destination.

CHAPTER IV – "FROM THE BAYOUS AND LAKES": RACE AND ETHNICITY ON THE GULF COAST, 1865-1898

When a credulous WPA writer interviewed Uncle Dave, the older men regaled a number of yarns in the best seafaring tradition. Starting out with his youth in Key West before working in the sponge fishery, the young Dave struggled during the harsh Reconstruction years. Eventually Dave enlisted in the Navy and took off on a three-year voyage before returning home. Dave described the racial environment on the ship, including an Afro-Haitian who looked down on African Americans and a sailor of Irish descent who had no problems forming a friendship with young Dave. The older sailor disliked being called Irish, however, apparently telling Dave, "'My fadder (sic) was Irish and me madder American. I been born aboard a Dutch brig in French waters. Now you tell me what flag I b'longs undah." Such a sentiment would have rung true for many inhabitants along the Gulf Coast. The realities of estuarian life complicated race, ethnicity, and nationality. The "Creole Coast" mixed people together more than anywhere else in the South, creating unique social and economic relationships that spanned long geographic distances.[150]

The relationship between African Americans and maritime work was a fraught one in the nineteenth century. Enslaved workers could create a space for themselves along the coast, working on the docks or on barges, coasting, or fishing vessels. Enslaved African Americans could gain autonomy working in an industry noted for its lack thereof. In comparison with gang labor on the fields or domestic labor under the

[150] Interview by J. A. Frost, *Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project, Florida, Vol. 3* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1936), 318.

ever-watchful eyes of plantation master and mistresses, maritime work was a good alternative. Maritime work represented some of the best avenues for life under enslavement, including the most secure possibilities of escaping to freedom. Enslavers themselves were aware of this, creating stringent limitations on race and maritime labor.

Maritime work on the rivers and coasts was preferable to work in the fields. It was also more difficult for enslaved African Americans to gain access to this specialized form of labor. The variations of maritime work included work as an enslaved ferryman, on flatboats, or on small schooners, each with its own pros and cons. Enslaved African Americans on the coast occasionally had the opportunity, as David Cecelski noted, to hire out their labor to local vessels, handing over part of their wages to their masters. Though subject to the violence and danger that accompanied all maritime work, it was still less onerous than working directly under the eye of an overseer on a plantation or farm. Ironically, enslaved seamen faced less violence on board a ship than they faced in the fields, with better working conditions, more food, and arguably more freedom. Maritime work allowed for personal mobility, created social ties across long distances, and allowed enslaved Africans to earn a wage, all benefits that were harder to find on shore.[151]

Enslaved African Americans most frequently escaped slavery by maritime routes. Recent research has suggested that the overwhelming majority of successful escapes began and ended near the sea. The relative ease by which an enslaved person could walk onto a ship and escape captivity was a source of constant concern for enslavers. Free Black and white New England sailors sympathized with the plight of runaway slaves and

[151] David S. Cecelski, *The Waterman's Song: Slavery and Freedom in Maritime North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 55-56.

informally assisted them both inside and outside the famous underground railroad. Escapees recognized the possibilities of escaping by sea. One particularly dramatic example depicted a runaway slave who had dressed "as a mariner" and had seamen's papers that he had borrowed from a flee Black sailor. In another instance, a former South Carolina slave, John Andrew Jackson, escaped to Boston by stowing away on a cotton ship. Though coasting ships were naturally attractive, with their quick voyages to havens in the northern states, there were additional alternatives along the wharfs. Vessels sailing away from the United States entirely created opportunities for daring runaways. The long duration of transatlantic voyages, or even longer whaling voyages, though discouraging for many sailors, were benefits for runaway slaves. They could work for as short as six months or as long as three years. When they returned, they would have a ready supply of cash and could reasonably hope that their captors had given up after such a long absence.[152]

But in the South, local authorities did their best to forbid free African Americans and Black sailors from coming ashore. Southern states passed laws forbidding the presence of Black mariners, beginning with South Carolina in the 1840s. The presence of free Black sailors in the South represented a "moral contagion" that threatened the stability of the slave society. Their very presence could inspire enslaved people to have dangerous thoughts regarding possible liberation. The initial solution was a swath of Negro Seamen Acts which barred the ingress of free Black sailors into the American South. The Acts sparked a diplomatic squabble with Great Britain which would last for

[152] Timothy Walker, *Sailing to Freedom: Maritime Dimensions of the Underground Railroad* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2021), 4, 27-28, 37-40.

nearly two decades without a clear result. Southern states insisted that they had the right and obligation to regulate their own boundaries and create "racial quarantines." British opponents of the Acts made their own argument based on several Anglo-American treaties which protected the rights of crown subjects, including Black sailors, to freely enter and exit American ports. Only the American Civil War and subsequent passage of the Thirteenth Amendment ended the debate by removing the core conflict of slavery.[153]

African-American sailors took advantage of the opportunities created by four years of warfare. Black sailors had long been a mainstay of the United States Navy during times of conflict. They had made up approximately ten percent of the Navy during both the American Revolution and the War of 1812. Southern politicians, always wary of upsetting the delicate racial hierarchy of the slave south, had capped Black enlistment in the Navy at five percent during the antebellum years, but during the fight for freedom that number had exploded. According to Howard University's Black Sailors Project, African Americans made up nearly one in six sailors enlisted in the Union Navy by the end of the war. Black sailors were especially prominent in Florida, which boasted the largest proportion of pre-war Black sailors as well, but every coastal state witnessed hundreds of Black sailors, with the sole exception of Texas.[154]

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[153] Michael Scheopner, *Moral Contagion: Black Atlantic Sailors, Citizenship, and Diplomacy in Antebellum America* (Boston, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 3; Timothy Walker, *Sailing to Freedom: Maritime Dimensions of the Underground Railroad* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2021), 37.

[154] George E. Buker, *Blockaders, Refugees, and Contrabands: Civil War on Florida's Gulf Coast, 1861-1865* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1993), 42, 44; Barbara Brooks Tomblin, *Bluejackets and Contrabands: African Americans and the Union Navy* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 180, 189; Irvin D. S. Winsboro, "Give Them Their Due: A Reassessment of African Americans and Union Military Service in Florida during the Civil War," *The Journal of African American History*, Vol. 92, No. 3 (Summer, 2007), 334.

Even when they did not officially enlist, African Americans aided the Union naval efforts in other ways. Contrabands, former slaves who had escaped to Union lines, did what they could to assist the Union war effort, though they were rarely listed in official reports. Coastal inhabitants served as informants and even spies along the meandering Gulf. Formerly enslaved pilots guided Union vessels, occasionally at great personal risk in exposed pilothouses. In one notable instance, Acting Master Edward McKeige helped established a refuge for Black pilots on Batten Island, near the St. John's River. The refuge was quickly named Pilot Town, grew to include more than a hundred Black pilots and their families. The outpost served as a reliable source of pilots along the Florida coast for the remainder of the war.[155]

As the war ground on, African Americans fled both enslaver and soldiers. This was often toward union lines, but also towards the coastline. The presence of the Union Navy and its serpentine blockade heralded potential shelter by the ocean. Over the course of the war 20,000 former slaves fled plantations and sought shelter in the sea islands of Beaufort County, South Carolina alone. As Union forces captured southern ports, they too became refuges for former slaves. Their presence created problems for the war effort, but it meant that thousands of African Americans experienced the coast as their means of emancipation.[156]

Peace naturally ended naval efforts along the coast, but the coast remained an asset to African Americans during the lean years of Reconstruction. Humiliated

[155] Barbara Brooks Tomblin, *Bluejackets and Contrabands: African Americans and the Union Navy* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 182-186.

[156] Caroline Grego, *Hurricane Jim Crow: How the Great Sea Island Storm of 1893 Shaped the Lowcountry South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022), 35.

southerners attempted to recreate the hierarchy of the slave south, but by the end of the 1860s that attempt had given way to a compromise system of sharecropping, tenancy, and contract labor. By the 1880s African Americans across the South had been forced into debt by sharecropping schemes, threatened and beaten away from the polls, and lost access to the mechanisms of state power. Former slavers would retain their ability to migrate, to set their own hours, and to control their families' labor, but lost ground in the face of early efforts to establish Jim Crow. This coast proved exceptional to these efforts. Coastal African Americans, in particular, enjoyed more freedom and arguably more prosperity than their inland counterparts during the post-war years. Fishing, crabbing, and oystering were relatively accessible as sources of subsistence and could be conducted throughout the entire year. In the absence of other work, it was almost always possible to take advantage of the estuary.[157]

A deepening agricultural depression in the late 1880s and 1890s made life on the coast all the more appealing. Coastal freedmen already had many of the skills necessary to subsist off the southern estuary, developed as individuals fishing after their day in the field was over, or as one of those rare enslaved maritime workers. Throughout the late nineteenth century, fish remained an important part of the coastal diet. An 1895 report from the United States Department of Agriculture noted that the diets of coastal African Americans were comparable to that of "mechanics and families of professional men" largely due to the proximity of fish for food.[158]

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[157] *Southern Workman*, May 1, 1885; Caroline Grego, *Hurricane Jim Crow: How the Great Sea Island Storm of 1893 Shaped the Lowcountry South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022), 25, 33.

[158] H. B. Frissel and Isabel Bevier, *Dietary Studies of Negroes in Eastern Virginia in 1897 and 1898*, US Department of Agriculture, Office of Experiment Stations, Bulletin No. 71 (Washington, D. C.:

Coastal African Americans

Throughout the nineteenth century the majority of inhabitants along the Gulf Coast were African Americans. This was especially true on the Atlantic side of the Gulf but included the Florida coast as well. In Beaufort Country on the South Carolina coast, African Americans outnumbered white Americans ten to one. While the South Carolina coast was noteworthy precisely because of the unusually dense Black population, the rest of the coast still exhibited frequent Black communities. Further west along the Gulf the number of African Americans declined, but they still made up a sizeable portion of the population.[159]

Life along the coast required a heterogeneous mix of strategies for survival. The isolated communities that peppered the Gulf Coast outside the major cities and on barrier islands could not afford to rely on a single crop or industry for survival. It was common for coastal inhabitants to farm, fish, and hire out their labor or their vessels all at the same time. Experience in marine work was as essential as experience in farming, carpentry, or any other skill. Fishing required knowledge of proper seasons as well as different fishing techniques, and an understanding of the potential market. Fishing for subsistence required flexibility in the face of the constantly changing environment.

Ambrose E. Gonzales described the relatively prosperous life along the Gullah islands that African Americans made in fishing, crabbing, and other marine endeavors.

Government Printing Office, 1899), 11; S. E. Giltner, *Hunting and Fishing in the New South: Black Labor and White Leisure after the Civil War* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 12, 15; Joel Williamson, *A Rage for Order: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 66.

[159] Caroline Grego, *Hurricane Jim Crow: How the Great Sea Island Storm of 1893 Shaped the Lowcountry South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022), 39; Ben G. Blount, "Coastal Refugees: Marginalization of African Americans in Marine Fisheries of Georgia," *Urban Anthology and Studies of Cultural Systems*, Vol. 29, No. 3, 2000, 294.

This small-scale fishing depended on keen knowledge of tides and wind. Esau, one such fisher, judged on a daily basis to fish past the breakers, work along the coast, or abandon fishing for the day and look for work on nearby islands. The humorous story of Esau also includes his female counterpart, Jane, who both farmed and worked in a nearby hotel, to which she travelled in her own small boat, though the story does not include her fishing.[160]

Wilbur Roberts, a Bahamian living in Riviera, Florida, recalled the different ways he had gotten by in both before and after migrating to the United States. He had gotten married in Florida but continued a life at sea in the Caribbean. Roberts knew how to make sails and repair the vessels he worked on, but these skills were only part of his repertoire. The backbone of his lifestyle was fishing, turtling and sponging, supplemented by hunting and foraging on the uninhabited islands and sand bars that dotted the broader Gulf.[161]

Training for maritime work occurred largely on a one-to-one basis, as young boys learned from more experienced neighbors and relatives. Uncle Dave began his career as a child by begging the sponge fishermen of Key West to take him out with them on their voyages. June Middleton, an elderly fisherman on the South Carolina coast regularly brought a young boy, possibly a grandson, to pilot his small boat while the more experienced man threw nets to catch shrimp and mullet. With nets in the water, the two also broke out hooks and lines to catch whiting and yellowtail. They carried the

[160] Ambrose E. Gonzales, *Black Border: Gullah Stories of the Carolina Coast* (Columbia, SC: The State Company, 1922), 175, 176.

[161] Wilbur Edwards Roberts and Veronica D Huss, "A Riviera Conch." Florida. Manuscript/Mixed Material. https://www.loc.gov/item/wpalh000429/. Accessed June 3, 2023.

collective bounty to the closest village for trade. Fishing reports for the states of Texas noted that the industry was dominated by immigrants, but the native fishermen were the sons of those immigrants, working in the same industry as their fathers.[162]

Skills with small boats were practically a given for African Americans living along the coast. Edward Robinson, a contributor to *Forest and Stream* magazine, noted that the inhabitants along the Georgia sea islands were all "fine sailors and pilots" who knew the winding banks, shallows, and meandering coastline as if they were "the streets of the town he was raised in." During his fishing voyage to Georgia, he found that sport fishing was a frustrating endeavor along the barrier islands due to the semi-tropical growth that infested the islands. Lines became easily tangled on stumps and submerged logs, but the locals had little difficulty in practicing their skills.[163]

In addition to fishing for subsistence, African Americans fished to sell their catch to the ever-growing market economy. Coastal African Americans sold their catches for cash or trade when living close to large ports or living in dedicated fishing towns. Market fishing was less common for African Americans, as many were unwilling to take on the risk that purchasing, supplying, and owning a ship entailed. The potential for local African Americans to lose it all in a failed business venture outweighed the potential benefits. Smalls scale fishing was safer and provided a surer guarantee of comfortable living. Even so, African Americans formed the backbone of several fishing industries in

[162] Interview by J. A. Frost, *Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project, Florida, Vol. 3* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1936), 312; Ambrose E Gonzales, *Black Border: Gullah Stories of the Carolina Coast* (Columbia, SC: The State Company, 1922), 243; Charles H. Stevenson, "Report on the Coast Fisheries of Texas," *Report of the Commissioner for 1889 to 1891* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1893), 375.

[163] Edward A Robinson, "A Trip to Georgia," *Forest and Stream*, March 18, 1899, 202.

the South. *Forest and Stream* magazine estimated that four or five thousand coastal African Americans worked in the shad and herring industries.[164]

People along the coast also rarely had the wherewithal to purchase a vessel larger than a small boat. More complex endeavors required hiring on with a master or renting a ship from someone who already owned one. The practice of renting out vessels had its roots in the antebellum era but continued after emancipation. One South Carolina plantation owner, John Edwin Fripp, rented boats to local African Americans for between $1 or $1.50, in addition to purchasing the fish they caught for food provided to his contract farm hands. Silas Stearns of Pensacola observed that African Americans rented vessels from pilots and stevedores in the summer season, when trade was at an ebb. In exchange, the ship owners take "one share of the catch as payment." The remainder was left to the captain and crew who frequently hawked them in popular city markets and squares. Among these workers, the potential for falling into debt, however, was very real. The fishermen of Cedar Keys were almost all deeply in debt to the local storekeepers at the end of the fishing season. The profits from next year's catch were spoken for before the next season had begun.[165]

Most fishing was done either with hook and line or by using siene nets. Either option was inexpensive, and fishermen could prepare the tools in their off time. Typically, multiple people worked at fishing, regardless of the method employed. In

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[164] Ben G. Blount, "Coastal Refugees: Marginalization of African Americans in Marine Fisheries of Georgia," *Urban Anthology and Studies of Cultural Systems*, Vol. 29, No. 3, 2000, 299; *Forest and Stream*, Vol. 16, 494; George B. Goode, ed., *The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), Part 4, 6.

[165] John Edwin Fripp Papers, ser. 1.2, folders 1-7, Account Books, v. 4, SHC #869, UNCCH; *Report of the Commissioner for 1885*, United States Commission of Fish and Fisheries, Part XIII (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1886), 285; George B. Goode, ed., *The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), Part 4, 25.

Florida, when the shad season started in early winter, small boats with three or four local Black fishermen would sail out into the bay, placing nets to catch the valuable fish. The fishermen sold some of the catch to local hotels, with the rest sold in the fish market and shipped to northern cities. A successful catch could bring in as much as $45 for a single day's work. The risk of working without catching a single fish was real, however. So-called "water hauls" cut into potential profits.[166]

Larger fishing endeavors quickly became community endeavors. Cooperative efforts at catching fish off the coast required subsequent processing and transportation. Coastal inhabitants made use of whatever labor they could. Wives and children worked on the shore, drying and deboning the catch, while husbands and older sons worked aboard the ships. This was especially true for part-time sailors, who could fish during the winter months when family hands were not as needed in growing crops. A description of the southernmost shores of Virginia, proximate to the Great Dismal Swamp, describe a company of men, women, and boys, all working as a unit to process a large catch.[167]

A few African-American entrepreneurs made themselves successful despite the obstacles in their way. In Charleston, C. C. Leslie became a pillar of the African-American fishing industry, purchasing from Black sailors and shipping large quantities across the state to both Black and white customers. In Sumter, W J Andrews kept a restaurant complete with both white and colored sections selling, "fish, oysters and ice." Edward King, a correspondent for Scribner's Magazine noted that the African Americans

[166] Kirk Munroe, "Shad Fishing in Florida," *Harper's Weekly,* Vol. 29, 1885, 203.
[167] *Southern Workman*, December 1, 1885.

south of New Orleans took full advantage of the fertile coast, farming but also fishing and oystering.[168]

African American's independent lifestyles along the coast were a constant source of irritation for white southerners eager to recapture Black labor. The ability to take advantage of the estuary gave coastal inhabitants a powerful tool in labor negotiations. Almost everywhere on the coast, except in large cities, African Americans were able to subsist on their own while taking advantage of temporary or seasonal opportunities. Along the South Carolina coast, African Americans on the barrier islands caught mullet in addition to growing corn on their own farms. At times they gathered oysters for the nearby factories, selling them by the boatload rather than for a regular wage. When they had collected the money they needed, the small boats returned to the island. Southern employers interpreted these actions as yet another example of chronic laziness, willfully ignoring the fact that they were simply not offering African Americans better options than nature provided.[169]

The fishing done by coastal inhabitants was supported by a vast unorganized fleet of small traders. These traders plied the coast collecting the harvest, whatever it was, collected by the locals. In Louisiana, traders equipped small luggers with cabins and a deck, called *canots*. Local steersmen manned the rudders as they moved along the shallow lakes, bays, and bayous. From there, the traders would either bring the cargo to New Orleans, or simply trade the bounty to a larger coasting schooner. The *canots* made

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[168] Irving E Lowery, *Life on the Old Plantation in Ante-Bellum Days Or A Story Based on Facts* (Columbia, SC: The State Company, 1911), 139; Edward King, *The Great South: A Record of Journeys* (Hartford, CT: American Publishing Company, 1875), 54-56.

[169] James Henry Rice, *Glories of the Carolina Coast* (Columbia, SC: R. L. Bryan Co., 1925), 64.

weekly circuits, typically beginning on Monday and returning to their berth on Friday. Along the eastern coastline, coasting schooners played their part in consolidating small catches before carrying them to a larger port.[170]

The estuary provided other means of employment beyond independent fishing. Sport fishing was a growing industry in the South during the late nineteenth century. Railroads and steamships alike opened up the coast to northern tourism. The coast represented an escape from the drudgery of urban life and an opportunity to test oneself against nature. The coastal community helped connect tourists and their guides. In Louisiana, a local pilot not only directed tourists to an equally local African American fisherman, but he also took his vessel to pick up the guide and bring him to the larger group. The assistance of local African Americans could mean the difference between a successful fishing voyage or a waste of time. "To enjoy good fishing at Beaufort the first thing you need is a good boatman," one South Carolinian wrote in 1874. The work of guiding tourists was a lucrative addition to everyday maritime work. Tourists along the coast could rent a boat for $1 a day and hire an experienced fishing guide for $1.50 on the low side to $2 on the upper end. In addition to the pay from the would-be sportsmen, guides also typically received a share of the catch for their personal use.[171]

If guiding sportsmen and tourists was a lucrative trade, it was also a reflection of the subordinated position of African Americans in southern society. It created opportunities for coastal African Americans, within a limited sphere. At times, onlookers

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[170] "An Island Outing," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, September 25,1892.

[171] "Cosmopolitan," "A Paradise for Sportsmen," *American Sportsman*, July 18, 1874, 246; S. Frederick Starr, ed., *Inventing New Orleans: The Writings of Lafcadio Hearn* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2001), 93.

noted the skill with which Black fishermen navigated the southern coastline. Guiding allowed locals to demonstrate the necessary skill required to make a living on the water, but it also required them to take a secondary position in such matters. White sportsmen were happy to take advantage of their skills and knowledge, but only when they prioritized the white sport fisherman. To continue making a living as a guide, coastal African Americans had little choice but to play to popular misconceptions, inviting comparisons to the Sambo image.[172]

More permanent coasting jobs were also open to people of color along the coast. The International Seamen's Union noted "quite a number" of African-American sailors along the Gulf Coast. The exact number is impossible to ascertain, but the union estimated that thirty to forty percent of the coasting vessels out of Mobile were crewed by Black sailors. Description of Black and white sailors working together were a fairly common feature in descriptions of coasting work across the South.[173]

These sailors worked as individual crew members, aboard multicultural crews, but also on ships crewed entirely by African Americans. African-American captains were rare, but not unheard of, such as Captain Sanchez, who ran a ship between the Bahamas and Pensacola in 1889. Other Black sailors captained sponging vessels along the Florida

[172] S. E. Giltner, *Hunting and Fishing in the New South: Black Labor and White Leisure after the Civil War* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 102-106; Ironically, coastal plantation owners also had to take a secondary position when it came to northern sport tourists. According to Virginia Christian Beach, southern plantation owners "invested themselves, economically and emotionally, in one of their few remaining assets" in the face of a "second Northern invasion," i.e., sport tourism. Virginia Christian Beach, *Medway: A Plantation and Its People* (Charleston, SC: Wyrick and Company, 1998), 38; Nathaniel Means, "Forging Identity: African American, Cajun, and Anglo American Folkways in WPA Guides to the Deep South," *Louisiana History*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (Spring, 2003), 218.

[173] *Proceedings of the Annual Convention of the International Sailor's Union* (1902), 12; *Proceedings of the National Seamen's Convention* (1892), 5; Abbie M. Brooks, *Petals Plucked from Sunny Climes* (Nashville, TN: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1880), 298.

coast, as did red snapper fishing vessels in Pensacola. Advancement on international vessels was much more difficult. There were no Black masters who captained vessels shipping out of New Orleans in 1880. Even in 1894, the existence of a Black captain for an international steam liner was noteworthy enough that the *Galveston Daily News* reported on the matter. The captain controlled an English steamship that had just landed in New York, roughly 1600 miles away from the Texas port. The next year, the *Daily News* reported on the existence of a second Black captain, this time closer to home in Mobile. This captain claimed Barbados as his home and had worked his way up in the British merchant marine.[174]

When they did work with mixed race crews, African Americans had to accept that they could take a relegated position in ship hierarchy. On ships where the majority of the crew was white, the most common job an African American could obtain was usually as a cook, rather than as a sailor before the mast. At times, coasting ships employed white captains, and frequently white officers, while hiring African Americans to fill the rest of the crew. Such ships were in the minority, but not unusual. Ships with all Black crews were almost always sailing ships of moderate size with four to eight crew. In 1880, seven ships employed all Black crews, though none as officers. All of those ships were coasting vessels except for one, which was travelling to Havana. If the ship operated well, the Black sailors enjoyed decent pay, working conditions that were often no worse than that found on land, and the ability to move about the coastline freely. When disaster struck ships, Black sailors were treated with little regard. Newspapers commonly omitted

[174]*Huntsville Gazette*, January 12, 1889; *Galveston Daily News*, August 9, 1894; *Galveston Daily News*, February 15, 1895.

the names of Black sailors when reporting on accidents or shipwrecks, simply referring to them as colored sailors.[175]

Shore leave was affected by the second-class citizenship of African Americans in the South. When on leave, African-American sailors were just as likely to drink heavily, visit prostitutes, get into fights, and all the other cliches that plagued the seafaring population. The consequences for stepping out of line were much higher for African Americans, however. The authorities reacted more harshly towards African Americans than toward the sailing population at large, as one sailor found out in 1874. Police arrested the unnamed sailor for being drunk and disorderly. As the officer was escorting the sailor to prison, he told the prisoner to start running. The sailor thought he was being released and took off at which point the officer shot him in the back. In other instances, officers performed their duty with more diligence, but were still unwilling to give the same leeway to Black sailors that white sailors received.[176]

Despite the danger, African-American boosters recognized the opportunities that existed in coasting and blue water work. The end of slavery created economic opportunities for African Americans. At the same time, the destruction of the Civil War created a need for alternative methods of subsistence and survival. The coast provided potential answers for both of these conundrums. African Americans in New Orleans proposed developing a school specifically for African Americans to learn seamanship. They hoped that this would revive the flagging shipping industry while providing

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[175] George B. Goode, ed., *The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), Part 4, 27; *Savannah Morning News*, September 09, 1881; *Galveston Daily News*, October 29, 1889; Crew Lists for the Year 1880. FTWNARA, Crew Lists, RG 36.

[176] *Galveston Daily News,* April 28, 1874; *Pascagoula Democrat-Star*, Jun 13, 1890.

employment and prosperity for African Americans in particular. One newspaper even suggested that African Americans' theoretical immunity to yellow fever could help carve out a niche in Caribbean and Latin American trade.[177]

Along the Florida coast, African Americans found irregular, but profitable work as wreckers. Small sail and steamships plied the coastline keeping an eye out for beached or otherwise stranded vessels. Upon spotting a target, smaller ships would gather to unload the cargo, crew, and perhaps even the rigging. This made the stuck ship lighter, and hopefully enabled it to float away safely at high tide. The first ship to spot a stranded vessel got a larger share of the cut, but all ships involved in the process got a part of the bounty. Wrecking was not necessarily a respectable means of employment. Shipping firms and captains suspected fraud and collusion with lighthouse keepers and sailing masters, giving wrecking a rakish reputation. Furthermore, wrecking was linked with Black Bahamians who also worked in the profession. Consequently, popular culture viewed wreckers as modern pirates, taking advantage of tragedy to extort honest men of their wealth.[178]

Industrial Changes

The coast was not immune to the national changes of the late nineteenth century. The industrial changes sweeping the nation as well as the regional changes sweeping the South carried deep implications for coastal residents. Making an independent living on the water's edge was increasingly precarious. A few inhabitants were able to turn their

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[177] *Weekly Louisianian*, April 16, 1881; *Weekly Louisianian*, Jan 14, 1882.

[178] Abbie M. Brooks, *Petals Plucked from Sunny Climes* (Nashville, TN: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1880), 318; Edgar Mayhew Bacon, "Notes of A Subtropic Study," *Scribner's Magazine*, Vol. 6, 1889, 747, 755.

older skills with fishing into lucrative business ventures. Along the Georgia coast, African Americans dominated the terrapin market. A Georgia resident of Harris' Neck served as a turtle magnate in the 1890s, using a notched measure to judge the catch that smaller boats brought to him. The workers who brought sizable hauls could make $15 to $20 a day at the peak of the season. Chinese shrimp fishermen in Louisiana sold their catch to a Chinese owned company that reached across the nation. In fact, Chinese shrimpers patented their traditional method for drying shrimp in 1885. By the early twentieth century their market extended across the country and had penetrated national borders, including Hawaii, Guam, and the Philippines.[179]

The ever-expanding presence of steamships changed the relationship between people of color and blue water work. The work aboard steamships was even more hierarchical than that on sailing ships, and miles beyond the work on small schooners and coasting vessels. Large corporations had strict rules regarding the organization of sailors on steamships, including rotation of mealtimes, quarters, duties. These were enforced by officers whose sole duty was to enforce discipline and shipboard hierarchy.[180]

Ethnic categories did not fall under a simple Black and white binary. Maritime specialization was divided up among numerous backgrounds and ethnicities. As slave takers had divided up African nations based on their perceived utility as slaves, captains divided up maritime work based on commonly understood innate gifts. Immigration and ethnicity decided what position an individual sailor was qualified for. Captains held that

[179] Edward A Robinson, "A Trip to Georgia," *Forest and Stream*, March 18, 1899, 202; *Lewiston Evening Journal*, Dec. 16,1898; Donald W. Davis, *Washed Away?: The Invisible Peoples of Louisiana's Wetlands* (Lafayette: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2010), 307-309.

[180] J. D. Kelley, "The Ship's People," *Scribner's Magazine*, vol. 9, 1891, 545.

Norwegians made the best able seamen, that Scotsmen made the best engineers, and of course, Americans and Englishmen made the best officers.[181]

As the age of steam increasingly dominated maritime labor, African-American sailors were cut off from a role in proper seamanship. In the early decades of the steam age, African Americans had found work in feeding the boilers. Invisible from passengers, but still engaged in active seamanship. By the 1890s, African Americans working aboard steam liners worked primarily as waiters, cooks, and barbers, cut out from even the grueling labor in firebox. This work visibly displayed submissiveness to passengers and imitated the rising racial hierarchy in the Jim Crow South. An article in *Harper's Weekly* from 1891 described life on newer steamships, including pictures of the newer vessels. Even in those pictures, the sole African American worked as a waiter.[182]

There were exceptions, of course. African Americans had more opportunities to work on steamships that travelled between the United States and Latin America. Whether this was due to a belief that African Americans were immune to the dreaded yellow fever, or whether captains simply cared less about the impression they made in Latin America is unknown. An examination of the crew lists for 1880 in New Orleans show that only one steamship, the *Wanderer* consistently employed African Americans. Out of a crew of twenty-two, six were listed as Black. Of the six listed, only one was still on the crew lists when the ship set out on its second voyage two months later. Two had reportedly deserted while three others failed to ship out with the same vessel a second time.[183]

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[181] J. D. Kelley, "The Ship's People," *Scribner's Magazine*, vol. 9, 1891, 534.
[182] Henry Loomis Nelson, "Between-Decks: Old and New," *Harper's Weekly*, vol. 35, 1891, 55.
[183] Crew Lists for the Year 1880. FTWNARA, Crew Lists, RG 36.

For a select subset of the African-American population, these changes created the backbone of a rising Black diaspora across the Caribbean and the American South. Educated Black Americans wrote and read widely. The local chaplain for the American Seamen's Friend Society specifically requested extra copies of the *Southern Workman*, published by the famously biracial Hampton Institute, as the paper was very popular with the New Orleans sailing population. When the magazine had spent enough time in the New Orleans reading room, the chaplain gave copies away to departing ships, spreading internationally. Other American reading material spread to the Bahamas as well, with one observer noting that Black Bahamians interested in perusing "an American magazine or review. Edgar Bacon, writing for *Scribner's Magazine,* observed that Bahamians welcomed sailors in particular for their news, both local and international.[184]

Most coastal African Americans did not enjoy such a far-reaching network. Though not necessarily isolated, their contact with the Black diaspora would have been occasional visits from coasting schooners, and perhaps seasonal voyages along the coast themselves. Even so, the temporary migration of Caribbean workers to the United States during the fishing seasons provided opportunities of contact. Part time fishermen working seasonally could well work with a different crew every year.

Creolization

In the midst of this milieu, the people of the Gulf Coast intermingled with one another to an extent noteworthy even at the time for its singularity. The so called "Creole Coast," as geographers have labeled the region stretching from the Chesapeake Bay to the

[184] *Southern Workman*, April 1, 1881; Edgar Mayhew Bacon, "Notes of a Subtropic Study," *Scribner's Magazine*, Vol. 6, 1889, 753.

Texas Bend, was populated by far more than only Black and white southerners. The benefits of life on the coast extended to other people of color as well. The coast in the nineteenth century was home to numerous ethnicities who intermingled on a regular basis. Mexican sailors in Texas, Eastern Europeans and Asians in Louisiana, Bahamians in Florida all contributed to the cultural landscape of the region. Even as late as 1938, the New Orleans City Guide made note of the "Greek, Italian, French, Negro, and Indian traders who brought their wares from the bayous and lakes of the lower Louisiana Coast." The meandering coastline nestled numerous small towns, villages, and fishing camps "at frequent intervals," close enough for regular communication with each other. These towns mixed the people of the coast together as they worked to survive in the southern estuary.[185]

The exact proportions of the various ethnicities who worked the southern estuary is difficult to measure. A report from 1893 estimated that 22 percent of native fishermen were Black. The same report estimated that African Americans were outnumbered by foreign born fishermen roughly two to one. These figures varied by state. Louisiana had the highest proportion of foreign fishermen, outnumbering African Americans five to one. Florida Conches made up roughly four fifths of the state's foreign fishing population. Texas had the fewest number of African Americans, but a proportionately larger Mexican population. Alabama had the fewest fishermen in general, but the

[185] George B. Goode, ed., *The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), Part 4, 28; Federal Writers Project, *New Orleans City Guide* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1938), 282; J. W. Collins and Hugh M. Smith, "A Statistical Report on the Fisheries of the Gulf States," *Bulletin of the United States Fish Commission. . . for 1891* (Washington, D. C., 1893), 108; Susan Wiley Hardwick, *Mythic Galveston: Reinventing America's Third Coast* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 150-151.

majority of the foreign population consisted of Spaniards. Regardless of the specific state, these numbers obscure those who worked as fishermen part time or who lived in isolated areas. The report included only those employed in commercial fisheries, though a separate report estimated that at least as many people fished for subsistence or as supplemental work.[186]

In Louisiana, two Filipino villages existed in the 1880s, Saint Malo and the larger but less famous Manila Village, both built on stilts in the south Louisiana marshes. Lafcadio Hearn reported on Saint Malo in 1883, bringing national attention to the small community, though they had lived along the coast since the as early as the 1760s. The Filipino migrants intermarried with African-American women, though they retained a distinct Filipino identity in Saint Malo and New Orleans. For more than a hundred years the Filipino inhabitants of Louisiana had engaged in subsistence fishing as well as more complex maritime work. They also retained at a least a few connections to the Philippines themselves, occasionally sending money across the Pacific. Hearn observed that the Filipino sailors preferred to ship on Spanish ships, working to pay for their transportation across the long ocean miles. Once they reached their destination, either New Orleans or the Philippines, they promptly deserted and faded into their local communities.[187]

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[186] J. W. Collins and Hugh M. Smith, "A Statistical Report on the Fisheries of the Gulf States," *Bulletin of the United States Fish Commission. . . for 1891* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1893), 95, 104; Charles H. Stevenson, "Report on the Coast Fisheries of Texas," *Report of the Commissioner for 1889 to 1891* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1893), 398.

[187] S. Frederick Starr, ed., *Inventing New Orleans: The Writings of Lafcadio Hearn* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2001), 87.

Saint Malo and Manilla Village were fundamentally creole towns, as Hearn observed on his initial visit, noting the diverse appearance of the inhabitants. The actual ethnicity of the inhabitants is impossible to ascertain, since the village had existed for decades at that point, but Hearn describes people who looked Filipino, or "Malay" while also describing those who looked Black or West Indian. Others were described as "Malay half-breeds," the children of Filipino fishermen and Native Louisianians. The town's ship carpenter was noteworthy for being the only white man in the settlement, described as having a French father. The carpenter also claimed to have converted the residents to Catholicism after their arrival in Saint Malo, suggesting recent emigration. Several decades later, Frank Schoonover visited Manilla Village, describing the residents as "French creoles, Mexican, Spaniards, half tamed men of the Manilla Islands, dark skinned Indians" and others of unknowable ethnicity.[188]

The villages all relied on the estuary for their ongoing survival. The two towns, both nestled in the Louisiana bayou, fished, shrimped, and hunted alligators for their skin, sending the harvest back to New Orleans at regular intervals. The men of Manilla Village worked on schooners and in small boats, utilized seine nets as well as hooks and lines. The method they used to dry the shrimp was the same method that they had learned from Chinese migrants in the 1800s, who had their own village called "Bassa Bassa," though the villagers intermingled to an extent. Branching out from Bassa Bassa were a number of shrimping platforms, used to dry the shrimp for a longer shelf life. The number of Chinese shrimping platforms is unclear, but possibly as many as eighty existed

[188] S. Frederick Starr, ed., *Inventing New Orleans: The Writings of Lafcadio Hearn* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2001), 86; Frank Schoonover, "In the Haunts of Jean Lafitte," *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, Vol. 124, Dec., 1911, 81-86.

before the hurricane of 1893 swept them away. The shrimp caught by the Chinese residents were not sold in New Orleans, but instead shipped directly to Chinese merchants in New York and San Francisco.[189]

The small towns were still fundamentally tied to New Orleans. The fishermen sent their catch back to New Orleans to sell in the larger markets. They returned to the villages with manufactured goods, most notably clothes, but also guns and ammunition. During the off season, the fishermen returned to the city, where their wives and children lived full time, primarily in the neighborhoods of Faubourg Marigny and St. Claude. Children went to school in the larger city and by 1883 the Filipino population was large enough to form its own benevolent society, *La Union Philippina.* Religion helped tie the two settlements together, as Catholic priests would travel a few times a year from New Orleans to St. Malo and Manilla Village. Historian Marina Espina noted other connections, including Filipino restaurateurs and tailors in New Orleans.[190]

Others also took advantage of the estuary, intermingling with the villages above. Croatian fishermen worked the same waters, as Schoonover observed. The oystering population in south Louisiana was dominated by eastern Europeans from the Adriatic Coast. These migrants, called Yugoslavians, Croatians or Slavonians interchangeably, had first started oystering in the 1840s and 1850s, with the industry becoming the backbone of the community by the 1860s and 1870s. Like others on the coast, they left

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[189] S. Frederick Starr, ed., *Inventing New Orleans: The Writings of Lafcadio Hearn* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2001), 87; Frank Schoonover, "In the Haunts of Jean Lafitte," *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, Vol. 124, Dec., 1911, 81-86; *Lewiston Evening Journal*, Dec. 16,1898; Donald W. Davis, *Washed Away?: The Invisible Peoples of Louisiana's Wetlands* (Lafayette: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2010), 309

[190] S. Frederick Starr, ed., *Inventing New Orleans: The Writings of Lafcadio Hearn* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2001), 988-90; Marina Espina, *Filipinos in Louisiana* (New Orleans, LA: Laborde and Sons, 1988), 35-36.

their wives and children either in New Orleans or in Europe entirely. Their children gained ample practical experience in boating in the Adriatic Sea. In Louisiana, they could work as saltwater fishermen, hunters, or as oystermen. The latter was the most practical given their previous experiences in Europe. The Yugoslavian camps started out as temporary oystering camps, containing only the men actively involved in oystering and only during the oystering season. The oystermen built their own platform villages during the height of the oystering season. As the community developed, however, they bloomed into full blown villages, complete with individual houses, schools for children, and weekly church meetings. The oystermen even dredged out the soil to create artificial garden spaces to grow produce during the off season.[191]

Similar communities formed on the other side of the Gulf Coast. British plantation owners had spearheaded imported Chinese labor into the Caribbean in the wake of emancipation as an alternative source of labor. Though never as popular in the southern United States, there were Chinese communities in Georgia, especially in Savannah and Atlanta where they predominantly worked as laundrymen, though also as merchants and grocers. The conflation of "Black" and "Chinese" made the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 popular in the South. Georgia laws haphazardly lumped the small Chinese minority in with African Americans over several decades, alongside the establishment of Jim Crow.[192]

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[191] Milos M. Vujnovich, *Yugoslavs in Louisiana* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 1974), 107; Donald W. Davis, *Washed Away?: The Invisible Peoples of Louisiana's Wetlands* (Lafayette: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2010), 339.

[192] Daniel Bronstein, "Segregation, Exclusion, and the Chinese Communities in Georgia, 1880s-1940," Eds., Khyati Y. Joshi and Desai Jigna, *Asian Americans in Dixie: Race and Migration in the South* (Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 113-124; Leslie Bow, *Partly Colored: Asian Americans and Racial Anomaly in the Segregated South* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 34-36.

More prominent on the east coast, however, were Creoles of Spanish descent. A tourist travelling through Saint Augustine described the residents as "entirely different from the rest of the mixture forming the United States." The locals, she said spoke Spanish, intermarried among themselves, and live as though Saint Augustine was disconnected from the rest of the nation. WPA interviewers observed in the 19340s that residents of Saint Augustine and Jacksonville were still proud of their early Spanish lineage.[193]

Eastern European fishermen had also migrated further east by 1900. The shrimping industry in east Florida was almost nonexistent throughout the 1800s, primarily used as bait to catch larger fish. Secondary usage was drying or pickling for local markets only. This changed in the 1890s, first with ethnically Greek fishermen, but soon attracting a polyglot of workers including Mediterranean, eastern European, and local Black fishermen all marketing shrimp. By 1902, Florida's shrimp production exceeded three million pounds per year.[194]

Throughout the South, but especially in Florida, Caribbean migrants made up a sizeable section of the coastal population. Enough white Bahamians moved to Florida in the late 1800s that they had gained a collective title, Florida Conches. While Black Bahamians apparently did not obtain a romantic monicker, they were even more prevalent along the Florida coast, making up half of the population of Key West in 1888. The remaining half was divided between white Bahamians and Cuban expats. Local

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[193] Therese Yelverton, *Teresina in America* (London: 1875), 143; Anthony J. Stanonis, *Faith in Bikinis Politics and Leisure in the Coastal South Since the Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2014), 100.

[194] Ben G. Blount, "Coastal Refugees: Marginalization of African Americans in Marine Fisheries of Georgia," *Urban Anthology and Studies of Cultural Systems*, Vol. 29, No. 3, 2000, 298.

Democrat newspapers noted the prevalence of naturalized Bahamians and Cubans, most notably their habit of voting for the Republican party, as nearly all Black citizens did in the years after the Civil War. Observers in the Bahamas noted a tendency for young men to leave the islands to seek their fortune, returning when they had enough money as so many others did in the coastal workforce.[195]

Bahamians and Cubans spread across the state of Florida, working on the coast or in cigar factories. Cigar making was a major industry in Key West and Tampa, with Cubans frequently employed as well. In Key West, Bahamian fishermen formed a majority, supported by other West Indians. They brought families to the small city, living comfortable lives and educating their children on the same fishing techniques that had supported them in the Caribbean. Spanish born entrepreneur Vicente Martinez Ybor founded Ybor city in the vicinity of Tampa in 1886. The city became well known for the production of its hand rolled cigars, attracting Black and white Cubans, Spaniards, and several thousand Sicilian immigrants who quickly learned Spanish.[196]

The extent of creolization along the Gulf is apparent in the numerous local dialects that developed due to the confluence of people. English, French, and Spanish were all commonly spoken on the coast throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century. Gullah and creole patois are two of the most famous creole

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[195] J. W. Collins and Hugh M. Smith, "A Statistical Report on the Fisheries of the Gulf States," *Bulletin of the United States Fish Commission. . . for 1891* (Washington, D. C., 1893), 94; *The Daily Sentinel*, April 6, 1888; *Pensacola Semi-Weekly*, May 9, 1882; Edgar Mayhew Bacon, "Notes of a Subtropic Study," *Scribner's Magazine*, Vol. 6, 1889, 757.

[196] Abbie M. Brooks, *Petals Plucked from Sunny Climes* (Nashville, TN: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1880), 323; George B. Goode, ed., *The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), Part 4, 24; Gary R. Mormino, "Tampa's Splendid Little War: Local History and the Cuban War of Independence," *OAH Magazine of History*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Spring, 1998), 37.

languages that emerged from the mishmash. The isolated *islenos* developed their own version of Spanish, as did the Filipinos of St. Malo. In Texas, the Mexican fishermen referred to tarpon as "guasa" and by 1890 that name had become integrated in local fishing vernacular as far away as Pensacola. The WPA's guide to Texas likewise noted that Galveston contained "negroes- some of them, from Louisiana and West Indian islands speaking French patois." Across the coast, a multilingual patter showcased the cross-cultural contact of coastal residents.[197]

Limits of Creolization

The claims to creolization had their limitations, however. The Gulf, though complicated, was by no means an integrated landscape. The Fish and Fisheries Report for 1887 noted that white and Black Americans intermingled peacefully on the North Carolina barrier islands. Edward Earl, a fishery biologist, even took a photograph circa 1880 depicting the mullet fishermen intermingling peacefully in front a drying shed. The community at Shackleford Banks is noteworthy precisely because it was so exceptional, however. Despite the complicated ethnic tapestry, it would be more accurate to say that the various races lived near each other rather than alongside each other. Racial communities tended toward geographic homogeneity at the community level. The African-American fishermen of Pensacola lived outside the city proper in their own neighborhood in Warrington. Greek sponge fishermen had their particular area in Tarpon Springs. Filipinos occupied their own village in south of New Orleans, with Chinese and

[197] John M. Lipski, *The Language of the Islenos: Vestigial Spanish in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 5; Charles H. Stevenson, "Report on the Coast Fisheries of Texas," *Report of the Commissioner for 1889 to 1891* (Washington, D. C., 1893), 382; Federal Writer's Project, *Texas: A Guide to the Lone Star State* (New York: Hastings House, 1940), 267.

Eastern Europeans in their villages, nearby but definitely not in the same village. Strict community segregation was more likely to be the rule. Though these groups might work together aboard a ship, and perhaps even spend shore leave together, their family lives were hallmarked by separation. Recently arrived sailors left the docks "seeking those who speak their own tongue," hunting down their own ethnic communities.[198]

In large cities the industries were notoriously dominated by individual groups. The work of loading and unloading cotton in New Orleans was dominated by Black stevedores, while Sicilians kept a hold of the fruit market. In Gulfport, the longshoremen were predominantly Italians with a Greek minority. Oystering was done primarily by eastern Europeans south of New Orleans, while Filipino and Chinese laborers shrimped. The melting pot of the coast still had plenty of lumps. These people intermingled with each other but also kept clear lines between the groups. While on shore they kept to insular settlements dominated almost exclusively by one ethnicity. Even into the twentieth century, each group understood themselves as separate from the others, maintaining their traditional ties with their home countries.[199]

As Sarah Gualtieri argues, Italians, Eastern Europeans, and Grecians were "not-quite-white" in the late nineteenth century. They were subject to racism and violence and their very presence was a threat to the racial binary southerners attempted to create

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[198] *Report of the Commissioner for 1885*, United States Commission of Fish and Fisheries, Part XIII (Washington D. C., 1886), 285; George B. Goode, *ed., The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), Part 5, vol. 2, 563; Kirk Munro, "Sponge and Spongers of the Florida Reef," *Scribner's Magazine* (1892), vol. 12, 649; Charles Woodward Hutson, ed., *Creole Sketches by Lafcadio Hearn* (Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1924), 113; Donald W. Davis, *Washed Away?: The Invisible Peoples of Louisiana's Wetlands* (Lafayette: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2010), 306.

[199] Edward King, *The Great South: A Record of Journeys* (Hartford, Connecticut: American Publishing Company, 1875), 54-56; Milos M. Vujnovich, *Yugoslavs in Louisiana* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 1974), 109.

through Jim Crow. Oystermen and shrimpers of Louisiana stayed away from the city as much as they did due not only to the nature of their work but also due to the prejudices that they faced in the urban environment. At the same time, these groups could stake a claim to whiteness by supporting Jim Crow efforts, placing themselves on the privileged side of the board.[200]

The maritime world itself was by no means free from prejudice and racism. The short-lived Gulf Coast Sailor's Union excluded African-American sailors, despite their inclusion in other branches of the organization. The ISU decided to deny membership to Chinese and Japanese sailors in 1902 due to ongoing competition on the West Coast. Union factionalism hampered their efforts along the coast, much as it did the efforts of New Orleans longshoremen to unionize.[201]

Conclusion

By the turn of the century the ability of coastal inhabitants to support themselves was coming under fire. On the east coast, the hurricane of 1893 destroyed most of the prosperity that Lowlanders had built for themselves since the end of the Civil War. All told more than 2000 people died as a result of the storm, with unrecovered bodies chocking the coastal marshes and bays. The inhabitants of the Georgia and South Carolina Sea Islands lost their land and most of the tools that they had accumulated. The storm devasted Charleston's dozens of wharves and the hundreds of tugs, schooners, and

[200] Sarah Gualtieri, "Strange Fruit?: Syrian Immigrants, Extralegal Violence., and Racial Formation in the Jim Crow South," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 3, Summer 2004, 74; Anthony J. Stanonis, *Faith in Bikinis Politics and Leisure in the Coastal South Since the Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2014), 104.

[201] *Proceedings of the Annual Convention of the International Sailor's Union* (1902), 33; *Proceedings of the National Seamen's Convention* (1892), 5; Eric Arneson, *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans: Race, Class, and Politics, 1863-1923* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 74, 118.

other ships docked there. The damage wrought by the hurricane extended as far north as New York, where it stripped the roofs off buildings. African Americans along the coast were disproportionately affected due to the geography of the home that they had made as well as the fact that post-hurricane aid was funneled into white residents. The hurricane of 1893 marked an era of declining prosperity for the Lowcountry.[202]

Legal changes also contributed to the decline of prosperity in the southern estuary. The rise of Jim Crow created strict limitations outlining what was and was not appropriate for people of color. African Americans' use of the coast gave them unseemly independence. Southerners had connected independent subsistence with other broader labor problems. To that end, southern states asserted state power to limit the independence of the estuary. Jim Crow legislation, with literacy tests and property qualifications took political power out of the hands of coastal residents, who rarely owned the land they lived and worked.[203]

"Lease hounds" began to purchase and lease tracts of land along the coast to make way for broader scale farming and fishing. Much of the coastal real estate had little to no value, so the question of ownership rarely arose. Estuarian inhabitants used the winding coastline and waterways to travel wherever they needed with little regard for legal ownership. The first decades of the twentieth century spurred a land rush across the coast. In New Orleans, a fad for muskrat pelt led to a land rush on the previously valueless land. A simultaneous lumber boom led to the sale of marshland by the state for

[202] Caroline Grego, *Hurricane Jim Crow: How the Great Sea Island Storm of 1893 Shaped the Lowcountry South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022), 80-8, 97.

[203] Caroline Grego, *Hurricane Jim Crow: How the Great Sea Island Storm of 1893 Shaped the Lowcountry South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022), 170-173.

twelve to twenty-five cents an acre. The invention of the pull boat in 1889 allowed cypress logging to expand into a year-round endeavor. As lumber barons snatched up land they forced locals away, often at gunpoint. Fishing companies also purchased lengths of seabed. Private oystering beds off the coast of Mississippi avoided the state legislature designed to prevent overfishing. They also forced long time coastal dwellers to not only pay licensing fees but would have to now pay the landowners for access to the coastal bounty. By 1900, fishing and oyster companies, such as the Mobile Fish and Oyster Company, not only purchased seabed, but also factories and its own fishing fleet of schooners. Industrial canneries, especially for oyster and shrimp, crowded out small fishermen, hiring the independent mariners for wages or barter tokens.[204]

Furthermore, southern states created legislation to limit the benefits that coastal inhabitants could gain from the natural environment. Licensing laws required permits to fish along the coast, complete with fines and jail time for violators, beginning with South Carolina, though it must be said that the South lagged the rest of the nation in regulating natural fauna. It is not surprising that the first person convicted under South Carolina's new law was a person of color. Alabama passed a law in 1891 limiting the oystering season and insisting that only Alabama citizens could purchase permits. Louisiana developed its own lease plans, privatizing the coastal waters, which could be rented for $2 per acre of seabed. Leases were originally obtained from local sheriffs, but the state

[204] J. W. Collins and Hugh M. Smith, "A Statistical Report on the Fisheries of the Gulf States," *Bulletin of the United States Fish Commission. . . for 1891* (Washington, D. C., 1893), 153; Donald W. Davis, *Washed Away?: The Invisible Peoples of Louisiana's Wetlands* (Lafayette: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2010), 131; Paul E. Durrenberger, *It's All Politics: South Alabama's Seafood Industry* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 40; Deanne Love Stephens, *The Mississippi Gulf Coast Seafood Industry: A People's History* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2021), 22.

government took control of the practice in 1902. These efforts were all labelled as attempts to prevent overfishing, but their alternative effects limited independent subsistence and economic improvement among poor coastal dwellers.[205]

The terrestrial coastline was changing as well. Railroads increasingly crisscrossed once impassable terrain, altering the social and economic landscape wherever they went. These railroads allowed investors to create centralized canneries, cutting out small fishermen entirely. By the 1890s, the Dismal Swamp Railroad Company had formed to build a railroad into the heart of the massive swamp and take advantage of the virgin timber available there. In Louisiana, New Orleans, Fort Jackson, and Grand Island Railroad fed wealthy tourists to the Grand Isle Hotel and the Ocean Club for a decade before the hurricane of 1893 destroyed the expensive resorts. While the resort thrived, it employed local Grand Islanders, who fished and turtled when they were not working. In 1896 the Gulf and Ship Island Railroad Company ran from Jackson to Gulfport, bringing residents from the Deep South to the Gulf Coast.[206]

The southern coastline transformed from a place of production to a place of tourism. Part of the process included pushing small coastal landowners off their land to open it up to white tourists. For decades, coastal inhabitants had thrived on what was essentially worthless land, but as the century turned that land appreciated in value rapidly. Where comfortable beaches existed, businessmen hurriedly invested in

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[205] Donald W. Davis, *Washed Away?: The Invisible Peoples of Louisiana's Wetlands* (Lafayette: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2010), 329; S. E. Giltner, *Hunting and Fishing in the New South: Black Labor and White Leisure after the Civil War* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 138, 165; Paul E. Durrenberger, *It's All Politics: South Alabama's Seafood Industry* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 37.

[206] H. T. Crittenden, "The Dismal Swamp Railroad Company," *The Railway and Locomotive Historical Society Bulletin*, no. 64, 1944, 61-68; Donald W. Davis, *Washed Away?: The Invisible Peoples of Louisiana's Wetlands* (Lafayette: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2010), 212.

beachside resorts, putting pressure on locals living off that land. Businessmen and real estate agents created a harsh color line. Property on the coast did not belong to people of color.[207]

[207] Donald W. Davis, *Washed Away?: The Invisible Peoples of Louisiana's Wetlands* (Lafayette: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2010), 130, 140; Andrew W. Kahrl, *The Land Was Ours: How Black Beaches Became White Wealth in the Coastal South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 57.

CHAPTER V – "WHOSE HERITAGE IS THE SEA": LABOR AND IMMIGRATION ALONG THE GULF COAST, 1876-1898

The labor system that developed along the Gulf Coast after the Civil War was a hybrid that contained remnants of paternal habits from the golden age of American shipping, combined them with increasingly systematized wage relationships and tinted with southern biases. As the Gilded Age progressed, fewer mariners were natural born Americans. The work was grueling, low paying, and unappealing compared to easier work on land. Local industries maintained a higher percentage of native workers, but even in coasting and fishing, American presence declined. Consequently, the estuarian industries relied on imported and migratory labor to sustain themselves.

Sailors occupied a peculiar niche in nineteenth-century labor history as both free and unfree laborers. They operated during a prolonged shift between bonded labor and free labor. Beginning in the seventeenth century, sailors began to feel the effect of industrial capitalism. They worked for wages for set periods, used the wages they received to keep themselves afloat between voyages, made use of advances, shares, and complex investment systems, though often to their detriment. Amy Dru Stanley noted the contrast between unfree labor and contract labor in midcentury America. Americans saw contracts as the antithesis of unfree labor, since both parties agreed to set terms. In this sense, mariners were on the cutting edge of developing labor trends. Shipping articles laid out their terms of a voyaged in blanket terms for masters and men. At the same time, sailors were also limited by "entirety" as defined by Robert Steinfeld, wherein a sailor would not be paid any of their wages until the totality of the contract had been

fulfilled. These sanctions operated in tandem to keep sailors in their place, while giving the industry a veneer of freedom.[208]

The issue of independence vs. dependence fascinated throughout the nineteenth century. The "Age of Reform" did not exclude the sailing population from the numerous crusades that occupied middle class Americans. The image of sailors as manly, healthy, and invigorating workers contrasted with equally compelling images of flogging, drinking sprees, and general debauchery. Most notoriously, the American Seamen's Friend Society saw sailors as an at-risk population that needed saving from their childish spending habits and louche lifestyles. Midcentury legislation in the United States and in Great Britain was torn between paternalist protections for sailors and a developing free market mentality that highlighted the importance of open contracts. Sailors were notably unable to free themselves from their work arrangements under the pain of criminal punishment. Sailors mid-voyage could not exercise control of their bodies, much less quit or renegotiate the terms of their employment. Onlookers explicitly made the comparison between sailors and enslaved workers. At the same time, labor organizers along the Gulf made repeated, if often futile attempts to rally maritime workers to the union standard. Union activists and strikers did what they could to improve their working conditions and remuneration. As the nineteenth century wound to a close,

[208] Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2000), 327-329; Amy Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), x, 3; Robert J. Steinfeld, *The Invention of Free Labor: The Employment Relation in English and American Law and Culture, 1350-1870* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 163-172.

workers on the Gulf Coast developed an increasingly open system of labor due to broader changes in the maritime industry, and local changes along the Gulf.[209]

This chapter explores the working world of sailors along the Gulf. In many ways, the Gulf was typical of maritime work almost anywhere in the world. Certainly, the basics of seamanship required some universal skills. Though different industries specialized, it was a truism that sailors could find work in whatever port they wound up. Part of the attraction of the Gulf coast to incoming migrants was the typicality of estuarian work. Sailors had to navigate their time ashore, choose which ship to embark on, prepare themselves for the difficult working environment that awaited them. This too was not unusual. Northern European, Eastern European, Mediterranean, and Asian mariners could reasonably expect to similar professional experiences working on the Gulf, even if the precise nature of that work was new to them. Even so, the distinct social geography of the South created its own challenges for incoming mariners. The South's ongoing hostility toward migrants made it a secondary destination at best; a way-station before continuing on to other ports or other jobs.

Coastal Work

This study divides maritime work along the Gulf Coast into three general categories: international trade, vessels in the coasting trade, and fishing vessels. The three industries occupied the same water, and broadly the same labor pool. In some

[209] Roald Kverndal, *Seamen's Missions: Their Origins and Early Growth* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1986), 557; Leon Fink, *Sweatshops at Sea: Merchant Seamen in the World's First Globalized Industry from 1812 to Present* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 55-60; Though more prevalent in the antebellum era, the image of sailors as hearty continued after the Civil War. *Harper's Weekly* described sailors and blacksmiths as paragons of physical health. *Harper's Weekly*, Vol. 10, 1866, 276.

ways, the work required the same skill set. Nevertheless, a hierarchy of work developed among mariners in their efforts to choose which vessel to ship out on. Individual needs complicated and occasionally ignored this hierarchy. Sailors who had made home for themselves along the coast preferred voyages that kept them close to home. Conch settler and sailor, Wilbur Roberts, for instance, limited himself to shorter voyages after he was married so that he could spend more time at home. More recently arrived migrants made their own decisions based on available vessels, wages, and even the time of year. Those who had no attachments to the region tended to prefer longer voyages aboard steam vessels. Larger vessels operated under more stringent safety standards and corporate oversight. They were also far less likely to be independently owned or operated by an owner or part owner. Regardless of which way they leaned, mariners on the Gulf had to make careful considerations before attaching themselves to a vessel and crew for the duration of a voyage.[210]

Few major steam lines flew under the American flag along the Gulf Coast. Instead, the major steam liners typically flew under the British flag. In Texas, only the Morgan Line flew under the American flag, since it was the only southern steamship line, but it was hardly the only one passing through the area. Nevertheless, the Morgan Line maintained a near monopoly across much of the Texas coast. The Morgan Line landed in Indianola ostensibly because Galveston lacked a deep-water harbor at the time, but also because of some pricing squabbles with the city. In true business magnate fashion, Morgan decided he would just build his own port rather than deal with uppity

[210] Wilbur Edwards Roberts and Veronica D Huss, "A Riviera Conch." Florida. Manuscript/Mixed Material. https://www.loc.gov/item/wpalh000429/. Accessed June 3, 2023.

Galvestonians. One of the most important boons for Indianola turned out to be the cattle industry. In South Texas, cattle drives sped toward the coast and quicker access to the market. Cattle drives moved directly to the shores in Indianola and by 1870 the surrounding area had not one but five meat packeries. This does not even count the cattle shipped while still alive whose numbers ran to the tune of 18,000 cattle in 1867 alone. The cattle industry was the exception, however, and the hurricanes that wrecked Indianola hastened the decline of the Morgan line in favor of foreign companies.[211]

For some, work aboard the massive steam liners was a step above all other forms of maritime labor. The international coterie that formed crews generally preferred work aboard larger vessels. The ships were cleaner, the work was easier, and employment more stable than on a tramp steamer or coasting schooner. In 1894, W. Clark Russel both complimented and criticized steamships for these qualities. On the one hand, life on steamships offered better food and higher wages to sailors, but Russel argued that steamships contributed to the declining skills of seamanship. Steamships also employed a host of peripheral officers whose duties accounted for increased mechanical and corporate complexity. Engineers and firemen, naturally, but also stewards, bursars, and other white-collar workers. These men were not necessarily skilled in sailing, but they possessed their own specialized skills that made voyages easier and more comfortable. As transportation and shipping companies increasingly dominated over independent captains and masters, work aboard smaller vessels became a steppingstone to later employment on a liner. Lieutenant Commander J. D. Jerrold Kelley of the United States

[211] James P. Baughman, *Charles Morgan and the Development of Southern Transportation* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1968), 186.

Navy, and author of several naval histories, noted in 1891 that junior officers took three or four stints aboard sailing vessels before transferring to large steam liners later in life. Career sailors had to pay their dues before taking better berths later in their careers.[212]

Passengers certainly understood the superiority of steam. Emigration guides recommended transportation on a steam vessel over a sailing ship under almost every circumstance. The *Practical Guide for Emigrants* listed suggested supplies for trans-Atlantic voyages on steamships only. The *Guide* claimed that "no person who has the means" would take passage on a sailing ship over a steamship. Other guides also recommended avoiding sailing ships at all hazards because they were slow, expensive, and unsafe. Steamships, on the other hand, provided more space and improved accommodation. Steamships were more reliable, typically provided more cargo space, and provided a much greater degree of certainty regarding timetables. Perhaps most of all, guides noted, steamships were operated by a better class of officer and crew.[213]

Sailors did not consider steamship work to be unanimously superior, however. The monthly wages in coasting were generally equal to or slightly higher than foreign voyages, though they were influenced more by local conditions and labor demands, depending on the port in question. The long meandering circuits that steam liners took demanded a time commitment far in excess of other contracts. Compared with the much shorter options on coasting voyages, or the lucrative lake and river contracts, steamships were onerously limiting. Counterintuitively, the amount of time that the ships spent in

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[212] J. D. Kelley, "The Ship's People," *Scribner's Magazine*, vol. 9, 1891, 534; W. Clark Russell, "The Life of the Merchant Sailor," *Scribner's Magazine*, vol. 14, 1893, 11, 20.

[213] Malcolm Macleod, *Practical Guide for Emigrants to the United States and Canada* (1870), 28; Edith Abbott, *Immigration: Select Documents and Case Records* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1924), 48.

port was greatly reduced on larger vessels. Pensacola businessman Silas Stearns claimed that sailors from steamships deserted each year. Rather than work on the liners, he claimed, they preferred to work on the local fishing fleets, where they could find ready work and comfortable living among their local communities.[214]

Throughout the nineteenth century, coasting maintained the backbone of American shipping. The size and prevalence of the coasting fleet was responsible for the United States' maintenance of the second largest merchant marine on the planet. In 1884 the total tonnage of American ships came out to 4.2 million. Of that, 2.8 million were engaged in the coasting trade. The remainder was split between the foreign trade and the river trade. Even after the turn of the twentieth century, coasting remained the bulk of the US's maritime power. The coasting fleet employed more than five times as many vessels as international trade, no matter which flag they flew under. The scale of geography along the Gulf Coast meant that both short and long scale voyages were options for itinerant coasters throughout the Gilded Age. Schooner construction of both wooden and steel vessels peaked between 1898 and 1908.[215]

Work in the coasting trade consisted of the bulk of work along the Gulf. The coasting trade was more protected yet simultaneously less regulated. Coasting vessels had to fly under the American flag, keeping the nascent shipbuilding industry alive, yet coasting vessels and vessels engaging in trade between the "United States, and the British

[214] Letter of Silas Stearns, Nov. 13, 1880, University of West Florida, M1973-01, Silas Stearns Papers, Box 2.

[215] Alex Roland, W. Jeffrey Bolster, and Alexander Keyssar, *The Way of the Ship: America's Maritime History Reenvisioned, 1600-2000* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2008), 209; *Report of the Commissioner of Navigation to the Secretary of the Treasury for the Year 1884* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1884), 22.

North American Possessions, or the West Indies, or the Republic of Mexico" did not have to register their crews with shipping commissioners like those in the international trade. Vessels under twenty tons did not even have to submit shipping manifests or cargo lists upon departure.[216]

The fishing industries provided the final option for sailors on the Gulf, though it was not entirely separate from the coasting trade. In the years that followed the Civil War, a small but vital number of wealthy investors looked to the sea. The demand of a consumer economy and the culinary needs of growing American metropoles demanded alternative sources of cheap, and hopefully tasty, food supplies. This included fish, of course, but also fruit, vegetables, and more prosaic foodstuffs, such as rice. Innumerable small ships took advantage of the estuarian bounty nearby. The report for 1898 adjudged that roughly eleven thousand fishermen along the Gulf in 1897. These numbers did not include smaller boats which hovered around the ports of the South constantly. Accurate figures for the number of small-scale fishermen are difficult to obtain, but a report from 1879 suggested that half of Key West's population were dependent on fishing and sponging, though not all of them were directly involved in the work.[217]

Fishing vessels were the least regulated ships that plied the Gulf Coast. The ongoing debates over the status of sailors and their work almost entirely overlooked fishing as an industry. Laws regulating food quality and quantity, ship conditions, numbers of sailors per ton, all applied to larger vessels only, typically those over forty

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[216] *Report of the Commissioner of Navigation to the Secretary of the Treasury for the Year 1884* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1884), 30, 54.

[217] *Report of the Commissioner of Navigation to the Secretary of the Treasury for the Year 1898* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1898), 186; *Annual Report of the National Board of Health* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1879), 393.

tons. Consequently, the work aboard fishing vessels varied the most. Part time sailors could get work of temporary duration, officers frequently functioned as part owners alongside masters. The work was undoubtedly brutal. On oyster vessels, two men worked the windlass, aware that if they dropped their grip, the heavy iron handle might unwind in an instant, breaking, or at least, bruising their ribs. Once their work was done and the oysters spilled across the deck, they began the work of "culling," removing the valuable oysters from the muck and detritus that they had also pulled up. While culling the sailors had to be careful that they did not cut themselves, for it was vanishingly unlikely that they would receive medical attention until they reached the shoreline. Similarly, fishing vessels of all stripes suffered from exposure to the wind and elements. Ordinarily these risks were mitigated, but in the event of a crisis they could spiral out of control.[218]

Smaller ships and boats demonstrated less hierarchy than larger ships. The crews of fishing ships could measure only a handful of sailors, including the master. At those times the full participation of every member was a necessity if a voyage was to be successful. The limited range of these smaller vessels meant that the crews were more likely to be locals as well, known and selected by the master directly rather than from a crimp or boardinghouse keeper or even a shipping master. Among local fishing vessels, every member of the crew was an expert on local conditions and acknowledged as such. Fishermen recognized expertise even between vessels. A small fleet of eight fishing boats gathered together off the coast of Virginia on their outward voyages to the fishing

[218] W. Wyman, "Hardships of the Coasting Trade, and Particularly of the Chesapeake Bay Oystermen," 277-279.

grounds. Five of the eight ships gathered judged that the sea was too rough, while the other three decided the catch was worth the risk. In this the majority were correct. Two of the three bold vessels were wrecked as the sea worsened throughout the day. No lives were lost, but the day's catch certainly was.[219]

Sailors' Roots

The perils of maritime work meant that the work force relied on the regular infusion of outside labor. By the late nineteenth century, it was taken as read that native-born Americans were no longer suited for a life at sea. The work of seamanship had changed, as had the national character. Red blooded Americans were too assertive for a life before the mast, though they may still find fulfilment in the more skilled positions. Outsiders were more appropriate, especially northern Europeans. The Annual Report of the National Board of Health for 1879 estimated that three quarters of all Americans at sea were masters or officers rather than ordinary seamen. Given that the latter population drastically outnumbered the former, the number of Americans at sea shrank drastically during the Gilded Age. Even in the coasting industry, the first report from the newly created Board of Navigation estimated that foreign labor accounted for two thirds of the work in the coasting industry. A fishing report from 1891 agreed, noting that the overwhelming majority of fishermen off the Texas coast were "natives of Italy, Sicily, Greece, Austria, and Mexico." A separate investigation noted that more fishermen in the American South were foreign born than any other section of the country. Maritime work across the nation was in the hands of those born outside the United States. Even the ISU

[219] *Annual Report of the United States Life Saving Service for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1882* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1882), 113.

accepted this fact, blaming poor working conditions, long hours, and the ease of finding occupations on shore.[220]

Officers had a greater stake in the success or failure of the voyage since they earned a share rather than a common wage. Furthermore, officers worked in close contact with captains. To keep their coveted position, officers were expected to maintain the utmost loyalty to the captain, following through on orders regardless of their personal preference. Captains expected officers to take on the most unpleasant leadership roles, ordering officers to discipline the crew and keep them active. These duties necessarily separated officers from both masters and men. The work was frequently unpleasant, but officer positions were difficult to obtain, and seamen valued them accordingly. On coasting vessels, officers were more likely to ship on multiple voyages. While in port, officers might be trusted with purchasing cargo if the ship was involved in an uncontracted voyage. The authority and prestige that came from officership depressed wages, but the possibility of becoming a captain, which usually included part ownership of the vessel, created a ready body of men willing to accept those positions. Scribner's Magazine noted in 1891 that fully half of the officers on the larger liners had Master's Certificates and were just waiting for the opportunity to command their own vessel.[221]

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[220] *Annual Report of the National Board of Health* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1879), 317; *Report of the Commissioner of Navigation to the Secretary of the Treasury for the Year 1884* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1884), 42; *Galveston Daily News*, February 14, 1888; *Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Convention of the International Seamen's Union of America*, 1900, 15; J. W. Collins and Hugh M. Smith, "A Statistical Report on the Fisheries of the Gulf States," *Bulletin of the United States Fish Commission. . . for 1891* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1893), 94; Charles H. Stevenson, "Report on the Coast Fisheries of Texas," *Report of the Commissioner for 1889 to 1891* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1893), 375.

[221] J. Grey Jewell, *Among Our Sailors* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1874), 17; *Galveston Daily News,* October 30, 1889; J. D. Jerrold Kelley, "An Ocean Steamship: The Ship's Company," *Scribner's Magazine*, Vol. 9, 1891, 564.

Captains and officers almost always came from the seafaring population themselves, working their way up the ranks. Starting out as a boy before rising up the ranks remained the traditional pathway to becoming a captain among the seafaring population. This tendency was complicated, however, but the fact that Americans persisted in dominating the officer corps even as they became a minority among the crew. This created a shortcut to officer positions among Americans, despite the fact that few served on American vessels. Starting as a boy was common for other races as well. Journalist Ambrose E Gonzales described young boys on the Gullah Islands who piloted fishing boats for part of the year. In Florida, Uncle Dave started his seafaring career by begging for work on the sponging ships.[222]

The source of sailors to serve under the officer class came from a variety of sources but had its roots in alternative methods of employment. The changes in the late nineteenth century labor markets produced padrones in many professions that relied on migrant laborers. As historian Gregory Peck has demonstrated, the demand for low-cost labor in the United States led to the rise of contract laborers who worked in immigrant ghettos and western extraction industries. This supply of cheap laborers came from disenfranchised Europeans who became trapped in exploitative work for years. The "padrone system" relied on regular infusions of European laborers, brought to the United States under false pretenses, or at least, with the promise of better conditions. In

[222] J. Grey Jewell, *Among Our Sailors* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1874), 16; Ambrose E Gonzales, *Black Border: Gullah Stories of the Carolina Coast* (Columbia, SC: The State Company, 1922), 243; Interview by J. A. Frost, *Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project, Florida, Vol. 3* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1936), 312; Eric W. Sager, *Ships and Memories: Merchant Seafarers in Canada's Age of Steam* (Vancouver, CA: University of British Columbia Press, 1993), 32.

exchange, their pay was garnished for the privilege of continuing work, with the remainder usually ending up going to overpriced company saloons and commissaries. W. Clark Russel claimed that in the foreign trade "Yawcub will sign on for a trifling wage" compared to American sailors. The local fishing industry also relied on migrant laborers. Ships illegally smuggled Chinese shrimpers into the country after the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act. The fishing vessels of the Gulf coast naturally relied on numerous sources of labor, but were noteworthy for hiring "Cubans, Spaniards, Bahamians, and Creoles." These men came during the mullet season, then either left or made the Gulf a permanent place of residence for themselves and their families.[223]

The merchant marine had spearheaded the practice, as crimping and shanghaiing had long been a mainstay of the maritime world. Mariners relied on crimps and boardinghouse keepers long before padrones moved into the industrial realms of mining, farming, and railroad construction. Young Europeans signed onto voyages without realizing the full extent of the work or the duration of the trip. Tramp fruit steamers were notorious for misleading young Norwegian men about the climate and labor during their yearlong voyages. However, the far more common reality was that most sailors who signed shipping articles did so with clear intentions. The widely understood image of sailors being delivered to ships while unconscious or intoxicated was true for many, but it did not reflect the reality for the majority. The image was fodder for reformers looking to

[223] George B. Goode, *ed., The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), Part 5, vol. 1, 562; *Coast Seamen's Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 8, 3; Gregory Peck, *Inventing Free Labor: Padrones and Immigrant Workers in the North American West, 1880-1930* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 22; Donald W. Davis, *Washed Away?: The Invisible Peoples of Louisiana's Wetlands* (Lafayette: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2010), 307; W. Clark Russell, "The Life of the Merchant Sailor," *Scribner's Magazine*, vol. 14, 1893, 11, 20.

portray sailors as helpless children. Communities along the Gulf Coast provided ready job markets for people willing to make the trip. Yugoslav migrants relied on a community established in New Orleans in the 1840s. The community provided ready jobs for migrants as oystermen in the Louisiana bayou. The work was difficult, their diet limited to fish, oysters, shrimp, and hardtack, and the men were isolated from almost everyone. Plenty of Yugoslavian oystermen left the industry for less risky work, returned to Dalmatia, or simply died, but their numbers were replenished by relatives and friends from other Adriatic villages. By the 1870s the Yugoslavian oystermen had become successful enough that they had developed a reputation along the broader Adriatic Coast.[224]

Of course, transporting immigrants across the Atlantic Ocean consisted of a vital part of the padrone system. Paying the price of a ticket was the first step in trapping would be immigrants. The steamship lines were themselves part of that exploitative system. Steamship lines brought English, Irish, and Scottish migrants to Galveston, crediting the cost of their ticket but binding them by contract to work for a fixed sum after their arrival in Texas. The system that transported migrant laborers was itself a system of labor. Steamships were noted for their tendency to hire inexperienced landsmen, since the work aboard steamships was more atomized as long as the engines functioned. The cost of American labor was simply higher than it was in Europe.

[224] Eric W Sager, *Ships and Memories: Merchant Seafarers in Canada's Age of Steam* (Vancouver, CA: University of British Columbia Press, 1993), 39; Milos M. Vujnovich, *Yugoslavs in Louisiana* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 1974), 105.

Advocates for shipping reform noted that as long as this was the case, American seamanship would continue to decline.[225]

European ships enjoyed cheaper wages across the Atlantic. Average costs on foreign vessels were roughly fifty or twenty five percent lower than those on American vessels. The Department of Labor noted wages for fishermen in North Carolina were nearly four times more expensive than the wages paid to European fishermen. Such trends did not apply only to the US. By the 1890s, even British commentors were noting that the cost of operating vessels under the British flag was increasing compared to continental nations. Like their American counterparts, British commentors blamed the difference in operating costs was due primarily to the difference in wages between United States and European markets. Captains were free to ship their men from whatever port they chose, alleviating that cost to an extent. Captains could take advantage of the differences in going wages between ports, hiring men when it was cheaper. American laws protected American sailors, insisting that captains discharge sailors in their home port or provide them with funds to return home. This law disincentivized captains from hiring Americans, giving them yet another reason to hire in foreign ports where sailors enjoyed no such protection.[226]

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[225] Alex Roland, W. Jeffrey Bolster, and Alexander Keyssar, *The Way of the Ship: America's Maritime History Reenvisioned, 1600-2000* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2008), 215; *Harper's Weekly* claimed in 1871 that "steam has rendered the thorough sailor less necessary than they used to be." *Harper's Weekly,* Vol. 15, 1871, 165; Edward King, *The Great South: A Record of Journeys* (Hartford, CT: American Publishing Company, 1875), 105.

[226] Hans Keiler, *American Shipping: Its History and Economic Conditions* (1913), 83; *Report of the Commissioner of Navigation to the Secretary of the Treasury for the Year 1889* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1889), 195; *Report of the Commissioner of Navigation to the Secretary of the Treasury for the Year 1896* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1896), 145-146.

Fruit steamers, which operated consistently in the Caribbean, still employed northern Europeans to man their vessels, signing them on for one- or two-years stints. These ships, though chartered and captained by Americans, sailed under the Norwegian flag as a cost saving measure. They also typically employed a higher percentage of Norwegian sailors. Shipping commissioners looked for inexperienced men, trusting to the extended length of the voyages to teach them the necessary skills. The sailors rarely understood exactly what sort of voyages they were signing up for, spending the intervening years working in the tropics, rather than on more familiar waters. Even as early as 1860, *Harper's Weekly* blamed inexperienced sailors as the primary cause for the sinking of the *Evening Star* on its transatlantic voyage.[227]

The untrustworthiness of sailors before the mast naturally varied. The overall image of sailors depicted them as both abuser and abused, but in the coastal industries, the reality was much more complicated. Observers called out instances of abuse, especially in the oystering industry, and noted the plight of sailors, but the everyday instances of labor progressing smoothly failed to capture their notice. Famed naturalist John Muir noted in one of his first treks in 1867 that the schooner he travelled on bore no sign of abuse. The captain and men worked well together and with a quiet professionality. In the case of the *Island Belle*, the captain trusted his men enough to leave the ship in their hands while he and Muir went drinking in Havana with several other captains. The captain even gave the men specific instruction on where and when to

[227] *Hearings before the Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries, On Sundry Bills Relating to the American Merchant Marine, Known as the "Maguire" Bills* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1894), 20; Hans Keiler, *American Shipping: Its History and Economic Conditions* (1913), 73.

pick him back up, showing that he trusted them enough to be in the right place at the right time.[228]

The maritime industries played a vital role in the human migration across the Atlantic to the western hemisphere. The demand for sailors facilitated a steady flow of people into the maritime industries, especially from northern European ports. High labor costs in the United States meant that captains saved on wages by travelling to European ports and hiring locals. Large steamship lines had the resources and the opportunities to hire Europeans in large numbers. The meandering circuits that steamships undertook allowed them to bypass local labor markets. Steam liners could afford to wait to hire additional crew until they had reached the port with the lowest wages.

After 1882, the United States increasingly restricted access to the United States in response to cyclical depressions. Anyone likely to become a public charge was explicitly forbidden from entering the country as were those with ongoing medical conditions. Migrants from western Europe were provided privileged status, but the northern and southern European migrants that made up much of the sailing population were granted no such exception. Illicit migration in the form of desertion became more common for those outlier ethnicities.[229]

Regardless of how they journeyed across the Atlantic, sailors' first encounter with the United States was invariably from other sailors. The work that sailors did, kept them away from the bustling life of port cities for long stretches at a time. Representatives of

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[228] John Muir, *A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1916), Chapter 7, Accessed November 1, 2022, https://vault.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit/writings/a_thousand_mile_walk_to_the_gulf/.

[229] Kevin Brown, *Passage to the New World: The Emigrant Experience, 1807-1940* (Barnsley, GB: Seaforth Publishing, 2013), 198.

the ISU estimated that roughly sixty percent of their membership was at sea at any given time. While at sea, sailors would occasionally pass by other ships, especially if they were near the shoreline. Quarantine stations provided most immediate contact between sailors entering the country. After that usually brief sojourn, ships entering port were swarmed by smaller vessels offering all of the trappings of civilization. Many of these boats sold diverse and questionable wares. In some Caribbean ports, boatman took on the task of transporting passengers and crew from ship to shore. It was the habit of potential employers to board ships before they landed to snag valuable employees with the most useful skills.[230]

Those immigrants who landed on the shores of the Gulf relied on the coastal community and their own established ethnic communities to find work and prosper. A Greek community in Tarpon Springs, Italian neighborhoods in Pensacola, Sicilians and Filipinos in New Orleans, Mexican *barrio* in Texas and intermittent Bahamian enclaves all provided potential safe havens for incoming mariners. These communities helped mariners adapt to life on shore and occasionally provided safe havens for deserters. Terrestrial work offered higher wages and fewer restraints, creating a revolving door of sailors. Newly arrived sailors in the United States discovered that unskilled workers demanded higher wages ashore than they could attain aboard their ship. The temptation to desert after reaching the United States was high for sailors looking to maximize their earnings. The laws of the United States also provided little disincentive for desertion.

[230] Arthur Emil Albrecht, *International Seamen's Union of America: A Study of its History and Problems*, Department of Labor Statistics (: Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1923), 4; Kevin Brown, *Passage to the New World: The Emigrant Experience, 1807-1940* (Barnsley, GB: Seaforth Publishing, 2013), 191.

The typical punishments for desertion were imprisonment until the ship left port, loss of wages accrued, and a fine equal to any advances provided. Imprisonment did not deter deserting sailors as much as landbound authorities hoped it would. For one, sailors' working lives were themselves a kind of constant imprisonment, albeit aboard a moving vessel. Second, prison sentences were short and would leave the sailor a free man at the end of the term, able to take on new employment of his choice. Third, desertions usually occurred just before a vessel left port. The time lost in procuring and retrieving an absentee sailor was frequently not worth a captain's time. Losing one's accrued wages was also hypothetically a deterrent, but the realities of desertion meant that often sailors risked little to no potential income. Finally, the threat of repaying advances might have made sailors hesitate, but an 1884 law outlawed the practice of providing advances, making the actual amount to be repaid effectively zero.[231]

Former sailors found work among the migratory masses. Frank Reilly, a surgeon for the Marine Hospital Service noted that men "whose heritage is the sea" were joining the ranks of terrestrial laborers "secure there at least of decent food, of a habitable dwelling, and of the equal protection of the law." Work on the expanding railroads provided a frequent option, especially as the work could be found internationally. Sailors' small skill in rope management and rigging gave them an edge in building railroad bridges and edifices. American officials noted the attraction of the railroad industry to migrant workers as well as the tendency of railroad representatives to headhunt employees abroad. One railroad representative did his work too well in New

[231] Hans Keiler, *American Shipping: Its History and Economic Conditions* (1913), 73; *Report of the Commissioner of Navigation to the Secretary of the Treasury for the Year 1896* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1896), 24.

Orleans, attracting more workers than was required, leaving the rest stranded in Guatemala when the work disappeared.[232]

The number of deserters in the United States is difficult to accurately assess. Michael Taylor Rafferty has argued that desertion in the American merchant fleet occurred on "almost every journey" between 1790 and 1861. Other large-scale studies concur with that assessment. Hager's study of British sailors noted that twenty three percent of sailors deserted at intermediate ports, with an astounding forty nine percent desertion rate in New York City. Judith Fingard has noted that these numbers are all under representative of the real statistics. The porous nature of the border allowed the movement of sailors without detection.[233]

Foreign deserters had few skills with which to survive in the US, with most returning to maritime work before long. One American consul noted that the primary motives for desertion was a longer stay on land before reshipping at a higher wage. In 1874, Jacob Frank, a runner for the Dublin House, a famous sailor's boarding house in Galveston neighborhood, the Strand, was arrested after enticing three sailors to desert from the German ship, *Leopoldine*. The record is unclear on exactly how long he had been engaged in the practice, but Frank had been operating for enough time that he was "well-known" to the Galveston community. The three sailors he had convinced to desert

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[232] *Annual Report of the Supervising Surgeon General of the Marine Hospital Service of the United States, 1874* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1874), 124; John Bogart, "Feats of Railway Engineering," *Scribner's Magazine*, Vol. 4, 1888, 9; *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1885), No. 43.

[233] Matthew Taylor Rafferty, "The Republic Afloat: Violence, Labor, Manhood, and the Law at Sea, 1789-1861," PhD diss., Columbia University, 2003, 56; Eric Sager, *Seafaring Labor: The Merchant Marine of Atlantic Canada*, *1820-1914* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989), 194-198; Judith Fingard, *Jack in Port: Sailortowns of Eastern Canada* (Toronto, CA: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 142.

had already found employment on another ship, the British *Oxford*, which was still at port. The authorities promptly returned the three seamen to the German vessel. The sailors claimed that they had no complaint to make about their treatment on the *Leopoldine* but gave no other reason for their desertion. After due process, the courts found Frank guilty of violating US Shipping Acts, fining him twenty-five dollars or six months in the county jail. At that point, Frank vanished from the official record. However, a Galvestonian with the same name died nine years later, of "heart disease" in the same neighborhood where the known runner worked and lived. In a separate instance, deserters in Galveston, after hiding out long enough to avoid recapture, returned to the docks to find new employment, with only one of the six successfully gaining terrestrial employment. The fishing industries also counted deserters as an additional source of labor. Fishermen in the snapper industry were "taken largely from the merchant ships that visit Pensacola.[234]

By the end of the nineteenth century, some ships acknowledged that desertion was becoming more trouble than the cheap wages were worth. The ISU boldly claimed that ships were willing to pay union wages rather than have their sailors desert before captains could get their money's worth. The Union credited the end of the allotment system as well as the "uplifting" effect of the union mission. The Union undercut its own achievements, however, by noting that an ever-increasing number of sailors in the coasting trade were from the West Indies. In particular, southern ports continued to resist

[234] *Galveston Daily News*, January 30, 1874; *Galveston Daily News*, January 31, 1874; *Galveston Daily News*, February 1, 1874; George B. Goode, *ed., The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), Part 5, vol. 1, 589; *Report of the Commissioner of Navigation to the Secretary of the Treasury for the Year 1890* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1890), 9.

such efforts, with mobile captains and merchants continuing the practice of importing crews from Europe.[235]

In some ways, the Gulf was an exception to these trends. The majority of international trade went to massive metropoles like New York. Smaller ports had a larger native population at sea. Coasting vessels out of Galveston were crewed entirely by inhabitants of the city. Fruiting ships feeding the local Key West market were also manned by locals, or in other cases by Cuban expats. The Morgan Line, which ran along the Gulf and to Mexico and Cuba, maintained its sailors in Morgan City, Louisiana, with its own railroad to help the sailors commute to their vessels. In 1896, only twenty five percent of men shipped in New York were native born, twenty four percent for San Francisco, and twenty nine percent in Philadelphia. Southern ports surveyed that same year all had larger percentages of native-born men shipping out. The lowest was New Orleans, with thirty three percent native born. Mobile had the highest rates of native-born American shipping out. Nearly ninety percent of men had been born inside the United States. These statistics are weighted in favor of native-born men regardless of geographic location as those numbers only include the men who shipped out of those ports, not men who were midway on a voyage. Nevertheless, all southern ports surveyed in 1896 showed a higher percentage of native-born men shipped than other cities.[236]

For many mariners along the Gulf Coast, working in the maritime industry was barely a choice at all. Work began young and tended to follow family paths. Even as the

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[235] *Coast Seaman's Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 6, 3.

[236] *Annual Report of the National Board of Health* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1879), 393, 406; *Report of the Commissioner of Navigation to the Secretary of the Treasury for the Year 1896* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1896), 60.

American maritime population shrank, maritime work continued to run in families. Poor families needed any extra source of income that they could get and shipping young sons as apprentices, engine wipers, or cabin boys provided an extra source of income as well as removing an inconvenient mouth to feed. In England and Scandinavian countries, young men cut their teeth on local voyages in European fjords and rivers before signing on with trans-Atlantic ships. This was as true for American as it was for foreign sailors. Newly established shipping commissioners were charged with "facilitating apprenticeships" for boys twelve years and older.[237]

The Gulf maritime industries were not solely fed by deserters. Foreign sailors came to the coast looking for temporary or seasonal labor legally before returning home. The fishing industries provided ready sources of seasonal work. Mullet fishing relied on a heterogenous mix of local and international labor. Fishing sailors were frequently only employed a few months out of the year, making it difficult to sustain as a profession. "Cubans, Spaniards, Bahamians, and Creoles" were all common members of the Gulf labor force. Proximity to nearby islands made it easy for ships to drop off foreign sailors on their way to or from the Gulf fisheries. The *Florida Agriculturalist* even claimed that the Florida sponging industry was dominated entirely by Bahamians before the Civil War. These Caribbean workers became a part of the local background, especially in Florida where they eventually formed a large portion of the overall population. The eastern European oystermen of Louisiana were also seasonal, journeying to the United

[237] Eric W. Sager, *Ships and Memories: Merchant Seafarers in Canada's Age of Steam* (Vancouver, CA: University of British Columbia Press, 1993), 32; Leon Fink, *Sweatshops at Sea: Merchant Seamen in the World's First Globalized Industry from 1812 to Present* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 55-60.

States in September, the start of the oystering season, and catching a steamship back to Trieste in May, at the end. The young oystermen typically tired of this lifestyle before long, either settling in Louisiana or back in Europe.[238]

Shipping Out

Between jobs, sailors spent days and weeks in relative leisure. Their mobile profession meant that those who lacked regular work had no choice but to find a place to live. The most obvious choices were the boardinghouses that lined the wharves of every major port. Reformers insisted that crimps and boardinghouse keepers took advantage of sailors and forced them into one aspect of maritime work or another at a whim. Before a sailor even stepped onto land, he was hounded by boardinghouse keepers and their runners. They offered temptation in the form of ready alcohol, significantly marked up, cheap rooms, and company, both male and female. Over the course of the next few days or weeks, the crimp would fleece the sailor of everything he had and usually what he did not have. The only way to repay the debt was to sign on to whatever ship the keeper demanded, giving away the advance and allotment.[239]

Boardinghouse keepers delivered sailors to captains willing to pay the keepers' bribes or fees, regardless of what business the ship was engaged in. When labor ran short, outright shanghaiing was the solution for shipping masters looking to make ends meet. Writers assumed that even local industries, such as fishing and oystering operated in this fashion. W. Wyman, in his expose on the Baltimore oystering trade, asserted that

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[238] George B. Goode, *ed., The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), Part 5, vol. 1, 561; Milos M. Vujnovich, *Yugoslavs in Louisiana* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 1974), 108.

[239] Wendy Gamber, *The Boardinghouse in Nineteenth Century America* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2007), 143.

one sailor was misled into thinking that he would be working on a steamship before being loaded peremptorily onto an oystering vessel. The sailor in question reportedly evaded forced labor only by jumping overboard and swimming to shore. To most onlookers, reformers, and ship masters, sailors were fundamentally helpless and needed some authority figure to manage them.[240]

Spurred by reformers and concerned over the declining merchant marine, Congress acted in 1884. The Dingley Act prohibited advance wages and allotments to cut out the power of landlords and boardinghouse keepers. The law made captains responsible for damages if they did pay out advance wages. The stated purpose of the law was to cut out the rampant fleecing that boardinghouse keepers indulged in. The actual result of the law was that both boardinghouse keepers and sailors rebelled. Ships along the Atlantic coast languished, unable to acquire crews. Silas Weeks, a shipping merchant in New Orleans, declared that the landlords had "full and complete control" over local crews who were refusing to leave until advances were reinstated. J. D. Smalls, a Baltimore merchant, noted similar "annoyances in securing crews" as long as the advances were denied. Onlookers failed to understand why sailors continued to support devious boardinghouse keepers in outright defiance of the law.[241]

On the Gulf, onlookers recognized the extraordinary influence that boardinghouse keepers possessed. They dominated the international labor market. The American Seaman's Friend Society acknowledged that, despite moderate successes in New England

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[240] W. Wyman, "Hardships of the Coasting Trade, and Particularly of the Chesapeake Bay Oystermen," 276.

[241] *Report of the Commissioner of Navigation to the Secretary of the Treasury for the Year 1884* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1884), 82, 84.

and New York, the South remained stubbornly outside of their influence. The organization established homes in New Orleans and Mobile in the early 1870s but had no luck in diverting sailors away from the boardinghouses. The International Seaman's Union noted a similar problem two decades later. Gulf sailors were "the prey of landsharks and crimps" who operated in full defiance of the law.[242]

While such images were poignant for their rhetorical purpose, it is difficult to prove that they were anywhere near as common as reformers asserted. The boardinghouse keepers represented an important step in negotiating the maritime labor market. Apparently helpless sailors had a remarkable quiver of tools to make the most of their profession while on shore. The apparent dominance of boarding houses was highly overrated. Conscientious sailors could avoid crimps and make their own arrangements with potential captains. Diligent or spendthrift captains could take the time to seek out their crew themselves and save the cost of bribes. The relationship between boarding house keepers and captains was fraught with tension, and sailors used each as a shield against the other. One sailor was clear that he trusted the boardinghouse keepers more than ships' officers. He claimed that captains took advantage of the men and at least the boardinghouse keepers "never robbed me." The *Sailors' Magazine and Seaman's Friend* noted in its crusade against the boarding houses that sailors saw the keepers and their runners as friends and would threaten a captain who refused them access. When faced with an abusive captain, prolonging a stay in a boarding house made sense. The boarding

[242] Wendy Gamber, *The Boardinghouse in Nineteenth Century America* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2007), 143; *Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Convention of the International Seamen's Union* (Boston, MA: 1901), 10.

house racked up debt, but it allowed sailors to wait for better conditions or better pay before shipping back out to sea.[243]

In fact, boarding house keepers occasionally lost money as sailors cut them out of the arrangement or took advantage of poor wording in the law. The Dingley Act did limit the amount that a landlord could claim from a sailor. In essence after shipping articles had been signed, a landlord could not claim any new debt. Thus, sailors turned the tables, racking up debts to the boarding house then shipped themselves out before the debt came due. Sailors were by nature highly mobile and chose when and how to ship out for the next job. They "tramped" from port to port waiting for the right opportunity. Maritime workers along the coast made their own assessments of the work available to them and chose ships that best fitted their desires.[244]

Sailors also did their best to negotiate the best wages that they could, despite local markets. Ships spent days and weeks in port, giving sailors the time to scope out their options before shipping. The boarding houses served as important waypoints where sailors could discuss options before shipping out. Safety and discipline aboard particular vessels were always hot topics among recently discharged men and served to inform those shipping out about what to expect. In the most basic instances, sailors simply refused to ship out, as two lumbering ships discovered to their regret in Sabine Pass, Texas. Their contracts with the crew expired on landing while the high wages available

[243] *Savannah Journal*, August 22, 1872; *Savannah Morning News*, July 30, 1884; *The Sailors' Magazine and Seamen's Friend*, Vol. 43, 259.

[244] *Savannah Morning News*, July 30, 1884; *Report of the Commissioner of Navigation to the Secretary of the Treasury for the Year 1890* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1890), 8.

ashore and the possibility of a nearby yellow fever outbreak prevented the ships from attaining a new crew or reshipping the old.[245]

In another instances, sailors demanded the same wages that their shipmates received in an attempt to avoid the undercutting that was common in foreign ports. On rare occasions, crews rose up en masse to demand more wages. Such instances of organized resistance were rare. It was precisely to prevent these uprisings that captains waited until the last second to ship their crews. Unexpected delays, however, could occasionally give crews the opportunity to communicate before embarking. The captain of the *Jane Cockerel* learned to his displeasure that his ship's rudder needed replacing before his ship could depart. The two days allowed the crew to get together, during which they went on a group bender. Once the rudder was installed, the entire crew went on strike in the forecastle until they had received both their pay and advance wages. Eventually the captain had no choice but to bribe the crew with extra rounds of grog, as well as the advanced pay before the crew would settle and go to work.[246]

Sailors were hardly helpless even after the vessel was under way. Ships that travelled along the coast were hardly isolated. A change outside of what was in the shipping articles gave sailors the right to sever their contracts. Two Germans decided to take advantage of this when the vessel they had shipped on decided to journey to Europe rather than the previously stated destination of Brazil. Since the ship was stopped in Brunswick, Georgia to take on additional cargo anyhow, the sailors decided it was a

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[245] *Galveston Daily News*, October 19, 1895.

[246] Hans Keiler, *American Shipping: Its History and Economic Conditions* (1913), 73; *Galveston Daily News*, May 29, 1892; Peyton O. Abbott and S. B. Brush. "Business Travel out of Texas during the Civil War: The Travel Diary of S. B. Brush, Pioneer Austin Merchant." *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 96, no. 2 (1992): 259-71. Accessed February 4, 2021. http://www.jstor.org/stable/30240188.

perfect time to leave. The two men left and walked for five days to Savannah where they anticipated finding a more suitable ship. Sailors could also make use of less legal alternatives to leave an undesirable ship. Stealing a ship's boat was an easy way to escape when near a port. The sailors could vanish and be confident that the evidence would never make its way to the authorities. Even small boats were valuable and coastal farmers would salvage them in short order.[247]

Violence on Board

Sailors occupied a nebulous space in American culture as the nineteenth century wound to a close. The culture at large was concerned with the nature of American masculinity and its presumed decline. Urbanization and the decline of agricultural work created a growing sense that something fundamental to the American character had been lost. Historian Frederick Jackson Turner codified the concerns in his famous "frontier thesis," but he was hardly the only observer concerned on the subject. Though not a major part of the dialogue, sailors did play their part in discussions of manliness. On the one hand, they were held up by contemporaries for their healthy and active work, with clean air and healthy exercise far away from urban smog and blights. On the other hand, sailors were subordinated by the nature of their work, constantly ordered, frequently abused, rarely independent. This paradox created conflicting views of sailors and their work. For the sailors themselves, violence, both the giving and receiving, helped solve this masculine paradox.[248]

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[247] *Galveston Daily News,* June 2, 1874; *Savannah Morning News,* June 04, 1887.

[248] See Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 12-17; *Harper's Weekly*, Vol. 10, 1866, 276.

Unsurprisingly, sailors resorted to violence frequently both on board their vessels and while ashore, picking fights with each other and with terrestrial residents. Elliot Gorn has argued, violent self-assertion were markers of status among colonial men. This trait applied to the maritime population as well. Acts of violence enforced an image of masculinity in the face of ongoing infantilization from reformers and officers alike. The crew of an entire ship, the *Robert S. Grimm* came into possession of illegal sheath knives, which they wore openly on their hips. The captain of the ship endeavored to force them men to throw them away, but the men became mutinous instead. Only the arrival of a revenue cutter, which forced the men to toss their weapons in the ocean, averted bloodshed. The ringleader of the crew was arrested, but the other men continued their voyage. The image of the sailor as a helpless peon was offset by sailors' abilities to enforce their will on their cohorts. In 1884, Elias Cocks, checked into the New Orleans Marine Hospital several days after a stabbing that occurred while the ship was underway. The sailor refused to say who had stabbed him, but the injury was severe enough that Cocks remained in the hospital for almost four months. As soon as Cocks was dismissed, another sailor, Oscar Jackson, was admitted after a dustup. Jackson suffered from a hatchet wound to the skull and only complained of stiffness in his jaw. The reality of the wound was much more severe when the surgeon saw that it had "disintegrated" the skull wall. Jackson's wound ultimately proved fatal four days after his admission.[249]

[249] Richard E. Nisbett and Dov Cohen, *Culture of Honor: The Psychology of Violence in the South* (New York: Rutledge University Press, 1996), xv-xvi, 4, 9; Forrest McDonald and Grady McWhitney, "Celtic Origins of Southern Herding," *Journal of Southern History* 51 (May 1985), 165-82; Elliott J. Gorn, "Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch," *The American Historical Review,* Feb. 1985, Vol. 90, 23; *Annual Report of the US Revenue Marine Service* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1891), 51; U. S. Marine Hospital Record Books, 1879-1890, Vol. 1, Tulane University, Manuscripts Collection 757, 213-222.

One upmanship, jibes, and insults were a part of shipboard culture. These events had the possibility of violence built into them. Tempers were easily frayed and misinterpretations due to language or simple misunderstanding could easily lead to injury or death. A sailor and a cabin boy on board the *Josephine* needled each other about who "was the better man of the two" while taking a break from their work. The boasting was all in good fun as far as the cabin boy was concerned, until the seamen grabbed a knife and attacked the younger man, managing to slice his cheek open before the other sailors stopped him.[250]

In the face of increasing competition and demands for profit, violence was an established part of shipboard discipline. The tradition of beating or whipping recalcitrant sailors was a codified part of shipboard life. By the postbellum era, American ships had a reputation for viciousness that had spread internationally, despite legislative attempts to curb the violence. A law in 1835 had outlawed "beating, wounding, or cruel punishment" of sailors "from malice, hatred, or revenge, and without justifiable cause." An 1850 law abolished flogging as an appropriate disciplinary measure. Both laws insisted that sailors prove that officers were unjustified in their punishment, a notoriously difficult task given that courts believed that sailors were chronic liars in the first place. Consequently, workplace beatings and corporal punishment remained a central part of shipboard life throughout the nineteenth century, despite the letter of the law. Even into the 1890s, American captains were known for their brutality and violence. The British vice-consul made a clear answer on such matters in response to an inquiry from the *Sailor's Magazine and Seamen's Friend.* The vice-consul, Mr. Keating, noted that

[250] *Galveston Daily News*, March 27, 1875.

captains put "the thumbscrews" to the men to drive them off the ship before their wages were due. This reputation was yet another reason for the lack of American mariners aboard American vessels, as better treatment was guaranteed under other flags. Even as late as 1904, a federal commission noted that despite high wages and ostensible generous rations, "the discipline is often more exacting and the work more arduous" aboard American vessels than on foreign hulls.[251]

Officers and captains routinely used violence as a means of enforcing their authority and as a means of persuasion. The time to establish authority was at the beginning of a voyage, as ships prepared for departure. The overwhelming tendency toward heavy drinking, if not outright shanghaiing, meant that seamen had to be forced to get the ship underway. Overworked officers resorted to famously brutal tactics, utilizing lashes and beatings with a callous disregard for the health of their charges. Jewell noted that there were almost no depths that officers could not sink to as long as the sailors could continue to work. The famous author recalled only a single instant where an abusive officer was dismissed, and even that was only temporary as the captain rehired him on the return voyage. The first few days of any voyage were always the most perilous for captains and officers. Officers had not yet established the proper shipboard pecking order. Newer sailors did not yet know their required duties. The threat of rebellion, if not outright mutiny, was always on the table.[252]

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[251] J. Grey Jewell, *Among Our Sailors* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1874), 49; *Report of the Commissioner of Navigation to the Secretary of the Treasury for the Year 1896* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1896), 20; *Report of the Merchant Marine Commission: Together with the Testimony Taken at the Hearings, Vol. 1* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1906), XIII; *Sailor's Magazine and Seamen's Friend*, Vol. 71, December 1899, 366.

[252] *Annual Report of the National Board of Health* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1879), 266; J. Grey Jewell, *Among Our Sailors* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1874), 90.

Mariners expected and even encouraged violence from officers. Coasting and fishing voyages that lasted days or weeks demanded a swiftly established shipboard hierarchy compared to months long steamship circuits. One captain claimed that that "rough handling" was necessary to gain the respect of the crew. The performative nature of violence in the nineteenth century applied to officers who had claimed authority over a rambunctious crew, even to excess. Though by no means unique, the oystering ships of the Chesapeake Bay were notoriously violent. On those ships, beatings from the master and mate were common enough that Dr. Wyman noted the violence in his expose, noting that oystering crews worked "by the most cruel treatment" at all hours during harvesting season. Sailors reinforced a culture of violence on their own by "hazing" boys on board and less experienced sailors. Jewell recounted two boys who suffered enough abuse that they ran to the closest US consul as soon as they made port. The consul believed their tail and arranged for their return, but the lads were the exception rather than the rule. The ability to inflict and accept punishment was a sign of experience with shipboard life.[253]

In addition to violence to enforce authority, violence and the threat of violence was an integral tool to increase productivity. Ship owners pushed masters to shave costs and increase efficiency wherever possible. The time pressure that sailors faced only increased as the nineteenth century ended. The use of violence to drive the crew harder was a given. In their turn, outright acts of violence against authority were also a part of life. Violence was an accepted way of establishing respect with one's peers. By demonstrating the capacity for harm, sailors established their own boundaries on what

[253] W. Wyman, "Hardships of the Coasting Trade, and Particularly of the Chesapeake Bay Oystermen," 276; J. Grey Jewell, *Among Our Sailors* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1874), 180; *Galveston Daily News*, May 29, 1892.

they would accept from their superiors. Abusive mates and captains pushed their crews hard and the violence that they used to enforce their command at times led to retaliation. An abusive mate landed one of his sailors in the New Orleans Marine Hospital in 1883. The sailor, Louis Miller, was admitted with severe contusions, especially on the right leg. The mate of his vessel had beaten him severely to encourage Miller to work faster. The case of sailor Miller was the notoriously egregious as the young man, died two weeks after his initial admission.[254]

If the conflict became severe enough, charges were far more likely to be brought against a sailor who "punched up" against a superior officer. Officers viewed any kind of self-defense as mutinous activity, no matter the degree of violence. When crew men fought back, alcohol often played a key role in fortifying seamen for the coming conflict. Many resisting sailors were accused of being drunk, though this accusation was frequently leveled toward maritime workers at any given time with some level of veracity. These consequences could be avoided if the entire crew united, as the crew of the *Jane Cockerel* did when setting out from Brownsville. The voyage was delayed by the loss of the rudder and the crew spent the intervening time drinking and fighting. The crew refused to set sail until the captain gave them advance wages and more grog. In a later instance, the *James Boyce Jr.* signaled distress to local authorities off the coast of Virginia and bound for Cuba. When a revenue cutter arrived, they found four members of the crew drunkenly threatening mutiny. The cutter restored order in short order, by

[254] U. S. Marine Hospital Record Books, 1879-1890, Vol. 1, Tulane University, Manuscripts Collection 757, 190.

depositing the men on shore, but this action cut the working crew of the *James Boyce* in half for the remainder of the voyage.[255]

In extreme cases, mariners attempted to rally the coastal community to come to their aid. When it came to particularly egregious abuses the shore bound community expressed resentment toward excessively abusive officers. The conflicts between officers and men did not simply cease to exist when they reached the shoreline. Instead, men looked for support from the terrestrial community. The docks and wharfs were public spaces occupied by those most familiar with what life at sea had to offer. Sailors exported shipboard conflicts onto land, hoping that they would find increased support. Reports and rumors of abuse could color a captain's reputation, especially among the classes who worked in the more local industries. In a particularly egregious instance, the captain and officers of the *Neptune* demanded that the crew spend hours aloft during frigid winter nights, resulting in frostbite to the crew. Upon arriving in New York word of the cruelty spread widely enough that the dockside population resorted to its own violent resistance. A lynch mob gathered outside the ship even as local police officers arrested the first and second mates. At such times, even those who ostensibly benefited from workplace abuse expressed disdain towards captains and masters. Runners, dockside merchants, and smugglers all had their limits concerning shipboard violence.[256]

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[255] *Annual Report of the US Revenue Marine Service* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1891), 51; Peyton O. Abbott, and S. B. Brush, "Business Travel out of Texas during the Civil War: The Travel Diary of S. B. Brush, Pioneer Austin Merchant." *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 96, no. 2 (1992): 259-71. Accessed February 4, 2021. http://www.jstor.org/stable/30240188.

[256] J. Grey Jewell, *Among our Sailors* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1874), 117, 126; *New York Herald*, February 14, 1871.

Despite the various ways that sailors tried to stem the tide of brutality that was endemic in their career, the more frequent reality was that sailors simply accepted regular violence as a part of their job. Violence against their peers was more common than violence against authority. The experiences of two American boys who ran away to sea highlight the casual abuse that sailors experienced. The two boys experienced daily beatings that eventually led to them deserting the ship and fleeing to the American consul for aid. Their experience was by no means unusual. As long as mariners were able to work, casual violence was allowed and even encouraged. Greenhorn seamen, American or foreign, quickly learned to simply deal with abuses on board. Seamen took a coarse pride in the beatings and abuse they received and passed on to the younger sailors. Violence was a natural skill that seafaring men learned for "no boy could become a sailor until he had many a good beating." Those that lasted in the profession often became just as violent and brutal as the officers that they had once despised.[257]

Nor were such sentiments limited to those before the mast. Even officers and engineers maintained that learning seamanship "requires suffering." English, Scottish, and American men were overrepresented in the officer ranks, but were not exempt from suffering at sea. Junior officers were kept perennially short of sleep by their superiors. This was not only due to the short staffing among American vessels, but also due to the perceived personal development that such treatment created. Enduring suffering was an appropriate endeavor, but so too was causing it. Junior officers learned their lessons from their superiors in treating the able seamen as expendable.[258]

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[257] J. Grey Jewell, *Among Our Sailors* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1874), 180.

[258] J. D. Kelley, "An Ocean Steamship: The Ship's Company," *Scribner's Magazine*, Vol. 9, 1891, 545.

One particularly dramatic case highlights the complexities of violence in shipboard life. In 1884, *the Matilda Brooks*, a schooner out of Savannah, Georgia arrived in Santiago de Cuba with crew and cargo. Violence broke out aboard the ship as one of the sailors went on a drunken rampage threatening both the captain and crew. The conflict escalated and the sailor, a German named George Row, eventually slit the throat of the ship's cook. Amazingly, the cook survived. Shortly after the incident, the captain arrived with the Spanish constabulary and managed to subdue the sailor before hauling him to the Spanish jail.

On paper, the case was fairly straightforward. International law was clear that crimes occurring on board a foreign vessel were legally the problem of that nation. A sailor stabbing another sailor on an American ship was a crime for the American courts. This particular case, however, quickly ballooned out of control. The inquiries that followed revealed that the sailor in question was not George Row at all, but a man named William Ketting. Nor was he German, but a veteran of the Newfoundland fisheries. Ketting had used George Row's identity to secure employment aboard the Matilda Brooks. A Savannah crimp, who Ketting claimed he "did not know" had delivered the sailor directly to the ship with no mention of why he was there or who he was replacing. The captain of the Matilda Brooks acknowledged that he had known Ketting was an imposter but had not concerned himself with it as long as he worked adequately.[259]

Out of his depth, the American consul attempted to find guidance from his superiors, but also from other consuls in Cuba. What should have been a straightforward

[259] Affidavit of William Ketting, Aug. 6, 1884. RG 59, Department of State Records, Despatches from United States Consuls in Santiago de Cuba, 1799-1906. Washington: National Archives, National Archives and Records Service, General Services Administration, Reel 9.

jurisdictional issue turned out to be anything but. The realities of liminal imperial spaces demanded a more flexible approach to crime. The French consul advised the construction of a makeshift court, consisting of a merchant, two ship captains, and a Spanish representative, to try Ketting immediately. The composition of this impromptu court is noteworthy in and of itself. It includes those who were knowledgeable regarding the contours of maritime life, but also did not include any of Ketting's presumed peers from before the mast. The Spanish Captain of the Port, for his part, took great delight in declaring that they were not going to get involved in the case. A crime committed aboard an American ship was an American problem.[260]

At the end of the day, the consul dealt with the attempted murder on the part of a sailor in typical fashion; by not dealing with it. Like so many other problems that occurred in liminal port cities, the law served merely as a guideline. With no way to send Ketting back to the United States and hefty prison fees adding up, the American consul simply dismissed charges against Ketting and released him, a freer man than he had been before his imprisonment.

Despite its prevalence, shipboard violence was not always a given. Vessels could avoid the stigma of violence and abuse, especially on smaller vessels. While aboard the *Island Belle,* Muir noted a collegiate, rather than adversarial, atmosphere. The crew of the vessel consisted of only four men, a mate, the captain, and a newfoundland dog, not including Muir himself. Muir described a near perfect civility on board the vessel as it

[260] J. Grey Jewell, *Among Our Sailors*, 1874, 97; Affidavit of Charles Perry, July 26, 1884. RG 59, Department of State Records, Despatches from United States Consuls in Santiago de Cuba, 1799-1906. Washington: National Archives, National Archives and Records Service, General Services Administration, Reel 9.

journeyed from Cuba up the Gulf Coast. The entire crew took meals together at a central table and helped themselves freely to the cargo of oranges, which were loaded unboxed in the hold and on deck. Muir noted "no signs of despotism on the small territory." The captain even offered Muir free room and board on the ship after it had docked in New York and trusted his crew to watch the ship while the two men went ashore.[261]

Labor and the Law

Maritime work required special attention from the law. Nations understood sailors and ships as a vital resource, but one that could not be trusted to take care of itself. The decline of the merchant marine after the Civil War added a new sense of desperation to ongoing legislation. Acts passed in 1872, 1884, and 1896 to try and shore up the nation's merchant marine, but the acts struggled to halt the movement of maritime work away from the country. These laws noted the decline of the seafaring population but blamed a mixture of high construction costs for American steam vessels, the harsh lifestyle customary aboard American vessels, and the low wages paid by foreign ships.

Sailors believed that the law existed to protect shipmasters and ship owners against sailors, not the other way around. Even when they undertook to take captains to court, juries found difficulty believing the tales that coarse, uneducated foreigners brought before them. The more frequently American officers and owners, however, nearly always received the benefit of the doubt. Captains could rely on officers, mates, and owners to support them in court, especially when profit was on the line. In fact,

[261] John Muir, *A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf* (1916), Chapter 8. Accessed November 12, 2022. https://vault.sierraclub.org/john_muir_exhibit/writings/a_thousand_mile_walk_to_the_gulf/chapter_8.aspx.

loyalty to one's superior officer was almost a given since the only route for further advancement was through the captain.[262]

Despite these difficulties, ordinary seamen were still willing to litigate, especially in cases of lost wages. A short delay could be disastrous for masters and owners, given the increasingly slim profits to be found in small scale, independent trade. Sailors oftentimes had little to lose, especially when desperate and the nature of maritime contracts could help sailors as much as owners. Wage disputes were the most commonly heard type of case in the Admiralty Court of Key West. Most typically, as in the case of *Smith et al v Schooner R W Brown*, the onset of disaster heralded future legal difficulties. The *Brown's* master had hired a crew to transport lumber, but the cargo had been blown off in a storm. Consequently, the captain refused to pay his men. The court ruled that the men naturally had a right to be paid for their labor as the contracts were in a dollar amount rather than in a share of the voyage. By the end of the case the master had no choice but to sell his vessel to cover the damages.[263]

Bringing the full force of the law was often difficult, but sailors found informal ways of making their voices heard. Consul and government officials were occasionally willing to listen to sailors if it meant that they could find evidence of fraud or corruption. For consuls at least, complaints from sailors were so frequent that consuls began to see captains as "as a kind of monster" and were cautioned against crediting most sailors' tales. Conversely, captains and ship owners expected government officials to ignore laws and treaties in favor of facilitating commerce. Their disregard for the laws of the land

[262] *Coast Seamen's Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 4, 3; *Savannah Morning News*, July 23, 1888.

[263] J. Grey Jewell, *Among Our Sailors* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1874), 147-149; *Emery A. Smith et al v Schooner R. W. Brown*, Admiralty Court of Key West, 1875.

was frequently predicated on their need for profitable voyages but also on their belief that government officials served the captains, rather than the governments. Consuls complained frequently of their inability to force captains to obey the law. Captains met threats of legal violence with their own threats of physical violence, secure in the knowledge that consuls could do nothing without the aid of the local government.[264]

As the nineteenth century wound to a close, organized labor attempted to make inroads along the coast. The majority of maritime activism focused on the Pacific Coast and the Great Lakes. The Atlantic and Gulf coasts proved tougher nuts to crack. Northern cities such as New York and Boston established large chapters in the late 1880s. These organizations attempted to set standardized wages, increase wages for sailors on both steam and sailing ships, and put an end to abusive practices. Opposition to organization came not only from shipmasters, boardinghouse keepers, and crimps, but also from the so-called Seamen's Friend Society. Word of these organizations quickly spread, since southern ports could reasonably have an interest in such activities.[265]

Organization along the Gulf reached its small peak in the early 1890s. Mariners along the Gulf played a small but active role in organizing maritime laborers. Their initial attempts in the early 1890s were initially successful, at least in New Orleans. Though smaller than either the Pacific or the Great Lakes branches of the sailing union, the Gulf Coast maintained a small cadre of union affiliates. In 1892, the Gulf branch sent

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[264] Report of Consul for Santiago De Cuba, December 31, 1883. RG 59, Department of State Records, Despatches from United States Consuls in Santiago de Cuba, 1799-1906. Washington: National Archives, National Archives and Records Service, General Services Administration, Reel 9; Report of Consul for Santiago De Cuba, July 11, 1895. RG 59, Department of State Records, Despatches from United States Consuls in Santiago de Cuba, 1799-1906. Washington: National Archives, National Archives and Records Service, General Services Administration, Reel 14.

[265] *Proceedings of the Second Annual Convention of the National Seamen's Union of America* (New Orleans, LA, 1893), 9; *The Morning News*, December 28, 1889.

representatives to Chicago to help organize the National Seamen's Union while the North Atlantic branch did not, sending only a telegram. Two years later, one of the Gulf Union representatives, Charles Hagen, a Norwegian sailor who settled in New Orleans, travelled with famed maritime activist Andrew Furuseth to Washington to plead their case on the passage of the Maguire Act designed to protect American sailors from shipping commissioners and boarding house keepers.[266]

Unfortunately for the Gulf Seamen's Union, Hagen turned out to be an untrustworthy leader. He absconded with much of the union's funds and disappeared after a few short years. By 1895 the Gulf was contributing no dues to the union. For the rest of the 1890s, maritime workers along the Gulf did without the influence of the Seamen's Union. Union representatives claimed that "the men sailing on the Gulf Coast are in a deplorable condition, the prey of landsharks and crimps." A few attempts to reorganize largely failed and the leaders of the union decided that the Gulf was not worth the effort. By the end of the century six union representatives trawled the Atlantic coastline, while only one remained active on the Gulf.[267]

The union did not help its cause by limiting membership only to sailors with European backgrounds. African Americans and Chinese sailors were explicitly excluded from Union membership. The exclusion of Chinese sailors was mostly a problem along the Pacific coast, but on the Gulf, African Americans made up a sizeable portion of the

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[266] *Proceedings of the First Annual Convention of the National Seamen's Union of America* (Chicago, IL, 1892), 1; *Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Convention of the International Sailors Union of America* (Milwaukee, WI, 1902), 12; *Hearings before the Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries, On Sundry Bills Relating to the American Merchant Marine, Known as the "Maguire" Bills* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1894), 3.

[267] *Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Convention of the International Seamen's Union of America* (Boston, MA, 1900), 19.

seafaring population, especially in the fishing industries. Grassroots resistance to African-American membership limited the Gulf branch of the union. What few members of the union remained refused to even consider a parallel organization for African-American mariners.[268]

Most Gulf mariners remained on the outside of the tumultuous struggles that their fellows went through. A few men working along the Gulf turned to alternative organizations instead or struck without formal organization, but a Labor Commission Report noted vanishingly few strikes between 1887 and 1894. Instead, coastal sailors joined the Masonic Order, the Odd-Fellows, or the Knights of Pythias to support them during difficult times. Biloxi fishermen struck in 1887. Crab catchers in Maryland struck in 1892. In Pensacola, the fishermen united under the Knights of Labor to negotiate with their employers. They held two strikes in 1893. The strikers first wanted an increase in wages, while the second strike concerned the cost of fishing supplies supplied by fishing companies. The strike went on for only a week before the fishermen were summarily fired. This was the exception rather than the rule, however, and fishermen along the Gulf mostly seemed unsympathetic or ignorant of the labor cause. Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Texas held no strikes that year. In Florida, union activism largely ceased in deference to a new cause, that of Cuban independence. By 1903, the Seamen's Union had managed to reestablish only one small dues paying chapter in Mobile, which enjoyed

[268] *Proceedings of the First Annual Convention of the National Seamen's Union of America* (Chicago, IL, 1892), 5.

slightly higher wages than the rest of the coast. New Orleans, Galveston, and Pensacola all remained outside union influence.[269]

Conclusion

The condition of sailors in the United States slowly improved after the century ended. Sailors' unions had failed to make a dent on the Gulf, but they had gained influence in other parts of the nation. In 1899, Congress, under heavy union pressure, passed the White Act. The act extended sailors' immunity from imprisonment for desertion to foreign ports participating in "the domestic trade." These ports included Mexico, Canada, and all the West Indies. Most workers along the Gulf were now protected. The White Act also reduced the sentence for desertion from three months down to one month, reflecting a freer understanding of maritime labor.[270]

Despite these endeavors, the work along the Gulf Coast remained notoriously brutal and largely based on temporary migrant labor. The Merchant Marine Commission noted six years after the turn of the century that the merchant marine along the Gulf was still dominated by foreign vessels with "almost no American labor." While the commission naturally failed to take fishing, the lumber trade, or even coasting into account, since these industries fell outside its jurisdiction, there is little doubt that the vast majority of maritime work done on the coast was done by marginalized groups. Labor

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[269] George B. Goode, ed., *The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), Part 4, 127; *Tenth Annual Report of the Commissioner of Labor, 1894: Strike and Lockouts, Vol. 1* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1896); *Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Convention of the International Seamen's Union of America* (Milwaukee, WI, 1902), 12; *Proceedings of the Eighth Annual Convention of the International Seamen's Union of America* (New York, NY, 1903), 17; Gary R. Mormino, "Tampa's Splendid Little War: Local History and the Cuban War of Independence," *OAH Magazine of History*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Spring, 1998), 38.

[270] Walter MacArthur, *The Seaman's Contract, 1790-1918: A Complete Reprinting of the Laws Relating to American Seamen, Enacted, Amended, and Repealed by the Congress of the United States* (San Francisco, CA: James H. Barry Co., 1919), 221-222.

activists attempts to reform maritime work along the southern coast largely failed to rejuvenate or nativize the estuarian workplace.[271]

[271] *Report of the Merchant Marine Commission: Together with the Testimony Taken at the Hearings, Vol. 1* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1906), XXVII.

CHAPTER VI – "TEMPTATIONS TO ENGAGE IN": SMUGGLING AND CRIME THROUGH THE ESTUARIAN GULF, 1860-1898

In 1895, noted expansionist Senator Henry Cabot Lodge wrote in his essay "Our Blundering Foreign Policy," "For more than thirty years we have been so much absorbed with grave domestic questions that we have lost sight of these vast interests which lie just outside our borders." This statement, however, failed to account for ongoing ties between the coastal United States and the broader Atlantic world. Sailors and illicit smugglers had long been a part of a transnational (or perhaps sub-national) community of liminal people who were used to moving in and through the official borders of modernizing nation states. Filibusters and insurgents tapped into the same network in pursuit of nationalist impulses. A new exploration of smuggling along the Gulf Coast suggests that the United States was unable to control the informal economic and diplomatic activities that occurred in the liminal spaces occupied by the coastal community.

Smuggling fed American desires for expensive consumer goods while fueling nationalist movements in the Caribbean basin. This chapter argues that smugglers in the second half of the nineteenth century relied on the coastal network of marine workers to bypass national boundaries. Smugglers into the American South hoped to profit from the malleability of the American border along the coast. These men inherited an older tradition of social networking and international trade that facilitated fraudulent exchanges. However, these illicit merchants were not immune to the broader changes sweeping across the nation. Smugglers had to adapt to an increasingly centralized and industrialized maritime environment. In doing so, individual sailors frequently found that

they bore the risks of avoiding the gaze of border officials while sharing in an increasingly small portions of the profit. While small scale, individual, attempts at smuggling continued throughout the late nineteenth century, large scale smuggling operations increasingly became the rule. Sailors were less often the beneficiaries of smuggling so much as assembly line workers, contributing their small share to a complicated web of commerce. Industrialized smuggling adapted well to the rising sentiments of American imperialism. Illicit trade in war materials and people boomed in the prelude to the Spanish American War.[272]

Antebellum Smuggling

Smuggling had long been an American tradition, one in which Americans took a certain pride. Light brigantines, sloops, and ketches regularly made the months long voyage to the Caribbean and other Atlantic ports. Even before the American Revolution, colonial merchants called for free trade with other empires, especially those colonizing the Caribbean. When British authorities failed to give them the economic freedom they desired, they turned to illicit trade instead. Smaller merchants, in particular, were drawn toward illicit enterprises, as the difference between taxed and untaxed goods might make the difference between profit and destitution. The market for cheap luxury goods, especially sugar, drove American seamen toward foreign ports in increasing numbers. Imperial efforts to focus consumption on recognized, British sources pushed many colonists to actively support smugglers as independent businessmen.[273]

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[272] Andrew Wender Cohen, "Smuggling, Globalization, and America's Outward State, 1870-1909." *The Journal of American History* 97, no. 2 (2010): 371–98. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40959765.

[273] Cathy Matson, *Merchants and Empire: Trading in Colonial New York* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 91, 287; Daniel Vickers, *Young Men and the Sea: Yankee Seafarers in the Age of Sail* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 72-74.

During the 1770s, American smugglers became a part of the movement for independence, with broad support from dock side communities. Light quickly moving vessels sailed from most colonial ports, in defiance of imperial rule. Smugglers purchased tea from the Dutch, rather than give in to the odious Tea Act, and the imperial abuse that they thought it represented. Such smugglers were lauded by their shore bound co-patriots, who were not entirely willing to make the transition from tea to coffee. The Townshend Acts and later the Intolerable Acts incited smugglers to sell other illicit goods under the table. Boycotts and nonimportation movements led colonial merchants to flock to smugglers in droves, who could continue to feed the rampant market without giving in to British oppression. In many cases, colonists ostracized those importers who continued to purchase their goods legally, seeing them as traitors to the Revolutionary cause.

Nevertheless, smuggling remained a morally ambiguous trade. Patriots across the American colonies could not decide whether to wholeheartedly embrace smuggling as a patriotic endeavor or excoriate it as a profiteering racket taking advantage of honest Americans in a time of need. Anti-smuggling rhetoric was especially common from members of the upper class, who could more easily weather the economic turmoil of the time. The Second Continental Congress itself debated attaching the "smuggler interest" to the Revolutionary movement, although it reached no clear conclusion on the subject.[274]

Support for smuggling continued along the docks, however, where people not only depended upon the goods that smugglers imported, but also on the industries that sustained smuggling ships. "Mob-rage," as one historian has put it, was often directed

[274] Paul A. Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront: American Maritime Culture in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 148; Cathy Matson, *Merchants and Empire: Trading in Colonial New York* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 301-308.

toward those who attempted to curtail smugglers. When smugglers were apprehended by imperial authorities, colonists did their best to secure their release and punish those responsible. On three separate occasions in 1768, mobs tracked down, tarred, and feathered, British customs informants who had led to the capture of smugglers in Boston and New York. Even forty years after the American Revolution, mobs threatened the government when smuggling ships violated another set of government laws, this time the Jefferson embargo.[275]

Authorities recognized the Gulf Coast as a haven for smugglers and contrabandists throughout the nineteenth century. The reasons for this were multifaceted. The long meandering coastline, frequent barrier islands, and dispersed population created ideal circumstances for would-be smugglers intent on avoiding government authority. Geographic proximity to various ports in the Caribbean also aided illegal trade, as did the plethora of smaller ships and ports dotting the coastline. Finally, southerners and sailors alike found little problems arising from the trade, leading the general population to ignore the violations of the law. Due to these influences, the Key West branch of the Revenue Service developed a reputation for "more excitement and diversity" than any other station, with the possible exception of Alaska, another notorious smuggling haven. The Revenue Service note, however, that the east coast of Florida was almost entirely unwatched, while the entire coastline of Texas had only one revenue cutter patrolling her

[275] Paul A. Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront: American Maritime Culture in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 103, 148-150.

waters. Throughout the nineteenth century, the Gulf Coast was perennially under patrolled by government officials.[276]

During the Civil War, smuggling, in the form of blockade running, became both an economic and military necessity. "King Cotton" had long been an integral part of the South's export economy. Despite southern certainty that withholding cotton would bring Great Britain into the conflict on their side, southerners in general, and the Confederate government, still needed the income that exporting cotton provided if they were to make their vision of an independent slaveocracy a reality. After a short-lived self-embargo, the Confederacy began exporting its cotton once again in 1862. The Union recognized that allowing southern trade to continue would only prolong the conflict. The United States Navy swiftly attempted to enforce a stranglehold on the Gulf States that was only partially successful at best. Confederate supporters regularly attempted to export their cotton via blockade runners. The success of such endeavors was chancy at best, but they were necessary if the Confederate states were going to continue their rebellion.[277]

In this milieu of conflict, oceangoing vessels and the men who crewed them naturally faced great risk by engaging in blockade running. Still, the wartime economy of the South attracted opportunists and venturers to try their hand at avoiding the Union blockade in favor of a quick profit. Many vessels along the Gulf Coast were conscripted

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[276] *Harper's Weekly*, 1892, Vol. 36, 44; *Annual Report of the US Revenue Marine Service* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1881), 10.

[277] The efficacy of the Union blockade remains a subject of debate. Stanley Lebergott has argued that "fewer than ten percent of the runners made more than a single trip" despite the potentially high profits, indicating that the blockade deterred many vessels due to risk. A more recent study has disputed this, showing that many ships attempted multiple runs, though under different names. See Stanley Lebergott, "Through the Blockade: The Profitability and Extent of Cotton Smuggling, 1861-1865." *The Journal of Economic History* 41, no. 4 (1981): 867-88; Bruce Hetherington and Peter J. Kower, "A Reexamination of Lebergott's Paradox about Blockade Running during the American Civil War." *The Journal of Economic History* 69, no. 2 (2009): 528-32.

early in the war by the Confederate or state governments, but these vessels proved incapable of supplying the Confederacy alone, opening the way for private interest in wartime trade. Shipping magnate Charles Morgan, who had previously aided William Walker in his famous filibustering excursion to Nicaragua, contributed several of his packet vessels to the Southern cause through his son-in-law Israel C. Harris, an ardent Confederate supporter. In fact, Morgan played both sides of the war to his own benefit, sending blockade runners to the Confederacy while simultaneously constructing new steam ships for the Union Navy to enforce the very blockade his ships were running.[278]

Nor was Morgan the only contrabandist businessman active in the area. Charles Stillman, the Texas businessman and banker, established his fortune running steamships between Matamoras and the Texas Gulf. Stillman's fleet flew under the neutral Mexican flag, despite his Confederate residency, allowing him to skirt the spotty Union blockade. His depot at Bagdad was one of the primary nodes in the Confederate smuggling network, before continuing overland to Shreveport and across the Mississippi River.

Reflecting the larger demographic changes occurring in the shipping trade, the men crewing blockade runners were increasingly not from the United States. In point of fact, few southerners worked as able sailors on blockade runners. While native born southerners considered the war to be a domestic endeavor, the work of blockade running reflected the broader demography of the sea. Throughout the four-year conflict, most blockade runners flew under the British flag and employed British crews. The protection offered by the crown facilitated illegal trade. Even when union ships captured blockade

[278] Stephen R. Wise, *Lifeline of the Confederacy: Blockade Running During the Civil War* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 107.

runners, they had little recourse other than to confiscate the materials. The smugglers themselves were released in order to avoid diplomatic incidents.[279]

The conflicting authority of the nations interested in the Civil War created a gap that blockade runners exploited. The Union walked a tenuous line in dealing with Civil War diplomacy. Ignoring the threat presented by blockade runners would only extend the conflict longer, but a forceful response could have pushed the British government to more openly support the Confederacy. Instead, the Union relied on its lengthy blockade to capture blockade runners while acknowledging the British right to send its ships where it wanted. The result was that British blockade runners continued to make their runs in the face of Union authority. Such protection naturally encouraged non-British ships to seek out the protection of the crown. Secretary of State Seward recognized the impossibility of halting blockade running under such circumstances. Blockade runners resorted to "every fraud which promises to conceal their true nationality, the unlawful character of their voyage, and the nationality of their vessels."[280]

Additionally, Confederate supporters and profiteers engaged in more prosaic smuggling as well, attempting to sneak goods under the eyes of union officials. The Confederacy lacked the centralization to create government funded blockade runners. Instead, they relied on private endeavors, funded by the ship owners themselves or by consortiums of southern citizens. Smugglers looked to make a profit, and there were more profits to be made in smuggling luxury goods to urban population centers. For

[279] Peter Andreas, *Smuggler Nation: How Illicit Trade Made America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 159.

[280] Quoted in Dean B. Mahin, *One War at a Time: The International Dimensions of the American Civil War* (Washington D. C.: Potomac Books, 2000), 167.

instance, one blockade runner, the *Minho* auctioned off its supplies in port, rather than selling them to the Confederate army. The auctioned supplies included hundreds of barrels and cases of champagne and wine, along the cigars, coffee, teapots, etc. The trade in war materials was profitable but chancy, while feeding southerners desire for consumer goods offered assured profit.[281]

The early capture of New Orleans and the high presence of the Union military along the Mississippi River complicated efforts by plantation owners along the Gulf Coast to export their wares abroad. Despite this, the general method of exportation remained the same, i.e., shipping their goods down the river to New Orleans, where they could be loaded on a seagoing vessel. River boats aligned with the Confederacy continued to travel up and down the river as they had done before the war. While Confederate troops occasionally manned or guarded river boats themselves, more often the labor was outsourced to more experienced maritime workers. As these men travelled along the rivers of the South, they collected cotton from nearby plantations and delivered supplies to Confederate troops. The supplies they delivered not only included war materials, such as medical goods, weaponry, or blankets, but also more prosaic goods. Even as late as 1864, river boats continued to keep the economic possibilities of the Confederacy alive.[282]

Other seagoing vessels attempted to avoid the blockade altogether by shipping goods into Texas or even Mexico, before attempting a lengthy internal voyage. Ships had an easier time dodging the Union blockade by avoiding it altogether, unloading their

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[281] Stephen R. Wise, *Lifeline of the Confederacy: Blockade Running During the Civil War* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 46, 217.

[282] US V. Rob Roy, 1864. FWNARA, New Orleans Circuit Court General Case Files, 1837-1911.

cargo at Matamoras or Brownsville. Such ventures, however, were the exception, not only because of the inordinate amount of time that they took to reach their destination, but also because of the various dangers along the way. War between Mexico and France complicated any attempt to use Matamoras as a free port, while the lawless miles in the Southwest introduced their own hazards, especially bandit attacks. Nevertheless, local officials estimated that as much as eighty percent of the international trade to Matamoras was designed to aid the Confederate endeavor.

Though Union forces did their best to suppress it, smuggling continued along the Gulf Coast after the Civil War. The economic turmoil and destruction of the Civil War created a market for the luxury goods that southerners could no longer afford or gain access to, while southerners themselves looked for alternative means of employment with the collapse of their slaveocracy. Since war materials were no longer required, smugglers turned toward other sources of income. Though smuggled goods ran the gamut, illicit cargoes tended to consist of cigars, tobacco, liquor, and other popular consumables. Much as their predecessors had done in the eighteenth century, smugglers helped fill an important gap in the marketplace.[283]

Postwar Smuggling

In the years following the American Civil War, federal agents and representatives preoccupied themselves with reestablishing the government's primary authority over the economic and diplomatic reach of its citizens. To that end, the federal government passed a slew of treaties with foreign nations, especially its close trading partners. The

[283] Letter to the Mexican Consul, July 13, 1864. FWNARA, Miscellaneous Letters Sent by the Collector, 1863-1866, Box 3.

government's attempt to reassert national authority, most clearly seen in the wave of protectionist tariffs put into place during and after the war, proved little more than a paper tiger along the Gulf. In port cities and shoreside towns, more nebulous ties proved the rule in such spaces. Such ties were naturally varied, including economic, ethnic or ideological, but they often proved far more robust than the legal boundaries that federal agents hoped to enforce.[284]

There were important differences between smuggling in the antebellum years and smuggling after the Civil War. The "Golden Age of Sail" had begun a slow decline in the 1840s and 1850s that only accelerated in the ensuing decades. The Civil War had exacerbated the problem. American vessels had largely been conscripted by either the Union or Confederate government to aid in their respective war efforts. Most of the remaining ships had been sold off to foreign buyers, leaving a drastic lack of domestic shipping in the following years. American ships and sailors were becoming less prevalent on ocean going vessels and becoming less prevalent in illegal trade. For decades, smuggling had been an "American" endeavor, but in the postbellum decades, the situation changed. The ships engaged in smuggling between nations were increasingly foreign ships and the men who did the work were rarely American born. Americans continued to engage in smuggling and were the primary market for smuggled goods, but it was foreign born outsiders who did the legwork.[285]

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[284] Daniel S. Margolies, *Spaces of Law in American Foreign Relations: Extradition and Extraterritoriality in the Borderlands and Beyond, 1877-1898* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 20.

[285] Brian Rouleau, *With Sails Whitening Every Shore: Mariners and the Making of an American Maritime Empire* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 200; Peter Andreas, *Smuggler Nation: How Illicit Trade Made America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 190.

The chief enforcer of these legal boundaries, and one of the most visible arms of the federal government, as historian Andrew Wender Cohen has recently noted, was the United States Customs House. Despite the government's miniscule size compared to more recent times, the Federal government was growing at a rapid pace in postbellum America. No single section of the federal government came under closer scrutiny than the Treasury Department, and consequently the Customs. As the primary guardians of the United States' borders, Customs officers were duty bound to protect the interests of the federal government and the revenue. Their frequent inability to stop groups and individuals from passing through those borders, however, demonstrate the limitations of formalized national authority in an industrializing age.[286]

Some of the difficulty also lay in the notoriously corrupt nature of the Customs Officials themselves. Despite frequent reminders of their sacred duty to the revenue and the nation, accusations of bribery and incompetence were a near constant feature along American dock fronts. One report noted that inspectors were frequently gifted with oranges or bananas while they were aboard incoming fruit ships; harmless perhaps, but at the least it gave the impression of corruption. Other reports detail frequent attempts at bribery by shipmasters and sailors. Officers were not only accused of taking outright pay offs, but several were themselves caught smuggling by taking goods out of warehouses before they had been processed. Such officers were severely punished, as highly visible reminders of the border's permeability. Possibly Customs officers sympathized with smugglers because they came from seafaring backgrounds themselves. The Customs

[286] Andrew Wender Cohen, *Contraband: Smuggling and the Birth of the American Century* (New York: W. W. Norton And Co., 2015), 45.

House required officers to be competent seamen, since they often had to sail out to meet ships or serve on one of the Customs cutters patrolling the coast in the course of their duties.[287]

Additionally, patronage in the Treasury Department meant that some officers were not even fully aware of their duties. In 1868, a special report on the condition of the New Orleans customs house noted over ten officers who were unaware of the full scope of their jobs. A different report criticized other Officers for frequently leaving their posts unannounced, allowing ships to unload their cargo without any federal supervision. In 1874, the federal government abolished the moiety system which had rewarded officers who reported smuggling with a cut of the profits after confiscation. The material reward for capturing smugglers was one of the few motivators for customs officers to do their job. The withdrawn reward created bitterness among officers who avoided their duty even more than they had previously. Overall, it seems that Customs Officers themselves contributed to the permeability of the nation's port cities.[288]

In 1866, the Inspector of Cigars at the Port of New Orleans made a desperate report to his superior concerning smuggling along the Gulf Coast.

> The temptations to engage in smuggling cigars are at present very great. Among the inducements may be enumerated- the comparatively short and safe passage between Havana and other Cuban parts, and the ports on the Gulf of Mexico. The various bayous and estuaries on the coast of Louisiana and Florida affording secure harbors and secret landing places. The great value of cigars with relation to their bulk and consequent facility for concealment in the small vessels sailing into New Orleans. The exceeding difficulty of detection after they are once

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[287] Report from the Treasury Department, October 20, 1868. FWNARA, RG 36, Letters Received, 1867-85, Box 2; Report of Deputy Collector, March 1, 1871. FWNARA, RG 36, Letters Received, 1867-85, Box 8.

[288] Report of Collector, July 22, 1884. FWNARA, Letters from Collector to Surveyor, 1883-84, Box 4; Peter Andreas, *Smuggler Nation: How Illicit Trade Made America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 179.

> transferred from the sea vessel to the lesser craft. . . The general unfriendliness to the government of the inhabitants of the Gulf Coast, affording a quantity of immunity from information to its officials. . . I have incidentally learned that regular organizations in the nature of joint stock companies have been and are forming for the introduction of cigars from Cuba, in violation of the revenue laws.[289]

The inspector's concerns were well warranted, and his suggested solution was simple; Convince Congress to lower the tariff enough that smuggling would not be an attractive profession. This suggestion fell on deaf ears, however, and tariffs remained high for the rest of the century. Consequently, smuggling remained a popular occupation among incoming ships and sailors along the Gulf Coast. Cigars were not the only goods smuggled along the Gulf Coast. Strong liquors, fine silks, diamond, and other valuable, but easily concealable items were illegally imported into the United States. A complicated network of sailors, merchants, and customers maintained the nation's ties abroad, especially to its Caribbean neighbors, despite the best efforts of the federal government.

The customs house officials guarded an estuarian coastline that blurred brown and blue water trade. Though the majority of American seamen had been, and remained throughout the nineteenth century, coastal seafarers, they were by no means isolated from their blue water counterparts, economically or socially. Even without the added impetus of smuggling, brown water sailors regularly encountered their ocean-going brethren as tugboat workers, bar pilots, and salvagers. Even prosaic fishermen had ample

[289] Victor B. Bell to W. P. Kellogg, October 31, 1866. FTWNARA, RG 36, Letters Received, 1804-99, Box 15.

opportunity to spend a few moments conversing with the larger ships as they made their way along the coast to their next port of call.[290]

The trip from the coast to New Orleans, for instance, required the use of small tugboats to pull ships through the swampy terrain and numerous bars to their destination. These tedious journeys allowed smugglers to sell their goods directly to the sailors on the tugs, who endured much less scrutiny upon arriving in the city. Small quantities of liquor or cigars were sold directly by incoming vessels to sailors on the tugs, and more than one accident occurred outside the city due to drunkenness. In one instance, several boxes of brandy had "fallen" from a British ship into the water and were immediately picked up by an approaching tugboat before being transferred to yet another small craft, indicating a previously established network to import illicit goods.[291]

Tow boats and fishing vessels played integral roles in the Gulf Coast smuggling networks. Smaller vessels did not undergo the same scrutiny as ocean going vessels. Thus, smugglers who were on good terms with their coastal brethren could easily drop off illicit cargo before ever coming in contact with official authorities. Some tow boats even went so far as to advise smugglers on the best strategies for avoiding official attention. Some pulled up alongside ocean going vessels and instructed inbound captains to "make [false] manifests after arriving on the bar" in the hope that such documents would pass inspection. In exchange, the vessels received a portion of the cargo as well as

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[290] Alex Roland, W. Jeffrey Bolster, and Alexander Keyssar, *The Way of the Ship: America's Maritime History Reenvisioned, 1600-2000* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2008), 1-2, 110. Daniel Vickers has noted a similar dichotomy between brown and blue water work in Colonial New England as early as the 1670s. Daniel Vickers, *Young Men and the Sea: Yankee Seafarers in the Age of Sail* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 53.

[291] Report of Collector, Dec 29, 1866. FWNARA, Letters Received, 1866-68, Box 1; Report to Collector, February 5, 1869. FWNARA, Letters Received, 1868-1885, Box 3.

securing further interactions between the vessels. There was no international standard for manifests, so captains commonly relied on local sources for the best means of navigating local laws. As long as the Customs officers were not too diligent, which was usually the case, forged manifests passed without comment.[292]

In such a porous environment and in the face of high tariffs, it is no surprise that smuggling reigned. Smugglers not only found lucrative economic opportunities but could take solace in preexisting ties that transcended nationalities. Small scale smuggling was prevalent among both individual sailors and, of course, normal American travelers. Concealing individual boxes of cigars or packages of fine silks was a common way for sailors to garnish their meager wages. Quartermasters and ship foremen were especially suspect in these matters, as they had more opportunities to hide goods around the ship. Though smuggling was not without risk, the rewards, along with a general lack of vigilance on the part of the Customs Office, proved far too tempting for many sailors to pass up.

It was a given that individual sailors engaged in selling personal goods when they arrived in port. Perennially cashless sailors were always on the lookout to make extra money. Sailors sought out their national and ethnic compatriots as ready markets for their wares. The image of a recently arrived sailor attempting to sell cigars on the street corner was its own cliché in the late nineteenth century. Famed journalist Lafcadio Hearn described sailors in New Orleans "seeking those who speak their own tongue" to sell "odorous packages of cigars concealed in their pockets."[293]

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[292] Report to Surveyor, Oct 4, 1869. FWNARA, Letters Received, 1869, Box 5; James R. Jolly to Secretary of State John Sherman, FWNARA, Miscellaneous Letters Received, 1867-1885, Box 21.

[293] Lafcadio Hearn, *Creole Sketches* (1878), 113.

Would-be smugglers engaged in a complicated process to determine which goods to bring into the country and how to dispose of them. The large numbers of cigars and liquor seized by customs inspectors undoubtedly had to do with the high tariffs on such goods, which created a demand for cheaper sources. However, cigars and liquor were also easy to dispose of and difficult to track once they were on shore, making them a prime candidate for smuggling. Most sailors, stewards and officers being the exception, had a limited amount of space in which to conceal illicit cargo, but they could easily hide small merchandise under their bunks or in their personal trunks, permitting them to supplement their cash upon arrival in port. One enterprising, but ultimately unfortunate, sailor, was caught with over three hundred and fifty cigars stuffed in his personal trunk, which was confiscated in its entirety, leaving the sailor without even his personal possessions. Depending on the quality of the cigars, such a venture could easily provide more than a month's wages at market value.[294]

Other sailors were luckier and managed to avoid attention from the authorities. Illegal sale and resale of goods occurred commonly along the waterfront. Sailors used smuggled goods to pay their debts or barter, trusting to be away from the city before they could be caught. Crimps and boarding house owners frequently operated on the edge of legality as a matter of course and were willing to accept goods instead of hard cash, which sailors frequently lacked anyway. Usually, the sailors themselves were able to avoid detection, but those they sold goods too were not always so lucky. One enterprising thief robbed a dockside warehouse of twelve entire barrels of sugar. Rather than hang onto his booty, the thief turned around and sold nine barrels to a coasting ship,

[294] Surveyor's Report, March 27, 1869. FWNARA, Miscellaneous Letters Received, 1869, Box 3.

the *William Murray*. The captain purchased two of the barrels while his mate doubled down and purchased seven. Naturally, both of these men claimed that they had purchased the sugar in good faith. This excuse rang hollow as the thief was not a regular mercer and did not provide the sailors with immunity from the law.[295]

Sailors even engaged in cooperative ventures with other members of the crew to increase their profits, pooling their wages to smuggle more goods. Most vessels relied on the subordinate officers under the captain to oversee the loading and unloading of cargo, while the captain took care of the necessary paperwork. While those petty officers turned a blind eye, the men simply loaded up their smuggled goods alongside the more prosaic cargo and prepared for a voyage as normal. In some cases, sailors invested part of their wages into smuggled goods, becoming small scale merchants themselves. If and when the goods were sold, each sailor would receive his share of the profits.

The Captain of the SS *Margaret* found himself in serious legal trouble when a large shipment of cigars was found aboard his vessel, hidden among the legal cargo. Upon investigation, nearly the entire crew, excluding the captain and his first officer, had decided to turn the voyage to their own profit. The crew was able to keep the knowledge of their venture quiet until they arrived in New Orleans and were in the midst of unloading when their first officer noticed that the ship had arrived with far more goods than they had officially set out with. The captain, first officer, and customs officers investigated and discovered the extent of the conspiracy. With the aid of the

[295] *Galveston Daily News,* October 30, 1889.

quartermaster, the crew had purchased a large lot of cigars in Havana. One sailor confessed that he was "interested to the extent of 1000 cigars."[296]

If enough sailors signed on to the venture there was little that the captain could do, especially if they managed to recruit some of the officers to their cause. Though officers ostensibly tried to keep their sailors in line, in practice they had difficulty controlling their activities. Captains complained bitterly of their inability to control their sailors both at sea and in port. Sailors saw smuggling as one of their rights and privileges. It was an easy way to squeeze a few extra dollars out of their work. The economic difficulties that sailors frequently dealt with made the inclination toward smuggling all the more apparent. They regarded the runners that carried smuggled goods as friends and "would become mutinous at any orders to prevent them from boarding the vessel. Sailing was a job, and most sailors did not turn up their nose at the opportunity to make some money on the side or ease their shore lives. [297]

In some cases, sailors had no choice but to turn to smuggling in order to make ends meet. Landlords, shipping agents, so called "crimps," and frequently their own captains engaged in predatory practices to keep sailors tied to them through debt, ensuring a steady supply of income and services. The *Sailors Magazine and Seamen's Friend* accused such men of coercing sailors to engage in smuggling through a variety of threats, both physical and financial. Landlords and crimps "aided by sailors whom they

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[296] Petition of J. Baker, May 26, 1872. FWNARA, Miscellaneous Letters Received, 1867-1885, Box 8.

[297] "An American Act for the Protection of Seamen," *Sailor's Magazine and Seamen's Friend*, Vol. 43, September 1871, 259; US Consul William Newton Adams to Secretary of State Daniel Webster, January 7, 1852, RG 59, Department of State Records, Despatches from United States Consuls in Santiago de Cuba, 1799-1906. Washington: National Archives, National Archives and Records Service, General Services Administration. Reel 4.

have duped into their service" loaded goods and people into "runners," small boats sent alongside the larger ships before they reached port, thereby avoiding the official gaze of customs officers all together. One runner was apprehended with over thirty cases of coffee and liquor while crossing the Mississippi river.[298]

Sailors drafted into illegal trade had few options available to them, even if they were inclined to turn their employers over to the law. They either had to go along with the operation, inviting the risk that entailed, or invite the risk of a lengthy investigation. Regardless of the outcome of that investigation, any sailor who reported their employer was unlikely to find more work. Ironically, the legal system was not disposed to believe a sailor who claimed that his captain had broken the law. Regardless of the behavior of the captain, a sailor who turned on him "for a fault of the captain" was "lower than the meanest cur" and "biting the hand that fed him." The fact that any sailor who attempted to bring the ship to the attention of the authorities was also an accomplice did not help their case.[299]

The relationship between sailors and smuggling changed as the size of the endeavor grew. In the years following the Civil War smuggling became an increasingly "corporatized" industry in which large scale operations, complete with contacts in multiple port cities and nations, dominated illegal trade. Small scale smuggling persisted as a way for individual sailors to garnish their meager wages, but industrial seafarers

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[298] "An American Act for the Protection of Seamen," *Sailor's Magazine and Seamen's Friend*, Vol. 43, September 1871, 259; Surveyor's Report, Nov 5, 1868. FWNARA, Miscellaneous Letters Received, 1868, Box 2.

[299] US V. Schooner Mai, 5206, Fifth Circuit Court, 1866; US V Steamship City of Mexico, M1360, Admiralty Final Record Books, 1829-1911, Washington, National Archives, National Archives and Records Administration.

were increasingly cut out of the profits generated by defrauding port authorities. Corporate smugglers imported drugs, in the form of opium, illegal Chinese laborers, large amounts of tobacco, and sugar. While the former captured the attention of the West Coast, the latter were of primary concern along the Gulf. Large scale smuggling differed from small scale smuggling in that the sailors may or may not share in the profits of the voyage.

It was the organized rings, "in the nature of joint stock companies," that represented the true threat to the national authority and help reveal the porousness of the United States' borders after the Civil War. Entire mercantile firms engaged in smuggling to evade high tariffs and maximize profit. One such venture between three separate Louisiana businesses was discovered in 1870 landed on Weeks Island on the southern coast of Louisiana. W. C. Sickles, the firm of Price, Hine, and Tupper, and a Mr. Weeks, who owned the ship and land involved, ordered 500 cases of strong liquor and nearly forty barrels filled with cigarettes and cigars from Havana. In this instance, a local Customs officer discovered the delivery and sent a hasty letter to New Orleans, not trusting the local telegraph office since he believed the men there were in on the conspiracy. The Revenue Cutter *Wilderness* did locate and confiscate the goods, but few consequences fell on the men involved. Two years later Price, Hine, and Tupper were still advertising their wares in New Orleans newspapers at "reduced prices."[300]

Nor did the networks end with the arrival of goods on the shoreline. Smuggling networks were highly complicated affairs, reaching deep into the economies of port

[300] Special Deputy Collector to Collector, July 21, 1870. FWNARA, Letters Received, 1868-1885, Box 6; Times-Picayune, January 25, 1872

cities. The safe delivery of goods upon American soil was only the first step in illicit trade networks as well as any of the more official routes. Carters and longshoremen brought smuggled materials away from their shadowy drop off points into the city proper. Smugglers required access to warehouses to store off-the-books goods until it was time to sell or ship them. Then smugglers could load the goods onto reputable transportation, including flatboats heading up the Mississippi and regular locomotive shipments. Once inside the border, access to the American heartland was virtually assured from St. Louis or Chicago.[301]

Industrialization and Crime

The connection between steamships and steam powered locomotives was an obvious one to Americans concerned with smuggling. It only made sense for illicit importers to try and relocate their goods as far as possible to avoid detection. Businesses which owned both railroads and steamships, which accounted for many of them, could easily keep their unofficial trade in-house. In New Orleans, transportation magnate Charles Morgan ran a regular set of steamship lines along the Gulf Coast, Havana, and Mexico. His ships regularly unloaded in New Orleans and Houston for further shipping along the Louisiana and Texas Railroad. Perhaps due to his involvement in blockade running during the Civil War, customs officials frequently scrutinized Morgan's vessels.

[301] In one particular case, four separate carters, caught by New Orleans officials in a single night, confessed that they had been hired by someone "who they did not know" to collect more than ninety bottles of strong liquor from a landing point below the city. The carters understood that they were to take the liquor to the Lower Ward Railroad Depot to "a person" who would pay them for their services. Though the carters' reticence to identify their employer is entirely understandable, the link with broader rail services remains evident. US V 90 Demijohns of Liquor, 5207, Fifth Circuit Court, 1866.

Even "industrialized" smugglers relied on local ships and experts to make their mission successful. The task of bringing goods from sea to shore without attracting attention required local expertise, which pilots and fishermen possessed in abundance. The practice of moving cargo from blue-water ships to smaller vessels before actually making for the shoreline was a practical one, dividing the cargo as well as handing it off to local experts. The Revenue Service noted the expertise of local sailors while attempting to hire their own pilots, equally expert in local knowledge. The Service continually struggled to catch the "fast sailing craft" that smugglers employed. The Revenue Marine noted that pilots' "intimate acquaintance with the configuration of our jagged coast" was essential to capturing smugglers and aiding wrecked vessels. Familiarity with a given stretch of coast only came from long years living upon that coast and it went without saying that smugglers possessed guides of equal proficiency. Even into the twentieth century, the sponge vessels of Tarpon Springs Florida maintained a connection to an "alien smuggling network" between the United States and Cuba. One such sponge fisher, Sotiros Targakis, was involved in smuggling goods, but also people looking to enter the United States illegally. These would be immigrants who successfully used his vessels to reach the Florida interior could use the same railways that smuggled goods relied on, disappearing into the interior in short order.[302]

Smuggling outside of the Gulf Coast followed a similar pattern. Ships, merchants, and sailors created a vast web of illicit trade across the Atlantic world. The

[302] *Annual Report of the US Revenue Marine Service* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1872), 18; Lisa Lindquist Dorr, "Bootlegging Aliens: Unsanctioned Immigration and the Underground Economy of Smuggling from Cuba during Prohibition," *The Florida Historical Quarterly,* vol. 93, no. 1 (2014), 45.

complications that affected more prosaic forms of shipping applied to smuggling as well. It was, perhaps, more important for merchants and ship owners engaged in smuggling to keep tabs on and provide directions to their subordinates. One Spanish merchant, Juan Jose Murga, owner of the Spanish Brig *Purissima Concepcion* (sic), provides crucial insight into the nature of smuggling during the late nineteenth century. Murga sent detailed instructions to his captain, Thomas Garcia, regarding the purchase and consequent smuggling of tobacco from Havana.

Upon arriving at Havana, Garcia was told to borrow the necessary funds from a local merchant house "without telling them for what purpose." The smuggler then bought cigars and tobacco from four or five different merchants, both knowing and unknowing, before concealing the cargo aboard ship. Garcia employed the aid of a local guide, Juan A Murga, who just happened to be the ship owner's nephew. This Murga acted as a knowledgeable agent in Havana to assist in his uncle's illicit business, reflecting traditional merchant practices and demonstrating the intricate nature of smuggling networks.

The *Concepcion* then travelled to New Orleans to pick up a cargo of wooden staves as cover for the voyage. Unfortunately for Murga and Garcia, the short interlude in the United States became much more complicated when Customs officers found the tobacco concealed in a hidden room behind the captain's cabin. After a failed attempt to bribe the customs officers, a common practice, Garcia acquiesced to the officer's orders and confessed to smuggling. The United States confiscated the tobacco and the damning letter from Murga. Ironically, the letter, which definitively implicated Murga in his captain's intention to smuggle, proved to be their saving grace. Murga had explicitly

written that the cargo was bound for Spain, rather than the United States, thereby placing it just on the right side of legality as far the courts were concerned.

Large scale smuggling rings opened the door to transport more than luxury consumables. Bulk goods such as sugar, salt, and cotton, usually well outside the sphere of small-scale smuggling, became profitable at a larger scale. Of particular import in New Orleans was a rise in sugar fraud. Due to the sheer scale of sugar importation, only large import companies could engage in the practice of degrading sugar with an eye to deceive federal officials and import their product more cheaply. This was usually done by burning a small portion of the sugar and mixing it with the rest or otherwise coloring the large bags to give the impression of lower quality. In other instances, the sugar plantations that operated along the southern coast provided the necessary cover to bring in foreign sugar. Though estimating the scale of sugar fraud is naturally difficult, a single case brought before the Federal Court, alongside a trio of others from the same shipping company, calculated that one shipload of degraded sugar robbed the government of more than $45,000. The other two shiploads owned by the same company and engaged in the same trade contained nearly six times as much cargo, with the appropriately increased penalty.[303]

Sugar was hardly unique in defrauding the customs service. Fishing vessels along the Gulf also misrepresented the quality of their goods. Those vessels suffered less scrutiny than international ships, though both products were theoretically weighed and valued as well. In Key West and Apalachicola, low quality sponges made regular entry

[303] "From New Orleans," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 2, 1869; "The Customhouse Ku Klux," *New Orleans Democrat*, June 9, 1876; "Seizure of Sugar and Molasses," *New Orleans Republican,* August 19, 1870.

into the market. If they were willing to make the voyage, spongers could also simply harvest inferior sponges from the coasts of the Bahamas, Mexico, or Cuba. Other methods of fraud were easily accomplished even by smaller vessels. Sponges were typically sold by dry weight, and failure to dry them completely was against the law. Wet sponges naturally weighed more however, creating a gap that canny ship masters could exploit. Sponge dealers soon began inspecting the sponges to make sure that they were dried, so Florida fishermen developed an alternative approach, mixing the sponges with dried sand to increase the weight. Plausible deniability was easy as the sponges were cured on the beach anyway and the amount of sand required to double the weight was "so small that its presence in the sponge might almost seem to be a natural result of the curing."[304]

In these circumstances able seamen could usually avoid direct conflict with border officials, assuming they were aware of the illegal trade at all. Bribery happened along the dockside, rather than in the hold. The patronage that dominated American politics and economics created many opportunities for graft and influence to eclipse the rule of law. Capitalists and importers used their influence to convince customs officials to look the other way, oftentimes without even the necessity of a bribe to oil the gears of commerce. Weighers, surveyors, and inspectors were tasked with making sure that the government took its cut of imported goods and were frequently informed of what clues to look for. Nevertheless, the increase of steam driven trade, and more common incentives toward corruption, frequently persuaded them to look the other way. Importers paid

[304] George B. Goode, *ed., The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), Part 5, vol. 2, 828.

entire customs houses openly to move goods through the national boundary. As postwar positions became scarce, Customs officers had to account for an exponentially increasing trade in the face of a constantly decreasing workforce. The numerous opportunities for graft, and the degree of corruption among both civil and military authorities, made a mockery of earnest attempts to enforce federal statutes.[305]

Customs frauds of this nature oftentimes ignored the seafaring labor force entirely. With wages no longer tied to the sale of the cargo, sailors had less concern for the contents of the vessel. Steamship lines made large circuits across the Caribbean and Atlantic with flurries of activity at each stop. Packages marked for different merchants littered the holds of large steamships in a never-ending whirl of commerce. Fraudulent labels and incorrect packaging meant little to sailors engaged in keeping the mercantile behemoths moving toward their destinations. Even the captains and officers of large steam liners did not know the contents of their cargo. Merchants often recorded cargo as simply "merchandise" both to evade high tariffs and also to more quickly speed their goods to its destinations.[306]

The industrialization of illegal trade also contributed to the "proletarianization" of the seafaring labor force. Maritime transportation became increasingly corporatized, focusing on large bulk carriers rather than smaller vessels. While sailors could still

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[305] Such attempts were not necessarily subtle. One American merchant operating in Cuba claimed that "his influence in the New York Customs House could secure the entry" of his goods without trouble directly to the US Consul. In this he was proven correct, as the consul was ordered to drop the matter. US Consul Otto Ramirez to Assistant Secretary of State George L Rives, February 8, 1889, RG 59, Department of State Records, Despatches from United States Consuls in Santiago de Cuba, 1799-1906. Washington: National Archives, National Archives and Records Service, General Services Administration. Reel 10; U. S. Congress, House, Testimony Taken by the Select Committee Appointed to Investigate the Conduct of Federal Officers at New Orleans, 44th Congress, 1st Session, 1876, 90-97, 323-325.

[306] U. S. Congress, House, Testimony Taken by the Select Committee Appointed to Investigate the Conduct of Federal Officers at New Orleans, 44th Congress, 1st Session, 1876, 275.

smuggle small quantities of goods in their private possession, the ability to make use of the ship's hold in pursuit of personal profit was no longer feasible, even among coasting vessels. Sailors were increasingly cut out of the smuggling process and from the potential profit that it generated. Bribes and pay offs occurred on shore, not at sea, increasing the profits of dockside laborers rather than seafarers.[307]

Even so, sailors did not work without risk. "Breaching cargo" was common enough to have its own technical term, and suspicious captains had to watch their own crew carefully. Perishables such as liquor could vanish without a trace, but hard goods required sailors to hide them until the ship reached port. Merchants whose goods went missing or were confiscated were quick to blame the sailors for their trouble, hoping to receive compensation from the ship owners, rather than pay the fines imposed by the government. Given the general assumption that sailors were easily tempted and lacking in morality, it was not a stretch to believe that they were inclined toward theft. Merchants caught with smuggled goods were quick to lay the blame at the feet of deceptive sailors who lied about the origin of the goods. Lack of evidence often unraveled these accusations as it was impossible, without eyewitnesses to the contrary, to prove that a sailor had stolen cargo while at sea. In other cases, the question of scale exonerated them, as no sailor could possibly make off with dozens of crates containing large quantities of cotton or sugar.[308]

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[307] For the "proletarianization" of the maritime labor force, see Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Alex Roland, W. Jeffrey Bolster, and Alexander Keyssar, *The Way of the Ship: America's Maritime History Reenvisioned, 1600-2000* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2008), 227.

[308] "Conduct of Federal Officers at New Orleans," Index to reports of Committees of the House of Representatives, 535; *Savannah Morning News*, May 11, 1884.

The dynamics of smuggling changed when an entire ship was chartered for illegal purposes. Tramp steamers and coastal sailing vessels could ensure stricter secrecy regarding smuggling than large steam liners. Fishing vessels served remarkably well as smuggling ships in their own right. The placid waters of the Caribbean and the proximity of nearby islands made it easy for small schooners and barkentines to travel down the Florida coast to Cuba, pick up a cargo, and return. Should any governmental gaze fall upon them while they were travelling, they simply had to actually go fishing to throw off suspicion. Such voyages ultimately relied on the discretion of the crew to remain unnoticed. Moving an entire shipload of cargo was rarely a quiet matter, and sailors were not known for isolating themselves while on leave. Nevertheless, general mistrust of the marine population made that a simple matter few sailors trusted the law enough themselves to report their employer.[309]

Filibustering

Most notable of these types of voyages were the numerous filibustering attempts originating in the United States during the nineteenth century. Though the most famous filibustering attempts occurred before the Civil War, they continued in the decades afterward. However, the nature of filibustering had changed. Individuals no longer set out on voyages designed to forcefully bring territory into the United States. Instead, filibustering became its own industrialized export economy. Ship owners and investors sought to maximize their profit from selling war materials to nationalist movements across the Caribbean basin. Nationalist movements, for their part, promised favorable

[309] "Smugglers from Cuba," *The Morning News*, August 9, 1889. *Savannah Daily Evening Recorder*, June 18, 1879.

investments once they were victorious, opening up their nations to American economic influence. Though filibusters operated in several Caribbean nations, the most common filibustering destination was nearby Cuba. Filibusters tapped into the coastal community's smuggling network before war materials even left the United States for their journey to Cuba. Between 1895 and 1898 filibusters conducted more than twenty-six successful voyages from the United States to Cuba.[310]

Since war materials were not easily concealed, nationalists looking to resupply in the United States had to avoid suspicion before their journeys even began. They were supported by local businessmen, sympathetic government officials, and everyday southern coastal dwellers in their actions. Jose Marti's initial voyage in 1895 was supported by prominent Fernandina businessman Nathaniel Barnett Borden, also vice consul for Spain, Norway, Sweden, the UK, Uruguay, and Brazil. Borden owned a mercantile company, had its own warehouse and dock, and engaged in the shipping business with Cuba, the West Indies and other locations. The deputy collector of customs in Key West, Ramon Alvares, was a known friend of the Cuban revolutionaries. Alvares did not explicitly evade his duty, but he regularly provided filibustering ships with extra time to make their voyages and dispose of incriminating cargo before he impounded the suspect vessels. One batch of filibusters had actually concealed themselves and 28 boxes of "rifles, swords, machetes, pistols and cartridges, and knapsacks" in the back room of a local cigar dealer before secreting themselves aboard their ship to journey to Cuba. The

[310] John Mason Hart, *Empire and Revolution: The Americans in Mexico since the Civil War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 10, 45, 62; Stephen H. Halkiotis, "Guns for 'Cuba Libre': An 1895 Filibustering Expedition from Wilmington, North Carolina," *The North Carolina Historical Review*, vol. 55, no. 1 (January, 1978), 75.

group had planned to pick up men in Florida before heading to the Cuban coastline and unloading the cargo. In this instance, however, the conspirators were caught by Pinkertons, tipped off by the Spanish Consul, before they could leave American waters.[311]

Other filibusterers were luckier, however, traversing the coastal waters to Cuba and other revolutionary hot spots right under the noses, and occasionally the eyes, of government agents. While many would be soldiers of freedom did travel to fight in the conflicts, most filibustering expeditions consisted of supplies more than men. Disguising the contraband goods in nearly the same methods that smuggling rings had used proved an effective tactic. One southern pilot described to newspaper correspondents that he was able to slip past American cruisers by concealing the contraband supplies underneath a load of fruit and even then "they kept such a close watch on us that we didn't dare to breathe." Once out of American waters the remainder of the trip passed peacefully, and the ship was able to unload its martial cargo in short order. Members of the party jumped ship aboard a skiff near Key West, while the ship made its way back to Brunswick in presumed anonymity.[312]

Filibusters used a revolving door of ships to arrange for successful voyages, most of which were based out of southern ports. *Juntas* raised money for the purchase of both supplies and ships. In 1896, the two most famous filibustering vessels, the *Three Friends*

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[311] "Raid by Uncle Sam," *Chicago Tribune*, August 21, 1895; Richard V. Rickenbach, "Filibustering with the Dauntless," *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 4 (April, 1950), 249; Antonio Rafael dela Cova, "Fernandina Filibuster Fiasco: Birth of the 1895 Cuban War of Independence," *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, vol. 82, no. 1 (Summer, 2003), 19-20.

[312] "What Filibusters Have Cost the United States Navy," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 14, 1897.

and the *Commodore,* had both gained sufficient attention that they were no longer useful. The two ships languished in Jacksonville and Florida, respectively under close government watch. Instead, the Cuban Junta raised $30,000, mostly from Tampa and Key West cigar makers, for the purchase of the *Dauntless,* a speedy tugboat operating out of Brunswick, Georgia. The *Junta* coordinated with a Georgia business owner to claim the ship's title. The man would receive $10,000 from the *Junta* for each successful landing. The *Dauntless* made three consecutive trips to the Cuban coastline delivering cargo valued at $110,000 and seventy-five men in short order. The ship went on to make numerous other voyages in 1896 and 1897, often with the tacit permission of local customs officers.[313]

Occasionally the same ships were involved in both filibustering and more prosaic smuggling. One steamship, the *City of Mexico*, which made regular journeys between Vera Cruz, Havana, New Orleans, and New York, was caught smuggling goods into New Orleans in 1879. This did not deter it, however, and the same ship was caught again six years later loaded down with arms and ammunition, Cuba being the eventual destination. A decade later, the *Joseph Oteri*, named after the owner, a New Orleans fruit importer, sent arms and ammunition to the Honduran government in 1892. Ironically, Oteri later sued for damages on the grounds that his ship had been captured by Honduran insurgents and that he had not had any intention of engaging in arms smuggling. While his suit was

[313] Richard V. Rickenbach, "Filibustering with the Dauntless," *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 4 (April, 1950), 236-248; H. S. Rubens, *Liberty: The Story of Cuba* (New York, 1932), 141.

eventually successful, after his death, the case nevertheless shows the ease by which instruments of war could travel in the Caribbean basin.[314]

Latin American nationalists partially funded their resistance efforts through smuggling as well. The filibustering ships that arrived loaded down with military supplies frequently returned with an entirely different cargo. Once again, tobacco played an important role as an illicit export to such an extent that "every Cuban camp. . . has been growing a batch for years." The proceeds from such trips could be used to outfit yet another load of war supplies, creating a reasonably steady commercial loop. Though it is difficult to estimate how much tobacco was sent from Cuba in this way, the Customs House of New Orleans did seize 3,050 cigars from a single ship, the *William H. Swan*, in 1898. Officers also discovered abundant war materials, including 2,500 rifle cartridges, and three brass cannons.[315]

The goods smuggled into the United States by nascent nationalists followed much the same trajectory as those smuggled by less idealistic merchants. Porters moved goods around port cities, warehouses stored them for weeks or even months, and would be purchasers came to peruse them. The case of a young Cuban man named Albert Saville, or Savinne, provides a clue about the ultimate destination of Cuban cigars smuggled during the 1890s. Saville was arrested in 1896 for selling unstamped cigars on the streets of New Orleans. When brought before the court he claimed to have purchased the cigars from a man standing outside a Chinese restaurant and that he did not know his name.

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[314] "Takes Smart Work," *Atlanta Constitution*, July 19, 1896; Collector's Report, November 6, 1879. FWNARA, Letters Received, 1879-80, Box 5; *Times Picayune*, December 18, 1885; *Times Picayune,* July 6, 1892.

[315] "Smuggling in Cuba," *Washington Post*, January 18, 1899; Report of Special Deputy Collector, November 23, 1898. FWNARA, Letters from Collector to Surveyor, 1898-1899. Box 9.

Saville was promptly released, and the young man returned to his illicit business. Unbeknownst to Saville, however, the authorities had only released him so they could follow him to the source of the cigars. Saville proceeded to a saloon, bought more smuggled cigars, and was arrested once again. Saville's testimony led the Customs Agents to an entire warehouse full of unstamped cigars, sold by peddlers such as Saville on the streets of New Orleans. Saville may not have been directly involved with Cuban Revolution, but while in custody he asked about the rumors swirling around the prison regarding the death of Antonio Maceo. Upon hearing of the Revolutionary's demise, Saville claimed that if he could just get $100 for bail he would "be in Cuba in a day or two."[316]

Filibustering expeditions increased the risk to sailors, already working in a hazardous job. On the surface, filibustering voyages promised little in the way of material rewards outside their everyday wages. Sailors were understandably reluctant to engage in voyages that not only threatened their health, but their freedom. The *City of Mexico*'s second filibustering voyage in 1885 was notably cut short when the entire crew rose, *en masse* to report their own officers to federal official for engaging them in a filibustering voyage to Honduras. Though the authorities were inclined to disbelieve a single sailor reporting on his officers, the presence of nearly thirty crew members convinced local authorities that the vessel was up to no good. Napoleon Broward, captain of the infamous *Three Friends* kept the same crew for the duration of his ship's participation in the Cuban Rebellion. Broward's crew is noteworthy precisely because it was so exceptional. The *Dauntless*, for instance, suffered a temporary setback when six

[316] "A Cigar Traffic," *Times-Picayune*, December 10, 1896.

Jamaican crew members testified to its work before the Collector at Fernandina. The ship was charged with violating the neutrality laws and released only after a $7,000 bond. Crewmembers of the *Laurada* also testified before an American court, though the *Laurada* was eventually let off the hook.[317]

Much like their blockade running forebearers, sailors found it prudent to invoke plausible deniability when filibustering voyages came into contact with legal resistance. In the presence of soldiers and weaponry, sailors frequently claimed that they had been forced or coerced to aid filibusterers against their will. During the Ten Years War, one sailor and one passenger, both aboard the Schooner *Grapeshot,* either volunteered or were kidnapped by filibusterers landing on the northern coast of Cuba in 1870. The two men were arrested and put on trial by the Spanish courts. In another instance, three sailors aboard the schooner *Shaver* (Or *Shorter*) participated in a minor filibustering voyage in 1884, conveying Carlos Aguera Fundora, thirty would be freedom fighters, and a cargo of muskets, powder, and cutlasses to Cuba. The ship set sail from Key West slipped past revenue cutters, dispatching the crew in Matanzas, then simply turned around and returned to Key West, where the ship was immediately impounded. The three sailors who returned aboard the vessel, none of whom were the master or officers, all claimed to have been forced to steal the ship by Aguera Fundora and his cohort. While a thin excuse, this was enough to convince the United States courts to release two of the three sailors. It was also enough to convince the courts that the actual captain and officers had nothing to do with the innocent, which released the ship from seizure. Only one man, a

[317] Richard V. Rickenbach, "Filibustering with the Dauntless," *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 4 (April, 1950), 238; H. S. Rubens, *Liberty: The Story of Cuba* (New York, 1932), 156.

Cuban sailor named Diaz, was found guilty of breaking neutrality laws. Even Frederick Funston, a supporter of Cuban independence and occasional filibuster, acknowledged that the crews did not always know what was going on. The crew of the *Dauntless* were "just crew, and they look alike the world over."[318]

Though the smuggling trade was beneficial to Cuban Revolutionaries and profitable for the ships involved in illegal trade, it was also a direct threat to the United States' authority and safety. This was not only because the United States was not getting taxes from the goods, but also because unsupervised entry into the nation was a threat to public health. In 1897, when yellow fever swept through New Orleans, southern ports deployed haphazard quarantines to try and contain the epidemics, but often only after the disease had already reached them. Steamships were diverted to other ports along the coast, most notably Galveston and Mobile. While this increased trade through the two cities, it naturally introduced the disease and spread it more quickly. The yellow fever epidemic of 1897 brought the southern economy to a grinding halt and sent shock waves throughout the national economy. By the time it receded 42 towns in ten states had been stricken with the disease.[319]

Once the crisis had passed, investigators discovered that the origin point of the 1897 epidemic was not New Orleans, though the city was the first major population center hit. Rather, the first American cases of the disease occurred one hundred miles to

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[318] US V Schooner CMSI Shavers, 697, Admiralty Court of Key West, 1884; *Weekly Floridian*, April 22, 1884; *Palatka Daily News*, July 03, 1884; Frederick Funston, "To Cuba as a Filibuster," *Scribner's Magazine*, Vol. 48 (1910), 313.

[319] Mariola Espinosa, "The Threat from Havana: Southern Public Health, Yellow Fever, and U.S. Intervention in the Struggle for Cuban Independence, 18978-1898," *The Journal of Southern History* 72, no. 3 (2006): 541-568.

the east. Federal medical investigators traced the epidemic to Ocean Springs, Mississippi, specifically a hotel known to harbor Cuban Revolutionaries. Vacationers from across the South, most notably New Orleans and Mobile, returned home from Ocean Springs in the summer of 1897 with the disease as a silent passenger. In order to prevent panic, doctors and health officials repressed knowledge of the sickness, thereby allowing it to spread without warning. Significantly, Ocean Springs was used by Cuban smugglers as a haven to drop off smuggled contraband and people. An investigation by the United States Marine Hospital Service found that patient zero of the 1897 outbreak was Thomas Shannahan, who owned a hotel and boarding house in Ocean Springs and had recently travelled outside the country. Other medical experts contended that Cuban filibusters had introduced the diseases to Ocean Springs directly. Either way, Shannahan's boarding house was a known meeting place for Cuban sympathizers on their way to the war-torn island. One of the first people to fall victim to the sickness was the son of Mrs. Gonzalez, a Cuban expat and patriot.[320]

Illicit trade and the dangers it posed to the nation became driving motivators for American intervention in Cuban independence. Not only did smuggling make a mockery of border enforcement and public health, but it also "subjected the United States to great effort and expense in enforcing its neutrality laws." Stopping Americans from trading with their neighbors was impossible, and the cost of patrolling the meandering miles along the Gulf was high. Nearby conflicts, from which filibusterers could easily profit

[320] J. H. White, "True Origin of the Epidemic of 1897," New York, January 29, 1898, *Annual Report of the Supervising Surgeon-General of the Marine-Hospital Service of the United State for the Fiscal Year 1898* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1899), 536-539; Arthur Nolte, "Answer to Dr. Walter Wyman's Communication in the New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal of March, 1906" in *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal*, Vol. 58, 11 (1906), 887-890.

"constrained" the United States to "police our own waters and watch our own seaports in prevention of any unlawful act in aid of the Cubans." This cost had quickly proven too high, if not too futile. Instead, the United States would make its first outwardly expansionist move in decades in 1898 with the Spanish American War, laying *de facto* claim to the smuggling haven closest to the American border.[321]

The "constraint" to enforce its own border controls was hardly a recent problem, however. Smuggling was an American tradition and smuggling along the Gulf Coast was a regional pastime for both pleasure and profit. Sailors and merchants connived regularly for mutual benefit by bringing in valuable goods into the country without attracting official attention. The closeknit community along the Gulf made this easy and even border officials were occasionally in on the schemes. Throughout the Gilded Age, Americans indulged in smuggling personal items as they travelled outside the country. Upper class women were particularly noted as smuggling fine silks and jewelry, but they were hardly unusual. Most travelers attempted to inveigle small items through the border. These efforts were usually harmless, but they defrauded the government of legally authorized tax income and ignored government authority.

Conclusion

The burden of enforcing its own borders provided a weak justification for war, though it was accompanied by other more dramatic charges. The Spanish American War marked a turning point for the United States as it asserted itself as an imperial power. Though smuggling along the Gulf Coast continued after the Spanish American War, the

[321] William McKinley, *Message to Congress Requesting a Declaration of War with Spain,* April 11, 1898.

imperial mission changed its shape. Self-Smuggling and illegal immigration increased, while smuggling of war materials practically vanished. This was due in part to the fact that Cuba and Puerto Rico now fell under the Jones Act and were protected by the same coasting laws as other port cities. Furthermore, a boom in the shipping industry itself meant that sailors enjoyed a brief golden era that would last until the advent of World War I. Both of these considerations had faded away in a few decades before prohibition brought about a resurgence of smuggling along the Gulf Coast. Then, as before, the smugglers turned to older traditions and older networks of illicit trade in the name of profit.[322]

[322] Lisa Lindquist Dorr, "Bootlegging Aliens: Unsanctioned Immigration and the Underground Economy of Smuggling from Cuba during Prohibition," *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, vol. 93, no. 1 (2014), 45-50.

CHAPTER VII – CONCLUSION: THE ESTUARY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Coastal work along the Gulf had provided a sustainable, if not necessarily profitable, lifestyle for southerners throughout the postwar decades. Though not immune to the changes of the Gilded Age, coastal southerners lived and worked in much the same fashion in 1870 as they did in 1890. Fishing, coasting, and piloting persisted in the Gulf, providing steady employment for coastal southerners. The barrier islands and swampy marshes provided subsistence for those willing to live on the edge of the nation's borders.

The end of the nineteenth century heralded sweeping changes for the Gulf world. The Gulf as a cohesive social and economic landscape slowly shrank, with fewer and fewer residents making use of the estuary. The reason for this decline was multifaceted. The Spanish-American War changed the tenor of the coast's relationship with its southern neighbors. At the same time, the war demonstrated that the coast was less important to a globally active United States. Ongoing industrialization shrank the population of the merchant marine and fisheries. Though the United States built more coasting vessels than in any other year, by 1900, even the most bullheaded shipowner or ship builder recognized that the age of sail had come to an end. Trading the nation's goods, even domestically, required fewer and fewer sailors. The nature of the coast itself was changing with new technologies that helped integrate the coast into the boarder nation. The liminality of the Coast declined, as did its exoticism. The Gulf world simply became a small part of the American world. These events had real social implications for coastal dwellers. The small towns that dotted the bayous, inlets, and barrier islands slowly shrank and eventually became ghost towns. The first decades of the twentieth century created a different life for coastal dwellers.

The United States' oceanic shipping had long been a lost cause. The growth of a few large port cities continued at the expense of smaller ports. The nation's merchant marine, such as it was, hobbled in its efforts to protect itself. Andrew Furuseth and the International Seaman's Union did what they could to keep blue water trade alive with limited success. Factionalism between the west coast, east coast, and the Great Lakes prevented any coordinated national efforts. At the same time racial hostility toward Asians, African Americans, and Hispanic sailors limited union membership.[323]

The Spanish-American War

The estuarian Gulf was also becoming less important to the national economy. For decades, boosters had claimed that the shipping industry needed protection so that the merchant marine could serve as auxiliaries in times of war. As late as 1887, representatives of the Navy claimed that a strong Naval force absolutely required an active marine workforce to compete on the world stage. A naval militia composed of "merchant seamen, fishermen, watermen, and crews of coasters," precisely the fields that Gulf dwellers worked in, would only add to the nation's naval prowess. That belief died in less than a decade. Only five years later, Naval boosters argued that the civilian marine workforce could not possibly serve in the Navy, as technological developments had made seamanship less important than technical prowess to the Navy. The ships that lined the coast no longer had value in the eyes of the military, even as a coastal defense force.[324]

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[323] Alex Roland, W. Jeffrey Bolster, and Alexander Keyssar, *The Way of the Ship: America's Maritime History Reenvisioned, 1600-2000* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2008), 245.

[324] James Russel Solely, "Our Naval Policy: A Lesson from 1861," *Scribner's Magazine*, Vol. 1887, 230; A. B. Wyckoff, "The United States Naval Apprentice System," *Scribner's Magazine*, Vol. 10, 1892, 577; Scott Mobley, *Progressive in Navy Blue: Maritime Strategy, American Empire, and The*

The military potential of America's seafaring population was put to the test in short order. On February 15, 1898, the USS Maine exploded in Havana harbor. Two months later the United States declared war on the Empire of Spain, ostensibly on behalf of Cuban revolutionaries. Americans reacted eagerly to news of the war. As previous historians have argued, a nationwide crisis of masculinity, combined with an effort to reconcile the North and South after the Civil War and Reconstruction created an unprecedented desire for war. There were exceptions, however, especially in the American South. Once war preparations began, President William McKinley called on each state to provide the necessary troops to conduct the war. The Deep South states struggled to fill troop quotas. Of the six states who could not get enough volunteers, five were on the coast.[325]

Despite their longstanding martial reputation, southerners were not thrilled at the news of the war. What David Turpie calls the "bear the brunt" thesis helps explain the reasons southerners hesitated to get involved in Cuba, all related to the southern coastline. First, the coast would be exposed to attack from the Spanish navy or Spanish privateers. Since the end of the Civil War, the federal government had expended little money on southern fortifications. Second, the war would disrupt southern trade. Spain itself represented a major trading partner for southern states. Third, southerners worried that army officials would deploy southern soldiers into riskier combat situations due to

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Transformation of U. S. Naval Identity (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2018), 144; Alex Roland, W. Jeffrey Bolster, and Alexander Keyssar, *The Way of the Ship: America's Maritime History Reenvisioned, 1600-2000* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2008), 256.

[325] Kristen Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 1-14, 107-132.

their presumed acclimation to the climate. The Gulf's frequent encounters with epidemic diseases made them the perfect cannon fodder in a Cuban war. These concerns meant that coastal southerners were even less willing to volunteer than those who lived in the interior South. Instead, they offered to form a coastal defense force with the dual purpose of defending the southern coastline and enforcing the fragile racial hierarchy in the region.[326]

At the beginning of the war, the federal government tapped into the marine workforce, much as it had in previous wars. Concerned that a maritime power as old as Spain had the upper hand, the United States government scrambled to make up a perceived deficit in its naval capacity. The Navy bought seventy merchant vessels from American individuals and businessmen to help make up the difference. Naturally, steamship lines were the majority of businesses involved, but wrecking companies, piloting associations, and lightering services all contributed vessels. Only six of these vessels were not steam powered and only one was a schooner, owned by Standard Oil. The government also purchased twenty-four foreign steam powered vessels for use in the Navy and War Department. All of these extra vessels had been built by British or German shipyards. Tellingly, the government purchased no sailing vessels from other nations. In addition, the government rented numerous steamships to serve as transport vessels for troops and supplies. In contrast with previous wars, however, auxiliary ships served mostly as transport or hospital ships, not as combat-worthy vessels.[327]

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[326] David C. Turpie, "A Voluntary War: The Spanish American War, White Southern Manhood, and the Struggle to Recruit Volunteers in the South," *The Journal of Southern History*, vol. 8, no. 4 (2014), 867, 885.

[327] *Report of the Commissioner of Navigation to the Secretary of the Treasury for the Year 1898* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1898), 244-246.

The first days of conflict were chaotic for those who lived in the Gulf estuary. A declaration of war caused a serious rupture in the Gulf community. The industries that persisted along the Gulf had close, almost continuous contact with Spanish, or Cuban, vessels. The outbreak of the Spanish-American War disrupted coastal communities reliant on informal trade and communication. The war temporarily divided communities separated by borders more than water. Blockades of Cuba and Puerto Rico brought trade with those islands to a complete standstill. Fishermen and coasters lost access to their markets, especially those who regularly sold fish to the Cuban market. The outbreak of conflict also sent commerce with the other Caribbean islands plummeting as insurance rates on vessels promptly skyrocketed. In a panic reminiscent of the Civil War, Americans anticipated danger to their maritime fleet, selling eighty-five vessels, mostly older sailing vessels, to foreigners.[328]

The war also created real dangers for those living on the coast. Troops stationed along the Gulf occasionally found the creole cultural climate distasteful. In South Carolina, local whites brutally beat a Black resident who spoke too openly about supporting Cuban independence. In Ybor City, white troops, including the famous Rough Riders, demolished saloons, theaters, and restaurants as they caroused. They distrusted the locals, Cubans, Spaniards, and Sicilians, suspecting that they served Spain as a fifth column. General Shafter responded by ordering agents to read the mail of suspected Spaniards, prompting hundreds of Spanish migrants to flee. On the eve of embarkation, white soldiers snatched a two-year-old Black child from his mother, using

[328] *Report of the Commissioner of Navigation to the Secretary of the Treasury for the Year 1898* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1898), 64, 244-251.

the infant for target practice. The crime instigated the Tampa Riot, with African-American troops seeking vengeance against white business that had denied them service.[329]

The movement of soldier and sailors back and forth between the United States and Cuba threatened a yellow fever outbreak in the nearby southern states. The danger of yellow fever had always been present, but the coast had never witnessed as many people passing through on their way from Cuba before. The Transport *Seneca* was denied docking permission at Norfolk due to potential yellow fever cases on board. The danger reared its head several times, leading to small scale quarantines, which were successful in preventing a major epidemic from breaking out.[330]

The U. S. Navy assumed control of the revenue cutters patrolling the southern waters for the war effort. Eight of them served on blockade duty in Cuban waters, while seven others continued guard duty along the American coast. Spanish and American fishing and coasting vessels were used to the freedom allowed by the Caribbean tides. The advent of war endangered their livelihood, if not their lives. The first prize of the war occurred right off the harbor at Key West. The tramp steamer *Buen Ventura* came into view on the morning of April 23, flying the Spanish flag. The *Buen Ventura,* not even aware of a state of war, but had the dubious honor of witnessing the first shot of the war from the *USS Nashville.* The captain of the Spanish fishing ship *Antonio Suarez*,

[329] David C. Turpie, "A Voluntary War: The Spanish American War, White Southern Manhood, and the Struggle to Recruit Volunteers in the South," *The Journal of Southern History*, vol. 8, no. 4 (2014), 859; Gary R. Mormino, "Tampa's Splendid Little War: Local History and the Cuban War of Independence," *OAH Magazine of History*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Spring, 1998), 39-41.

[330] John Evangelist Walsh, "Forgotten Angel: The Story of Janet Jennings and the Seneca," *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*, vol. 81, no. 4, (Summer, 1998), 280.

captured in May of 1898, claimed that he was unlawfully attacked by American ships. The Spanish ship had left Havana on April 17, during a state of peace. By the time it had reached the Florida straits, it had become a target. The *Antonio Suarez* like all prizes, was taken to Key West where they were assessed and auctioned off. Much like customs officers who caught smugglers, the crew of the ships that captured war prizes received a portion of the proceeds. Several years after the war, the owner of the *Antonio Suarez* was compensated for its loss, but the eight crew members were received nothing for their time and had to make their own way from Key West back to Cuba.[331]

The captain of the Lola told a similar story. Thomas Betancourt and five crew members left Havana in April, proceeding to the Yucatan Peninsula to fish the less exhausted waters there. The ship returned a month later and encountered the American blockade outside the Havan harbor. They were captured and sent to Key West as well. The court auctioned the *Antonio Suarez*, The *Lola*, and ten other Cuban ships at the same time, driving down the cost of the ships and consequently the size of the damages that the owners could seek after the war.[332]

The irony of the United States intervening in Cuba on behalf of Cubans, only to label Cuban ships as targets was not lost on the victims. For decades, Cuban sailors had moved more or less freely between the island and the Gulf Coast. The captain of the *Antonio Suarez* and other captains of Cuban ships made note of that fact in the court

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[331] Irving H. King, *The Coast Guard Expands, 1865-1915: New Roles, New Frontiers* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1996), 110; United States v Spanish Schooner *Antonio Suarez*. Admiralty Court of Key West, RG21, M1360; Richard Harding Davis, "The First Show of the War," *Scribner's Magazine*, vol. 24, 1898, 5-6.

[332] United States v Spanish Smack *Lola* and Eleven Others, Admiralty Court of Key West, RG21, M1360.

record. The two captains argued that their ships should be exempt from capture for three reasons. First they were fishing ships engaged in peaceful commerce. Second, the captains and crew were native Cubans. Third, they were all supporters of independence. To their way of thinking this meant that the court should treat them as allies rather than targets. Unfortunately, the court did not agree. The United States recognized Cuban independence but did not recognize the independence of Cuban ships.[333]

Enterprising coastal dwellers took advantage of the opportunity as much as they could. The flurry of ships down the Atlantic Coast all needed food to keep soldiers fed. When they were in port soldiers had to be entertained and housed. Coastal dwellers had long known that an incoming ship created its own captive market and that applied to Naval vessels as well as any other. Floridians campaigned to make sure that their state was the departure point for Cuba. Miami and Jacksonville Florida both hosted troop camps for the duration of the conflict, alongside a temporary camp at Fernandina. Civilians at Fernandina were thrilled to have the soldiers arrive at their small town and were upset when the troops departed for Alabama a months later.[334]

Working directly for the military provided work, even if one did not enlist. A Galveston stevedore signed on to help unload troops and cargo once they landed in Cuba, travelling to Tampa before departing on the Transport *Seneca*, a small steamship rented from the Ward Line. The ship attempted to unload at Siboney with "great difficulty" and many of the supplies were ultimately sent back to Tampa. Despite high hopes, his

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[333] United States v Spanish Schooner *Antonio Suarez*. Admiralty Court of Key West, RG21, M1360; United States v Spanish Smack *Lola*, Admiralty Court of Key West, RG21, M1360.

[334] William Schellings, "Florida Volunteers in the War with Spain, 1898," *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (July, 1962), 54-55; Joseph A. Fry, *Dixie Looks Abroad: The South and U. S. Foreign Relation, 1789-1973* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), 124.

encounter with wounded troops and treatment on board the ship convinced him of his mistake quickly. Succumbing to sickness, not yellow fever but possibly typhoid, the young stevedore managed to ship back to Galveston where he delivered a stinging indictment of the war effort.[335]

Smugglers and filibusters found the market for their wares shut off, as a state of official war put the hands of weapon manufacturing in legitimate hands. The *Dauntless,* which made continual filibustering voyages between 1895 and 1898, was finally caught at and libeled on March 7, 1898, just barely missing the start of the war. Ironically, the ship continued to make voyages between the United States and Cuba, now as a dispatch ship chartered by the Associated Press. [336]

The United States enjoyed overwhelming success in the Spanish-American War, announcing a new imperial power in the region. A relative late comer to the imperial game, the United States declared its dominance over the Caribbean with the Roosevelt Corollary. After the Spanish-American War, the relationship between the United States and the Caribbean changed. Consequently, so did the relationship between the residents of the coastal community. The early twentieth century would witness numerous American interventions into the Caribbean. The image of the sailor was replaced by the image of the soldier in the eyes of America's neighbors. Military interventions helped calcify once fluid national boundaries.[337]

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[335] *Galveston Tribune*, August 5, 1898; John Evangelist Walsh, "Forgotten Angel: The Story of Janet Jennings and the Seneca," *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*, Vol. 81, No. 4, (Summer, 1998), 288.

[336] Richard V. Rickenbach, "Filibustering with the Dauntless," *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (April, 1950), 252.

[337] Alex Roland, W. Jeffrey Bolster, and Alexander Keyssar, *The Way of the Ship: America's Maritime History Reenvisioned, 1600-2000* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2008), 260-263.

The Decline of Coast Industries

In 1899, the Commissioner of Navigation delivered a report beginning with great improvements benefitting the American sailor. In December 1898, Congress passed the most sweeping maritime protection bill ever, the White Act. As a result, Wages were higher, complaints of abuse were down, ship construction was up, as was active tonnage at sea. The previous year, sailors in the coasting and "nearby" foreign trade had finally gained the right to quit on demand, at least while the vessel was in port. Sailors enjoyed more "personal liberty" than at any time previously and much more, the Commissioner claimed, than sailors of any other nation enjoyed. Still, the Commissioner noted bluntly that these facts could not obscure a deeper problem. American vessels carried the smallest percentage of the nation's trade in its entire history. Thus far, the nation had not been able to compete on the world stage when it came to shipping. The fastest growing merchant marine was that of Norway, which had provided the laboring backbone of the marine Atlantic for so long.[338]

There was a possibility for regeneration. Success in the Spanish-American War had given the United States new territory, de facto or otherwise, in both the Caribbean and the Pacific. Former Spanish subjects in Puerto Rico and the Philippines were given the opportunity to become Americans. Ship owners who did so would be allowed to bring their ships under the protection of the American flag. The Cuban merchant marine, previously sailing under the Spanish flag, remained a significant presence in coasting across the Caribbean. While the United States occupied Cuba, Cuban ships were allowed

[338] *Report of the Commissioner of Navigation to the Secretary of the Treasury for the Year 1899* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1899), 9, 88.

to fly the American flag, though they did not receive the benefits that the United States allowed its own ships. This would remain an untapped source of trade, however. By executive order, Cuban ships would remain the property of the Cuban nation, rather than the United States.[339]

The states played their own role in putting an end to older forms of work on the coast. The coastal states, from Texas to Virginia, all levied extra taxes on sailing vessels engaged in the coasting trade. Sailing ships that used the services of pilots paid extra charges, but steamships involved in the same trade were exempted. The long decline of small coasting vessels finally concluded in the twentieth century. Sailors who had long fought against steam-powered ships found themselves forced to find other jobs as the number of men required to move the mighty vessels plummeted.[340]

Even piloting, long one of the most stable forms of coastal employment, declined at the turn of the century. Their expertise had once been a thing of value to ships coming into and out of shallow southern harbors. As the century ended, federally funded public works inadvertently made pilots unnecessary. Deeper harbors and longer piers, hurricane control, lighthouse construction, and the placement of buoys, beacons, and ranges all served to make pilots' expert knowledge unnecessary. In 1896, the federal government spent more than $35 million on harbor improvements in seventeen southern ports. Ships that had once had little choice but to hire local experts now made their way from port to port with relative ease. The results were stark for coastal sailors. Foreign trade to New

[339] *Report of the Commissioner of Navigation to the Secretary of the Treasury for the Year 1899* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1899), 86.

[340] Leon Fink, *Sweatshops at Sea: Merchant Seamen in the World's Frist Globalized Industry from 1812 to the Present* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 136.

Orleans tripled between 1898 and 1899. Savannah's doubled. Galveston's foreign trade increased by seven hundred percent. Despite the best efforts of boosters, it was clear that the nation's produce would travel across the world in foreign bottoms. Coastal dwellers would pay the price for the nation's skyrocketing international trade.[341]

To a lesser extent, the fishing industry suffered from the same squeeze. Industrial fishing grew in the twentieth century but required a smaller percentage of the population. Processing facilities employed cheap immigrant labor to operate the canneries, as well as poor sharecroppers, black and white. Packing companies in Baltimore made profitable use of the railroads, shifting immigrant employees from Baltimore in the summertime, down to the Mississippi coast in the winter. Once again, locals had to adjust. Croatian immigrant and Mississippi fisherman, Peter Skrmetta, found that fishing for tourists was much more lucrative. He won the contract to run a ferry between Gulfport and Ship Island, eventually becoming a wealthy local business owner.[342]

Overfishing also contributed to the problem. In 1887, Silas Stearns had reported on overfishing in the Gulf red snapper fisheries. A decade later in 1898, the National Fishery Congress noted similar overfishing of the sponge beds off the coast of Florida. The industry was only half a century old but was already facing an ecological crisis. The

[341] *Report of the Commissioner of Navigation to the Secretary of the Treasury for the Year 1896* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1896), 32; *Report of the Commissioner of Navigation to the Secretary of the Treasury for the Year 1899* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1899), 88, 90.

[342] Anthony J. Stanonis, *Faith in Bikinis: Politics and Leisure in the Coastal South Since the Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2014), 36.

sponges grew rapidly, but not rapidly enough to prevent over-fishing. The Congress claimed that a new sponge ground became exhausted in only a year.[343]

Recreating the Gulf

Working in Cuba, army medical officer Walter Reed revolutionized life in the Gulf. Reed's experiments identified the source of the South's most feared diseases, yellow fever and malaria. The common mosquito served as the disease vector for both. Reed's experiments ushered in sweeping efforts at mosquito control, eliminating the long-held fear that travel to the Gulf invited serious sickness or death. The New Orleans yellow fever outbreak of 1905 would be the last of its kind. On request of Dr. J. H. White of the Marine Hospital Service, the *Times-Democrat* ran notices for the citizens in capital letters to "KILL ALL MOSQUITOS." Dr. White and his supporters also brought medical experts from Havana, fumigated homes, boats, and trains, and simply put-up screens to keep mosquitos outside. After the short lived 1905 epidemic, state governments oiled ponds and waterways to kill larvae and developed better draining to prevent standing water. Debilitating quarantines, setting town against town, became a thing of the past as yellow fever and malaria became historical oddities rather than ever-present threats.[344]

At the same time, the Army Corps of Engineers undertook its own efforts to redefine the coast. These efforts deepened harbors to make way for larger steamships,

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[343] Silas Stearns, "Fisheries of the Gulf of Mexico," *The Fisheries and Fishery Industries of the United States* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1887), Section II, 567; *Proceedings and Papers of the National Fishery Congress* (Washington D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1898), 102-107.

[344] Margaret Humphreys, *Yellow Fever and the South* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 83-89; Irving H. King, *The Coast Guard Expands, 1865-1915: New Roles, New Frontiers* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1996), 130.

removed pesky shoals and sand bars, and constructed new canals between ports. The latter had long been a dream of commercial-minded southerners. Schooners and flat boats had taken advantage of smaller canals and natural waterways throughout the nineteenth century, but those waterways were insufficient for modern shipping. Though by no means as famous as the Panama Canal, several canals helped reshape the southern coastline, including canals in the Great Dismal Swamp, with subsequent sections built piecemeal south toward Key West. By 1917, the Army Corps of Engineers had completed projects on more than 90 rivers and harbors. Eventually the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway snaked from Massachusetts to Corpus Christi, Texas, enveloping the entire Gulf Coast.[345]

Weather control enjoyed its own revolution. In 1890, Louisiana's General Assembly established the first Board of Levee Commissioners to systematize the Parish's levee system. The board had unprecedented power to levy taxes, maintain its own police force, and purchase land it deemed necessary. Perhaps most importantly, the Levee board could acquire land it deemed necessary without the hassle of eminent domain. Other states also constructed levees and beachfronts, ostensibly for weather control, but also to attract more tourism.[346]

The devastating Galveston hurricane of 1900 proved to be a blessing in disguise for Gulf tourism. The city responded to the devastation with the construction of a three-

[345] Aubrey Parkman, *History of the Waterways of the Atlantic Coast of the United States*, National Waterways Study, U. S. Army Engineer Water Resources Support Center, Institute for Water Resources, NWS-15 (January 1983), 53, 74-75; Andrew W. Kahrl, *The Land Was Ours: How Black Beaches Became White Wealth in the Coastal South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 165.

[346] Andrew W. Kahrl, *The Land Was Ours: How Black Beaches Became White Wealth in the Coastal South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 119, 215; Cornelia Dean, *Against the Tides: The Battle for America's Beaches* (New York: Columbia University, 1999), 83.

mile-long seawall, standing some seventeen feet above sea level. Residents also raised the grade of the surviving city by some five to twenty feet, pumping in massive amounts of sand. Galveston's seawall was first erected in 1904, but the seawall and sand grade proved its value in 1915, when another devastating hurricane assaulted the city. This time Galveston escaped large scale destruction. Though devastating hurricanes remained a fact of life, the frequency and scale of destruction declined precipitously.[347]

The rest of the coast soon followed Galveston's example, erecting seawalls, levees, and artificial beaches to protect the now valuable coastal properties from deadly storms. Within a week, Biloxi residents began mulling plans to build their own hurricane protection. Bay St. Louis completed its own massive seawall, artfully designed to serve a double purpose as waterfront stairs, in 1923. By 1928 twenty-six miles of seawall protected the Mississippi Shoreline. Coastal property values continued to rise, eventually skyrocketing with the completion of U. S. Route 90 in 1925. New motor vehicles could reach from Texas all across the Gulf to Jacksonville, Florida. The ecological cost, in the form of erosion and pollution, was unknown, but even after it was discovered, states prioritized profits over sustainability.[348]

Disease and weather had kept the tourism industry small throughout the nineteenth century. Adventure tourism remained the rule, catering to hunters, fishermen, and yachters. Wealthy Americans travelled south "for their health," while planters made

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[347] Anthony J. Stanonis, *Faith in Bikinis: Politics and Leisure in the Coastal South Since the Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2014), 70; Cornelia Dean, *Against the Tides: The Battle for America's Beaches* (New York: Columbia University, 1999), 8.

[348] Andrew W. Kahrl, *The Land Was Ours: How Black Beaches Became White Wealth in the Coastal South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 64; Anthony J. Stanonis, *Faith in Bikinis: Politics and Leisure in the Coastal South Since the Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2014), 70-71.

seasonal sojourns to the coast, but the region was still foreign to average Americans. This all changed after 1900. Confident in their ability to control yellow fever and withstand devastating storms, northerners increasingly travelled south during what had been peak yellow fever season. Once cheap coastal land boomed in the 1910s and 1920s as the South finally saw serious outside investment. Hotels, resorts, and golf courses all sprouted like weeds across the Gulf.[349]

The rise of tourism as the coast's primary industry created tension between new arrivals and those who had lived on the coast for decades. Newspapers in Mississippi and Florida complained regularly that coastal farmers let their livestock roam free. The practice had not been a problem when the land was unowned, but new resorts wanted to keep the coastline intact for tourists. Coastal towns passed zoning laws, organized planning committees, and lauded progressive chambers of commerce boosting new industries and driving out the old ones. The *Sea Coast Echo* cheered that "there will be no shacks or forty-foot lots with a camp or tent on them," harkening to now unwanted fishing and sponging camps that had dotted the shoreline. The coast as a place of industry did not appeal to vacationing Americans who wanted tranquility and the value of the latter swiftly outpaced the former.[350]

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[349] Anthony J. Stanonis, *Faith in Bikinis: Politics and Leisure in the Coastal South Since the Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2014), 60.

[350] Anthony J. Stanonis, *Faith in Bikinis: Politics and Leisure in the Coastal South Since the Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2014), 55; Andrew W. Kahrl, *The Land Was Ours: How Black Beaches Became White Wealth in the Coastal South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 64; *Sea Coast Echo*, May 1, 1926.

Not the End of the Estuary

The story of the coast is not simply one of declension, however. Even as coastal opportunities declined for those who saw the estuary as a place of employment, it increased for those who lived on the coast in general. Railroads connected the Gulf to the interior as companies finally made their way onto the marshy coastline. By the 1920s railroads connected the Gulf Coast directly to metropoles as far north as New York and Chicago. Bad harvest and low prices drove more southerners off the fields, but they could find stable, if unsteady work in the coastal tourist industry.

The rise of the southern leisure economy increased the value of coastal land and landowners saw the potential for previously unknown profits. The industrial shipping and fishing economy helped kill the subsistence lifestyle of the 1800s, but tourism created new livelihoods for coastal southerners. In select areas of the Gulf, "negro resorts" began to appear alongside white-only resorts, in strict accordance with Jim Crow. The Hampton Institute created one of the first of these resorts in the 1890s, naming it the Bay Shore Hotel. Others soon appeared across the Gulf, most commonly in the Carolinas, where Black land ownership was highest, but Black resorts also appeared as far south as Mississippi and Alabama. Rail connections with Chicago and New York helped bring first hundreds then thousands of African Americans to vacation on the coast. The sea was still a marketable commodity.[351]

Coastal fishing industries continued to prosper for several more decades, especially in the less attractive wetlands surrounding South Carolina and Louisiana.

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[351] Andrew W. Kahrl, *The Land Was Ours: How Black Beaches Became White Wealth in the Coastal South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 156-158, 161, 182.

Shrimp drying remained largely the same until commercial ice guaranteed the catch would stay fresh. Oystering towns persisted for decades, with locals continuing to live seminomadic lives travelling between the bayou and the New Orleans metroplex. The industry spread outward in both Texas and Mississippi. Slavic migrants continued to fish, alongside recently arrived Poles, or worked in oystering factories. Mississippi canneries actively sought out experienced watermen from nearby Louisiana. Their working lives remained difficult, but the fisheries continued to provide a living. In North Carolina, African-American families continued to fish, harvest oysters, and log in the forests and swamps. Land ownership continued to decline, but use of the estuary remained an option.[352]

The infrastructure projects which helped spur the tourist trade across the South also had the potential to help commercial fishermen. By 1900, overfishing along the Gulf was already taking its toll. Blue water vessels had to travel further afield to find healthy shoals. Mullet and red snapper ships were already travelling as far away as the Yucatan Peninsula to find their prey. Sea walls and artificial inlets created quick and cheap access to deep water fishing grounds while docks and jetties created clearly delineated harbor space.[353]

Even the nation's blue water trade experienced a last gasp of prosperity with the outbreak of World War I. Woodrow Wilson declared that the United States would be

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[352] Donald W. Davis, *Washed Away?: The Invisible Peoples of Louisiana's Wetlands* (Lafayette: University of Louisiana at Lafayette Press, 2010), 297; Andrew W. Kahrl, *The Land Was Ours: How Black Beaches Became White Wealth in the Coastal South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 161; Deanne Love Stephens, *The Mississippi Gulf Coast Seafood Industry: A People's History* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2021), 62-66.

[353] Cornelia Dean, *Against the Tides: The Battle for America's Beaches* (New York: Columbia University, 1999), 83.

strictly neutral when war erupted in 1914. His desire to keep the United States out of the conflict was in no way an effort to keep American businesses out of potential profit created by the war. The war created a massive demand for American trade, military and civilian alike. War in the Atlantic, especially Germany's use of submarine warfare threatened any attempt on the part of American businessmen to take advantage. Famously, in 1915 German U-boat sunk the HMS Lusitania, bringing the United States to the brink of war. Less famously, the Germans had sunk one of the few remaining American ships involved in international trade, the SS *Gulfllight* on its maiden voyage six days previously.[354]

The war created the need for a large merchant marine flying under the American flag. British and German ships had dominated the peacetime trade, operating at lower costs and employing European crews. However, once those ships were drafted or sunk by enemies, American goods began languishing on the docks and wharves. The opportunity was clear. For the first time since the Civil War, the United States could expand its blue water merchant marine without overt competition. Wilson himself said, "Without a great merchant marine, we cannot take our rightful place in the commerce of the world."[355]

A spree of shipbuilding occurred during the war years. Ironically, most of the ships were only finished after the armistice had ended the conflict. Even so, as the United States entered the 1920s it once again had the second largest merchant marine in

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[354] Alex Roland, W. Jeffrey Bolster, and Alexander Keyssar, *The Way of the Ship: America's Maritime History Reenvisioned, 1600-2000* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2008), 264.

[355] Quoted in Jeffrey J. Safford, "World War I Maritime Policy and the National Security: 1914-1919," Robert A. Kilmarx, ed., *America's Maritime Legacy: A History of the US Merchant Marine and Shipbuilding Industry since Colonial Times* (New York: Westview Press, 1979), 111-148.

the world. At the onset of the war, the United States carried less than ten percent of its own trade, a figure that risen to twenty two percent by the war's close. This boom was short lived, however. In 1919 and 1921 the International Seaman's Union instituted two failed strikes, with deep pay cuts as the only result. Within less than a decade the United States was abandoning blue water trade yet again.[356]

The porous southern border also remained a problem into the twentieth century, even as the federal government expanded its authority. The recently created Coast Guard took on the responsibility of policing America's borders, leaving the Navy free to pursue American interests further abroad. The Coast Guard, alongside the Customs Bureau and the Bureau of Immigration did what they could to tighten control over the Gulf Coast. At the same time, the federal government passed stricter immigration laws and continued high tariffs under Progressive administrations.[357]

New Orleans and Galveston experienced heavy liquor traffic during the era of prohibition. Alcohol continued to spread through the American interior as far north as the Great Lakes. Smugglers continued to deliver contraband from the Caribbean, most notably opium and alcohol. Cases of liquor purchased for $8 in Havana sold in the United States for as much as $65, netting an easy profit for smuggling ships. Coastal resorts absorbed illegal alcohol like sponges, spreading tourist profits among what remained of the coastal community. The problem was evident almost from the beginning in 1920 when federal agents received word that Canadian whiskey had been buried

[356] Alex Roland, W. Jeffrey Bolster, and Alexander Keyssar, *The Way of the Ship: America's Maritime History Reenvisioned, 1600-2000* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2008), 274, 278-281.

[357] Herald Waters, *Smugglers of Spirits: Prohibition and the Coast Guard Patrol* (New York: Hastings House Publishers, 1971), 28.

ashore at Gulfport. Smugglers continued to mask their presence by taking advantage of limited national boundaries. Treasury officials swore that Cuban ships were responsible for the trade. Others insisted that the smuggling vessels sailed under the Honduran flag. Regardless of their nationality, smugglers worked closely with American counterparts. E. J. Cain, a shrimper from Alabama, admitted to WPA interviewers in 1930 that he had been involved in smuggling alcohol from Cuba to Mobile, though he also claimed to have gotten out of the trade.[358]

At the same time, stringent immigration laws created a potential source of revenue that would haunt the Gulf Coast for decades. Smugglers from Cuba began transporting people as well as alcohol and drugs. Greek sponge fishers from Florida played an important role in transporting alcohol from Cuba to Florida. By 1925, they also got involved in trafficking people. Cuba's lax immigration laws, geographic proximity to the United States, and reputation for corruption, had all made it an attractive smuggling port in the 1800s. This reputation did not change after independence. Despite the best efforts of the newly created Coast Guard, an organized smuggling ring between the Gulf and Caribbean developed in the 1920s. Schooners picked up a cargo of liquor and illegal immigrants, using the latter to unload the former under cover of darkness. The ring was supported by coastal ships, but also by the very railroads that connected the

[358] Anthony J. Stanonis, *Faith in Bikinis: Politics and Leisure in the Coastal South Since the Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2014), 179; Everett S. Allen, *The Black Ships: Rumrunners of Prohibition* (Boston, MA: Little Brown, and Co., 1965), 31; Lisa Lindquist Dorr, "Bootlegging Aliens: Unsanctioned Immigration and the Underground Economy of Smuggling from Cuba during Prohibition," *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, vol. 93, no. 1, (2014), 45; Eduardo Saenz Rouner, *The Cuban Connection: Drug Trafficking, Smuggling and Gambling in Cuba from the 1920s to the Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 22.

Gulf to the rest of the nation. Tourists and businessmen came one direction, alcohol and illegal immigrants there other.[359]

The persistence of smuggling in the face of Prohibition highlights the resilience of the coastal community. For decades, the Gulf estuary had provided subsistence and profit for coastal southerners. The Gulf Coast remained connected to the Caribbean despite the ongoing changes of the early twentieth century, but the number of Americans directly connected to the waterways declined. Even as they lost access to a subsistence lifestyle, the people who had lived and worked on the Gulf faced these changes and adapted the best they could. For some this meant doubling down on fishing, shrimping, and oystering, either working on the ships or in the canneries. For others it meant adapting to new jobs in the tourist trade or on the railroads. Those resorts and railroads still depended on the water to provide trade and traffic into the American South. The coastal community endured even as the lifestyle of coastal southerners changed to adapt to new circumstances.

[359] Lisa Lindquist Dorr, "Bootlegging Aliens: Unsanctioned Immigration and the Underground Economy of Smuggling from Cuba during Prohibition," *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, vol. 93, no. 1, (2014), 52; Eduardo Saenz Rouner, *The Cuban Connection: Drug Trafficking, Smuggling and Gambling in Cuba from the 1920s to the Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 21.

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