

reader, but well-written and accessible for the non-specialist. As a minor quibble, for a volume which purports to give the designers of ships “their place in history” (310), the book could have benefitted from an appendix of ‘Person-ages’ similar to that in the predecessor volume. A larger criticism would be of the publisher for not seeing fit to publish this important volume in a similar hardback format.

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Skip Finley. *Whaling Captains of Color—America’s First Meritocracy*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, www.usni.org, 2020. xv+287 pp., illustrations, tables, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. US \$42.00, cloth; ISBN 978-1-68247-509-6. (E-book available.)

Skip Finley uses a wide range of sources, including log books and historical records from seafaring towns, as the wellspring for his fascinating and unusual story about the largely forgotten whalers of colour, some of whom rose to command and own whaling vessels. Lasting slightly over two hundred years, the American whaling industry was an enormously complex and evolving enterprise consisting of more than 2,700 ships of various types, sizes and capabilities. Whaling was vulnerable to weather, war, faulty management, errors in judgement, disease and, perhaps most importantly, depletion of a non-renewable resource. The industry attracted slavers, pirates, deserters, renegades, thieves and murderers, as well as investors, gamblers, con-men and, fortuitously, some clever inventors. This activity, largely based in New England and Long Island and Quaker administered, was one of the first to apply meritocracy to

its workforce with little regard to ethnic and racial diversity, especially as applied to men of colour. The sources of labour for these two centuries were first Native Americans, then local residents and vagabond white mariners, slaves and former slaves, and later, an influx of men from Cape Verde, a ten-island archipelago off the west African coast.

Slavery was abolished in Massachusetts by 1776. All the Northern states followed suit by 1805, although the last slave received manumission in New York in 1827. It was legal to keep an owned slave in Connecticut until 1848. Rhode Island was the capital of the slave trade at the time of the Revolutionary War and but, by 1840, the number of slaves in the state’s census totalled five. These four states had significant whaling fleets. Inter-marriage took place between former slaves and Native Americans and soon the Black-Native American “Mustee” offspring population grew. Some white politicians saw interracial marriage as a method for gradually diminishing Indian blood, thus fostering the disappearance of the aboriginal population. Native Americans, however, were granted rights by Congress that caused this scheme to backfire. Indians had rights to Native lands, but Blacks could not legally be landowners. Being tribal members by marriage provided potential land ownership for impoverished Blacks. Many males from these families, as well as their native “brothers-in-law”, opted to go to sea onboard whalers.

Whaling life has been written about in many books highlighting mutinies, desertions, floggings, drunkenness, scurvy, fire at sea, falls from aloft aboard ship, stove boats, drownings, lightning strikes, hulls crushed in ice and occasional deaths by a sea creature like a shark or sperm whale attacks.

The occupation of whaling allegedly appealed “only to three classes of men: those who had been compelled to leave the land to avoid gaol or starvation, those who thought they were going to see the world and gain adventures, and those who were determined to work their way up until they owned a whale ship of their own.” (66) For the latter, competent performance at the various aspects of whaling was the determining factor for promotion. Those who ascended to high rank, however, often had to manage unskilled and sometimes resistant men.

These leviathan hunter ship captains had to know navigation and vessel safety, how to conduct business, plan for untoward events, find prey, and gain enough respect to maintain unquestioned authority as master of the ship that was “a cross between working in an oil refinery and a slaughter house, with the chance of drowning thrown in.” (31)

By the eighteenth century, many dark-skinned men who worked the ships were Cape Verdeans, immigrants from the then-Portuguese colony 350 miles off the African coast. The Portuguese generally distanced themselves from the darker skinned Cape Verdeans of African descent, but these colonials were generally fluent in at least one European tongue and were in accord with the Iberian culture and religion. Arriving in the New England area, most settled in the New Bedford, Massachusetts and Providence, Rhode Island, areas. They soon formed close-knit communities interwoven with family units and started a variety of businesses, often related to maritime pursuits. Unfortunately, the dark-complexioned Cape Verdean immigrants discovered “black” and “white” prejudice in America. Despite being classified as Black by most of their neighbours, they did not consider themselves African Americans, the

descendants of slaves. They felt that their Portuguese heritage was as much a part of their ancestry as their African blood. Because their faith was Roman Catholic, they closely identified with white Catholics rather than Protestant Blacks. Because of their colour, they were forced to live in Black neighbourhoods, but generally maintained their own identity separate from other African Americans. Over time, however, intermarriages resulted in descendants of slavers, slave holders and slaves integrating into an unanticipated coloured minority.

With this recurring background, the book’s thrust is identifying and telling the stories of whalers and whaling captains of colour and their maritime exploits. Most of the more than fifty sailors mentioned were obscure, but some became famous such as Paul Cuffe, Valentina Rosa, John Henry Gonzales, and Paul Wainer, to name just few. As Finley states, “These men led whaling voyages to every part of the globe, indeed, several contributed to the mapping of the world’s oceans. They were adventurous, tenacious, fearless, and ruthless; their skills were honed before the mast. . . in [a very] dangerous enterprise. . .” (206.)

*Whaling Captains of Color—America’s First Meritocracy* is a comprehensive yet unusual view of a storied fishery that was especially hazardous. It was partly manned by men of colour who braved their way into positions of leadership and responsibility. This narrative is a guidepost into a welcome aspect of whaling literature, one that has received little attention. The author’s many tables, appendices and bibliography should be particularly useful to scholars of this industry and maritime historian in general. I highly recommend Finley’s latest work to all readers of *The Northern Mariner/Le marin du nord*.

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Richard Frank. *Tower of Skulls: A History of the Asia-Pacific War, Volume I: July 1937-May 1942*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton, www.penguinrandomhouse.ca, 2020. 836 pp., illustrations, notes, bibliography, maps, index. CDN \$54.00, cloth; ISBN 978-1-324-00210-9. (E-book available.)

Richard Frank is well known to students of the Second World War. An attorney by trade, he made his name as a historian of the conflict in 1990, with the publication of his first book on the battle of Guadalcanal, which, three decades later, remains the definitive history of its subject. He followed that up with *Downfall*, which examined the denouement of the U.S. war against Japan. Now Frank has embarked upon an even more formidable project: a three-volume history of the Second World War in Asia and the Pacific that Frank claims is the first work in any language “that takes as its fundamental perspective on World War II the whole canvas of Asia and the Pacific Region.” (7) This claim ignores Peter Harmsen’s own ongoing trilogy about the wars during that period: *Storm Clouds over the Pacific* (Casemate, 2018) and *Japan Runs Wild* (Casemate 2020). Given the longstanding tendency of historians to survey the war from the perspective of Japan’s opponents, Frank’s approach is nonetheless welcome. For while the Chinese, the Americans, the British, and the Soviets might have viewed their war against Japan primarily from their own perspective, for the Japanese, these were all various fronts in a single conflict that stretched from 1937 until their surrender in 1945.

Frank emphasizes this point by noting how events occurring in var-

ious regions played a role in shaping Japanese policymaking. This emerges early on in the book with chapters on the early stages of Japan’s war against China. What began as a minor incident at the Marco Polo (Lugouqiao) Bridge on the night of 7-8 July, quickly escalated thanks to the aggressive response of Japanese commanders in the region, who anticipated a quick victory instead of the quagmire that followed. Frank gives considerable credit here to the Nationalist Chinese leader, Chiang Kai-shek, who despite the varying quality of his forces, and the fractured political situation in his country, nonetheless committed his best units to slow the Japanese advance, giving the Chinese time to withdraw and regroup. As a result, Japan found itself in a war that made an unsustainable demand on her resources and lacked a clear path to achieving victory.

For many in Japan’s military hierarchy, the war was especially worrisome because it distracted people from the country that many in the Imperial Army saw as their primary foe: the Soviet Union. This was soon underscored by a brief border war in 1938-9 that ended in an embarrassing defeat for the Japanese. Yet Germany’s victories in Western Europe in the spring of 1940 opened up a tantalizing opportunity for Japan to seize strategically valuable British, French, and Dutch colonial possessions in the Far East. Frank places particular weight on the Tripartite Pact, which, while giving Japan new allies at a point when their victory seemed certain, also “served even more to acquire vehement enemies” by turning Japan’s ongoing war with China into part of a larger global conflict. It also contrib-