



The Evil Necessity: British Naval Impressment in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World (Early American Histories)

Denver Brunzman

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A fundamental component of Britain's early success, naval impressment not only kept the Royal Navy afloat—it helped to make an empire. In total numbers, impressed seamen were second only to enslaved Africans as the largest group of forced laborers in the eighteenth century.

In *The Evil Necessity*, Denver Brunzman describes in vivid detail the experience of impressment for Atlantic seafarers and their families. Brunzman reveals how forced service robbed approximately 250,000 mariners of their livelihoods, and, not infrequently, their lives, while also devastating Atlantic seaport communities and the loved ones who were left behind. Press gangs, consisting of a navy officer backed by sailors and occasionally local toughs, often used violence or the threat of violence to supply the skilled manpower necessary to establish and maintain British naval supremacy. Moreover, impressments helped to unite Britain and its Atlantic coastal territories in a common system of maritime defense unmatched by any other European empire.

Drawing on ships' logs, merchants' papers, personal letters and diaries, as well as engravings, political texts, and sea ballads, Brunzman shows how ultimately the controversy over impressment contributed to the American Revolution and served as a leading cause of the War of 1812.

Early American Histories Winner of the Walker Cowen Memorial Prize for an Outstanding Work of Scholarship in Eighteenth-Century Studies

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