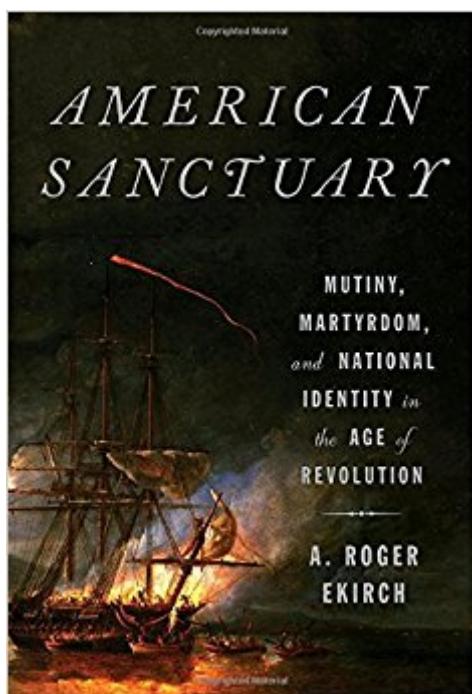


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American Sanctuary: Mutiny, Martyrdom, And National Identity In The Age Of Revolution



Synopsis

From *Ã¢â€œone of the most wide-ranging and imaginative historians in America today; there is no one else quite like him in the profession*Ã¢â€• (Gordon S. Wood)Ã¢â€œa dazzling and original work of history.Ã A Roger EkirchÃ¢â€œs *American Sanctuary* begins in 1797 with the bloodiest mutiny ever suffered by the Royal NavyÃ¢â€œon the British frigate HMS Hermione, four thousand miles from EnglandÃ¢â€œs shores, off the western coast of Puerto Rico. In the midst of the most storied epoch in British seafaring history, the mutiny struck at the very heart of military authority and at BritainÃ¢â€œs hierarchical social order. Revolution was in the air: America had won its War of Independence, the French Revolution was still unfolding, and a ferocious rebellion loomed in Ireland, with countless dissidents already arrested.Ã A Most of the Hermione mutineers had scattered throughout the North Atlantic; one of them, Jonathan Robbins, had made his way to American shores, and the British were asking for his extradition. Robbins let it be known that he was an American citizen from Danbury, Connecticut, and that he had been impressed into service by the British.Ã A John Adams, the Federalist successor to Washington as president, in one of the most catastrophic blunders of his administration, sanctioned RobbinsÃ¢â€œs extradition, according to the terms of the Jay Treaty of 1794. Convicted of murder and piracy by a court-martial in Jamaica, Robbins was sentenced by the British to death, hauled up on the fore yardarm of the frigate Acasta, blindfolded with his hands tied behind his back, and hanged.Ã A AdamsÃ¢â€œs miscalculation ignited a political firestorm, only to be fanned by news of RobbinsÃ¢â€œs execution without his constitutional rights of due process and trial by jury. Thomas Jefferson, then vice president and leader of the emergent Republican Party, said, *Ã¢â€œNo one circumstance since the establishment of our government has affected the popular mind more.*Ã¢â€• Congressional Republicans tried to censure Adams, and the Federalist majority, in a bitter blow to the president, were unable to muster a vote of confidence condoning RobbinsÃ¢â€œs surrender.Ã A *American Sanctuary* brilliantly lays out in full detail the story of how the Robbins affair and the presidential campaign of 1800 inflamed the new nation and set in motion a constitutional crisis, resulting in AdamsÃ¢â€œs defeat and JeffersonÃ¢â€œs election as the third president of the United States.Ã A Ekirch writes that the aftershocks of RobbinsÃ¢â€œs martyrdom helped to shape the infant republicÃ¢â€œs identity in the way Americans envisioned themselves. We see how the Hermione crisis led directly to the countryÃ¢â€œs historic decision to grant political asylum to refugees from foreign governmentsÃ¢â€œa major achievement in fulfilling the resonant promise of American independence, as voiced by Tom Paine, to provide *Ã¢â€œan asylum for mankind*

Book Information

Hardcover: 320 pages

Publisher: Pantheon; 1st edition (February 21, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0307379906

ISBN-13: 978-0307379900

Product Dimensions: 6.6 x 1.2 x 9.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.3 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 16 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #363,810 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #63 in Books > Law >

Administrative Law > Emigration & Immigration #77 in Books > History > World > Maritime History & Piracy #278 in Books > History > Americas > United States > Immigrants

Customer Reviews

Celebration for A. Roger Ekirch AMERICAN SANCTUARY A dramatic tale . . . A good, readable story in the mode of Nathaniel Philbrick's nautical histories . . . Impressive. Thomas E. Ricks, The New York Times Book Review It takes a special gift in writing about the past to offer readers the sense of events unfolding through the deeds, decisions, policies and prejudices of dead white guys, as Mr. Ekirch has done . . . Ekirch navigates deep water in enumerating events, detailing arguments and tracing sequelae . . . Fact-based and argumentative, a real history like this may disarm modern

patriots who lard their pronouncements with pious references to our Founding Fathers . . . American Sanctuary is trenchant in its drawn parallels to our day. Philip Kopper, The Washington Times A gifted storyteller . . . absorbing . . . The thoroughness of Ekirch's research, his attention to detail, combined with his considerable narrative skills, make American Sanctuary an engrossing, informative and enjoyable read. Ben McC. Moise, The Post and Courier Great new book: American Sanctuary by Roger Ekirch, about the battle that resulted in the US granting asylum to refugees. Very timely! Arianna Huffington, Co-Founder of The Huffington Post It is always gratifying to learn history you don't know. In this case, the subject is a specific incident with which the vast majority of Americans are unfamiliar but revolves around one of the major controversies between the nascent American Republic and its former mother country, Great Britain, and questioned the fundamental American belief in the provision of asylum to the oppressed and persecuted. Stuart McClung, New York Journal of

illuminating its immediate impact on party politics in a polarized, revolutionary age and on the new nation's enduring identity as an asylum of liberty. Ekirch's brilliant reconstruction is a triumph of historical research and analysis. • Peter S. Onuf, Professor of History at the University of Virginia • "Fascinating. Ekirch is a marvelous storyteller. Beautifully written and engrossing, a book that should be of interest, to the historian, and to the general public. An important addition to our understanding of early American history." • James Roger Sharp, author of *American Politics in the Early Republic* • "Packed with drama. Ekirch tells this story with rich and powerful prose, demonstrating how this saga of the mutiny on the *Hermione* helped Americans develop their national identity during the early republic." • Paul A. Gilje, author of *Liberty on the Waterfront*

A. ROGER EKIRCH was born in Washington, DC, and raised in Alexandria, Virginia. He is the author of "Poor Carolina," Bound for America, Birthright, and At Day Close. His writing has appeared in The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, and The Huffington Post. He holds degrees from Dartmouth College and John Hopkins University, and has received a Guggenheim fellowship. He lives in Roanoke, Virginia, and is a professor of history at Virginia Tech.

A portion of American History from the late 18th century I had never heard of. Found it fascinating and very informative. Kudos to Roger Ekirch.. The book is making the rounds of the American Legion in South Miami and will end up in the Veteran's Hospital. Thanks.

excellent

Good read

A good book from one of my favorite periods of American history.

This is a thinking man's page turner. From the start, the reader is thrust into the brutal maritime practice of "impressment" via a tragic encounter between an American freighter and the British frigate HMS Rose near Cape Anne. (Note: Ekirch delightfully establishes a Patrick O'Brien-esque understanding of 19th century British naval culture and custom in quick fashion.) But this international incident is just an appetizer to the main course aboard the HMS *Hermione* years

later. And what a main course it is - a horrific mutiny that would leave even Thomas Hobbes agape by its human savagery. It is in the aftermath of this gory event that Ekirch truly shines at his craft. He dissects the complex moral, legal, and social ramifications of the up-rising with a surgeon's precision. The news of heavy-handed British retribution ran fast and deep into the delicate social folds of our young republic. In fact, it swayed the American political spirit right through the Presidential election of 1800 - providing a pivotal tailwind for the Democratic-Republicans (see: Thomas Jefferson), raising a national fervor against impressment, and lubricating the gears of war with the British that would only accelerate over the next dozen years. His arguments for the catalyst are clear and convincing. Upon finishing American Sanctuary, one is left with the profound impression that the crucible of history passed aboard the HMS Hermione on that September day in 1797 and Ekirch masterfully gives it the interpretation it deserves.

Professor Ekirch has uncanny mastery of detail and great skill as a researcher and scholar of early American history. This work undoubtedly will remain the definitive study of the mutiny on the Hermione and its consequences, for it is difficult to imagine anyone attempting to supplant this study with new findings or contrary interpretation. The bloody uprising on the British man-of-war HMS Hermione and the vicious slaughter of its officers, the military and political pursuit of the mutineers, and the international reaction to this event are presented in dramatic fashion. But few writers have the skill to examine and interpret the serious consequences this naval crime had upon the presidency of John Adams and his administration, and upon Jefferson and other political and ideological rivals of the Federalists. One of the leaders of the mutiny, Jonathan Robbins, an American citizen impressed into the Royal Navy, entered the United States and attempted to oppose British efforts to have him extradited. In a long-lamented decision from Washington, Robbins was released to the British, who promptly hanged him, without a hearing. Reaction to that decision did much to weaken Adam's chances of reelection and dramatized America's need to define itself as a sanctuary for the oppressed of the world. Few scholars can match Ekirch's skill in following the ensuing political and judicial consequences of the Hermione Affair for the American public and their leaders, down to our own day. The volume is handsomely bound and well printed, with many portraits, maps and plates capturing the spirit of this era. In the right hands, this narrative could well form the basis of an interesting movie script, a film for thinking audiences and an antidote for the noxious pap that Hollywood spoons out in recent years. We can only hope.

Roger Ekirch's book about a mutiny that has been largely forgotten, but that had major implications

for American politics, the Presidential election of 1800, and sanctuary of fugitives in the United States, is well written, and opens a window into a poorly understood era of American history. The book reads well and explains a part of the complex relationship between the United States and the British Empire in the first 50 years after the Declaration of Independence. During those years the Royal Navy manned its ships partially by impressing American sailors at sea. American courts were often sympathetic to the mutineers rather than to the British request for extradition. In the case of the Mutiny of the *Hermione*, the Captain and eight other officers were thrown overboard. Ekirch's tale of the mutiny and the aftermath is a compelling read.

This book is terrific. I have had an interest in the bloody mutiny aboard HMS *Hermione* since reading Dudley Pope's "The Black Ship" many years ago, but Pope focussed on the mutiny itself. Ekirch recounts in less detail what happened aboard *Hermione*, but concentrates on the effects of the mutiny and the British pursuit of the mutineers, especially Thomas Nash, aka Jonathan Robbins, on American politics, law, and Anglo-American diplomacy. From the presidential election of 1800, in which it was a major and perhaps decisive issue, to judicial cases and legislation as late as the 1980's, the mutiny and the fate of Nash/Robbins have had a continuing major impact on the United States and its self-image as a sanctuary for fugitives from oppression in other countries. Thoroughly researched and very well written, this book is must reading for students of the early national period of American history.

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