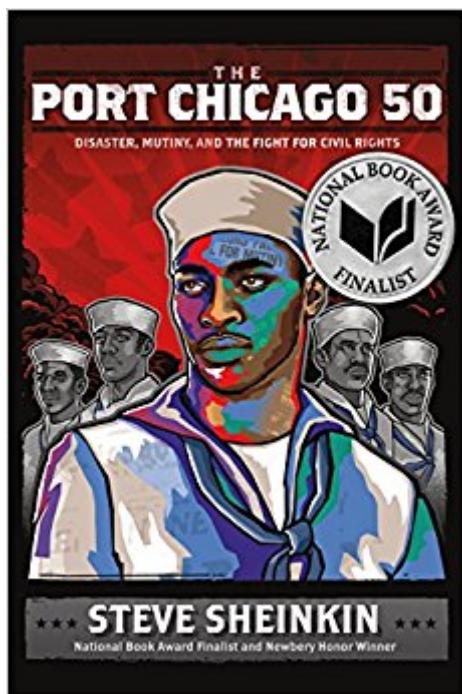


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The Port Chicago 50: Disaster, Mutiny, And The Fight For Civil Rights



Synopsis

An astonishing civil rights story from Newbery Honor winner and National Book Award finalist Steve Sheinkin. On July 17, 1944, a massive explosion rocked the segregated Navy base at Port Chicago, California, killing more than 300 sailors who were at the docks, critically injuring off-duty men in their bunks, and shattering windows up to a mile away. On August 9th, 244 men refused to go back to work until unsafe and unfair conditions at the docks were addressed. When the dust settled, fifty were charged with mutiny, facing decades in jail and even execution. The Port Chicago 50 is a fascinating story of the prejudice and injustice that faced black men and women in America's armed forces during World War II, and a nuanced look at those who gave their lives in service of a country where they lacked the most basic rights. This thoroughly-researched and documented book can be worked into multiple aspects of the common core curriculum, including history and social studies. Steve Sheinkin is the acclaimed author of many nonfiction works, including *The Notorious Benedict Arnold: A True Story of Adventure, Heroism & Treachery*, Newbery Honor Book and National Book Award Finalist *Bomb: The Race to Build--and Steal--the World's Most Dangerous Weapon*, and National Book Award finalist *Most Dangerous: Daniel Ellsberg and the Secret History of the Vietnam War*. Sheinkin delivers another meticulously researched WWII story, one he discovered while working on his Newbery Honor book, *Bomb*. . . . Archival photos appear throughout, and an extensive bibliography, source notes, and index conclude this gripping, even horrific account of a battle for civil rights predating Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr.

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Publishers Weekly, starred review

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Customer Reviews

Gr 7 Up  •In a fluid, methodical style, Dominic Hoffman reads this powerful book, which tells the story of brave men who fought the entrenched system of segregation found within the U.S. military during World War II. Sheinkin (Bomb) explains that while African American men had filled the ranks of the armed forces since the beginning of the nation, their advancement and status were limited. In this epic tale, African American sailors at Port Chicago naval base in California were assigned the dangerous task of loading explosives onto cargo ships. The men had had no training and were subjected to brutal work schedules under prejudiced commanders. In July 1944, munitions exploded, killing more than 300 people, most of whom were African American. Afterwards, a group of men, known as the Port Chicago 50, refused to continue the dangerous work. They were charged with mutiny and brought to trial, found guilty, and sentenced to hard labor. The riveting text draws upon court documents and testimony, allowing listeners to hear the words of the accused as well as the lawyers. The case drew the attention of NAACP lawyer Thurgood Marshall and officials within the Roosevelt administration who recognized that the real issue was segregation within the military. The brave men known as the Port Chicago 50 were pioneers in what would become the Civil Rights Movement; they led the way for other men who loved their country and wanted equal rights. This is a stupendous account sure to intrigue anyone interested in history or civil rights.  •Patricia Ann Owens, formerly with Illinois Eastern Community Colleges, Mt. Carmel, Illinois --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

The award-winning author of *Bomb* (2012) returns with another compelling American history narrative. This time Sheinkin takes on the Port Chicago 50, a group of African American sailors who were court-martialed and convicted of mutiny when they refused to continue loading ammunition after experiencing a terrifying accidental explosion that destroyed the entire port. Tracing the history of racial discrimination in the U.S. armed forces, Sheinkin describes the U.S. Navy's long-standing policy of restricting duties for African American servicemen, the unfair treatment the divisions received at the segregated Port Chicago facility, and the dangerous working conditions facing the sailors there, including a lack of training on how to properly handle explosives, and competitions that encouraged reckless practices. Sheinkin's narrative shines as he recounts the frustrating court-martial trial that resulted in a guilty verdict for all 50 men, which still stands today despite repeated attempts to exonerate the sailors. Photos, reproductions of primary documents, and direct quotes from the sailors themselves flesh-out this account of a little-known piece of civil rights history. Grades 6-9. --Sarah Hunter --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

First, Sheinkin struck our funny bones with the likes of King George: What Was His Problem? and Two Miserable Presidents. He relied less on humor and more on drama and moral ambiguity in The Notorious Benedict Arnold and Bomb. His tone shifts once again in The Port Chicago 50. The subject is too serious and too close to home for lightheartedness. Something is rotten in the state of Denmark. The heroes of this tale never got what they deserved. Rather the opposite, in fact. It's a sad and disturbing tale. Writing this is a gutsy move on Sheinkin's part, and he brings his maturing talents to bear on it with skill and sensitivity.

THE PORT CHICAGO 50: DISASTER, MUTINY, AND THE FIGHT FOR CIVIL RIGHTS by Steve Sheinkin is at the top of many nonfiction awards lists for 2014. Consider purchasing both the print and audiobook versions. A finalist for YALSA's 2015 Excellence in Nonfiction for Young Adults Award, the book traces the little-known story of 50 African American sailors convicted of mutiny by the U.S. Navy during World War II. Refusing to follow orders to load dangerous explosives onto ships, their story became a rallying cry for those who felt the military's segregation policies were discriminatory. Sheinkin brings the story alive through his compelling, well-researched narrative. Woven throughout the story are primary resource materials including historical photos, interviews, and court records. The print and ebook versions contain extensive references and notes that support the narrative. Middle and high school students often skim works of nonfiction and miss the impact of the narrative. Consider sharing the audiobook version of this story with youth. Dominic Hoffman is a superb storyteller who masterfully switches among a wide range of voices to keep listeners actively engaged in the story. Many students and teachers who thought they knew about the Civil Rights Movement will be amazed by this gripping, little-known piece of history. To learn more about the author, go to <http://stevesheinkin.com/>. To see a slideshow on historical photos from the book, go to <http://us.macmillan.com/theportchicago50/SteveSheinkin>. Watch a short documentary that explores the Great Port Chicago Explosion at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DalpGJt5NU>.

I am a veteran of the Vietnam era. I did not serve in a combat role. I am white. There is no way I will ever be able to fully understand and appreciate the problems African Americans have had to endure. When I consider how angry I can become when shown disrespect and lack of common courtesy, I find myself humbled when reading the experiences of the Port Chicago 50. African Americans earned their rights as free Americans. They paid a much higher price than the rest of us.

In my many history classes including African American studies in college, I had never heard of this tragic event that definitely was a pivotal event to end segregation. Everyone knows the story of Rosa Parks refusing to give up her seat, but how many people know of Joe Small. I hope this book gains enough recognition that the Navy finally does the right thing by these 50 men.

Gripping story that I couldn't put down. Written for young adults but plenty of interest for grown-ups as well. Discrimination against African-Americans was particularly bad in the Navy, and black enlisted men had only two options - to work in a mess, or to load heavy ammunition onto ships with no safety precautions taken. After hundreds died in an explosion, black sailors refused to continue with the loading and were found guilty of mutiny. Thurgood Marshall is a hero of this story for effecting their release - and Eleanor Roosevelt also stood on the side of justice. Good nonfiction reading for middle and high school students.

Good story follow up however weak on some research and some names are not correct for example the prosecuted who latter became DA in alameda county was known as Frank not James also the author did not know that Dekucci was his brother in law

How military desegregation happened. The description of treatment of Negroes in the military before integration of the services after WW 2. Told through stories of 50 men, accused of mutiny, after surviving a horrendous explosion in a California Naval yard. Engrossing and horrifying, this book reminds us what Inhumanity looks like and inspires us to know what humanity is.

I served in the Coast Guard at Port Chicago supervising the loading of the same Liberty ships during the Vietnam war. No one ever mentioned that black Navy sailors were required to load bombs very unsafely and at great risk to their lives. No one mentioned that many black sailors lost their lives when white commanders were competing to see who could load their Liberty ship the fastest. The Navy kept it quiet that they discriminated against black sailors and tried them for desertion because they refused to go back and continue to load ships at great risk to their lives. Also there was no memorial to the lives lost at Port Chicago until many years later.

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