



White Jacket: The World on a Man-of-War

Herman Melville

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Written by Herman Melville (who was best known for his classic whaling novel), *White Jacket* was first published in 1850. It is considered to be a semi-biographical book, written from Melville's own personal experiences while returning home to the Atlantic Coast from the South Seas with the American Navy on a man-o'-war vessel. During 1834-44, Melville served as an ordinary seaman aboard the U.S. frigate *United States*. A critically acclaimed novel, *White Jacket* won political support for its stand against the use of flogging as corporal punishment aboard naval vessels. It is not known if *White Jacket* was directly responsible for the cessation of flogging; however, members of Congress received copies of the novel during the Congressional debate over the issue, and flogging in the U.S. Navy was abolished that year. Subtitled *The World in a Man-of-War*, the novel depicts life aboard a typical frigate, the *Neversink*, and describes the tyrannies to which ship's officers subject ordinary seamen and the appalling conditions under which the seamen live.

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