

## White Jacket; Or, The World on a Man-of-War

*Herman Melville*

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**Herman Melville : White Jacket; Or, The World on a Man-of-War** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised White Jacket; Or, The World on a Man-of-War:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A tour of shipboard life that is also a call for a more just society. By Jim Webster Melville gives great insight into the life in the US Navy of the 1840s, but it is also, as the sub-title implies, a view of life on this naval ship as a microcosm of the larger world. Melville, describes the strengths and foibles of his shipmates and the ship's officers. Moreover the book is a political argument against the needles cruelty and disrespect

imposed upon the enlisted sailors -- and thereby also an argument for a more enlightened social and political organization ashore. The book is not so much a novel (i.e., it has no plot, per se). Rather, chapter by chapter, Melville takes us on a tour of the various crew members' duties and standing in the ship's social hierarchy and describes shipboard life ranging from standing watches up in the rigging, to hiding gambling games from the masters-at-arms, to frequent floggings for minor infractions. For any who might be intimidated by Melville, don't be. Melville was a keen observer and writes with many touches of humor -- example: "it is often observable, that, in vessels of all kinds, the men who talk the most sailor lingo are the least sailor-like in reality." And some of what Melville wrote about the 1840s was still true of my own experience as an enlisted US Navy sailor in the 1960s and 70s: "...from a frigate's crew might be culled out men of all callings and vocations, from a backslidden parson to a broken-down comedian. The Navy is the asylum for the perverse, the home of the unfortunate. Here the sons of adversity meet the children of calamity, and here the children of calamity meet the offspring of sin."<sup>2</sup> of 2 people found the following review helpful. Authentic History - Laced with social commentary By Greenshirt I chose this book as a referred classic - a first hand history of the Sailing Navy. To that end the book was faithful and good. Chapters spent in commenting to the societal truths of Navy life added depth, but also slowed down the read. Melville is very often subtle in sarcasm - you kind of need to pick through his words a second or third time to get his meaning. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Excellent! By fiona I found Melville's White Jacket a great read. I have read a fair amount of 19th century books on sailing and navigation (including Melville's major novels), but White Jacket was extremely informative on the injustice pervasive in the U.S. navy ... It was shocking to me. Melville addresses the military caste system at its worst: the power, injustice, brutality, cruelty. Living conditions on a U.S. Man of War ship were horrendous, much worse than on a whaler. Melville is a fascinating writer, able to capture spirit, decency, respect, heroism and genius among all sailors. He doesn't blink at the degeneracy and debauchery existing among all groups, too, but he is clear on who has the power. White Jacket might have a tiny hint of the major themes found in Moby Dick, but Melville's purpose was more concrete: to present life on a Man of War in a literal way clearly addressing the disenfranchisement of US sailors. Having read Billy Budd years ago, I now realize I would have had a much greater understanding of Melville's messages of good, evil, and catastrophic injustice if I had read White Jacket first. This book should be required reading for military leaders.

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About the Author Herman Melville (August 1, 1819 ndash; September 28, 1891) was an American novelist.