



The Port Chicago 50: Disaster, Mutiny, and the Fight for Civil Rights

By Steve Sheinkin

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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.

This is a fascinating story of the prejudice 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.

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Gr 7 Up—In the summer of 1944, 50 sailors, all of them African American, were tried and convicted of mutiny by the U.S. Navy. They had refused to follow a direct order of loading dangerous rockets and munitions on ships bound for battle in the Pacific after an enormous explosion had killed more than 300 of their fellow sailors and other civilians working on the dock. At the heart of this story is the rampant racism that permeated the military at all levels, leaving minority sailors and soldiers to do the drudge work almost exclusively while their white counterparts served on the front lines. Through extensive research, Sheinkin effectively re-creates both the tense atmosphere at Port Chicago before and after the disaster as well as the events that led to the men's refusal of this one particular order that they felt put them directly in harm's way. Much of the tension in this account stems from the growing frustration that readers are meant to feel as bigotry and discrimination are encountered at every turn and at every level of the military. There is a wealth of primary-source material here, including interviews with the convicted sailors, court records, photographs, and other documents, all of which come together to tell a story that clearly had a huge impact on race relations in the military. This is a story that remains largely unknown to many Americans, and is one of the many from World War II about segregation and race that is important to explore with students. Abundant black-and-white photos, extensive source notes, and a thorough bibliography are included.—Jody Kopple, Shady Hill School, Cambridge, MA

From [Booklist](#)

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

Review

“Through effective research, Sheinkin re-creates a story that remains largely unknown to many Americans, and is one of the many from World War II about segregation and race that is important to explore with students.” *?School Library Journal, starred review*

“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.” *?Publishers Weekly, starred review*

“In this thoroughly researched and well-documented drama, Sheinkin lets the participants tell the story,

masterfully lacing the narrative with extensive quotations drawn from oral histories, information from trial transcripts and archival photographs. The event, little known today, is brought to life and placed in historical context, with Eleanor Roosevelt, Thurgood Marshall and Jackie Robinson figuring in the story.” ?*Kirkus Reviews, starred review*

“Sheinkin follows *Bomb* (rev. 11/12) with an account of another aspect of the Second World War, stemming from an incident that seems small in scope but whose ramifications would go on to profoundly change the armed forces and the freedom of African Americans to serve their country.” ?*The Horn Book*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

James Shafer:

Reading a e-book tends to be new life style in this particular era globalization. With examining you can get a lot of information that could give you benefit in your life. With book everyone in this world could share their idea. Textbooks can also inspire a lot of people. Lots of author can inspire their reader with their story or their experience. Not only the storyline that share in the books. But also they write about the ability about something that you need illustration. How to get the good score toefl, or how to teach your kids, there are many kinds of book which exist now. The authors nowadays always try to improve their proficiency in writing, they also doing some study before they write to the book. One of them is this The Port Chicago 50: Disaster, Mutiny, and the Fight for Civil Rights.

Elmira McGraw:

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