



Naval Engagements: Patriotism, Cultural Politics, and the Royal Navy 1793-1815

Timothy Jenks

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The construction of an important element in British national identity is explored in *Naval Engagements*, looking at the ways in which the navy - a major symbol of national community - was given meaning by a range of social groupings. The study is at once a cultural history of national identity, a social history of naval commemoration, and a political history of struggles over patriotism.

Examining the place that naval symbols occupied in British wartime political culture, Timothy Jenks argues that these were more relevant to patriotic discourse than the more commonly explored 'apotheosis' of the Hanoverian monarchs. He establishes the centrality of public images of admirals to the 'victory culture' and political experience of the day, tracing efforts by groups across the political spectrum to invest these figures with appropriate political capital and contemporary meaning. He engages with arguments concerning popular patriotism and the relative cohesiveness of British society. Most importantly, the book establishes the centrality of naval symbolism to the political culture of Georgian Britain. At the same time, it reveals the social practices and discourses that consistently interacted to delimit and restrain a variety of projects ostensibly designed to foster patriotism and national identity.

Patriotism was contested, this study argues, rather than consensual, and British national identity in the period was contingent, an ambivalence crucial to the manner in which naval symbols functioned.

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