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## Middle and Working Class Struggles Against Authoritarian Whig Reforms of the Eighteenth Century: An Examination of Mess Relations Below Deck

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Middle and Working Class Struggles Against Authoritarian Whig Reforms of the Eighteenth Century: An Examination of Mess Relations Below Deck

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The fans of British naval fiction, like C.S. Forester's Horatio Hornblower series or Patrick O'Brian's Aubrey-Maturin series, are drawn into the well-researched and historically accurate depictions of the British professional navy of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. What they do not see is that from the mid-eighteenth century there were major naval reforms that converted a civilian led navy into a true military force that redefined the rules of combat. These changes created strict hierarchy and discipline on board the ships. Historian Sarah Kinkel argues that the reforms were hotly debated by the mercantile elite in the British urban centers who profited from privateering and feared a strong centralized navy, however her work overlooks the broader public sphere. The seamen who lived and died in the new navy honored and challenged these reforms in their own way and it all began and centered on the mealtime routines that became the barometer of the crew's temperament. This project is based on primary research involving eight private journals of British seamen from middle- and working-class backgrounds, each of whom write about their messmates and the social networks that were created as they ate together. The struggle to remain free men in a culture of domineering discipline and hierarchy helps us understand the rising tensions that were raging in Britain between the ruling authoritarian Whigs and the lower classes.