

# What is a Steward?

GRADES 5-8



## Overview

This activity is geared toward participants in grades 3-8. The estimated amount of time to deliver this lesson is 60 minutes.

The Steward's Branch of the Navy was tasked with serving officers in a variety of ways, from cleaning their living quarters to serving three meals a day. Before, during and after World War II, stewards were almost exclusively Black, Filipino and Guamanian.

Steward's Mates, the entry-level sailors in the Steward's branch, were generally assigned the lowest pay grade on board. Before and during World War II, Steward was the only job available to Black sailors on combat vessels. On some ships, stewards received training to serve as gunners in times of emergency.

Participants will use oral histories and other primary sources to explore the experiences of stewards and steward's mates.



## Objective

Participants will be able to make connections between the duties of a steward, individuals who generally served in this position, and the wider societal attitudes toward people of color.



## Materials

- "Chapter 2: Steward's Mate's Rates" from the Steward's Mates Navy Training Course
- Oral history compilation of Eugene Smith Jr, Samuel Hayward, and Levi Murray
- Images of steward's branch from USS *Sangamon*, USS *Intrepid* and USS *North Carolina*



## Inquiry

Participants will read the selected pages from “Chapter 2: Steward’s Mate’s Rates” from the Steward’s Mates Navy Training Course of 1946. This chapter describes the day-to-day life of steward’s mates and their main jobs aboard ship. Discuss the following questions:

- What is a steward’s mate? What kind of work were steward’s mates assigned to on board a Navy vessel?
- Why were these duties necessary on board such a vessel?
- Who is depicted in the photos of steward’s mates modeling the department’s uniforms and duties?
- How might a steward’s mate reading this training booklet feel about the instructions and language used inside?



## Investigation

Listen to or read transcripts of the [oral histories](#) from three men who served as stewards in the U.S. Navy during World War II: Eugene Smith Jr, Levi Murray and Samuel Hayward. Discuss the following questions:

- What duties did Eugene, Levi and Sam have on board their vessels?
- What was similar about each man’s experience? Different?
- How did the men feel about their status as a steward?
- From the oral histories, what can you conclude about how sailors became part of the steward’s branch?



## Activity

### Demographics of the Steward’s Branch

Provide oral history transcripts and images of the steward’s branch. Pose the following questions:

- Who do you see in these photos?

- Who is sitting? Who is standing?
- What activities is each person performing?
- What demographic of people made up the steward's branch during World War II?

Provide background content on the steward's branch and its demographics. Discuss the following questions:

- Why did the Navy keep Black and Filipino Americans in the steward's branch during World War II?
- What was going on socially in the United States during the 1930s and 1940s? How could this have affected the opportunities for non-white sailors during World War II?



## Lesson Connection

Have participants listen to the oral histories of other Black sailors who served in the Navy during World War II, such as: John Seagraves, Henry Mouzon and Theodore Jackson. Please see our lesson: **Limits on Black Sailors in World War II**.



## Background

### Stewards

Stewards and steward's mates were in charge of cleaning and organizing officers' living quarters, serving food in the officers' wardroom, assisting the cooks in the galley and other similar duties. Steward's mates were ranked lower than Stewards. Stewards oversaw officers' mealtimes and had authority over steward's mates. During wartime, stewards could be trained as gunners and placed in a gun tub as a group in case of an emergency.

### Roles of a Steward's Mate

A "stateroom boy" was the steward's mate tasked with cleaning an officer's stateroom, including taking out their laundry, dusting, and changing the sheets.

A “wardroom boy” served meals in the officers’ wardroom, or large dining room. They set tables, served food and reset the room after the meal.

A “watch” or “relief boy” answered calls in the wardroom and pantry, made sure the wardroom was always in order, and took care of other small duties like serving soft drinks as requested.

A “pantry/galley boy” brought out the necessary food for the day’s meals, cleaned refrigerators and dishware, helped prepare food and took out the trash.

A “cigar mess boy” handled the stock and distribution of convenience items kept for officers, like tobacco, cigarettes, cigars, candy and toilet articles. This was separate from the ship store and was only on some vessels.

## Demographics of Stewards

During World War II, stewards were almost exclusively Black and Filipino. The changing statuses of Black and Filipino sailors in the Navy meant that the demographics of the branch was ever-changing throughout the twentieth century. From 1919 to 1932, Black sailors were not able to enlist in the Navy at all. A succession of agreements between the U.S. and the Philippines brought Filipino nationals in and out of the Navy, ending with the Military Bases Agreement in 1947, which allowed the US to actively recruit and enlist Filipino nationals. However, Filipino sailors served exclusively as stewards until 1971.

At the beginning of the war, Black sailors could only enlist in the Messman Branch, later called the Stewards Branch. Although the Navy began to permit Black personnel to enlist in the general service in June 1942, it wasn’t until 1948 that Executive Order 9981 abolished racial discrimination in the armed forces. However, Black sailors were still frequently restricted to menial jobs until the Zumwalt era in the 1970s.

In 1975, the Navy combined the steward rating with commissaryman. Commissarymen prepared and served meals for enlisted sailors. The new rating was called mess management specialist. Job responsibilities focused on menu planning and food preparation for enlisted sailors as well as officers. A pool of enlisted sailors took over some of the cleaning duties formerly done by stewards.



## Additional Resources/References

For more information on stewards and Black Navy sailors in the early 20th century:

<https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/diversity/african-americans.html>

<https://www.navyhistory.org/2022/02/doris-miller-messboy-steward-cook-hero/>



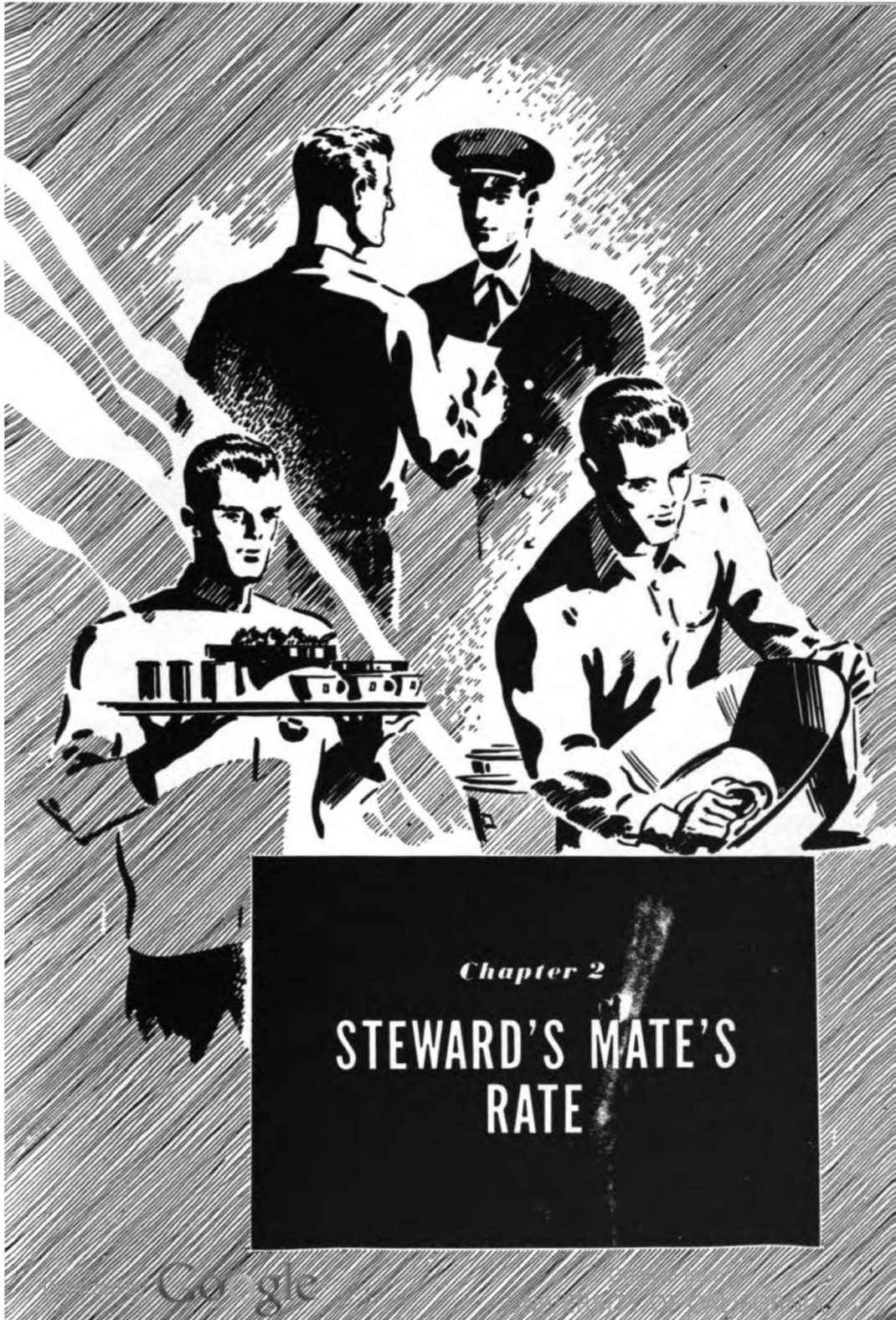
**NATIONAL  
ENDOWMENT  
FOR THE  
HUMANITIES**

*Full Muster: Inclusive Histories on Historic Naval Ships* has been made possible in part by a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities: Democracy demands wisdom.

Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this resource do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

## Documents and Images

### Stewards Mate's Rates Booklet



# STEWARD'S MATES

*can become Stewards  
or cooks*



## THIS IS THE LINE OF PROMOTION



Steward's Mate, 3c



Steward's Mate, 2c



Steward's Mate, 1c

## THE STEWARD'S MATE CAN STRIKE FOR STEWARD OR COOK



Steward, 3c  
Cook, 3c



Steward, 2c  
Cook, 2c



Steward, 1c  
Cook, 1c



## THE CHIEF IS TOP MAN

*You may become a Chief  
Steward or a Chief Cook*



Digitized by Google

Original from UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

# STEWARD'S BRANCH *wears these uniforms*

## STEWARD'S MATES



## STEWARDS AND COOKS



Three- or four-button blue coats may be worn.



## WHERE DOES THE STEWARD'S MATE WORK?



### IN ADMIRAL'S COUNTRY.

On a flag ship, you may be selected to serve the flag officer. Only a topnotch Steward's Mate can qualify.



### IN CAPTAIN'S COUNTRY.

If you do an outstanding job, you may be chosen to work with the commanding officer. You can try for this job.



**IN EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S QUARTERS.** A Steward's Mate, usually the Head Boy, serves with the executive officer. You can try for this job.

### IN OFFICERS' STATEROOMS.

Each Steward's Mate will be assigned to clean certain staterooms. You will do such things as make the bed, sweep the deck, and dust desks and shelves.



**IN WARDROOM AND WARRANT OFFICERS' MESS.** Most Steward's Mates work in the wardroom and the W.O.'s mess. Here you will wait on tables, set and clear tables and keep the room shipshape.



### IN PANTRY AND GALLEY.

Steward's Mates also work in the pantry and galley. Preparing and serving food properly is important to the good health of your officers.



# DUTIES OF THE STEWARD'S MATE

*The work of your division has been split up to give every Steward's Mate a fair share of the job. You will take your turn at these jobs.*



**BATTLE STATION**



**STATEROOM BOY**



**WARDROOM BOY**



**WATCH BOY  
RELIEF BOY**



**PANTRY BOY  
GALLEY BOY**



**CIGAR MESS  
BOY**



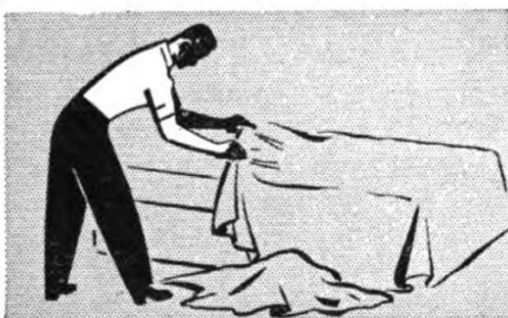
# SAMPLE WEEKLY CLEANING SCHEDULE

*Your work schedule may  
be like this . . .*



## MONDAY

Scrub the deck and all the bulk-  
heads in the officers' rooms.  
Shine shoes for the officer



## TUESDAY

Change linens and towels in  
the morning. Count the dirty  
linen and take to Head Boy.



## WEDNESDAY

Scrub the deck and all bulk-  
heads. Take officers' dirty  
clothes to laundry. Shine shoes.

**THURSDAY**

**Field Day in the galley. Begin Field Day in wardroom. Return officers' laundry to staterooms.**



**FRIDAY**

**Field Day in the wardroom and in the pantry. Change all towels in the officers' staterooms.**



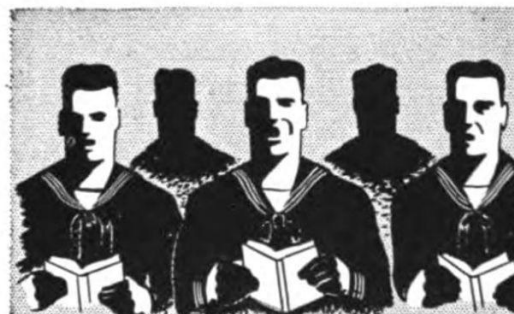
**SATURDAY**

**Polish silver. Scrub decks and all the bulkheads in officers' rooms. Shine the officers' shoes.**



**SUNDAY**

**Sunday is your light day. Make up officers' beds. Tidy up rooms. Attend the church services.**





# A STEWARD'S MATE'S DAY

*when not on watch  
or special duty*

### MORNING

<b>0530—0630</b>	<b>REVEILLE</b>	Trice up your bunk. Clean up and get dressed.
<b>0600—0630</b>	<b>YOUR BREAKFAST</b>	You will eat breakfast before the officers do.
<b>0630—0700</b>	<b>SET TABLES</b>	Report to wardroom in clean jacket. Have tables set up before 0700.
<b>0700—0830</b>	<b>BREAKFAST</b>	All Steward's Mates serve the breakfast meal.
<b>0830—1030</b>	<b>CLEAN ROOMS</b>	Make up officers' rooms as soon as breakfast is finished.
<b>1030—1130</b>	<b>YOUR LUNCH</b>	You will eat your lunch before the officers eat.
<b>1130—1200</b>	<b>SET TABLES</b>	Tidy the wardroom and set tables for lunch.

### AFTERNOON

<b>1200—1300</b>	<b>LUNCH</b>	All Steward's Mates serve the noon-day meal.
<b>1300—1310</b>	<b>QUARTERS</b>	All hands fall in at your quarters for muster.
<b>1310—1530</b>	<b>CLEAN ROOMS</b>	Finish cleaning officers' rooms and clean your own quarters.
<b>1530—1700</b>	<b>HAPPY HOUR</b>	Rest, haircuts, visit ship's store and fountain.
<b>1700—1730</b>	<b>YOUR DINNER</b>	You will eat your dinner before the officers eat.
<b>1730—1830</b>	<b>SET TABLES</b>	Tidy wardroom and set tables for the evening meal.

### NIGHT

<b>1830—1930</b>	<b>DINNER</b>	All Steward's Mates serve dinner.
<b>1930—2100</b>	<b>RECREATION</b>	Movies.
<b>2100</b>	<b>TAPS</b>	Lights out.

Digitized by Google

## Images of the Steward's Branch



Photo of the Steward's Branch on *USS North Carolina*, 1945

Credit: Battleship NORTH CAROLINA



Men working in the Officer's Galley on board *USS North Carolina*, 1945

Credit: Battleship NORTH CAROLINA



Thomas Sprague in Wardroom, 1944 [Possibly on USS *Sangamon*]

Credit: Collection of the Intrepid Museum. Gift of Paul I. Lyness. P2015.62.40



Captain Kelley's Anniversary Cake, USS *Intrepid*

Credit: Collection of the Intrepid Museum. Gift of Joan Huffman Kelley. P00.2009.27.03.44





Cutting the 7,000th Landing Cake, USS *Intrepid*

Credit: Collection of the Intrepid Museum. P00.2012.01.76