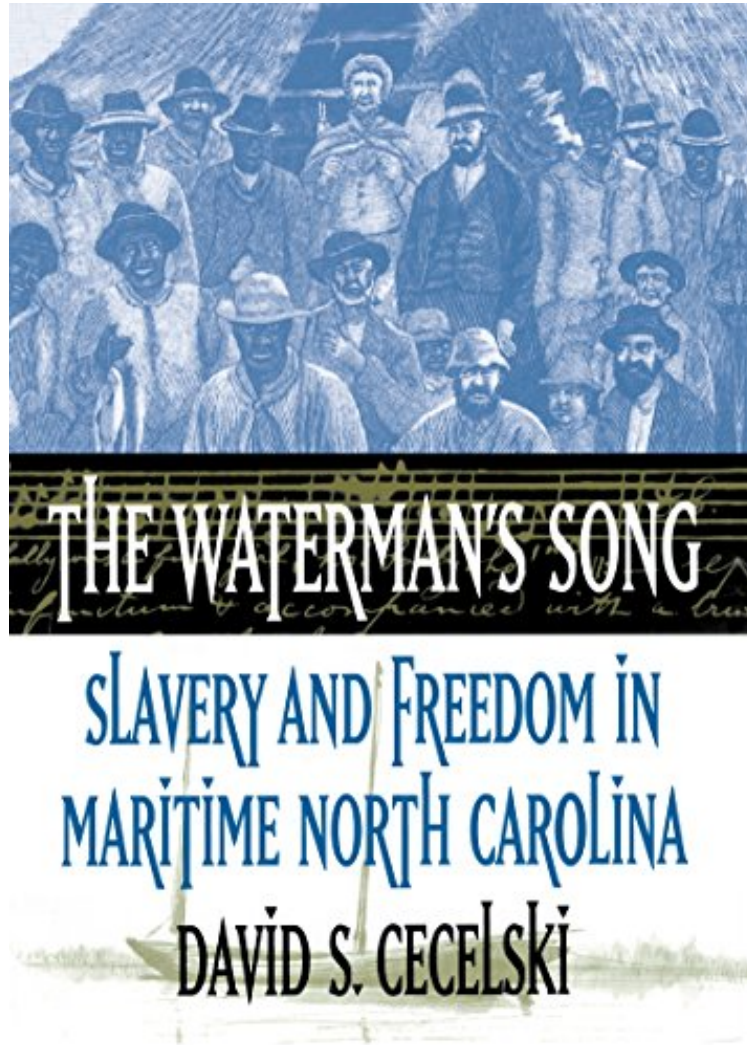


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The Waterman's Song: Slavery and Freedom in Maritime North Carolina

David S. Cecelski

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The first major study of slavery in the maritime South, *The Waterman's Song* chronicles the world of slave and free black fishermen, pilots, rivermen, sailors, ferrymen, and other laborers who, from the colonial era through Reconstruction, plied the vast inland waters of North Carolina from the Outer Banks to the upper reaches of tidewater rivers. Demonstrating the vitality and significance of this local African American maritime culture, David Cecelski also reveals its connections to the Afro-Caribbean, the relatively egalitarian work culture of seafaring men who visited nearby ports, and the revolutionary political tides that coursed throughout the black Atlantic. Black maritime laborers played an essential role in local abolitionist activity, slave insurrections, and other antislavery activism. They also boatlifted thousands of slaves to freedom during the Civil War. But most important, Cecelski says, they carried an insurgent, democratic vision born in the maritime districts of the slave South into the political maelstrom of the Civil War and Reconstruction.

Based on solid research and elegantly written, Cecelski's sophisticated account will appeal to both academic and popular readers. (Douglas R. Egerton, Le Moyne College) Deeply respectful of historic Black watermen who, like himself, were intimately acquainted with the treacherous and enchanting North Carolina coast, David Cecelski has written the finest regional maritime history of Black Americans ever produced. (W. Jeffrey Bolster, author of "Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail") Building on but transcending the work of other scholars who have explored the maritime world of the Atlantic, David Cecelski painstakingly recreates the economic, social, and political environments in which these African-American sailors, fishermen and women, and ship's mates plied their craft.--Georgia Historical Quarterly Deeply respectful of historic Black watermen who, like himself, were intimately acquainted with the treacherous and enchanting North Carolina coast, David Cecelski has written the finest regional maritime history of Black Americans ever produced. Vivid and indefatigably researched, *The Waterman's Song* is a study of place that illuminates the interconnectedness of the Black Atlantic.--W. Jeffrey Bolster, author of *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* By uncovering and interpreting deep structures of meaning inlaid in the African American experience of North Carolina's maritime past David Cecelski has enriched immeasurably our sense of coastal North Carolina. . . . Elegant.--Southern Cultures Cecelski has produced the first major study of slavery on the North Carolina coast.--Carolina Country Cecelski is to be commended for tackling a topic that is complex, difficult to discern and easily distorted. His easy style of writing, combined with his passion for the topic, shine through the entire book, making it a wonderful read. . . . All readers of *The Waterman's Song*, the casual as well as the devote, cannot escape the expanded understanding of the maritime world that David Cecelski has given us.--International Journal of Maritime History *The Waterman's Song* is not only important because it breaks new ground. It is exceptional in its feeling for time and place, its discussions of the great variety of work performed by slave fishermen and boatmen, its descriptions of the many boats used by slaves . . . and, as the title implies, its suggestion that water seemed to symbolize freedom.--Journal of Interdisciplinary History David Cecelski knows that place matters--even when the human drama is one of slavery and freedom. His intimate account of Black watermen on the coast of North Carolina is unquestionably the finest regional maritime history of Black Americans ever written.--W. Jeffrey Bolster, author of *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* A fine book, refreshing in its scope even as it attends wonderfully to the details of local life. . . . A careful, persuasive study, one that will be immensely helpful to those seeking to understand both the diversity of southern slavery and the ways in which slaves embraced, shaped, and used a militant political culture.--Journal of American History This lively, deeply researched account traces three centuries of black watermen's experience on the North Carolina coast. . . . Cecelski shows a sure and sensitive touch in depicting the experience of life within the backwater communities.--Sea History Celebrating North Carolina maritime slaves' insurgent, democratic ethos, Cecelski illustrates the variety of experiences under slavery with power and precision. His book ranks among the best of the new slavery studies.--Choice [A] remarkable achievement. This book links race and the environment in creative ways. . . . [Cecelski's] love of coastal North Carolina makes this a compelling study of an early American environment. The sights, sounds, and smells of the land and water are evident on every page. Cecelski has written a classic study that will be read widely.--Journal of Social History This highly original and well-written study fuses the best of local history to the wider arena of Atlantic-world studies. . . . An exciting and important study that enriches the historiography of North American slave labor as well as the scholarship of nineteenth-century African American politics. Beautifully illustrated and impressively researched, it will appeal to general readers and academic specialists alike.--Journal of Southern History A fine study of African American history that joins a growing chorus describing the complexity and variety of life under slavery. . . . Cecelski has recovered a different sort of slave society and a different sort of maritime society, and readers will profit from learning about both.--William and Mary Quarterly This unique work of scholarship is of considerable importance. Scholars have begun to describe the many varieties of unfree labor in North America, but until *The Waterman's Song*,

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Cecelski's book is well-written and well-researched; it would be ideal for undergraduate courses dealing with slavery, pre-Civil War southern history, maritime history, or African-American studies.--Journal of the Early Republic
A new approach to race relations and African American history in the nineteenth-century South.--Civil War History
About the Author
David S. Cecelski is an independent scholar living in Durham, North Carolina. A native of the North Carolina coast, he is author of several books, including *Along Freedom Road: Hyde County, North Carolina, and the Fate of Black Schools in the South*, and coeditor of *Democracy Betrayed: The Wilmington Race Riot of 1898 and Its Legacy*.