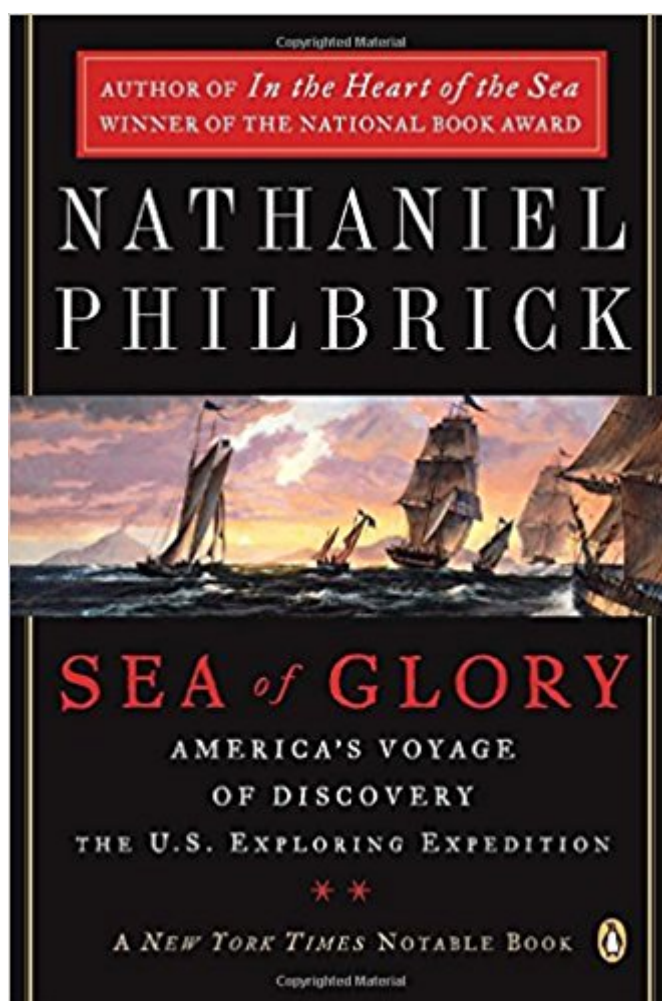


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# Sea Of Glory: America's Voyage Of Discovery, The U.S. Exploring Expedition, 1838-1842



## Synopsis

"A treasure of a book." —David McCullough  
The harrowing story of a pathbreaking naval expedition that set out to map the entire Pacific Ocean, dwarfing Lewis and Clark with its discoveries. A New York Times Notable Book  
America's first frontier was not the West; it was the sea, and no one writes more eloquently about that watery wilderness than Nathaniel Philbrick. In his bestselling *In the Heart of the Sea* Philbrick probed the nightmarish dangers of the vast Pacific. Now, in an epic sea adventure, he writes about one of the most ambitious voyages of discovery the Western world has ever seen—the U.S. Exploring Expedition of 1838–1842. On a scale that dwarfed the journey of Lewis and Clark, six magnificent sailing vessels and a crew of hundreds set out to map the entire Pacific Ocean and ended up naming the newly discovered continent of Antarctica, collecting what would become the basis of the Smithsonian Institution. Combining spellbinding human drama and meticulous research, Philbrick reconstructs the dark saga of the voyage to show why, instead of being celebrated and revered as that of Lewis and Clark, it has—until now—been relegated to a footnote in the national memory. Winner of the Theodore and Franklin D. Roosevelt Naval History Prize

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The expeditions of Magellan, Columbus, and Lewis and Clark have been well documented and are instantly familiar to anyone with even a passing interest in world history. But the average person is likely unaware of the U.S. Exploring Expedition or its mercurial leader, Charles Wilkes. This despite the numerous accomplishments and lasting legacy of the massive four-year project that involved six

ships and hundreds of men. The "Ex. Ex.," as it came to be known, is credited with the discovery of Antarctica, the first accurate charting of what is now Oregon and Washington, the retrieval of thousands of new species of life, and the foundation of the Smithsonian Institution. Yet when Wilkes returned, instead of being hailed as a great man of science or a national hero, he was shunned by the President, ignored by the press, and was the subject of so much ill will on the part of his men that he was ultimately put on trial for a variety of offenses. In the portrayal presented in Nathaniel Philbrick's *Sea of Glory*, Wilkes is a passionate man, brash and enthusiastic, driven by seemingly impossible goals, many of which he actually accomplished. But he's also a petty, mean-spirited loner, egotistical enough to unilaterally give himself a promotion in the middle of the expedition. Without Wilkes' singularity of purpose, it's hard to imagine the mission being as successful as it was, but it's also hard to conceive a personality more poorly suited to leadership than the near-universally-despised Wilkes. Philbrick also skillfully reveals the insecurity behind the tyranny in excerpts from letters to Wilkes' wife, Jane. The accounts of the expedition's adventures are at various times exhilarating and tragic as the crew scales the volcanoes of Hawaii, becomes involved in a bloody war with Fijian natives, and struggles merely to stay alive while at the same time not killing Wilkes. Philbrick's compelling narrative and meticulous research provide a vivid picture of the triumphs and hardships of the exploration age. --John Moe --This text refers to the Audible Audio Edition edition.

After chronicling the sinking of the whaleship *Essex* in *In the Heart of the Sea*, Philbrick attempts to rescue from obscurity the U.S. Exploring Expedition's 1838-1842 circumnavigation of the world and its cartographic and scientific accomplishments. With a strong narrative pull but an anticlimactic story arc, he chronicles the six-vessel squadron's Pacific escapades. Instead of a grisly page-turner, however, Philbrick follows his bestselling tragedy with a drawn-out success story. More than a tale of the *Ex. Ex.*'s journey, the book also profiles the expedition's egomaniacal commander, Lt. Charles Wilkes; the psychological warfare he waged against his officers; and the near-miraculous survival of the squadron despite Wilkes's perverse leadership and lack of nautical experience. Wilkes was, however, an accomplished surveyor, and the *Ex. Ex.* mapped hundreds of Pacific islands, 800 miles of the Oregon coast, 100 miles of the Columbia River and 1,500 miles of Antarctic coast. The expedition's scientists made groundbreaking contributions in ethnography, biology and geology (their collections formed the basis of the Smithsonian Institution). Particularly noteworthy among Philbrick's gripping passages are his descriptions of brash navigation in the Antarctic-but too much of the book bogs down in Wilkes's petty politicking, as he degraded talented men and promoted

incompetent ones so as not to be outshone. After four years at sea, he had alienated nearly every officer and returned home to a court-martial. "Instead of a thrilling tale of discovery and incredible achievement, [America] heard more about the flawed personality of the Expedition's commander than anyone wanted to know," Philbrick writes of Wilkes's 1842 trial, in which he was acquitted. Unfortunately, this spoils the retelling, too. Maps not seen by PW. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Audible Audio Edition edition.

One of Philbrick's better books. Well researched and written. Much of what happened during that expedition still happens in today's armed forces with the likes of Wilkes; people given authority, but not able to handle the rigors of command; with those below them paying the consequence of these incapable leaders. As for the book itself. The story about the EX Ex is as important as any other launched during our country's formative years. The names of the forgotten seaman, and marines; those that did not get their names on any special markers or spits of land are some of the true heroes of this tale. The book itself is a good and informative read. This story of exploration should be discussed as part of our history; placed with and include with the explorations and journals of Lewis and Clark, Jedediah Smith, Kit Carson, John C. Fremont, etcetera. In summation, whether you consider Wilkes a hero or a villain; he still remains an intricate part of 19th century exploration.

A wonderful book about a subject that has certainly been long forgotten. There is no doubt about the failures and arguments that took place during this expedition, but the story of Lt. Charles Wilkes is something everyone who has been in the military (as was I) was thoroughly drilled about, and that was: Rank has its privileges. The organization of this expedition certainly also was in question, as to why it was originally advertised as the "Pacific region", and then expanded to Antarctica. The book was certainly very well researched, and a colorful picture of what must have taken place. It's not an easy book to get quickly digested, but once you get hooked, it does keep one's interest going. I particularly enjoyed the description of the rediscovery of the Hawaiian islands, since I have been there many times. Of course with modern transportation available today, I can't imagine how the expedition ever got around, yet to the top of Mauna Loa. Lots of interesting facts in this book that I certainly did not know about. A good lesson in American history.

Nathaniel Philbrick brings to light a lesser known endeavor undertaken by the United States during her early years of global exploration which had huge impacts on our understanding of Oceanography and Geographical Surveying. The book is much more than a lesson in the early days

of exploration but rather brings the reader into the understanding of the human elements involved in such a huge task.

This is the story of Charles Wilkes, a talented, driven, hard-working yet unseasoned naval officer who was put in charge of the United States Exploring Expedition ("U.S. Ex-Ex"), an expedition whose mission it was to explore, map, and bring back artifacts from the Pacific. A motley collection of 6 refitted ships made up the expedition's fleet. Starting out from the East Coast of the U.S., they initially did some exploring and artifact-gathering in the Atlantic -- in Madeira, Cape Verde and South America. Together, and at times separately, the expedition's ships went on to explore the southern tip of South America, part of Antarctica's periphery, Fiji, Hawaii, various other islands in Polynesia, and the U.S. Pacific Northwest. After finishing up in the Pacific Northwest, the expedition headed back to Hawaii, then sailed on to the Philippines, Borneo and Singapore, then rounded the Cape of Good Hope and sailed back home to New York. The expedition lasted 4 years, from 1838 to 1842. The expedition's haul of artifacts, and plant and animal specimens was huge. A need to store them and make them available for public viewing helped to drive the founding of the Smithsonian Institution. The expedition also made many maps, some of which still were used by the U.S. military as recently as World War II. The main theme of "Sea of Glory," however, are the expedition's trials and tribulations -- in particular, those brought about by the expedition's commander, Lt. Charles Wilkes, who, although talented and hard-working, was handicapped by blinding ambition, insufficient leadership skills, and insufficient people skills in general. A large part of the book chronicles incidents brought about or aggravated by Wilkes' inner demons. Imagine the worst boss you've ever had. That's Wilkes, times 10. One of the book's more memorable parts is its descriptions of the iceberg fields in Antarctic waters that the expedition encountered and had to cautiously navigate through. Another memorable part of the book is its description of two battles that took place on the island of Malolo, in Fiji. In the first battle, two members of the expedition were killed on the beach in an attack launched by the Fijians. One of those killed was Wilkes' nephew. The second battle, launched by the Americans in retaliation for the Fijians' initial attack, was at a Fijian fortress in the interior of the island. Approximately 80 Fijians' were killed in that battle. There was also a smaller, swift skirmish that day on boats in the water. There are some interesting tidbits in the book, including the expedition's discovery of an American and another outsider on Fiji, whom the expedition initially mistook for Fijians on account of their having embraced the culture and blended in with the people there. Another intriguing character in the book is "Oahu Jack," a native Hawaiian who joined the expedition as a navigator and interpreter in the expedition's initial visit to Hawaii. Were the Hawaiian

and Fijian languages at that point in time close enough so that speakers of one could understand speakers of the other, or did Oahu Jack know Fijian or some other language that was close enough to Fijian so that he could communicate with Fijians? The book doesn't say. It piques one's curiosity. The audiobook version of the book, which I am reviewing here, is an abridgment of the printed edition. I wish the audiobook version were unabridged, as I have many unanswered questions about the expedition that I am guessing are answered in the print edition. This is an interesting book that I would love to see made into a movie for the big screen.

The true story of this 4-year voyage of discovery is an epic tale and an important piece of the history of our planet as we know it today -- definitely fascinating and worth reading. There is so much to tell, though, that even the great Nathaniel Philbrick (author of "In The Heart Of The Sea" among many more) drowns a bit, between the ocean and the ships and the men who made the voyage. However, despite the caveats, don't miss reading this book!

After reading Mr. Philbrick's "Heart of the Sea" and "Mayflower" I think this guy is the finest author of this generation. He knows how to tell a story. I gave copies of "Mayflower" to friends at Christmas and they all were excited by it. "Heart of the Sea" tore my heart out as I read the story of shipwrecked sailors. In modern day Navy vessels I have crossed the Pacific four times on a boat, hundreds of times in the air and know what a gigantic expanse of water it is. Yet without charts and rudimentary celestial instruments these men take on the world's largest ocean. Truly amazing. I will read all Mr. Philbrick's books. I don't want to miss a word. Great book Mr. Philbrick. Thank you.

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