

ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

Robert Smalls

By **Ethan J. Kytte**, California State University, Fresno

Resources

If you can read only one book

Author	<i>Title</i> . City: Publisher, Year.
Lineberry, Cate	<i>Be Free or Die: The Amazing Story of Robert Smalls' Escape from Slavery to Union Hero</i> . New York: Picador, 2017.

Books and Articles

Author	<i>Title</i> . City: Publisher, Year.
Billingsley, Andrew	<i>Yearning to Breathe Free: Robert Smalls of South Carolina and His Families</i> . Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007.
Dray, Philip	<i>Capitol Men: The Epic Story of Reconstruction Through the Lives of the First Black Congressmen</i> . Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2008.
Holt, Thomas C.	<i>Black over White: Negro Political Leadership in South Carolina during Reconstruction</i> . Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977.
Miller Jr., Edward A.	<i>Gullah Statesman: Robert Smalls from Slavery to Congress, 1839-1915</i> . Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995.
Uya, Okon Edet	<i>From Slavery to Political Service: Robert Smalls, 1839-1915</i> . New York: Oxford University Press, 1971.

Organizations

Web Resources

Other Sources

Scholars

Name	Email
Ethan J. Kytte	ekytte@csufresno.edu

Topic Précis

Born into slavery in 1839 in Beaufort, South Carolina, Robert Smalls seized his and his family's freedom by commandeering a Confederate ship, the *Planter*, in nearby Charleston in 1862. After sailing out of the city's well-guarded harbor, Smalls surrendered the vessel to the Union fleet blockading Charleston, earning fame across the North and infamy across the South. Smalls was hired as a civilian pilot for the US Navy and, in 1863, after being reassigned to the Army, he became the first African American to captain an Army ship. Smalls helped found the Enterprise Railroad Company of Charleston and South Carolina's Republican Party. In 1868 he was a delegate to the state constitutional convention and was elected to the state House of Representatives. Smalls served in the state senate from 1870-1875 and the U.S. House of Representatives from 1875 to 1887. He was customs collector for the Port of Beaufort from 1889 to 1913. Smalls died in 1915 at the age of 75.
