Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Meaghan Walker

JVN [00:00:00] [SINGING] You and I will always, no one. Oh! Oh my God, we're recording! I'm so sorry, everyone. Welcome to Getting Curious. Let's get into it. December 19, 1997. A day that would change culture forever! A young Leonardo DiCaprio transforms into Jack Dawson. His hair windswept, his clothing elevated, slop the satchel he carries to steerage. I wish he were carrying me instead. Actually, I'm more, like, into that other one. Like, the villain. He's more my type. Like, more hairy chest. But anyway, I don't want to get distracted. Dr. Meaghan Walker is the Ewart A. Pratt postdoctoral fellow at Memorial University of Newfoundland. She studies the clothing of working men who went to sea under British jurisdiction in the 1700s and 1800s. Meaghan, how are you? Also, I hear: word on the street is that you are literally in Newfoundland. It's giving gusty. It's giving—actually, I'm not going to tell the people what it is. Will you tell us where's your location, what is your weather, and how are you thriving, queen.

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:01:12] Hi. We're in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, which is basically sitting precipitously on the edge of Canada in the North Atlantic.

JVN [00:01:24] Meaghan, I don't know if you meant to stumble into one of my favorite fucking distracting words of all the time, but "precipitously" is one of my favorite words, it gives me—it tantalizes me all the way down to my tippy toes. I'm obsessed. Now, if you've ever been to one of my standup comedy shows, you will know that when I go "skkkr," hard right, this soon, it's going to be a big day. We're going to—it's gonna be fun. But hard right: I am a little bit shook that Titanic was released 25 years ago! When I performed in my sixth grade talent show, I did a stirring rendition of this hybrid off ice figure skating and jazz ballet from someone who'd never taken dance class. I tried out. I made the talent show, honey, but so many people tried out with "My Heart Will Go On" they ended up assembling them into a chorus. And if you saw the episode of Queer Eye with Kathi Dooley, I will never forget: she was, like, conducting this, like, hodgepodge, like—*and* they dressed up in, like, whatever Quincy community theater's version of maritime fashion was.

And because I know that that fucking lady Kathi Dooley, who I love so much, did secure footage of that tape and then went on to embarrass me with it. The first time I ever did, like, a nighttime talk show alone, it was on freakin' Jimmy Kimmel, and then he was, like, he played the tape was the first time I'd ever seen the tape off-ice figure skating in jazz shoes, and an outfit that I made myself and, like, it was a glitter pin question mark that said, "Right," on the front of the shirt and then, "Wrong," on the back of the shirt, like, I was giving you existential crisis in sixth grade. Like, it was so deep. But anyway, the point is, is that, like, I have been loving Titanic forever and it's very iconic and—it's just so iconic. Also, tell us everything about where you are. Because I asked you that question and fucking talk for 30 minutes. Kill me. God, Meaghan! Tell us where you are and then answer the question, tell us.

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:03:16] Well, it's related to the Titanic! So the Titanic sank on April 14th, 1912, not very far from where I'm sitting currently, just off the coast of Newfoundland. So if we drove south a little bit to the Cape Race Lighthouse at the tip of

the island peninsula, which is about an hour and a half drive away, that would be the closest on land you could get to where the wreck sits today. And the Cape Race Lighthouse would have had a telegraph office and would have received the distress signal from the Titanic.

JVN [00:03:45] What word are you saying? What is that? The Cape—

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:03:50] So the plot in Titanic, where they're trying to be the fastest to cross the Atlantic, is where the "race" part of Cape Race comes from. Because it's the first land you hit in North America when you are coming from Britain to North America. So they're literally racing. In the past it would be to hit the fisheries first. So therefore you would catch the most fish and then come home to Britain and have the highest prices for your fish catch when you returned. But as the liner races grew, you wanted to have the fastest ships so you could advertise the speediest voyage across the Atlantic. So, like, Cunard ships, Lusitania and Mauritania were really famous for being very fast, the greyhounds of the sea. And Titanic was entering into that market, trying to say that it could very rapidly cross the Atlantic and get people from Southampton to New York in the fastest time possible. Although the Titanic wasn't really designed for speed the same way that the Cunard ships were. So it's a little bit of, a little bit of a strange argument.

JVN [00:05:00] My obsession grows for you wildly by the minute. You're amazing. I cannot get enough. Okay, so, not to get so deep into Titanic, but I can't help it. But, like, because, like, you were, like, a baby when it was released, right? Like, you were just, like, a young little baby you are now.

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:05:18] Oh, no! No! I'm a nineties baby. I—

JVN [00:05:20] But you were, like, in grade school. You weren't, like, a scientist yet.

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:05:23] Yeah, yeah. I was already obsessed, though. I was like a '90s kid. You know how everyone's either, like, Egypt or Titanic. Well, I was Titanic. Yeah, I grew up on it.

JVN [00:05:30] Ah!

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:05:31] On Halloween, I went as the, like, newspaper boy with the newspaper that says, "Titanic: great loss of life!" Yeah, I'm that kid.

JVN [00:05:40] Oh, my God, I love that. So for me. When you first saw it and now, like, having become like a literal, like, doctor of, like, history, darling, and, like, you're like, literally, like—does it hold up for you from when you were, like, little to now? Like, are you like, "Yeah, they really did, like, they did the damn thing."

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:05:57] Yeah, James Cameron's *Titanic* is very good in the pantheon of Titanic films. It can be a lot worse.

JVN [00:06:02] Ah! Okay, so it literally has, like, the Dr. Walker seal of approval. I'm obsessed. Okay, so now, I got that out of my system. Let's sail into the year 1800. What was the British Empire up to in the moment, it's the 1800s. Like, yes, we're giving, like, nostalgia, but it's also giving fucked up colonialism, I'm sure.

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:06:26] Yeah, well, this is basically in the middle of what is the French Revolutionary Wars, which will soon be transitioning into the Napoleonic Wars. Between initially revolutionary France, who had their French Revolution in 1798 and then it transitioned into the Napoleonic Wars when Napoleon became emperor and ended in 1815 with the Battle of Waterloo.

JVN [00:06:49] God damn, Meghan, That's okay. Not to take a second hard, right? But 1776, like, the US, like, does the Revolutionary War, honey. Then it's, like, over in, like, '81. Then there was that whole thing about, like, France being like, "You—we have our treaty Queens," Like, but then we were, like, "Actually, that was like with your monarchy and you overthrew that. Actually, technically, like we don't really like thank you so much for, like, what was actually in reality, just like, what, like, 30 years ago. And bye! Sorry." And then that's like why everyone was, like, "Washington's biggest achievement was like not getting us into another war." But I didn't realize that France and England would go on to get into another war for, like—or that, that that went on for 25 years and maybe is that way. We ended up being kind of, like, air quote, like, "safe" because—oh!

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:07:35] Oh, no! Oh, no. The Americans are right in the middle of this. They're trying to be a neutral shipping party. But the British and the French are stopping their ships and trying to tell them where they can't and can sell their goods. And also the British, very infamously, although this is largely been forgotten, are pressing American seafarers into British service or dubious American seafarers, essentially. So, like, imagine, like, in the past, there's no such thing as immigration. There's no such thing as, like, citizenship. There's no passports. So you board—the British board—an American ship. They talk to the crew and they decide that some of the American crew are British who could be pressed into British service. So they essentially—

JVN [00:08:24] Holy shit!

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:08:26] —Move them into British service. But they could be just Americans or they could be British pretending to be Americans. And this goes on until the War of 1812, where the Americans do go to war against the British. And that's when the British burnt the White House down.

JVN [00:08:41] That's what! Oh, yeah, that's when Dolly Madison had to run out with, like, the picture that I saw on Drunk History!

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:08:47] Yeah.

JVN [00:08:48] Oh, my God. I can't believe I was never more curious about that. And then also, we did this episode, like, years ago about, like, lady pirates and just like, about pirate, like, pirate stuff. So this is all, like, that's all going on. It's kind of the same time, isn't it?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:09:05] Yeah, well, how legitimate some of these merchants are is questionable. Some of them are privateering and things like that. But the Americans will assert that they're legal merchants who deserve to be left alone because they're neutral shippers and should be allowed to land in France and land in England and not be harassed. But the British are, of course, saying that they're smuggling goods into France. Or they're acting as privateers and attacking British ships and things like that. Yeah.

JVN [00:09:37] Is privateers British for pirate?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:09:41] It's, like, a slightly more legal—like, it's, like, it's, like, you're a pirate if you don't have the paperwork. But you're a privateer if you do have paperwork.

JVN [00:09:52] So then that whole tea about, like, like, when the Revolutionary War was happening, and then the colonies were trying to get Canada to join in, but then they were, like, "No, like, we're kind of good. Like, leave us alone or whatever." Like, in America, or at least for me, because I'm basically like, sometimes like, I think that, like, we just get, like, really into, like, propaganda of wars in, like, grade school. So you're just kind of, like, "Fuck the British!" Like, "And we won!" Like, you really do get that, at least growing up in the cornfields of the Midwest. So, like, you as a Canadian historian, honey, like, were we kind of cool or like, hideous, or, like, was 1812 kind of fierce because, like, we were, like, "Sit down, Britain!" like, and then, like, we totally won? Or was that, like, more nuanced than that?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:10:33] Actually, it's really funny cause where I am now, Newfoundland and where I'm from, New Brunswick, which just north of Maine, and also New England, the northern New England states, because they were fishers and merchants, actually really didn't want to go to war. And there's, like, an apocryphal story where a community in Maine didn't have enough gunpowder to set off July 4th fireworks. And so a New Brunswick community sent them gunpowder in the middle of the War of 1812. Just, like, "Oh yeah, here's some stuff, you can blow it up."

JVN [00:11:07] Awww that's sweet!

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:11:05] They were really against it because the Americans got kicked out of the fishery every time they went to war against the British.

JVN [00:11:12] So I did just lose my battle with ADHD for the last 12 minutes, but I'm going back. So basically the British Empire in the, like, Atlantic Ocean was basically just, like, kind of at war with France. And both France and England were like stopping ships and, like, kind of fucking up commerce and like America and Canada, like, everybody over here was kind of, like, in the middle of that. They were probably just trying to get their shit,

but it was like fucking up trade and probably messing up, like, prices and there was like all sorts of shit happening. Are they like sailboats, ships? Yeah. Yeah, cause there's motors. Right?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:11:42] The first ship with an engine is sailing by 1805, I think.

JVN [00:11:49] How fast—I'm gonna ask, I have to—how fast could, like, a big ass British naval like ship that didn't have an engine. Like, that just had, like, sails. Like, how fast would those go? Was it, like, slow or could it, like, pick up some speed if the wind was in the right thing?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:12:03] I think they were pretty fast for what they were, and these were extremely skilled workers, so they knew how to harness the wind at, like, the right way. But also there's sort of a misconception that you would just sort of point a ship in a direction and sort of go. But if you actually look at the maps where they chart, they, like, zigzag. So it's: they can move quite fast, but sometimes it actually takes them a really long time to get where they're going because they're dependent on the direction of the wind.

JVN [00:12:30] Okay, obsessed. So they're kind of kidnaping people being, like, "Okay, you're British now." Like, if they ran into like—was it easier for them to kidnap like an American ship because there was common language. Right. Like because if they kidnapped a French ship, and they were all like, "Bonjour!" Like, isn't it harder for them to be like you're English?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:12:46] Yeah. So the labor system at this time is extremely liminal, like, there's a lot of actually foreign workers in the British Navy, things that we would think was really weird today.

JVN [00:12:57] Like what?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:12:58] Well, French people worked for the British Navy, and the Brits didn't really care as long as they did the work. But the kidnapping system, called impressment, is, like, service that British people owed to the crown. So it's, like, a legal thing that they're trained in civilian shipping, so fisheries or merchant shipping, and then the British get to call on them as military workers. So they're always sort of moving in and out of military and civilian labor. And so what's happening with the Americans is that they're trapped in the middle. There's no way to tell if they're actually American or British. And the British do owe, legally, service to the crown. The Americans did pass a law to have protection papers so the sailors would carry a document on their persons that said, like, "According to a console or according to a consular officer in America or sometimes overseas, this man is an American citizen and deserves the rights due him and should not be kidnaped by the British."

JVN [00:14:07] But would they just light them on fire? Or would they honor them?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:14:09] Yeah. You just had to pay for them. So the British didn't think very much of them, but they turn up in letters, I've seen. I've actually got one of an African American sailor who had his protection paper signed in Savannah, Georgia. Which says that he's a legal citizen and is due the freedom on land and sea, which is really crazy when you think that the institution of slavery existed in Georgia at the time. But here's this free Black man who's going to sea with protection papers that say he's a citizen of the United States.

JVN [00:14:44] Do you know what ended up happening to him?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:14:46] He went to prison.

JVN [00:14:47] Where?!

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:14:48] There's a prison in Britain that would have held the American prisoners of war.

JVN [00:14:52] He got kidnapped and went to fucking Britain in a goddamn prison?!

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:14:55] Well, he insisted that he was American. If he had agreed that he was British, he would have worked on the British warship. So he either could have chosen to serve on the British ship or he would be a prisoner of war.

JVN [00:15:08] And then he was just died a prisoner of fucking war?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:15:13] By the end of the war, they would have been sent home.

JVN [00:15:16] Oh! So he ended up getting to go to America or we don't know?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:15:18] Yeah, I don't know what happened in the end for him, but there was a large prisoner of war riot in 1815. Devon… more?

JVN [00:15:29] Shire?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:15:30] It's very famous. It's a very famous prison in the middle of the moors in Devon. Yeah, there was a prisoner riot. And several Americans died. But I don't think that our American was one of them.

JVN [00:15:45] So what differentiated a warship and a merchant ship in this era, because at least in the 1700s, like, was there, like, warships, merchant ships that were carrying goods and, like, passenger ships?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:15:58] So there were merchant vessels. And you could either hire a cannon or you could actually hire an entire ship to take the majority of passengers. But it wouldn't be, like, a liner. It would literally be that they just wouldn't put—they wouldn't fill the ship with cargo. There would be space. So they would make space for passengers. But

you would just kind of, like, live in the ship. There weren't, like, beds. You would just have hammocks and things like that.

JVN [00:16:24] Is that, like, the American Girl story when people would immigrate from, like, Ireland and like when someone would die of cholera on the ship, they would just be like they would all be on, like, haystacks in the basement. And then like, they'd all be, like, pukin' and barfin' and fevers and then they just like, throw somebody. Yeah. Like, so that's how it was for, like, basically all of time up until the first cruise liners?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:16:45] Yeah. So when you start getting steam ships with, like, propellers, they start being more reliable. So you can start setting timetables and claiming that your ship will arrive within a certain number of days. And it starts to be attractive to travel in this way instead of just sort of a hardship that you have to deal with. Isambard Kingdom Brunel in Britain developed, like, some ships like the S.S. Great Britain and the Great Western who were marketed as traveling vessels, where you would travel to America with cabins and accommodations and entertainment. Like an extension of the railway.

JVN [00:17:24] When was that?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:17:26] That was in the mid 19th century.

JVN [00:17:28] So basically you're doing that, like, American Girl, like, rough ride thing til, like, the 1850s.

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:17:35] Yeah. And then you get the Cunard Company, which was a Halifax family who start really emphasizing timetables and saying that you can be assured that your ship will leave at a certain time and arrive at a certain time. And that starts really pushing transatlantic travel and this sort of race to build bigger and bigger liners that have more and more luxurious accommodations, which gets us to Titanic.

JVN [00:18:07] So, like, remember the show Cribs, like, "Welcome to My Crib." Like, I'm like, "Hey, welcome to my crib." So if you were like, "Hi, I'm Dr. Walker, and welcome to my 1800s British naval ship." Like, can you give us a tour?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:18:21] Yeah, we can talk about, like, 1800, 1805-ish, around there.

JVN [00:18:24] Fuck yeah!

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:18:24] So this is, like, the age of sail. This would be the sort of peak of sailing ships before steam starts to really take off. And especially because the war is so important to Britain, this is a really important nostalgic time for, for Britain. So we're really lucky that some of these warships still exist in Portsmouth, in England. The HMS Victory is still on display, and it was the site of Nelson Horatio Nelson's death in 1805 at the Battle of Trafalgar. And it's a really great example of what a warship would be like. It's

huge. It's got 100 plus guns, so lots of firepower. And what life was like on the ship and its geography are extremely interrelated.

JVN [00:19:13] Question! I'm sorry, I hate myself sometimes for asking them all the time, I have to: you when you say guns, was there, like, cannon?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:19:20] Yeah, these are cannons. Yeah.

JVN [00:19:21] So those, like, things that you've seen in the movies.

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:19:22] So they would have portholes, they had ropes and you would push them out the holes and they would fire and then they would recoil and the sailors would have to then move them back into position every time. So it would be, like, 50/50 split of guns on each side of the ship. And all the tactical considerations of naval warfare accounted for how fast you could get your broadside guns to face another ship with the maximum amount of surface payoff when you fired all your guns into the other boat.

JVN [00:20:58] Wow! So, like, how many floors was there? Was there, like, the deck, like, the main deck and then, like, the cannon floor and then was there, like, a basement or, like, did it not work like that?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:20:10] Yeah, there were several floors, so there would be the main deck that was fleshed to the top where you would walk around outside and often there would be a higher deck, the poop deck or the quarter deck, and the front is the vauxhall or the Fort Castle. And that could be raised as well. So there would be a little bit of stairs that you would go up. So sailors wouldn't actually be allowed to, like, just walk up there casually. It would be, like, a place where the officers were, like, raised higher than everybody else, could sort of see what everybody was doing and would be able to, like, point out things and tell people what to do.

JVN [00:20:49] Yes, okay, love that. So what would, like, daily life look like on a ship like that in 1805?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:20:53] Were very what would they do it regimented so they served in watches so, like, these would be groups where the same men would serve for a certain number of hours on a rotation so that the ship was never understaffed. There was no point where there weren't people awake that were making sure the ship wasn't, like, running into rocks or just careening, like, around the sea. And these men would, like, work with each other and live in the same parts of the ship together and would become extremely familiar with each other. And then if the captain tried to move them into different watches, sometimes the sailors would cause problems because they would resist moving into groups with other men that they didn't know or like.

JVN [00:21:37] Which naturally leads us to: was there gay stuff?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:21:44] Yeah.

JVN [00:21:45] Do we ever have stories of just hot day love, or was it just too poopie, barfy, couldn't clean out rounds that to be offensive, but, you know what I'm saying. Just, you couldn't really. Or could you?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:21:55] The Navy is what we call a "homosocial environment," meaning that there's largely no women. It's almost exclusively men who went to sea in these ships, and it was highly regulated. There were female nurses sometimes that went to see at this time. And in port, women would get brought on board for entertainment, sometimes as prostitutes, but often, like, just as saleswomen who brought liquor on board and things like that. But there is records of men being caught and unfortunately charged with having sex with other men in these ships. And unfortunately, the thing with queer history at this time is that that's where you find the stories. So often the happiest sort of story you can hope for is that they never get caught. So you never see that they're that they turn up in the historical record.

JVN [00:22:56] Cause there's never a story of someone getting caught and it like being okay or them not getting put in jail or something, like, it was really bad?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:23:03] Yeah, it's very rare, but you can sometimes find letters and things that are, like, recollections of maybe love between two men. Although at this point, I think it's very rare, it gets more common in the later 19th and early 20th century when people have more access to literacy and they're able to produce diaries or leave behind letters. And it's more likely that those letters would have been preserved and kept. But the large portion of gay relationships at this time would have been prosecuted and they would have been hung for a quote unquote, "unnatural acts." Yeah, it's bad.

JVN [00:23:40] No! So, like, well, so, fuck. So you're probably not going out to see did you want to have some open gay sex? Like, so what was making people go out to sea in this time? Like, was there, like, great benefits like from the British Navy? Like, did your family get a cool house or something? Did it pay good? Like, why did people do that?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:23:58] The pay could be good. The British were always behind in pay, so in arrears, as they say. But you would be guaranteed reliable source of food and you would be clothed by the state—although they would make you pay for it. That's part of the reason that they have impressment is that people didn't really like to join the Navy. They would rather work in merchant service because one, they weren't at risk of dying all the time and two, they—the wages were higher in the merchant service. But there were some benefits. The reason that the system sort of did work is because the sailors would get a lot of specialized training on naval ships. They would be able to work up to a sort of more qualified position. And then when they went back to merchant work, they could get a higher paying job based on the training that they'd had in the Navy.

JVN [00:24:57] So potential for upward economic mobility. Yeah. So and then also just not having a choice, it's, like, just being forced into it. So, okay, let's talk clothes! We are so

excited, it only took me 40 minutes to get there. Jesus Christ, help us. Like, what were the rings and what were the styles of, like, a naval ship at this time?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:25:23] Yeah. So it is really separated by whether you are an officer or whether you are a sailor. So the officers, if we're still in 1805, are wearing not completely regulated but state uniforms. So the government says what they want, and the officer goes to a tailor and there would be specialist tailors that would serve almost exclusively or predominantly naval officers. So they would be aware or know what the government wanted and they would make the uniforms. So they weren't regulated in the sense that the state was producing the uniforms themselves. There was a bit of leeway so the officers could ask for more stylish cuts or a new fashionable accouterment to be added to their uniform. And the state might be a little pissy about it, but they weren't going to, like, go after them in the same way because these officers were like aristocratic men or upper, like, very high upper class or middle class men who were wealthy enough for the government to sort of leave them alone.

JVN [00:26:29] Mm.

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:26:30] At this time epilees are really popular, but they're not actually part of the regulations. So, so Nelson died with a coat that had epilators, which is the little things on the shoulders.

JVN [00:26:43] Who's Nelson?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:26:44] Horatio Nelson. The guy from Trafalgar.

JVN [00:26:48] Of course.

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:26:50] Yeah.

JVN [00:26:52] Was he British?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:26:53] Yeah.

JVN [00:26:55] Okay, so. So there is, like, commander outfits and then crew outfits? Was there several different crew outfits or just one crew outfit, in 1805?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:27:01] So what's happening with sailor outfits is sort of the opposite. The sailors' uniforms are being mass produced by the government. So the government isn't making them themselves, but they're buying lots of clothes from contractors, and the contractors are making them based on specific demands that the government wants. They want certain kinds of coats, certain kinds of trousers, certain kinds of shirts. And those are being mass produced. So how that's being done, which creates a crisis for sewing machines before even really like the explosion of mechanized weaving, this is called piecework. So what's happening is they're taking the fabric and a pattern to women in their own homes and they're asking them to make the clothes and the women

are paid by piece. So every show that they make, they get an amount for that shirt. So it's mass production, but it's not concentrated in a factory. The women aren't being supervised by managers. They're being visited by contractors, subcontractors that come around and pick up the goods and take them back to a warehouse where they're put in a bale and then delivered to the government. The government weighs the bale, says it weighs the amount it should weigh. They might open one and make sure the quality is good. And then they put the bale on a ship and the ship distributes them to sailors who, because they're at sea, have no other option but to buy from the government.

JVN [00:28:36] That's rude that they, like, made them buy it, and it wasn't it—and they're, like, it's, like, giving Monopoly. So, like, what, like, range of fabrics and, like, fits would we see? Where they, like, tight? Was it giving crop top? Was it, like, what it's, like, is it what we would imagine is like a sailor outfit today or like—you know how we always say like, you know, "things back, like, in the day were, like, built to last and they were, like, better constructed," like, were these really well constructed like, or were they shitty?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:29:02] For the mass produced clothes, I think there was sort of, like, an in-between because the fabric still would have been like, good. They would have been, like, 100% natural fibers. So this would be, like, linens. The coats would have been woolen. So the shirts and trousers probably were made of linen or cotton and the coats would have been made for wool. But how—if you're being paid by the piece—how good the sewing, how careful the sewing was, is up for debate. But it's hard to know, too, because the sea is very hard on clothes, it's obviously full of salt and they're doing a lot of really hard work that involves, like, covering themselves in tar, doing a lot of strenuous physical labor, maybe being in combat.

JVN [00:29:46] Tar, question mark? Why tar?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:29:48] So the ropes are tarred. So there's actually an extent, there's actually a surviving suit at the Museum of London from, like, the late 17th century, a sailor suit. And you can see the tar, like, where he's pulling the rope, go, like, slash across his chest. So it could just stain over time, the tar. Yeah.

JVN [00:30:14] Oh, my God. It sounds hot! I hate it! Okay, so let's talk slop. What is slop, like, what? Like what? What's up? What's a slop garment? So that's what we've been talking about, right?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:30:27] So the mass produced clothes, yeah, are called slops, and essentially it's like they don't fit.

JVN [00:30:34] Oh, because they only came in one size or something?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:30:39] Less that then there's just no such thing as standardized sizing. Like there's no concept of a standard human body or a standard thing that's, like, small, medium or large.

JVN [00:30:49] That sounds fun!

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:30:52] Yeah. Most clothes are produced by tailoring. So you would come in and someone would fit clothes directly to your body and your clothes would be built for you. But obviously, that's extremely expensive, extremely labor intensive. So this would be largely accessed by rich people or, or middle class people. And the poorer people, depending, would either access less skilled tailors or they would buy clothes through secondhand. So slops were kind of—they just didn't fit right, because you had to guess what size those people would be and they might not necessarily have access to somebody who would modify the garments after the fact to fit your body. So there's some of the pictures I have…

This tailor is trying to sell this man a slop coat. And you can see that it's, like, hanging off his body in a weird way. So there's a lot of caricatures at this time that are reacting to the first available, what we would call "readymade" clothes. Or, like, off the rack clothes where you could walk into a store and buy a coat. They're showing it as, like, completely ridiculous like, "Why would people want this? Look how stupid this man looks in this coat." But you can see that it doesn't fit him. And the implication of off the rack clothes is that you wouldn't then have the tailor fix the clothes for you. So you would just walk out the door with this coat that doesn't fit. But people at the time thought this was wild, that will never catch on. And then you look back and that's completely revolutionized an industry. That's what's basically happening with readymade clothes. This is how we buy clothes now. And here it is 200 years ago that they're seeing it for the first time. And they're like, "This is really dumb."

JVN [00:32:43] Now the coat is, like, really big—it is really big. And it's also like a very vibrant green and the tailor's jacket is red. So, like, where would this fabric and dye have come from?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:32:55] The British love wool, so these probably both would have been wool coats, the British had a very vibrant woolen industry which reacted very poorly when cotton was introduced, for example, as a competitor. And the British were always trying to find new markets for woolens. So those would have been wool clothes with the dye would have been natural, some sort of natural plant dye. What they did use for red was either matter or—

JVN [00:33:27] Is that blood?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:33:28] No, it's the type of plant.

JVN [00:33:29] Oh cool.

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:33:30] And cochineal, which is a crushed up bug from Mexico.

JVN [00:33:34] Oooooh!

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:34:35] Yeah.

JVN [00:33:36] So now once they buy their slop, where would a sailor store and, like, wash their clothes like. Or would they just buy, like, five outfits for, like, a five month journey? Or like, how did that work?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:33:48] So sailors went to see it with sea chests and bags. And later in the British Merchant service. So in the later 19th century, they develop regulations to say how much space the sailors legally have to be given in order to fit their possessions. But they would have bags that they would take to sea with them that would have clothes. But obviously how ships work is these men would just sleep in hammocks in, like, one space, like, one or two decks all together so their possessions were accessible to other people and people would have their clothes stolen out of their bags and then appear on somebody else later and they would get into fights over it and things like that. But the washing is really interesting because the Navy did put aside specific time for sailors to wash their clothes, which I think were washed seawater, which probably didn't help the longevity of the clothes' lives, but they did wash clothes and there's images of clothing being hung in the rigging. So you'll see, like, a clothesline with, like, clothes between the masts.

JVN [00:34:55] How did they get water to drink? Did they just, like, bring like, big jugs of water?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:35:00] There's a part of the ship called the scuttlebutt, and that's a huge freshwater tank. And it would have been guarded. So it would have the water would have been rationed and they would have had Marines that would have guarded the, the scuttlebut to make sure that the water wasn't overly accessed by sailors or contaminated by either nefarious or accidental means.

JVN [00:35:23] So were the mass produced crew clothes more regulated by the government? And when they would go between ports, would they bring on, like, more clothes for them to, like, buy? And how did their power structures work there? Like, did it make the sailors, like, easier to spot and easier to control from the officers? Like, what was the power dynamic of clothes being assigned to certain people?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:35:47] Ships all had a purser, which was a person that looked after the clothes, like, basically was, like, the ship banker or the person that looked after the finances. So he kept track of the pay that sailors were owed. Like, he had a little also locked area on the ships that would have the slops inside. And he would like, the sailors would come to him and ask for clothes and he would distribute them. But there were regulations on how much sailors were allowed to spend on clothes, because this is a, like, period where rich people thought that poor people were stupid and couldn't control themselves. And so they thought the second that they got any money, they would just over spend it on, like, liquor and and fancy clothes. So there was a lot of regulations about how much money sailors could actually spend on clothes, which got the Navy into problems occasionally, because sometimes sailors would actually have, like, a legitimate reason they needed more clothes, but they would have hit their maximum allowance of clothes for the

month. So I got a lot of letters in my research where naval officers had to appeal to the government to let them clothe their sailors.

JVN [00:36:59] Because it was, like, freezing or something. They're, like, "Our sailors are fucking freezing their asses off, like, they need three coats."

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:37:05] Yeah, actually, I, I have that exact case, which is a rather funny one, because a gentleman, of whom I am very fond, Sir Home Popham was in South Africa and he was convinced to go invade South America. Not because he was asked to by the British government, but just sort of on a not a whim. But there's reasons that he went but was not supposed to invade essentially Rio de La Plata, which is now Montevideo and Argentina. And when he got there, it of course went completely wrong. And I got letters where he was writing saying, "My sailors are very cold and they need clothes." And the government is just, like, "What's he even doing there? How dare he ask us for clothes when he's not even supposed to be in, he's not even supposed to be in Argentina."

JVN [00:38:00] So then what'd he do?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:38:02] He paid to clothe the sailors through his own money. But he did spend, like, three years going after the government, trying to get the money to, like, be recompensed personally. But the invasion was a failure and he was not treated very well by the government.

JVN [00:38:20] Did they make it back to England?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:38:22] Oh, yeah. Popham lived for a while longer and continued to annoy the British government with his various schemes and issues.

JVN [00:38:33] We've gotta do a different episode about him, and he sounds fun.

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:38:36] He's great. And actually I can tell you exactly who to talk to because somebody I know is writing a book about him.

JVN [00:38:41] So then like, what were the power dynamics of like, you know, crew members only having, like, these types of uniforms to choose from. But then the officers had—it's kind of giving me, like, our cult fashion episode. It's kind of giving, like, easier to divide and conquer when people are easily identifiable or, like, is that a piece of it or no?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:39:00] So if you switch to the image of the sailor and the banker, this one. Yeah. So caricaturists loved sailors at this time. And because—the reason was—they did look different from other people, you can see he's got trousers on where the banker's wearing breeches and stockings. And he's got a short blue coat where the banker is wearing a long, like, more old fashioned coat. And a really great detail of this caricature is you can see two things hanging from his belt. Those are watch fobs, which means that he's wearing two pocket watches instead of just one. And pocket watches would have been, like, having an iPhone or an iPod in, like, the 2000s.

JVN [00:39:47] Ahhh! Very cutting edge.

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:39:49] Yeah, like, and then having two iPods and then having two sets of earbuds and being, like, "Yes, I have two in my pocket." That's, like, what's happening here.

JVN [00:40:02] I love! So you've written about how garments didn't have standardized sizing, what was like the range, like, size ranges for these outfits, or was it literally all one size? And you just have to use, like, string to tie the pants or, like, just like, how did that work?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:40:22] Yeah, I think there was a bit of an attempt to do a bit of sizing, but from how they're getting uniforms for the Marines at this time for the Royal Marines. I know that I do have an account of a board meeting where they discussed sizing. And what they did is they'd bring in sort of an idealized, like, strapping young man, like, the kind of person they *want* to be a marine. And they put him in the clothes and they're, like, "Ah, the clothes fit! And this is the people we want. So if we make the clothes for the people we want, we'll get the people we want to be Marines," kind of logic. But obviously that's not how it works. Sailors were actually very skilled sewers. They made their own clothes at sea. They modified their own clothes. I have a lot of accounts from the Caribbean where clothing didn't make it always to the Caribbean because of various reasons, including that moths would get in the clothes and eat it before it got to the West Indies. So there's a lot of letters saying that there's not enough clothes in storage in the West Indies, and the sailors taking trousers, I think, and remaking the trousers into coats. Mm hmm.

JVN [00:41:37] Mmmm. Fierce.

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:41:38] Yeah. And some of the men who were pressed into the Navy were actually originally tailors as well. So there were different trades. There were men who were in the Navy that had originally been, like, tradesmen in the garment industry that would have been able, like, I've seen stainmakers. So people who made what would have predated corsetry, and tailors being pressed into the naval service.

JVN [00:42:04] You were telling us earlier about when I asked out gay stuff and then you were, like, "homosocial environment," love "homosexual," great word. So when we think about homosexual environment, that makes me think about, like, the, like, range of masculinity and, like, gender ideals that would have been present because homosexuality is so criminalized at this time. But obviously gay people exist through history. So, like, that's happening simultaneously in there. So what does maritime fashion in this era have to do with gender?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:42:36] Oh, a lot. There's a lot of transition at this period from sort of older ideas into, like, a new sort of military masculinity, especially identifying with the sort of meritocracy of the Navy in Britain, specifically. So, for example, sailors wore

trousers. So it was, like, a working class dress. But as this 25 year conflict goes on, what the state owes to sailors becomes more clear because they're protecting Britain and blockading Europe and fighting in so many parts of the world. Naval officers start to adopt trousers as a symbol of their, like, military masculinity, or their, like, meritus masculinity. So identifying as, like, the fighting working man.

JVN [00:43:38] So pants are more butch over there, like tights and, like, the earlier one is giving, like, kind of, like, that golfer style where it's, like, or, like, almost, like, a baseball player. Like, like the tights on the bottom and like the baggy on top. Like just so you have a mental. And so pants become seen as more but.

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:44:54] Yeah, and the other thing with that is this is a change in, like, where the site of male sexuality is focused. So prior to this period and the adoption of trousers, a man's, like, best physical trait were his calves. The reason that the calves are exposed with breaches is that, like, that was considered the most sort of sexy aspect of a man's body. It was, like, very important that you have good calves so therefore they were made visible and people grumbled if they, you know, had, like, less good calves and stuff like that. So then the three piece suit-is actually brought in, when it's first adopted as sort of a menswear in the late 17th century, having usurped the place of, like, the doublet and hoes, it's adopted from clothes that would be lower cut. So the waistcoat and coat would have been more skirt-like from the cultures that they adopted the three-piece suit from. So, like, Turkish Janissary uniforms or Indian male robes that would hang to the floor. But Europeans, or the British, refused to cover their calves. So that's why the, the coat on the banker is, like, cut right at his knees because it shows the calves being exposed. And it's such an important part of male sexual identity. So for men to then adopt trousers and to hide calves was a movement away from showing calves in public.

JVN [00:45:40] So then what became more, the sexual part of men, like, their ducas, or, like, no?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:45:47] No, there is—

JVN [00:45:49] Or just not calves not really like another primary, just, like, calves are, like, closed for business, honey, that is, like, that is so yesteryear.

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:45:57] Well, in this period if you look at portraits and you watch period dramas and stuff the way that the coats are cut with the waistcoats and the navel and the coats are cut to be open, and a lot of men are wearing trousers in the countryside. It just shows like their whole front just sort of revealed and trousers and britches could get very tight at this period. So actually the site of attraction is, like, it's transferring to their junk.

JVN [00:46:27] Yes! It is! So it was their duca, I'm obsessed! Okay!

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:46:31] Yeah. But then as the Victorian period began, the skirts on men's jackets lower and their coats snap shut as sort of, like, a closing of the curtain and the male body is, like, completely covered up.

JVN [00:46:47] Booo!

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:46:48] But the waist becomes the focus at that point and there's a lot of anxiety.

JVN [00:46:52] Also boo!

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:46:53] So men are wearing corsetry because there's a lot of emphasis on men having very broad shoulders and a giant chest. And in order to emphasize that, they have actually a very hourglass wax figure in the thirties and forties. But like women's fashion, men's fashion really varies considerably over the Victorian period. There's a lot of changes in silhouette, so a lot of changes in coat styles, a lot of hats and facial hair appearing and disappearing and a lot of people don't give men very much credit for fashion ability. They just see them wearing three pieces that are black and are, like, "Oh, well that's the only story here."

JVN [00:47:35] But there is more to the story. So that's kind of fun.

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:47:37] Yeah, And military uniforms actually is one of one side of extreme male fashionability and not just Fashionability, but like color and embroidery and embellishment. So as the 19th century goes on, the British aren't that often at war, although they are quite a bit. But the uniforms get more elaborate and more extreme and just, like, dripping and embroidery and big red coats and—

JVN [00:48:11] And oh my God, I want to come back to that. I want to come back to that. Okay. So, like, How was, like, managing slop inventories considered an effeminate task—or was it considered an effeminate task?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:48:21] The purser specifically was sort of an extremely contested figure on a ship, he was often thought to be scamming everybody all the time. And because they actually put their own money up to finance the ship, they often *were* scamming everybody all the time because it was really risky to not do it. Essentially, if you invested your own money into a warship, into, like, the food and clothes and things, and then the warships sank, you lost your entire investment. So there was a lot of incentive for purchasers to continue to charge dead men on board for things, for example. And then there was something called the Perseus pound, which meant that the purser got a cut of everything he sold on board. And the sailors knew all of this. And they weren't they didn't like it very much. But the actual interesting thing is that the officers were very matter of fact with regulating clothes. They understood that this was part of their job. They didn't necessarily like it. I had an Admiral, Keith, who had to buy 20,000 shoes in Sicily, so got to go on a big shoe shopping spree and didn't much care for it! And wrote a lot of how,

about how annoyed he was that he had to do this instead of like more important things, which was chasing Napoleon to Egypt.

JVN [00:49:55] Ah, that's cool!

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:49:56] But actually it's really interesting that sometimes historians now, like, feminize officers who had to regulate clothes as part of their job in hindsight. So clothing isn't—in naval history—it's starting to get better. There's a lot more discussions of gender and things like that in historical writing now. But you can read a whole text on health care, for example, and read two paragraphs on clothes, as if they had nothing to do with health management on the ship and then have the historian be very dismissive about the utility of clothing ads and how much the officers should be thinking about clothes, even though they had complements of 500 men that they had to make sure they didn't freeze to death or get sick.

JVN [00:50:44] And we know from Forrest Gump that socks are so fucking important. Lieutenant Dan, us. You have to keep your fucking socks dry. And that really does affect health and stuff. Yeah.

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:50:52] So some of the power is actually not just with the officers. There's not even amounts of power, but sailors could make their content known. So the officers actually had a lot of incentive to, to make sure the sailors were happy with their clothes and their food and other creature comforts as much as that would be at the time, because there was always the danger of the sailors would mutiny. And there had been in 1797, two huge mutinies in the British Navy that sort of rocked the foundations of the naval administration and the British government.

JVN [00:51:31] I wanted to ask that, is that where like the sailors would like, just kill the officers, like, assassinate officers and then just steal the ship and like abscond to America or something?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:51:40] It did happen but in these two cases, especially the first case, it was more petitions. So the sailors kicked the officers off the ships and then they wrote very formal petitions to the government that were essentially statements about what they want to change. So they wanted better wages, they wanted their back pay, they wanted to visit port more often and, like, go to visit land. They wanted better food, they wanted better clothes, and they wanted their officers to not be pricks, which is a big ask!

JVN [00:52:15] So what happened?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:52:16] Well, this one was in Portsmouth at a mooring called Spithead and it was a fleetwide and sort of so—I don't know if well-organized would be the term—but it was very influential. And the British Navy capitulated. They actually gave them what they asked for and they didn't arrest anybody or try anyone for mutiny or anything. Essentially, it went really well for the sailors. But within a few days before that one ended, there was another mutiny at the entrance of the Thames. So the entrance to London

where, where it was a lot more militant. So they did threaten to take their ships to France and defect to the French government. But again, they didn't kill their officers. They just kicked them off the boats.

JVN [00:53:10] And was that one successful, too, or did they come for those ones?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:53:12] That one was not successful, because it was more radical. The British were way less thrilled with that one. I mean, they weren't thrilled with the other one either, but they couldn't tolerate it. So they eventually, when it finally broke, when the mutiny finally broke, after about a month, several court martials and a good number of men were hung and some were transported to Australia.

JVN [00:53:33] Mmmm! So how did, like, how did slop close in the mass production of slop clothes and just all of naval fashion influence fashion outside of the Navy and just in Britain and the United States and, like, all of it. How did it influence it?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:53:48] So obviously, we all wear pants today. So, sailors would have introduced trousers into more common clothing trends. So one of my arguments is that the slop clothes system, which really thrived during the 18th century because it was a contractual system that got government contracts and got to supply all of these clothes to the government. After 1815, when the war ended, they kind of had to find a new market to sell their clothes. So what they did was because sailors were already conditioned to know what stock clothes were and to purchase our clothes, it was a lot easier to pursue maritime markets for slops during and after the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars, and that after a while, this trickled into working men, generally. So at first, longshoreman and dockyard workers also purchasing readymade clothes and then broadly working people, working men especially buying clothes off the rack. And women's off the rack fashion is a lot later in the 19th century.

JVN [00:55:04] Wouldn't women's clothes at that time have just a bit more intricate to mass produce because you'd have like, a corset, there's, like, 80 different pieces, like, the top, you got the bottom, you got a fucking hat. Like, there's, like, more shit to make.

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:55:13] Yeah, part of this, too, is that because women's clothing is more visible and fit would be more, like, a more of a consideration. It would be better if it was tailored. Especially high quality dresses. Part of the reason why it's so important that it's working people that adopt off the rack, readymade clothes first is that they're not being scrutinized with that sort of lens. And that's why it takes a really long time for, for high fashion to, to eventually become off the rack or to have an off the rack component. So for extremely rich people to wear clothes off the rack takes a lot longer because they're richer and they're able to afford the services of high class tailors.

JVN [00:55:56] But how interesting that slop clothes and like this maritime fashion this time ended up becoming, like, the blueprint to kind of, like, what is fast fashion now and, like, that was like people being, like, "Oh I kind of like that look that that guy is wearing," like, in the ship and then it comes to the dockyard and then people in the city are, like, "This

dockyard bloke, honey, he's wearing these pants. I want—" I mean, I'm paraphrasing, but that's just fascinating that that ended up becoming the blueprint to how, like, our fashion industry kind of now. So that's fascinating. So as we wrap up, I have to know more about how you became a literal historian of, like, maritime fashion. It's so interesting. So, like, what sucked you up in this subject and how do you research for your work?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:56:37] So I wanted to get away from mainland Canada, so I went to Newfoundland for my undergrad. So I've actually, I'm here now, but I've, I'm like a boomerang. I went away and came back. So, so I came to Memorial University as an undergraduate and MUN has a really great world class collection of working men's records from the British Merchant Service, which is held at the Maritime History Archives here, just on the other side of the wall where I'm sitting. And it's a huge repository of working men's papers. And as a young history student, I got to work with in projects. And I wrote my masters on using those specifically because when sailors die at sea, the officers were regulated by the government to produce an inventory of their effects. So in those documents, when a sailor died, it would include a list of all their clothes that they owned when they died. So, so I wrote a masters project based on the clothes of seafarers who died in the late 19th century.

JVN [00:57:52] How would you have to handle those documents? Like, did you have to handle them with, like, gloves and like in certain climates or something? Are they, like, falling apart? Are they in pretty good shape?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:58:01] That was ten years ago. So they were—the older documents. So I worked with documents from the 1860s to the 1880s. The older documents are a little bit in our very rough shape, but it's actually because of the format. They would be these huge sheets. And in order to get them into the boxes at the time, the government would fold them. But they've been folded for over 100 years or 150 years, so the folds are breaking up and the documents are coming apart. But otherwise, no, we don't use gloves. Our archive is climate control, but yeah, I would just sit in the reading room and read them. The reason that you don't use gloves is because you can't feel the documents. So if you're going to rip something, it's a lot harder to tell or you're, like, doing something wrong. It's a lot harder to tell because you can't feel the paper. So it's actually safer to touch documents without gloves and with. The damage from transferring oils is a lot less significant than ripping—

JVN [00:59:06] Than ripping it! How interesting! So we learned in our episode, with Jue Guo, that history is often written by the winners. And we learned and you, you know, mentioned that earlier and we said, you know, "no news is largely good news." I'm curious about what some of your favorite archival things have been, like, maybe, like, one of your favorite stories. Yeah, what was your favorite stuff that you found?

MEAGHAN WALKER [00:59:26] One of my favorite documents is I have a 200 year old poster that got ripped off the wall in Portsmouth. So—and this is a good reversing the power dynamic. When the captains came into port, the desertion risk for their sailors was so high that you couldn't just let your sailors go to like the tavern and have a good time.

Instead, you would have people sailboats to your ship and they would bring liquor and entertainment to the ships and the captain would sort of regulate this. And this specific captain, John Towers tried to overregulate the slop sellers that were coming aboard, tried to tell them what they could sell to the sailors and and that he was going to act as a middleman between the sailors and the slop sellers, that he was going to be the one to manage his sailors money. And he put up a poster in Portsmouth to say that this is what he expected. So those slop sellers took one good read of that, and they went and printed their own poster. That essentially is, like, a doge meme that makes fun of the captain. And I say that because there's some jokes that I get, but there's clearly some historical jokes that, that they're making fun of this man. But, like, because I'm not a 200-year-old person from Portsmouth, England. I can't tell you what the joke is.

JVN [01:00:45] Oh, my God! How cool!

MEAGHAN WALKER [01:00:48] But! But one of the jokes I do know is that the captain's ship was called the Curacao, which is an island off the coast of South America. And they instead called the ship "the So-And-So." So it's like a, like a sibilant pun putting on the name, like, "John Towers So-And-So, like, who does this asshole think he is?"

JVN [01:01:06] Yes! Fucker!

MEAGHAN WALKER [01:01:07] So Towers went into Portsmouth, saw one of these posters and ripped it off the wall and put it in a letter and sent it to the Admiralty. And he said, "Guys, what are we going to do about this? What are we going to do about these assholes in Portsmouth?" And the Admiralty turned it over and wrote back, "This is a land issue and we don't have authority on land, so we're not going to do anything." Which, of course, the slop sellers knew, and John Towers, I think was in a little bit of denial over. But yeah, essentially he got told that they couldn't do anything because that wasn't their jurisdiction. But the actual letter—or the actual poster—is still in the National Archives in Britain. It's still stuff with the paste that they would have pasted it on the wall. And when he ripped it off the wall, I assume it was him. But I mean, maybe it was a lackey. You can see the other posters that got ripped off the wall with it. So, like, tenancy advertisements and, like, contract appeals and things like that. As a document, it's really great but as, like, a tactile thing, what you can hold, like, this stiff poster that literally was on a wall that people walk by 200 years ago, it's, like, just one of those really exciting things that you see in the archives.

JVN [01:02:31] Yeah, such a connection, like, to people before us. It's so interesting. So earlier this year, we interviewed Sarah C. Byrd, who encouraged us to see everyday styles as part of fashion history. So what's the importance of studying slop clothes and workwear and what can we learn about the people who made and wore these garments?

MEAGHAN WALKER [01:02:51] I really like studying men's clothing specifically because it's sort of outside of the typical interests of most clothing scholars. Not to say that they're dismissive of it, I mean, it is really exciting to study beautiful dresses and, and women did think a lot more about their clothes and wrote about their clothes. But men's clothing gets

us really interesting access to the sort of questions of masculinity and power and male fashion ability and male bodies. And I think the really sort of subversive thing about that is that men hate talking about their bodies, especially straight men, and hate thinking that they have fashion and hate acknowledging that they wear clothes. And it's really interesting to, to study something where it's very clear that they think extremely hard about these issues and are very passionate about them, even as they sort of dismiss them and pretend like they don't care.

JVN [01:03:53] And you were mentioning earlier that as the 19th century wore on, the naval officers got more and more elaborate in their outfits. Can you take us back there for a moment? And, like, just embroidery for days is, like, it just got more fabulous. Like what happened?

MEAGHAN WALKER [01:04:07] Yeah, that would have largely been officers. So the naval officers, for example, would have had a bit of a touchstone in the age of sail. So their, as their uniforms get more modernized, they still keep aspects of the old uniforms, especially around the cuffs and the pockets. The pocket flaps are still the shape of the old 18th century pockets, but the infantry especially, and the cavalry, especially, especially in the British army, really lean into imperial prestige by the late 19th century. And it's all about having big red coats, so very brightly colored coats with, like, gold embroidery and a lot of accouterments and a big sword and, you know, pretty horse and the whole bit. And there's a lot of anxiety about men who join these regiments, whether they're joining them because they actually want to be military men or whether they're joining them because they just want to dress in, like, exciting clothes and have a good excuse to do it.

JVN [01:05:21] Oh, my God. Okay, I love it! So now we have, last two questions. And so this one I want to say kind of and where we began, which is with the Titanic. So as we celebrate its 25th anniversary, why do you think this voyage continues to have such a tight grip on pop culture?

MEAGHAN WALKER [01:05:36] Um… it's the hubris. A lot of ships sink. A lot of ships sink more tragically than the Titanic, more fast, more terribly. But the idea that a ship would leave on its maiden voyage and then immediately sink, not having even reached its first destination. Chock full of extremely rich people is just metaphors for days.

JVN [01:06:06] It's so true. Is there any, like, stories on the Titanic that we haven't really heard about that there is research on that's like quite interesting that maybe wasn't in the movie or or has everything been kind of explored to death?

MEAGHAN WALKER [01:06:17] I mean, it depends on who you talk to, but like if you were talking to somebody on the street who's like, just seen Titanic, just, like, interested in more Titanic stories, two main places that, like, almost never get a lot of discussion are second class passengers and the second class parts of the ship and also the staff. And because I work with crew agreements, which are specifically about the staff, like, the crew of the ship, I am very interested in the staff makeup of the Titanic, which was huge. I think 5 to 800 people worked on the ship?

JVN [01:07:54] What was the survival rate of the staff?

MEAGHAN WALKER [01:07:57] I think it was about 50 or below 50%. It was really rough on the staff. The majority of the female staff survived. But the casualty rates, for example, in the engineering department were very high. Some stokers did survive, but the actual officers stayed till the very last minute and made sure that, you know, right before the ship breaks in half and the lights flickering way, they had to maintain the power to keep the lights on. Part of keeping the power going was keeping the bilge pumps running. So they were actually equalizing the water intake of the ships, so that—because what largely happens when a ship is struck on the side like the Titanic was, is that they capsize. And if a ship rolls over on its side, it's incredibly more difficult to evacuate than it is if it's upright. So what they were doing was they were trying to equalize the water so that the ship didn't roll on its side. And it's actually very strange that the ship didn't roll because a lot of ships usually capsize.

JVN [01:08:03] So it's kind of heroic-ish of the, it was heroic that they were able to keep it upright.

MEAGHAN WALKER [01:08:08] There's monuments in Southampton and in Edinburgh where a lot of men went to school for engineering where they're celebrated as heroes of the Titanic's sinking.

JVN [01:08:19] Were any officers or, like, staffers, like, pulled out of the water and, like, lived to tell about it or no?

MEAGHAN WALKER [01:08:26] The highest ranking officer that lived on the Titanic was Lightoller. And he testified at the inquiry in New York and would have talked quite extensively about the sinking. He famously denied that the ship broken half, but like probably because he didn't actually see it, he would have been on a collapsible at the end. So one of the last boats.

JVN [01:08:56] did the sinking of the Titanic cause them to make, like, industry changes for like make them have more lifeboats or like, make there be more lights on the ships or anything like did that cause, did that spark industry change?

MEAGHAN WALKER [01:09:07] Oh, yeah! Yeah, yeah, yeah. Like, how, how safety functions on ships today is directly stems from the Titanic. So lifeboats obviously was the first big thing. They made sure that every ship had to carry enough lifeboats for the entire ship— for the crew and the passengers. But one of the big problems with Titanic that doesn't really discuss a lot is just crew training, crew training for emergencies, like, there's a lot of stock put into the fact that the Titanic skipped their boat drill. But the staff itself was never trained to evacuate a ship of that size. They all would have been signed on to the crew agreement contract and put on the vessel between hours and days before the ship sailed. So they would have been as unfamiliar with that ship as the passengers. And so one thing that changed after the ship was that there had to be drills. Now staff are

assigned to boats, passengers, meet the staff that will be helping them get into boats in the case of an emergency, which was not the case on the Titanic. Lightoller and Murdoch, the other chief officer, were loading lifeboats on each side of the vessel in completely different ways than each other. So one was more lenient letting men get in the lifeboats and the other was putting them off empty because he was running out of women and children to enter the boats. But he wasn't letting men get in the boats. So, like, there were —so there's reasons for the, even the lifeboats filling up at different rates because the two men never spoke to each other and had no, had just been told women and children first. And that was their only direction on how to load the boats.

JVN [01:10:58] Jesus! Megan, I have had so much fun. I learned so much, I can't even stand it. So what's next for you and your work? What are you doing? What's up next?

MEAGHAN WALKER [01:11:06] Well, I'm working on a project here. I laugh a lot because I'm always, since I started with merchant shipping, and I moved to the Navy. But now I'm looking at a fishing community in Newfoundland, so I'm doing more seafarers, but a different industry. But these men in a community called Bonavista, they would have had a merchant, a fishing merchant who would buy all their fish, and he had a store where they then would come in and buy goods like food and things. But one thing they were also buying was cloth and notions for sewing and readymade clothes, predominantly men's readymade clothes. So I'm looking, I'm using the reference from this community to look at how readymade clothing is entering outport markets and New Zealand in the late 19th century.

JVN [01:12:02] Meaghan Walker, historian extraordinaire! You taught us so much today. I cannot even stand that I love your brain. I love your work. I am so grateful for you. I can't even like, I just, I really did have so much fun. Is there anything that you would just be remiss that you didn't tell us? Or are you feeling complete? Tell us everything?

MEAGHAN WALKER [01:12:19] I think we're good. I mean…

JVN [01:12:21] I'm feeling so good. I feel like we got to have you back in a little while. So I do another touch base signing. I just had so much fun. Thank you so much for coming on Getting Curious And go, Meaghan Walker!

MEAGHAN WALKER [01:12:29] Thank you!

JVN [01:12:33] You've been listening to Getting Curious with me, Jonathan Van Ness. Our theme music is "Freak" by Quiñ - thank you so much to her for letting us use it. If you enjoyed our show, please introduce a friend and please show them how to subscribe. Follow us on Instagram & Twitter @CuriousWithJVN. Our editor is Andrew Carson. Getting Curious is produced by me and Erica Getto, with production support from Julie Carrillo, Chris McClure, and Erin McKeon.