

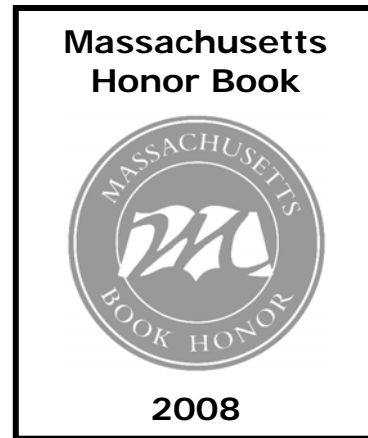
A Reading and Discussion Guide

Leviathan: The History of Whaling in America

By Eric Jay Dolin

W.W. Norton

Prepared by Jane Cain
Pearle L. Crawford Memorial Library, Dudley, MA



SUMMARY



In this book, the reader will have the opportunity to review the history of whaling in the United States, from the early 17th century through the halcyon days of whaling in the mid 19th century, to the decline of the culture and the industry of whaling in our country in the 20th century. Steeped in tradition and folklore, but still a primary means of earning a living for many in New England, the history of whaling is the history of our new nation -- its growth and turmoil, struggle and triumphs. The accounts of various whaling adventures, and the world in which they occurred, are well-researched, thorough, and interpreted by a noted American scholars on whaling and American maritime history. Grab your gear, stow it nigh and c'mon along - it is a great trip!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The whaling industry represents a fundamental American business. In what ways are whaling industry concepts typical business concepts? How do they differ?
2. How does the book provide a meaningful depiction of colonial-English relations in the mid-18th century? Was there anything new you learned?
3. Would you have wanted to be a whaler? The captain of a whale ship? A whaler's wife? How would you have coped?
4. Why has Nantucket's history been the most severely impacted by whaling and by international relations in the past two centuries?
5. How were the whaling ships the microcosmic "melting pot" in our nation's history? In what ways was this situation an advancement, and how was it an impediment to racial equality?
6. Discuss some unconventional roles for women related to the whaling trade. How does all this reflect on women's struggles for equality and suffrage?

ACTIVITIES

- Take a trip to the New Bedford Whaling Museum, and leave time to walk the cobblestone streets of Johnny Cake Hill. It is a magnificent museum and exists in a once proud, now economically depressed, community. The trip will bring about great reflection, and you'll learn more about the history of whaling and our maritime heritage in Massachusetts.
- Visit nearby Fairhaven, Dartmouth (Padnaram), and other locations in southeastern Massachusetts, for an educational and enriching experience.
- Tour the U.S.S. Constitution in Charlestown Harbor, or head to see the Charles W. Morgan whale ship at Mystic Seaport, to get a taste of our New England history.
- Go on a whale watch! (out of Gloucester, Mass.) It is fun for both young and old.

WEB SITES TO EXPLORE

- www.whalingmuseum.org The New Bedford Whaling Museum
- www.ericjaydolin.com The website of the Author, Eric Jay Dolin
- www.nps.gov The website of the National Park Service,
search: New Bedford, Mass., National Historic Park

Here are some additional links from Dolin's website:

- Cold Spring Harbor Whaling Museum
<http://www.cshwhalingmuseum.org>
- Massachusetts Historical Society
<http://www.masshist.org>
- Mystic Seaport-The Museum of America and the Sea
<http://www.mysticseaport.org>
- Nantucket Historical Association
<http://www.nha.org>
- Peabody Essex Museum
<http://www.pem.org>
- Sag Harbor Whaling & Historical Museum
<http://www.sagharborwhalingmuseum.org>
- The *Plough Boy* Anthology (*links to full text whaling books*)
<http://www.du.edu/~ttyler/ploughboy/#pbeditions>

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

<From amazon.com and from ericjaydolin.com>

Eric Jay Dolin was born in 1961, in Queens, New York. He grew up in New York and Connecticut and was always fascinated by the natural world and, in particular, the ocean.

He received degrees from Brown University in biology and environmental studies, a Masters of Environmental Management from the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies and a Ph.D. from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (where his dissertation focused on the role of the courts in the cleanup of Boston Harbor).

He has served as a program manager at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, an environmental consultant in the U.S. and in London, a Fisheries Policy Analyst at the National Marine Fisheries Service in Gloucester, an American Association for the Advancement of Science writing fellow at *Business Week*, a curatorial assistant in the Mollusk Department at Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology, and an intern at the National Wildlife Federation, the Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management, and the U.S. Senate.. In addition to books, Dolin has written more than 60 articles for magazines, newspapers, and professional journals.

In addition to books, he has written over 60 articles for magazines, newspapers, and professional journals, mainly on environmental issues. Eric and his wife Jennifer live in Marblehead, Massachusetts. They have two children.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

<from *The New York Times Book Review*, July, 2007>

[Whalers] pursued a natural resource, like the oil drillers of the modern era, balancing risk against reward and, driven by scarcity, sailing to ever more remote and dangerous regions. Colonial Americans simply looked for whales on the beach, cast ashore by storms <ca. 1640> Drift whaling...became a prominent feature of the colonial economy... Blubber was transformed into oil or candles. Drift whaling led to shore whaling, the pursuit of whales swimming close to shore...this industry established the island of Nantucket in Massachusetts as the whaling capital of the nation. The profits were as big as the fish, "with a single good-size whale providing each member of a whaleboat's crew with a payday equal to that which a shore-based worker might earn in a half a year," Mr. Dolin writes. When the population of shore-swimming whales declined, whalers set sail for the open seas, and the golden age of whaling began, the...hunt for sperm, right, bowhead, gray and humpback whales...

The great whaling tycoons of Nantucket made great fortunes...but the crews who signed on for whaling voyages never knew what they might earn, or how long they might be away, since a ship kept sailing until the hold was filled with whalebone and barrels of whale oil. Each sailor was assigned a percentage of profits, called a lay...If everything went exactly right, the rewards could be substantial. If not, crew members returned in debt... Americans were the best whalers in the world. During the Revolutionary War, Britain tried to steal expertise by pressing American sailors into service with its own whaling fleet, and France later offered inducements for Nantucket's finest to emigrate...During the golden age of whaling, from about 1815 to 1860, Americans dominated the industry, their ships accounting for 735 of the 900 whalers worldwide in 1846. This was the period, Mr. Dolin writes, "when the whaling industry spawned most of its greatest stories of human drive,

perseverance, success and failure, and when the American whalemens, harpoons in hand, attained mythic status.” . . .

The multicultural mix aboard ship described by Melville <in Moby Dick> was accurate. In colonial times, American Indians were hired to do the menial jobs; their numbers later joined by black Americans, who received equal pay for equal work, a radical notion. “A coloured man is only known and looked upon as a man, and is promoted in rank according to his ability and skill to perform the same duties as a white man,” one black sailor reported. . . The discovery of oil in Pennsylvania in 1859 sounded the death knell for whaling. Corsets and stays kept the whaling industry profitable, on a small scale, into the early years of the 20th century, but when the hourglass figure fell out of fashion, a thrilling chapter in American history came to a definitive close. . .



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