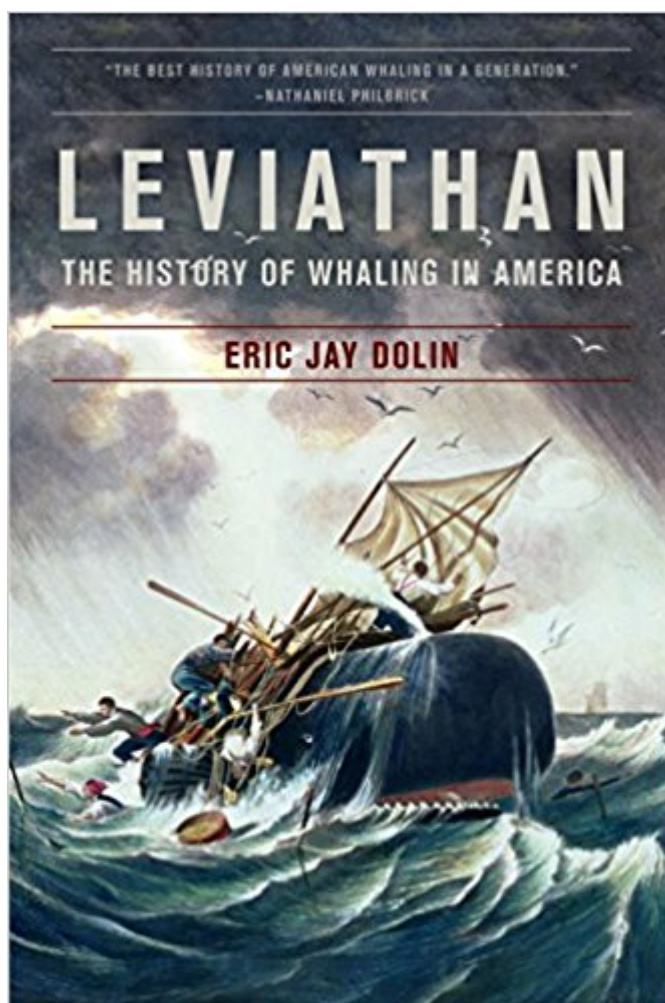


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Leviathan: The History Of Whaling In America



Synopsis

A Los Angeles Times Best Non-Fiction Book of 2007 A Boston Globe Best Non-Fiction Book of 2007 .com Editors pick as one of the 10 best history books of 2007 Winner of the 2007 John Lyman Award for U. S. Maritime History, given by the North American Society for Oceanic History "The best history of American whaling to come along in a generation." —Nathaniel Philbrick The epic history of the "iron men in wooden boats" who built an industrial empire through the pursuit of whales. "To produce a mighty book, you must choose a mighty theme," Herman Melville proclaimed, and this absorbing history demonstrates that few things can capture the sheer danger and desperation of men on the deep sea as dramatically as whaling. Eric Jay Dolin begins his vivid narrative with Captain John Smith's botched whaling expedition to the New World in 1614. He then chronicles the rise of a burgeoning industry from its brutal struggles during the Revolutionary period to its golden age in the mid-1800s when a fleet of more than 700 ships hunted the seas and American whale oil lit the world, to its decline as the twentieth century dawned. This sweeping social and economic history provides rich and often fantastic accounts of the men themselves, who mutinied, murdered, rioted, deserted, drank, scrimshawed, and recorded their experiences in journals and memoirs. Containing a wealth of naturalistic detail on whales, Leviathan is the most original and stirring history of American whaling in many decades.

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review. In this engrossing account, Dolin (*Political Waters*) chronicles the epic history of the American whaling industry, which peaked in the mid-18th century as "American whale oil lit the world." Temporarily dealt a blow by the Revolutionary War, whaling grew tremendously in the first half of the 19th century, and then diminished after the 1870s, in part because of the rise of petroleum. Many of America's pivotal moments were bound up with whaling: the ships raided during the Boston Tea Party, for example, carried whale oil from Nantucket to London before loading up with tea. Dolin also shows the ways whaling intersected with colonial conquest of Native Americans—had Indians not sold white settlers crucial coastal land, for example, Nantucket's whaling industry wouldn't have gotten off the ground. He sketches the complex relationship between whaling and slavery: service on a whaler served as a means of escape for some slaves, and whalers were occasionally converted into slave ships. This account is at once grand and quirky, entertaining and informative. 32 pages of illus. (July) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the MP3 CD edition.

Many people regard the hunting of whales as an archaic and even barbaric practice that threatens a magnificent, highly intelligent animal with extinction. The Japanese have been particularly scorched recently for their refusal to abide by various conventions to limit whaling. So it is useful, as well as very interesting, to be reminded of how integral a role whaling has played in our own national development. Dolin, who has written extensively on the marine world, has crafted a survey of the whaling industry over the past four centuries. It began in North America early in the seventeenth century and reached its peak in the mid-nineteenth century. Whaling was critical in the economic growth of New England, and whale products flooded international markets. Dolin provides wonderful, exhilarating accounts of whaling expeditions and illustrates just how dangerous the profession could be. He also describes (in sometimes gruesome detail) the industrialized processing of the fruits of the hunts. Even those adamantly opposed to the industry will find this to be a finely written account of a once-burgeoning industry. Freeman, Jay --This text refers to the MP3 CD edition.

Some years ago -- never mind how long precisely -- having nothing in particular to interest me in current fiction, I thought I would embark on a quest to re-read (or, read for the first time) some of the classic literature I had neither understood nor appreciated in high school and college. My first effort was Melville's *Moby Dick* -- I daresay I was the only person reading it on the beach that summer. I fell in love with it and wished to master it. So, among the other works I've tackled, I re-read Melville's

symbolic adventure yearly...whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul. A dear friend, learning of my affinity for the tale of the white whale, recommended Eric Jay Dolin's *Leviathan*. This book is more than deserving of all the kudos and awards it's garnered so far. Mr. Dolin makes what could be dry, dusty subject matter vibrant and relevant; the historical figures are alive and the depth of detail he uncovered in his research is astonishing. Everything about whaling is explained in the context of the times (Colonial America, the Civil War, Quasi War) and everyday life -- both on whaling voyages and for families at home -- is an important part of the story. When I pick up *Moby Dick* again this fall, it will be with a new appreciation and perspective for Ishmael, Ahab and the Pequod. I recommend this book without reservation for anyone interested in *Moby Dick* or American history.

Recently I read Eric Jay Dolin's *"Leviathan: The History of Whaling in America."* I've been interested in whaling for a long time, partly because I love the novel *"Moby Dick"* and partly because whaling deeply influenced Japanese modernization. I have many other reasons why I've been interested in it, but I don't have enough time to write about all of them. I've been to Nantucket Island, which is famous for the resort for celebrities living in the East Coast of the U.S. and the Nantucket basket. But for me Nantucket Island is the place where Ishmael got on the whale ship Pequod in *Moby Dick*. Before I read the book *"Leviathan,"* I knew about the history of American whaling in fragments, but I got a better overall knowledge about it from this book. I could now understand how Nantucket became the center of American whaling. According to *"Leviathan"* the golden age of American whaling was from the 1820s to the 1850s, which is just when Japanese modernization began. From the 17th century to the early 19th century, the Edo Bakuhu, samurai's regime, which strictly closed the country, ruled Japan. In 1868 Edo Bakuhu was overturned, and the new government accelerated Japanese modernization. The main reason why Edo Bakuhu was overturned was that it couldn't handle the threat of Western countries. In 1853 the fleet of the U.S. navy led by Matthew Perry arrived at the Tokyo bay to demand to open the country. Because of this affair Edo Bakuhu opened the country and many Japanese realized that Japan should be modernized to avoid being colonized by Western countries. In the background of this affair there was American whaling. After the war of 1812, American whaling made great progress. Before that, its main fishing places were in the Atlantic, and then they expanded to the Pacific and the Indian Ocean. In the 1820s a fishing place off the coast of Japan was discovered and many whale ships from America appeared around Japan. Edo Bakuhu wanted to close the country, but the foreign whale ships arriving off the coast of Japan resulted in contacts between Japanese people and foreign whalers. Sometimes American

whale ships saved Japanese drifters, and some of them were taken to America and got an education there. Sometimes American whale ships shipwrecked off the coast of Japan and Japanese coastal people saved them. One of the most famous Japanese drifters is John Mung. He was helped by American whale ship and taken to America. He learned English and became a whaler. And then he smuggled himself back into Japan. When the fleet led by Matthew Perry arrived at Japan, there were only two English interpreters in Japan including him. One of the main reasons why the U.S. government sent the fleet to Japan was to secure supply bases for American whale ships, but ironically at that time the golden age of American whaling was ending. Although the main use of whale oil was for lights, in the 1850s oil fields were discovered and developed in America and whale oil was replaced by kerosene. I learned from the history of whaling that globalism wasn't just a recent phenomenon and an unexpected side of Japanese modernization. I think that you can find another unexpected side of American and world history from the book "Leviathan: The History of Whaling in America."

Unsurprisingly, Eric Dolin provides us with a history of American whaling. What is surprising, though, is the enjoyable way in which he tells the story. This is not a dry academic history, nor is it an economic history of the impact whaling had on the growth of America. Instead, it is the tale of how Americans, starting in earliest years of colonization, and running through the demise of whaling just after World War I, were shaped by the pursuit of these giants of the deep. Dolin spans the globe in his tale - he tells the reader of early whaling just off the East coast of the United States, he discusses ships chasing whales around the Cape Horn, up into the Arctic, and even in the South Pacific, near Australia. His history focuses on the men (and sometimes women) who worked on the boats and what these folks did with the whale. Naturally, it is a sad tale to know that Americans used a very small portion of the whale and simply discarded the remainder of the carcass, but it is important to know why - and Dolin gives us that information; he tells us that the whale oil was the desired product, and only part of the whale was needed for that product. Overall, I enjoyed the book a tremendous amount - I could smell the salt in the air during the whaling voyages, and I could envision the docks teeming with activity when the ships were either setting out or returning from their (often) several year treks around the globe. Fascinating reading for anyone with any interest in American history, critical reading for anyone with an interest in how Americans viewed the whale and other creatures of the deep during this 300 year period.

A superbly written book about a fascinating part of American history in the 19th century.

This is a very comprehensive and well written history of the origins, growth, and decline of the whaling industry. I enjoyed this book immensely and learned a great deal from it. What is particularly interesting is the importance of whaling in the economic growth of the Americas and world economics.

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