

INTO THE DEEP

AMERICA, WHALING
AND THE WORLD

1 X 113 HD



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A fantastic sea adventure, a cautionary economic and environmental tale, and a mythic saga of man and nature, *Into the Deep: America, Whaling & the World* tells the thrilling and epic story of three centuries of American whaling, and the unique relationship between whalers and the giant creatures they hunted. The hunt for these mysterious, mammoth beings helped to fuel the expansion of the American economy—propelling tiny backwater ports like Nantucket and New Bedford to the unrivalled center of the whaling world—and pioneered the first truly global enterprise America ever knew. The magnificent creatures were slaughtered for the precious oil that filled their massive heads, the high-quality illuminant that lit the drawing rooms of Europe and greased the wheels of the Industrial Revolution.

Into the Deep explores two events that would forever anchor whaling into the American consciousness. On August 12, 1819, the whaleship *Essex* set sail from Nantucket, bound for the Pacific. Whaling had become an increasingly dangerous industry, yet, none suffered a more horrific fate than the *Essex*. On November 20, 1820, thousands of miles off the coast of Peru, a sperm whale as long as the ship itself, rammed the ship twice, sending the vessel to the bottom of the ocean. Twenty sailors made their frantic way onto whaleboats, eight of whom would ultimately survive after a harrowing ordeal that lasted months and reduced the sailors to cannibalism.

Into this heady world walked Herman Melville, a restless 21-year-old who arrived in New Bedford—the new whaling center that replaced Nantucket in the 1840s—to look for work. He soon set sail aboard the *Acushnet*, a whaling ship bound for the South Pacific, the same marine wilderness that the ill-fated *Essex* had traveled some twenty years before.

By one of the most fortuitous events to occur in literary history, Melville encountered William Henry Chase, the son of the first mate of the *Essex*, one of the tragedy's few survivors. The younger Chase gave Melville a copy of his father's memoir, and the harrowing tale of man vs. nature would haunt him for a decade. In 1850, Melville set to work on *Moby Dick*, arguably the greatest American novel.

But when *Moby Dick* was published in 1851 it was met with indifference. Two years into the California Gold Rush, Americans were losing interest in the maritime wilderness of the great oceans, focusing instead on the boundless possibilities of the American West. The golden age of whaling was drawing to a rapid close. The 1859 discovery of petroleum in Pennsylvania identified the illuminant and lubricant of the future, and quickly relegated whale oil to a rapidly fading past.

Into the Deep's look at the whaling past is a stark reminder of not only the volatility of the global marketplace but also the dangers of viewing the planet and its creatures as commodity.

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CREDITS

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