

MULTIFACETED FACTORIES OF DEATH:
THE THREE COMMUNITIES OF THE AMERICAN WHALESHIP

by

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Introduction

"Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people's hats off—then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can."¹

On the night of February 11, 1823, a savage storm raged in the Pacific Ocean sending waves crashing down onto the deck of a whaleship. Every wave that smashed against the gunwales drove the ship towards its doom on the shallow coral reefs of the French Frigate Shoals. Broken upon these treacherous formations the ship would vanish beneath the waves for one-hundred and eighty-eight years, her crew clinging to small boats until they were rescued the next morning by a fellow whaleship the *Martha*. This newly lost whaleship, the *Two Brothers* out of Nantucket, and her captain on her final voyage was none other than George Pollard, Jr, who two years earlier had captained the infamously ill-fated voyage of the whaleship *Essex*. While, at only thirty-two years of age, he was still fairly young, Pollard's loss of two whaling ships in a row ensured that he would never captain a whaling ship again—in fact, he would spend most of his remaining life ashore as a night watchman. That the *Two Brothers* was the very ship that had returned Pollard and the other *Essex* survivors to Nantucket after their months adrift at sea, and that her very next voyage was entrusted to the man who had so recently led a ship to destruction can be said to be a truly Shakespearean irony. The quick rescue of her crew came from the fortuitous happenstance that the *Two Brothers* had been sailing closely at the time of the storm with the whaleship *Martha* partaking in the practice of the gam.² The *Martha* had successfully

¹ Herman Melville, "Moby Dick or the Whale" in *Moby Dick (Third Norton Critical Edition)*, ed. Hershel Parker (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018), 16.

²The gam was practiced whenever two or more whaling ships met and agreed to sail together for a while, often engaging in social visits back and forth between their ships, and agreeing to split any whales that they encountered during that period.

taken shelter nearby and rode out the storm largely unscathed. She deployed her whaleboats to rescue the stranded *Two Brothers* crew the next morning once the storm had cleared, and they had enough light to navigate the dangerous shoals. But why did two American whaling ships sail so close to a largely uninhabited part of the Hawaiian island chain in 1823?³

While they had almost certainly moved closer to the treacherous shores seeking shelter from the storm the broader answer to that question is that they were engaged in the American oil boom of their era. Before petroleum-based oils became the fuel of society and industry, the world was lit by the rendered fats of the largest mammals alive on the earth, and much of the whale oil which came out of the Pacific Ocean did so on American whaleships. Beyond that, whale oil served various industries of that time, from lubricants to soaps, and even to perfume. The global market was hungry for whale oil, and the American whaling fleet would continue to grow steadily until the late 1850s, with the New Bedford fleet in 1857 topping out at 329 vessels and more than 10,000 men. Who were the thousands of men who crewed these hundreds of American whaling vessels between the 1790s and the 1850s, and how do we understand them? That is a question that has long been asked by the small collective of historians who have devoted themselves to whaling history, and often answered in parts, but never as a whole.⁴

Eric Dolan's *Leviathan: The History of Whaling in America* serves as the most comprehensive modern book on the general history of the whaling industry in the area now known as the United States. Dolan traces the story of the industry from the early colonial era in

³Nathaniel Philbrick, *In the Heart of the Sea: The Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex* (Viking Penguin Press, 2000), 208-210; CNN Wire Staff, "Sunken ship of 'Moby-Dick' captain found," *CNN.com*, February 12, 2011; Jason Graziadei, "Wreck of a Nantucket whaleship identified in Pacific," *The Inquirer and Mirror* (Nantucket, Massachusetts), February 28, 2011; National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, "Lost whaling shipwreck with link to Melville's Moby-Dick discovered in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands", Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument Press Release, February 11, 2011.

⁴"Yankee Whaling," New Bedford Whaling Museum, last modified August 3, 2016; US Bureau of the Census, 1960, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1957*, 445; Derek Thompson, "The Spectacular Rise and Fall of U.S. Whaling: An Innovation Story," *The Atlantic*, February 22, 2012.

the 1600s to its relatively modern, ending in the mid-1920s. His core view of the whaling industry is that of a highly profitable industry, drawing Europeans to the shores of the New World in hopes of being able to take part in the exploitation of natural resources for their own gain. This industry grew during the following centuries requiring ever-growing numbers of whalers, the vast majority of whom did not care about the damage that they were causing as long as they could still turn a profit. While this book seeks to include a social history that spreads itself to cover the American mainland, it relies primarily on economic records which ensures that the main focus of the text is the economic history of the industry. This is certainly an important aspect of the whaling industry—as its ever-declining profitability was key to its downfall—but in understanding the whalers themselves it serves to present them as solely motivated by money. While money was assuredly a major component of their being, it also most definitely cannot be said to be the entirety of their being.⁵

Similarly, Granville Allen Mawer sought to highlight the history of the South Seas whaling industry in *Ahab's Trade: The Saga of South Seas Whaling*. Basing his research heavily on the much-analyzed texts of prominent members of the whaling industry such as Alexander Starbuck, W.H. Macy, J.T. Jenkins, and George Good, Mawer's primary divergence is to add to the story using primary documents drawn from archives in Australia. This allows him to broaden the story of the fight for the South Sea whale fishery by bringing in new perspectives. This includes the interesting, and significant, story of the London whaleship *Emelia*—which on her 1788-1790 voyage became the first commercial whaler to ply her trade west of Cape Horn—whose journey serves to disprove the long-held belief that Yankee Whalers were the first whites to take the whaling industry around the horn. Making sole use of well-mined records and

⁵Eric Jay Dolin, *Leviathan: The History of Whaling in America* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2007), 3-7, 10, 58, 194, 290, 322-325, & 446.

Australian records also serves to limit his argumentation on the struggle to primarily American and British interests, while not necessarily providing much on how to understand the sailors or their communities. A much stronger focus on the American whaling industry's full fight for the South Seas whale fishery can be found in Edouard A. Stackpole's *Whales and Destiny: The Rivalry Between America, France, and Britain for Control of the Southern Whale Fishery, 1785-1825*. This book, which came out in 1972, focuses its narrative largely on the story of the island of Nantucket, and how these islanders came to be the leaders of a massive whaling industry in the Pacific. While it promises to tell the story of the struggle for control of this fishery between two major established powers, and the emerging American nation, there is relatively little on the on-going conflict between Britain and France, nor much explanation of how the whalers fully fitted into the larger political struggles between these nations.⁶

More recently multiple books have begun to look at whaling through the lens of various subaltern groups, such as Native Americans and African-Americans. In *Living with Whales: Documents and Oral Histories of Native New England Whaling History*, Nancy Shoemaker describes the importance of whaling to Native Americans in New England, and their deep involvement in the American whaling industry. Blending primary source documents from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries, she traces the story of English colonists first learning whaling from the Wampanoag through the continuing involvement of Native whalers to the bitter end of the industry. Building off of this in her follow-up book, *Native American Whalemen and the World: Indigenous Encounters and the Contingency of Race*, she demonstrates how involvement in the whaling industry provided much needed economic

⁶Granville Allen Mawer, *Ahab's Trade: The Saga of South Seas Whaling* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), xii, 17, 40-41, & 93; Edouard A. Stackpole, *Whales & Destiny: The Rivalry between America, France, and Britain for Control of the Southern Whale Fishery, 1785-1825* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1972), xi, 1, 141, 146, 229, & 260-264.

incentives for Native Americans and their communities. She also contends that it forced these Native sailors into the position of continually being expected to fulfill the expected stereotypes of what it meant to be a Native American, namely the idea that they had to be intellectually, and culturally, inferior. These concepts in turn were utilized by white whalers in particular ways to frame their encounters in the Pacific with other "native" populations. Due to their geographic location, these studies focus almost entirely on Natives who came from the Eastern United States, particularly New England, as they were the ones who had the longest and most profound contact with the American whaling industry.⁷

The importance of whaling to the natives of the West Coast of the United States is one of the central topics of Robert Sullivan's 2000 book *A Whale Hunt: How a Native-American Village Did What No One Thought It Could*. In this text, he analyzes how the Makah tribe of the Neah Bay in Washington State successfully fought the federal government and environmentalist protests to be able to hunt a single baleen whale every year as a continuation of "traditional tribal practice." This exception to the federal government's laws prohibiting American whaling had its origins in the 1855 Treaty of Neah Bay, in which the Makah ceded much of the modern state of Washington to the federal government, but reserved the right in perpetuity to whaling. While, at the point of their petition, they had not been involved in whaling in the better part of seventy years, tribal elders argued that allowing them to resume the practice was crucial to healing the cultural disintegration that had occurred within the tribe. In particular, Sullivan highlights the

⁷Nancy Shoemaker, *Living with Whales: Documents and Oral Histories of Native New England Whaling History* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014), 2-4, 21, 26-32, & 102-118; Shoemaker, *Native American Whalers and the World: Indigenous Encounters and the Contingency of Race* (University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 4, 6, 9, 21-22, 24, 27, 36, & 87.

tribe's millennia-long traditions involving whaling and whales, and how the preparation for the initial modern whaling voyage drew dispersed tribal members back to their community.⁸

The most recent subaltern study regarding the American Whaling industry is *Whaling Captains of Color: America's First Meritocracy* by Skip Finley. Through the lens of roughly fifty whaleship captains of color, predominantly those who were Black, Finley traces the history of the New England whaling industry as an opportunity for members of these often-oppressed communities to advance themselves to a level of social respectability and stability. This he credits to the meritocratic nature of the whaling industry in which to become a ship's officer a man had to come up through the ranks. Like the works of Shoemaker, he is deeply studying one often previously overlooked group within the whaling community, and providing insights on their experiences, and contributions to the industry as a whole. Both of these authors even go as far as to offer an analysis of how these particular subaltern groups interacted with white individuals within the industry. These studies are crucial for giving a voice to the previously voiceless in the American whaling industry, but due to their focused nature, they cannot allow for a full understanding of the cultural nature of the whaleship as a whole.⁹

Beyond various racial groups who were involved in the whaling industry, there is also the question of women who were involved in the industry, primarily through having fathers, brothers, sons, and husbands who were whalers. *Captain Ahab Had a Wife: New England Women & the Whalefishery, 1720-1870* by Lisa Norling focuses on the more traditional story of those women who were left behind for years on end while their male relations were off whaling. She finds that contrary to the idea of whaling community women being seen as strong independent

⁸ Robert Sullivan, *A Whale Hunt: How a Native-American Village Did What No One Thought It Could* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2000), 13, 15, 23, 47, & 105.

⁹Skip Finley, *Whaling Captains of Color: America's First Meritocracy* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2020), 2-3, 13, 66, 124, 200 & 280.

forces having to care for themselves and their families for years on end, they were primarily still tied to paternalistic ideals of womanhood. Far from being seen as increasingly important, the greater need for them to handle affairs at home when whaling voyages became ever more prolonged served to heighten the idea of their labor holding an intrinsically lower value. In the end, she concludes that the greatest value that they were seen as offering was the keeping of the home fires burning, the concept of which their male relatives could cling to while facing the trials of the whaling industry.¹⁰

Slightly counter to this, Joan Druette in *Petticoat Whalers: Whaling Wives at Sea, 1820-1920*, looks at the story of a small number of whaling wives who, starting in the 1820s, went to sea with their whaling captain husbands. She shows that these women had to overcome the objections of nervous ship's owners, and a society that felt that a whaleship was no place for a woman before they were even able to leave port. Once aboard, they were faced with not only having to adapt to an environment where space was at a premium, but which was not designed for comfort but for the business of rendering oil. For some of these women, these discomforts were overcome through the additions of certain creature comforts such as rugs, curtains, and even on one occasion a small piano, to their living spaces. For others, they found themselves turning to those tasks typically seen as the purview of women at this time, such as knitting, sewing, and leisure reading, along with frequently acting as nurses to injured and ill crewmembers. When they became exceptionally bored, their husbands would occasionally drop them on islands where missionaries resided, so that these women would be able to socialize without hindering the whaling efforts of their husband's crews. While these studies both serve to highlight the complex stories of women tied into the whaling industry, they also seem to indicate

¹⁰Lisa Norling, *Captain Ahab Had a Wife: New England Women & the Whalefishery, 1720-1870* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 2, 5-6, 12, & 290.

that women were largely seen as appendages to the actual business of whaling, and were often kept out of much of the deeper culture, even if they were directly onboard the ships.¹¹

This thesis argues that those involved in the American whaling industry, from the start of the American Republic until its height in the 1850s, were members of a floating community, in the form of the whaling ship, which can be understood as three distinct types of community. First, these whaling ship communities were a part of, and apart from, the larger veins of society and politics, particularly in the early decades of the American nation. Well beyond their importance to the economy, whalers were entangled in the struggles for the establishment of the young nation's place in the international order and setting national priorities. Second, the whaling ship was a multicultural community that saw members of multiple races drawn from across the world working together to achieve their goals. While it was still often heavily informed by mainland biases that favored whites, there was an undeniable exchange and blending of cultures that occurred onboard these ships and, in the communities, they touched. Finally, the whaling ship represented a widespread and perpetual culture of violence. Beyond the core job of hunting and processing whales, whalers were surrounded by a world of violent interactions between members of the crew, violent environments, and multiple violent methods for leaving the ship including desertion—which perpetuated violence against a person's honor rather than their physical being.

Finding these answers can be difficult the sources that are available for use often do not provide much in the way of in-depth information about the individual sailors who took part in the whaling industry. This is due to most of these sources being items like ships' logs and crew lists which were primarily intended to be legal documents for the whaling industry, and thus when

¹¹Joan Druette, *Petticoat Whalers: Whaling Wives at Sea, 1820-1920* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 2001) 3-5, 11, 76, 190, & 193.

they discuss members of the crew, they are primarily concerned with providing the bare minimum required for use in a court of law. This does not mean that they are entirely without value as it is possible to read between the lines of the information which they do provide to find at minimum generalized information about those who were involved in the industry. For example, while it is relatively impossible to pin down the exact race, ethnicity, and origin of every single whaler, based on these documents, patterns and trends can still be found. Adding to these findings are the contents of the small number of personal journals kept by individuals onboard whaling ships that have come into public circulation, as well as governmental records such circular letters, memorials, and official communications. While they do not fill all of the holes in the record, they do provide additional information on the world of the whaleship, the political discourse around the whaling industry, and at times disciplinary issues regarding crewmembers (as well as officers). Finally, newspapers can occasionally be drawn up, but unfortunately as whalers were primarily out in the middle of the ocean the majority of times events onboard ship made it into newspapers was when something went incredibly wrong, such as the sinking of the *Essex* or the murder of the captain of the *Sharon*. Thus, their greatest contribution is frequently to demonstrate the threads that did tie whaling ships back to their home nation so far away, and to provide additional detailing of those infrequent yet major moments of whaling history.¹²

¹² John Wilson, *The Cruise of the Gipsy: The Journal of John Wilson, Surgeon on a Whaling Voyage to the Pacific Ocean, 1839-1843*, ed. Honore Forster (Fairfield, Washington: Ye Galleon Press, 1991); Joel Turrill, *Turrill to the State Department*, October 1, 1847, State Department microcopy Department of State Records, National Archives of the United States, Washington D.C, M144/1; Thomas Adamson, *Thomas Adamson to the State Department*, February 1, 1870, Department of State Records, National Archives of the United States, Washington D.C., M144/12; "Shipping Intelligence," *Sydney Morning Herald*, December 23, 1842; "Boston Post Marine Journal," *Boston Post*, April 3, 1843; "Strange Story," *The Star of Freedom* (Leeds, West Yorkshire, England), April 5, 1845; "Mutiny and Murder," *The New Bedford Mercury*, February 23, 1845; "Mutiny and Murder," *The Courier-Journal* (Louisville, Kentucky), March 14, 1845; "Mutiny and Murder," *The Public Ledger* (Philadelphia), March 4, 1845; "From Material," *Boston Post*, March 12, 1845; "A Duel in the Dark," *Boston Weekly Globe*, July 14, 1885; "A Duel in the Dark," *Huntsville Weekly Democrat* (Huntsville Alabama), September 9, 1885; "A Duel in the Dark,"

While there was a booming Colonial American whaling industry this industry was confined to the northern and southern fisheries of the Atlantic, with New England whalers only rounding the Horn in 1791. More importantly, while the American whaling fleet was targeted for attack during the American Revolution, it was still an ostensibly British enterprise as America was not a distinct entity at this time. Thus, for the purposes of this text, that industry, which was also heavily devastated by privateers, is not considered for understanding American whalers. Further, while the American whaling industry held out until the 1970s, with the last New England whaling ship sailing in 1927, the industry after the highs of the 1850s was drastically altered. Primarily, this was the result of the industry's lost primacy as a provider of fuel, and thus the drastic downsizing of the American fleet that followed. However, the industry at this point also drastically changed with the rise of steam powered ships and significantly more deadly bomb-lances. No longer did whalers need to have traditional skills related to operating a sailing ship—rather skills in engineering would be useful for those few who were tasked with those jobs—nor did they need the same skills as the harpooners of old. This diminished, and industrialized, industry is thusly significantly different from the American whaling industry whose membership this thesis considers. As such, those whalers are similarly not considered for the discussions of how to understand American whalers.¹³

Understanding American whalers as members of these complex multifaceted communities is important for several reasons. Primarily, these communities were a significant part of the life of a whaler for as long as he continued within that profession. While they had land-based communities that they would eventually return to, the longevity of Pacific Ocean

Orange County Observer (Hillsborough North Carolina), October 3, 1885; "A Duel in the Dark," *North Star* (Danville Vermont), August 7, 1885; "Dare-Devil Ben," *The San Francisco Examiner*, July 22, 1885.

¹³ Second Letter of George Washington to Gouverneur Morris, Esq., New York, October 13, 1789, American State Papers: Foreign Relations 1:122

whaling voyages meant that the communities of the whaling ships were every whalers' semi-permanent home. Beyond that, these were their workspaces which meant that the life of a whaler at sea was entirely defined by the whaleship, and thus to understand the ship is to begin to understand the man. Further, it is all too easy to understand whalers solely through their roles as perpetrators of one of the most consistently violent industries that ever existed. This is particularly true given that the most enduring literary legacy of the whaling industry is a tale centered on a man obsessed with seeking vengeance at all costs, whose actions lead to the destruction of his ship.

Yet, the humanity of these whalers cannot be forgotten, and it is an eternal fact of the human condition that humans are rarely, if ever, confined to one definitional box. Thus, a whaler can only be understood by recognizing that they existed within and drove these multiple communities at the same time. Finally, these three communities all, in their own fashion, are rather American for the times that they existed in. American whalers not only helped the young nation define itself politically but, in many ways, struggled to define themselves within the political discourse of the era. They were engaged in a multiracial community that saw all men theoretically being treated equally, and yet there was still a distinct set of racial biases and confinements that tended to benefit whites. The most violent action that could be taken in resistance to perceived authority was not the obvious act of mutiny or violent rebellion, but to deny the authority and thus the honor of these oppressive forces through the act of deserting from one's ties to their authority. While they certainly cannot be said to be the only Americans, or even necessarily the most American-like Americans of their times, these whalers were much more American than their frequent separation from the nation would indicate.

Chapter One

A Community A Part of and Apart from the Republic

The early American whaler has forever been cemented into the public consciousness thanks to Herman Melville's 1851 novel *Moby Dick*, which is still frequently assigned to high school and college students. That whaling was important to the economy of the United States, from its inception until the 1850s, is hard to deny as this industry provided the nation, and its trading partners, with sperm oil for lighting, soap, and perfume, oil for cooking, and whalebone for clothing and art. Such was its importance that the people of Nantucket felt only too justified in asking Congress for "the nett revenue collected in Nantucket" so that they might fund the construction of a deep draft channel into their harbor to facilitate growing ships. Whereas historians have placed much emphasis on the importance of whaling to the American economy—particularly in the regions and professions directly tied into the various aspects of the industry—less has been examined relating to the broader political maneuvering and debate around the industry, as well as how whaling and whalers were intertwined into the broader political culture of the period. Of particular importance as well in these considerations is the fact that whaleship owners often times were themselves prior whalers, and/or relatives of those who were out whaling, and thus there is a necessary blurring of the line between whalers who were actively onboard ships whaling, and those who were speaking for them to those in government. This is particularly true in the case of cities like Nantucket and New Bedford where much, if not all, of the economy was based on whaling, and thus whaling's concerns were the towns concerns as a whole.¹⁴

¹⁴Survey of the Harbor of Nantucket. Communicated to the House of Representatives, February 16, 1803, American State Papers: Commerce and Navigation 1:526.

When looking at whalers at sea from 1785 to 1830 what commonly appears is a community of independent mariners who in many ways represented the core ideals of liberty found in Jeffersonian Republicanism. They also represented the American movement away from rural agrarianism combined with a rising urban commercial outlook that relied on substantial financial investment. Despite their guise of independence, American whalers were often tied into the international political-economic discourse of the period, from struggles to establish independent American free trade with the nations of Europe, to being drawn into the military conflicts of the early 1800s between France and England via the threats of impressment and embargo. They also were significant in discussions regarding internal policies for the United States, both as related to direct petitioning from whalers and their communities on shore, and from the perspective of ongoing debates relating to whalers in a more general sense. This was notable true when it came to those debates and discussions centered on how much aid the federal government should offer to various interests and under what conditions, as well as determining which interests could be sacrificed for the good of the nation at large. Finally, whalers were uniquely needed for crewing early exploration of the Pacific by the United States, which helped establish the country in the international community as a scientific and imperial nation, as well as providing impetus and support for establishing western facing ports to exert control over both their Pacific and Louisiana Purchase territories.¹⁵

More than anyone else, sailors represented the republican ideal of liberty—an ideal formed for them through the very nature of their business. Sailors represented a community apart, with members being easily recognizable due to “peculiarities’ [that] resulted from the nature and setting of his work. The sea-man had an unmistakable way of talking that included

¹⁵Jason W. Smith, *To Master the Boundless Sea: The U.S. Navy, the Marine Environment, and the Cartography of Empire* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018)

technical terms, unusual syntax, distinctive pronunciations, and a generous portion of swearing and cursing.” They also tended to walk and dress distinctly, while also being physically marked (scars/missing limbs, tattoos, windburned/sunburned skin) by their work. Nantucket whalers, in turn, marked themselves as separate from other sailors, particularly in the whaling trade, possessing their own language and traditions, such as a particular code relating to whittling which signaled what kind of berth they expected based on their experience. Because of this ready identifiability, sailors and whalers could not be mistaken for anything other than what they were, marking them as members of unique brotherhoods.¹⁶

These brotherhoods formed as sailors came to find themselves united in being pressed from one side by the violent and often unpredictable nature of the sea, while the near-total power of their captain and his officers assailed them from the other side. In the case of the whalers, they were also faced with the dangers and pains largely exclusive to their industry. Beyond the normal risks of sailing men, such as violent storms, suddenly shifting cargo, tropical diseases, and cruel ships’ officers, whalers were hunting large sentient creatures that were wont to resist being slain. It was a routine experience for whalers, that once they had successfully harpooned a whale, to be pulled “miles and miles...at fifteen bone-jarring knots” before the whale tired enough to be slain, or to find their whaleboats attacked by a harpooned whale, or another member of its pod. Once a whale was dead the whalers had to tow the large mammal back to the ship, and over the next several days render it down into the valuable oils that they were there to collect. The threat of death at the head or thrashing tail of an enraged, injured, whale, the hard, bloody work to turn that mammal into oil, as well as the common threats of environment and

¹⁶Marcus Buford Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (New York; Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1987), 11-13; Nathaniel Philbrick. *In the Heart of the Sea: The Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex*. (Viking Penguin Press, 2000), 22.

harsh officers, compelled whalemens to work cooperatively with one another to run the ship. It also drove them, like other sailors, to use “negotiations and resistance to defend themselves and to protect and expand their privileges and rights.”¹⁷

It is in this drive to defend and grow their rights that sailors, and whalemens, during the Early Republic, came to embody the republican concept of liberty. In the most direct sense, sailors were not afraid to assert their sense of liberty against those who would oppress them, although when on a ship they were more likely to ‘vote with their feet’ and desert than to engage in actual mutiny. Even then, the threat of a mutiny was always a distinct hum that ships officers had to be mindful of when disciplining or otherwise directing their crews. Mutiny, while not necessarily likely, still was a tool in the chest of shipboard assertions of liberty. Ashore, away from the necessary stratification of their ships and the dangers of their jobs sailors developed a semi-fatalistic liberty centered on the concept that “there was no future, only the here and now,” and a desire to “be ‘their own lords and masters, and at their own command.” Consequently, they frequently drank heavily, fought, gambled, womanized, and generally violated the social norms established by their ‘social superiors’, instead creating norms that centered on freedom (liberty) of action.¹⁸

During the American Revolution, sailors driven by a mix of this sense of liberty and personal pragmatism - relating to their employment opportunities— “played a central role in the...conflict, first as the shock troops in the mobs of the resistance movement...and then as combatants at sea.” Simply stated, they helped to form the base of liberty upon which the American Republic would be constructed, and due to the stated importance of impressment and

¹⁷Philbrick, *In the Heart of the Sea*, 52-53, & 55-57; Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 290-291.

¹⁸Paul A. Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront: American Maritime Culture in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 6, 13, 72, & 89.

its role in the decision to enter into the War of 1812, they embodied a potent symbol of American liberty. Nonetheless, they also stood apart in several key ways from the definition of liberty that was being advanced by the Jeffersonian Republicans. First, even with their concepts of liberty, the Jeffersonians were interested in establishing a government run by a carefully curated natural aristocracy, which directly confronted the ideology held by Nantucket whalers. The ideal of mixed government containing a true natural aristocracy—in which those who governed were selected based on their “Virtue and Talents—was an ideology that the heavily Quaker Nantucket whalers supported, as it directly argued against aristocracy by birth and rather for one by work and skill—or more simply meritocracy.¹⁹

This was reflective of their work ethic in which everyone onboard the ship contributed to the hunt. It was also reflective of how their ships officers came to power—sailing out on repeated voyages during which they would learn the skills necessary to advance in rank until they earned a mate position and then a captaincy—rather than simply being given those ranks by virtue of birth. During the course of the Revolution, Jefferson and his allies had determined that the popular assemblies had concentrated an oppressive amount of power within the states. Based on this the Jeffersonians felt that these assemblies were the biggest threat to achieving the republican ideals. While they desired a republic of liberty, they sought to quell the political power of the masses, due to concerns about it turning into mob rule. This ran against the ideals of Quakers, who allowed all members to have a voice in their meetings and would seem to inflate the power of men born to the higher classes at the expense of those trying to rise from below. It is here that their sense of liberty began to diverge from that of the Jeffersonians.²⁰

¹⁹Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront*, xii.; John Adams, *Letter from John Adams to Thomas Jefferson*, November 15, 1813, *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-6198>.

²⁰Lance Banning, *The Jeffersonian Persuasion: Evolution of a Party Ideology* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 89.

A key marker of the divergence between the whalers and the Jeffersonians was that the Jeffersonians were focused on a particular vision of agricultural republicanism. This conceptualization emphasized ideas of property ownership and the importance of the land to the republic and liberty. For them, the ideal republic primarily focused on agriculture and the countryside, and not on what they saw as the corrupting influence of commerce and the cities. They did not categorically oppose commerce in of itself, as between 1755 and 1820 the growth of the Atlantic market for grains had created a well-embraced agrarian-commercial system that Jeffersonians happily exploited for their benefit. Rather, within the rise of financiers and commercial interests, the Jeffersonians saw the rise of the same corruption and self-service that had ruined the English republic. Namely, they were concerned about those who speculated on the markets, those who ran the financial institutions, and those who into whose hands control of public debt was placed. For the whalers of Nantucket, who embraced the sea because of the lack of arable land on the island, land ownership did not constitute a major concern. Alternatively, with their conception of liberty being primarily focused on freedom of movement and activity, they focused on the continuation of their commercial interests within the whaling industry. Because of this, the early nineteenth century residents of Nantucket were investors in the whaling industry and not the bonds and stocks that the typical speculator put their money into.²¹

This placed them in the position of being the vanguard of the turn in American society towards a liberalized culture of capitalistic self-interest that historian Steven Watts identifies as occurring during the period. Watts sees the War of 1812 as being crucial to these changes by stimulating and legitimizing major liberalizing impulses within America in the early nineteenth

²¹Lance Banning, "Jeffersonian Ideology Revisited: Liberal and Classical Ideas in the New Republic" *The William and Mary Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (January 1986): 5; Banning, *The Jeffersonian Persuasion*, 68, 154, & 205; Philbrick, *The Heart of the Sea*, 20.

century. These liberal ideals were primarily promoted by individuals who were elites of the middle and upper classes who sought to justify them through the war. This would appear only partially true for the whalers. They proved to be useful props for politicians in advocating for the war when it came as they could be pointed to as victims of British aggressiveness in need of protection. Further, the most vocal of the whaling community in their requests to the government for assistance were economic elites who had the political connections necessary to be truly heard. These elites were the most overtly involved in the growing capitalistic system in the United States but whaling was a naturally capitalistic endeavor. Because of this, all whalers were involved in a capitalistic business model stemming back to when the industry truly took off around 1715. Watts identified a pattern and shift within the mainline society of the United States, but, as would seem to be consistent for them, the whalers were slightly out of step with the rest of the nation.²²

Despite their ideological differences with the Republicans—on the proper conceptualization of liberty and the transition away from a classical republic towards a liberal culture of capitalism—whalers tended to agree with the aspirational direction of the rising American republic. After the Revolution, the United States was not only required to construct a new confederated nation, they had to navigate their own path into the international community as both a political and commercial entity. As this was occurring the re-emerging American whaling industry found itself frequently coming under economic pressures. The consistent source of these economic pressures during the Early Republic period was attempted British inducements to convince American whalers to switch flags. As the United States was no longer a part of the British Empire whalers could no longer rely on its numerous ports for selling their oil, at least as

²²Steven Watts, *The Republic Reborn: War and the Making of Liberal America, 1790-1820 (New Studies in American Intellectual and Cultural History)* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), xvii.

long as they were Americans. In a communication to Congress on February 4th, 1791, then-Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson stated that at the start of the Revolution the British sought to put their whaling industry into a dominant position.²³

This attempt by the British was possible because the initiation of the war had caused the American whaling industry in the Atlantic to be put on hold, due largely to the threat of British warships and privateers. At the core of the British plans were “bounties of £500, 400, 300, 200, 100 sterling, annually, to the five ships which should take the greatest quantities of oil,” which by 1786 had doubled their oil production. In 1788, they increased the bounties in hopes of enticing more American whalers to become what they referred to as “foreigners who had been employed in the whale fishery.” Finally, to further pressure American whalers to bring their families and ships over to the British whaling industry during the war, the British increased the duty on foreign whale oil to eighteen pounds and five shillings a ton. This made their common whale oil entirely more affordable and lent their spermaceti oil an advantage as well. The result was that the American whaling fleet ships, if they even made it out of their American ports, or if they had been out when the war started, could not turn a profit if they continued to operate as Americans.²⁴

As was the case with their refusal to speak on behalf of the Americans to the Barbary States regarding harassment of the American carrying trade in the Mediterranean, the British were interested in preventing the rise of a competing American whale trade. Even if the United States remained independent, the inducements presented by the British created a proposition that frequently forced the American whalers with the most skill to try their trade elsewhere. Even if

²³Fisheries. Communicated to the House of Representatives, February 4, 1791, American State Papers: Commerce and Navigation 1:10.

²⁴Ibid.

those whalers chose to ignore the clear incentive to migrate their skills to the British, these inducements created a threatening situation for the government. If the American whaling trade became unsustainable the United States government would be forced to either subsidize the trade or find other industries for sailors with very specialized skills. As the Nantucket whale trade employed “between 5 or 6,000 men and boys” but the island itself was only capable of maintaining, by its agriculture, about twenty families,” it would have been incredibly expensive to try to subsidize the needs of out-of-work whalers.²⁵

Jefferson, in regards to a retaliatory duty on foreign oil, argued that only one nation brought its oil to the United States seeking competition and that it “makes ours pay a duty of about 82 dollars the ton, in their ports.” Even more concerningly that oil was “brought here, too, to be reshipped fraudulently, under our flag, into ports, where it could not be received under theirs, and ought not to be covered by ours, if we mean to preserve our own admission into them.” Furthermore, outside of France, with whom the United States had ongoing agreements, all other major nations either fully self-supplied their whale oil, or purchased from the British. Therefore, Jefferson did not see an easy way for the United States to protect its whaling trade outside of continued positive trade with France as the only other force they could deal with was the nation directly working against them. Rather, he suggested that if the whale trade were to fall, the best solution would be to turn whalers to the carrying trade. He argued that it was in the national interest to protect its seamen and that there were three nurseries in which they formed:

1. Our coasting trade, already on a safe footing;
2. Our fisheries, which, in spite of natural advantages, give just cause of anxiety;

²⁵Frank Lambert, *The Barbary Wars: American Independence in the Atlantic World* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 5; Fisheries. Communicated to the House of Representatives, February 4, 1791, American State Papers: Commerce and Navigation 1:11; Fisheries. Communicated to the House of Representatives, February 4, 1791, American State Papers: Commerce and Navigation 1:10.

3. Our carrying trade, the only resource of indemnification for what we lose in the other.²⁶

A portion of this carrying trade resided in the hands of shipping interests from other nations; a result of the large number of goods that the United States could offer at the time for carrying. Jefferson estimated that part of the portion held by these foreign shipping interests could be regained for domestic shipping interests without harming those nations who treated fairly with the United States. This fragment, he estimated, would “find constant employment for ten thousand seamen, be worth two millions of dollars, annually, will go on augmenting with the population....and be taken wholly from those who force us to this act of self-protection.” The Secretary of State believed it important to maintain a nursery of seamen, as it was only with their abilities that maritime trade could be conducted. Taking back more of the carrying trade would provide a greater increase in jobs than would be lost if whaling failed, and it would generate more money for the fledgling economy. This transformation would punish Britain for its pettiness by targeting the pocketbooks of its merchants.²⁷

Regaining primary control of, and protecting, the American carrying trade was not only a concern for those who feared the demise of whaling due to British economic wrangling, but for those who were concerned about asserting the United States’ right to maritime trade in general. Two years before Jefferson’s speech to Congress, George Washington in 1789 expressed a similar desire to Gouverneur Morris, the United States Minister to England. Washington asked if Britain was considering a commerce treaty with the United States, and emphasized that “in treating this subject let it be strongly impressed on your mind that the privilege of carrying out productions in our vessels to their islands...is regarded here as of the highest importance; and

²⁶Fisheries. Communicated to the House of Representatives, February 4, 1791, American State Papers: Commerce and Navigation 1:11

²⁷Ibid.

you will be careful not to countenance any idea of our dispensing with it in a treaty.” While the United States wanted a commercial treaty with the British, they were unwilling to relinquish free trade and the right, held by every independent power, to carry their own goods.²⁸

Even earlier, Washington stressed that “it is important to both countries that the treaty of peace between Great Britain and the United States should be observed and performed with perfect and mutual good faith.” Washington indicated that he was referring to the failure of the British government “in the delivery of the posts and payment for property carried off,” in a speedy manner. The actions of the British government regarding American whale oil, particularly given that the United States government had not pursued similar duties, could be interpreted as a subtle peace treaty violation. While perfectly within the rights of a nation to set whatever duties on goods, attacking the commerce and economy of an enemy power during this period represented a practical, and accepted, form of warfare. Deliberately seeking to induce citizens of another nation to come to seek employment within your nation, by making their livelihood impossible, would appear to move beyond economic protection of your interests into warfare. As such, Washington’s reference to mutual good faith can be interpreted as an attempt to remind the British that their actions challenged the peace that supposedly existed between the two nations.²⁹

In 1786, the French, concerned about the impact on their well-being if “4 or 5,000 seamen, of the best in the world, be transferred to the marine strength of another nation” had hurriedly abated their duties on American whale oil and offered bounties for it. While this solved the immediate issue of losing whalers to the British, it, combined with Britain’s refusal to sign a commerce agreement unless it was also a pact of offensive and defensive alliance, placed

²⁸Second Letter of George Washington to Gouverneur Morris, Esq., New York, October 13, 1789, American State Papers: Foreign Relations 1:122

²⁹Ibid.; Message of the President of the United States, relative to a Commercial Treaty with Great Britain, February 14, 1791, American State Papers: Foreign relations 1:121.

Americans in a position of being solely reliant on French ports for selling their oil at a profitable margin. This rapidly became clear when, in December of 1787, English North American whalers, subsidized by their government, dumped their oil into the French market, at lower prices than both the Americans and French, prompting the French government temporarily to block all foreign whale oil from their ports. Suddenly, the Americans no longer had any external ports into which they could discharge their oil, even though British whalers declined “from 222 to 178,” due to this action.³⁰

By December 7th of 1788, the French reopened their ports to American whale oil, but, even then, worked tirelessly to regain a portion of the whale fisheries directly for themselves, through the help of American whalers. The interests of American whaling, and by extension commerce itself had been served but whalers themselves were poorly represented in the chess game of international trade. More problematically, in the official set of acts opening up the French ports to American whale oil, as well as other trade goods, it was stated that:

His Majesty grants to the citizens and inhabitants of the United States all the advantages which are enjoyed or which may be hereafter enjoyed, by the most favored nations in his colonies of America; and moreover, his majesty assures to the said citizens and inhabitants of the United States, all privileges and advantages which his own subjects of France enjoy, or shall enjoy in Asia, and in the straits leading thereto: provided always that their vessels shall have been fitted out and dispatched in some port of the United States.

The United States had emerged from the Revolutionary War expecting to have independent trade status. Instead, they found Great Britain actively working to block American trade, particularly where it would be in direct competition with their interests. The French, while willing to facilitate trade between France and America, instead placed the United States in a position

³⁰Fisheries. Communicated to the House of Representatives, February 4, 1791, American State Papers: Commerce and Navigation 1:10; Message of the President of the United States, relative to a Commercial Treaty with Great Britain, February 14, 1791, American State Papers: Foreign relations 1:121; Letter of Gouverneur Morris, Esq. to George Washington, London, September 18, 1790, American State Papers: Foreign Relations 1:127.

paralleling their official colonies and subject territories. This meant that rather than Franco-American trade being fully between equals, Americans were technically operating at the sufferance of the French government. Accordingly, the United States was beholden to keeping those good graces, rather than seeking the full promotion of their interests.³¹

Nor were the American whalers, and by extension the nation as a whole, simply trapped between the competing commercial interests of England and France; they also found themselves being drawn into the military conflicts between the two. Particularly, they were faced with the dual threats of impressment and embargo/privateering. In the case of impressment, this issue largely arose from the British who used such practices as a means of replenishing their depleted naval crews, as well as a means of protecting their commerce. In particular, Britain claimed to be losing sailors from their merchant marine and navy to desertion. Because “she claims the services of her own seamen in time of war,” Great Britain felt that they were within their rights to seize potential deserters, and/or shirking citizens from American vessels, particularly as “her officers are directed to take British subjects only...and not even them, if in so doing they shall distress the vessel.”³²

The United States largely accepted the concept of Great Britain’s right to its own sailors, but questioned: “whether from the similarity of language and manners, or from design, our seamen are often forcibly taken.” American interests could pressure the British government, but it required their nearest kin swearing out affidavits of their American nativity “before the Governor or Chief Justice of the State accompanied with a certificate...stating that the person

³¹An Act of the King’s Council of State, for the encouragement of the commerce of France with the United States of America, December 29, 1787, American State Papers: Commerce and Navigation 1:18.

³²Wade G. Dudley, *Splintering the Wooden Wall: The British Blockade of the United States, 1812-1815* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2003), 37; The Honorable D. Sheffey (Member of Congress from Virginia) to His Constituents, February 1813, in *Circular Letters of Congressmen to Their Constituents 1789-1829*, Vol. II, ed. Noble Cunningham and Dorothy Hagberg Cappel (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 818.

administrating the oath was authorized so to do.” This process was a complex series of hoops that were heavily reliant on the British government accepting evidence of a mistake having been made. Beyond that, it could take years to fully pursue (due to the speed of ship-based communication) and did nothing in the meantime for the sailors who found themselves impressed.³³

Representative James Garnett noted in 1808 that “sailors, although certainly safe from impressment as long as they remain on shore, have been many of them driven to the painful alternative of starving, or seeking a foreign service.” This foreign service, much as was the case with the whale oil duties a decade before, largely drove these sailors to the British provinces where they would be, in theory, protected from the majority of the British navy’s machinations. It would seem odd to say that moving to a territory controlled by the government whose navy was doing the impressing would be safer, particularly as the British Navy did draw sailors when needed from British merchantmen. This would be particularly true for whalers as they possessed skills that took years to master, and thus would be wasted in many ways onboard naval ships when they could be used to increase whale profits. Moving of their own accord would also be in line with the whaler’s sense of liberty of movement and action, which in part involved their ‘right’ to leave one employment scenario for another whenever they felt it was in their best interest to do so.³⁴

³³“The Honorable D. Sheffey (Member of Congress from Virginia) to His Constituents”, February 1813, in *Circular Letters of Congressmen to Their Constituents 1789-1829*, Vol. II, ed. Noble Cunningham and Dorothy Hagberg Cappel (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 818; Extract of a Letter from William Savage, Esq. Agent at Jamaica, August 21, 1800, *American State Papers: Foreign Relations* 2:293.

³⁴James M. Garnett, “To the Freeholders of Caroline, Essex, King and Queen, and King William”, April 12, 1808, in *Circular Letters of Congressmen to Their Constituents 1789-1829*, Vol. II, ed. Noble Cunningham and Dorothy Hagberg Cappel, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Va., 1978, 560.

Americans never faced the same issue of coercive and damaging impressment at the hands of the French, largely it would seem because there was less of a chance for an American to be ‘mistaken’ for a Frenchman. Not only were the accents ordinarily rather distinct, but the French, until the Napoleonic Wars, happily worked as trade partners with the Americans. Once tensions between the two European states began, American interests, including whalers, found themselves faced with the threats of embargoes and privateers from both sides. This left them immobilized until they could get protections and/or reversals of policy. While the United States wanted free trade and independent status, in European conflicts neither European power would accept United States neutrality. Rather, they made use of embargo to prevent their traders, and if they were strong enough other nation’s traders, from trading with the enemy state. This was often partnered with the use of privateers, whose commissions allowed them to not only attack ships of the enemy but to seize commercial ships as well as their cargos, which they believed were violating the embargo, regardless of their national origin.³⁵

In the case of the French, this became particularly aggravating for Americans as the French privateers violated multiple portions of the 1778 Treaty of Amity and Commerce between France and the United States, committing what they referred to as “irregular or illegal captures.” They laid out five notable situations in which they felt that “captures and condemnations...are manifestly irregular or illegal.” The first of these was a situation in which the cargo that the American ship was carrying was entirely or partly goods that originated in England or any of her holdings, such as the Sugar Islands. Next were situations in which the privateer claimed the ship, based on a muster roll (what the Americans after 1803 called the crew list), did not meet French laws—the Americans further clarified that such a list was not even required by any treaty

³⁵Ibid., 555-566.

between France and the United States. Third were any claims that papers relating to the origins of the cargo proving that the cargo was indeed American were insufficient to justify the release of the cargo. While such deficiencies could excuse damages to the cargo, they did not go so far as to allow the condemnation of the cargo. The last two situations were cases in which either those who were responsible for the cargo were not allowed a hearing/could not be there in person, or the vessels or cargo were destroyed or sold without the normal condemnation trial.³⁶

While the final two situations listed are tightly focused on procedural abnormalities, and therefore not useful for a broader question of political motivations, the first three directly resulted from the embargoes that the French employed on the English and their goods. The embargoes allowed privateers authority, and the listed scenarios not only showed that the French willing to imperiously enforce those prohibitions even at the expense of the commerce of ‘allies,’ but they perceived the United States as weak enough to be exploited in those manners.

By September 13, 1800, the representatives of the two nations, while unable to agree upon exact interpretations of the previous agreements between their countries, and what may or may not be owed for violations therein, signed a twenty-four-point convention. In this, they outlined a system of free trade between their nations, protected from the deprivations of commercial warfare, and regulated by express rules of conduct. The last point largely outlined protections for the existent cod fisheries held by each country, but ended with the stipulation that “the whale and seal fisheries shall be free to both in every quarter of the world.” This would seem to mark whaling as a minor afterthought, being that it is only mentioned in the last line, of the last point, of an agreement that is largely focused on ensuring protections for commerce, and

³⁶Timothy Pickering, “Instructions to Oliver Ellsworth, William Richardson Davie, and William VanMurry, Esquires, Envoys Extraordinary and Ministers Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the French republic,” October 22, 1799, *American State Papers: Foreign Relations* 2:302.

how privateers will conduct themselves. Yet the conciliatory tone of sharing the whale fisheries, rather than demarcating them into national holdings, makes it clear that both nations agreed that whaling was important enough to put aside their current differences to assure mutually continued successes.³⁷

Whaling was not only tied into and involved with the international relations of the Early Republic; it was also tied tightly into the internal political struggles of the period. This can be most readily seen in the petition sent by the Town Meeting of Nantucket³⁸ to Congress in February of 1803. In it, they outlined their concern that the increasing size of whaling vessels, caused by them having to go farther afield for longer periods, could not clear the sandbar that lay at the mouth of the bay. They complained that they had “already sustained considerable loss by our vessels grounding on said bar, and...have been obliged, during the inclement seasons, to send them to a port of a neighboring island for safety, to load and unload.” They had concluded that they needed to, and could, deepen the channel to allow the necessary draught for their ships, but that it would be too expensive for their coffers alone. Rather, they asked for assistance from Congress for “granting...the revenue of this place for a short term, or in such a manner as, in your wisdom, shall appear most eligible.” To justify this request, they pointed to the importance of their trade, as well as the commerce that they carried back from Europe, to the well-being of the United States, as well as the bounties that both England and France offered for their whalers, which threatened their industry’s well-being. Finally, they emphasized their point by arguing that

³⁷Convention between the French Republic and the United States of America (Convention entre la Republique Francaise et les Etats Unis d’Amerique), September 13, 1800, American States Papers: Foreign Relations 2:301.

³⁸A town meeting is a practice found mostly in New England, dating back to the colonial era, in which either the entire voting population of a town (open town meeting – which is what Nantucket is chartered for) or their chosen representatives (representative town meeting) will come together (normally once a year) to discuss the business of the city, namely the budget, law changes and other concerns for operation over the next twelve months.

due to the lack of other ports between “the island of Martha’s Vineyard to Cape Cod harbor, vessels are frequently exposed to shipwreck.”³⁹

Congress quickly dispatched surveyors to assess the situation, and on September 25, 1803, they reported to the Committee of Commerce and Manufacture. In it, they concurred with the assessment that the problem could be fixed by simple dredging of the bar down to a deeper draught. This they argued would only be a temporary fix as the current would rapidly replace the sand so removed. To counteract this, they determined that two piers needed to be built out into the ocean, to channel the flow of the current thereby keeping the dredged bar open. With this, there remained a possibility of needing to do additional building if the current proved to move in a manner counter to what they predicted. In all, they estimated the cost to be “fifty-four thousand one hundred and twenty dollars to complete the whole work,” of the dredging (\$16,045) and initial pier construction (\$38,075), plus an unknown cost for the theoretical expansion of the piers. This report led the committee to conclude in their November 7, 1803 report to Congress that, while whaling was important, these costs were prohibitive. Rather, they argued that a new committee should be formed to draw up ideas on how to encourage American whaling, which they felt was the core intent of the petition from the beginning. This new committee, on January 3, 1804, in turn, concluded that there were many other draws on the Treasury and that it was important “not to draw unnecessarily on the public funds at this particular period.” As it was important, in their minds to offer the whalers what encouragement that could be given, they suggested the adoption of a bounty system, similar to that being used for the cod fisheries, which would reward whalers by tonnage carried.⁴⁰

³⁹“Petition from the town of Nantucket to the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States in Congress assembled,” January 15th, 1803, American State Papers: Commerce and Navigation 1:526-527.

⁴⁰John Foster Williams and Lemuel Coxe report to Congress on their survey of Nantucket Harbor, September 25, 1803, American State Papers Commerce and Navigation 1:533; Committee of Commerce and Manufacture report to

The government of the United States was small, relatively weak, and guided by President Jefferson who strongly believed in keeping taxes, and federal expenses as low as possible. This served as a means of keeping the citizenry happy while paying off the war debt and to keep the power of the federal government, compared to the states, as low as possible. When Nantucket asked for money for what were internal improvements, they faced an uphill battle, particularly as this project presented the potential for already high costs to increase, depending on the vagaries of nature.⁴¹ In the end, they lost the battle to make their harbor more traversable, but as the comments by the various committees showed, there was an ingrained sense of the economic importance of whaling to the nation. This importance to the economy would still be wielded by whalers as late as 1823 when both New Bedford and Nantucket submitted memorials on tallow duties within a day of each other. In both cases, the whalers lamented that an overabundance of oil has driven down the prices they can get from soap boilers and candle makers, putting their businesses at risk. The solution, they proposed, was the introduction of new duties for tallow, which they felt would increase their profits, thereby stimulating the economy.⁴²

By early 1824, the soap boilers and candle makers of both New York and Boston had replied to these demands with memorials arguing that such duties would not fix the issue, let alone the economy. Conversely, they argued that there were simply too many whalers, and thus

the House of Representatives on the survey of Nantucket Harbor, November 7, 1803, American State Papers Commerce and Navigation 1:534-535; Report by Mr. Hughes of the new committee formed on the question of Nantucket Harbor, January 3, 1804. American State Papers Commerce and Navigation 1:536.

⁴¹In the August 15, 1828, *Missouri Intelligencer and Boon's Lick Advertiser*, there was an ad offering three hundred dollars "for making a survey of the harbor of Nantucket, and the passage leading to it, and an estimate of the cost of improving and making the harbor a good secure one. Further, the January 28, 1830, *Southern Galaxy* announced that the previous Spring a dredging machine had been purchased to attempt to make a deeper channel and that it had been used to make a channel which so far had remained open, and the agent involved "has no doubts of a satisfactory result from the continuance of operations."

⁴²Watts, *The Republic Reborn*, 305; Memorial of the citizens of New Bedford (and its vicinity) regarding duties on imported tallow, December 9, 1823, American State Papers Finance 4:371-372.; Petition of the inhabitants of the town of Nantucket regarding duties on imported tallow, December 10, 1823, American State Papers Finance 4:372-373.

the market was glutted. The best solution for the economy was to drop tallow duties altogether, thereby allowing them to more aggressively market to the West Indies. This not only served their interests but would offset losses from the failing whaling industry. While both of these sets of arguments were diametrically opposed, as one industry was set up as needing the other to be harmed to save itself, both sets of parties refer to the importance of whaling and commerce to the American economy. The main difference is that for whalers it was their raw product that would save the nation, while the candle makers and soap boilers saw the finished products made from those raw materials, regardless of origin, as more important. Neither faction desired to be the loser, and thus worked dutifully to bring politicians to their side of the fight.⁴³

Because neither industry could fully thrive unless the protections that existed for the other were removed, this meant that influencing their oftentimes shared representatives was all the more important. This was particularly the case for the whaling industry as theirs was an industry that, as time progressed, only turned a profit every few years when a whaleship finally made its way home from the Pacific hunting grounds. While the loss of profitability for the candle and soap makers would certainly be damaging, they could continuously be looking for the best places to sell their stock, or otherwise turn a profit. A whaleship full of men who had been at sea for three or more years, who were eager to finally see a profit, was at the total mercy of the market. While they could wait for a short period if the value of oil was extremely low, keeping a ship in port, storing oil in warehouses, and spending money they did not yet have, were all expenses. The only way to even slightly protect themselves was to have the politicians securely in their corner when it came time to decide official policy. Thus, even if they were not making

⁴³Memorial of the Tallow Chandlers and Soap Boilers, in the city of Boston, and vicinity, Against duty on Imported Tallow and For Drawback on Candles, January 12, 1824, American State Papers Finance 4:390-391.; Memorial of the Tallow Chandlers and Soap Boilers, in the city of New York, Against Duty on Imported Tallow, January 12, 1824, American State Papers Finance 4:391-392.

official overtures it is almost certain that those in the whaling community with the wealth and reach to do so—often times members of the more prominent whaling families—were engaged in the exact kind of political “corruption” that the Jeffersonians had been so afraid of.

The involvement of whalers in international politics in the Early Republic went beyond commercial questions, specifically when it came to the United States’ striving to expand its influence in the Pacific region. In March of 1829, the *Vermont Journal* ran an article about preparations that were being made for a federally back exploratory voyage into the Pacific. Among the list of preparations, it said that “orders have been given to enlist seamen, of middle age and of good character, and an officer has been sent to Nantucket, and New Bedford to enlist a few who are accustomed to whaling and other employments in the Pacific.” This voyage would end up delayed by about ten years at which point it would be known as The United States Exploring Expedition, or more simply the Wilkes Expedition. The importance of this voyage for the United States was multilayered as it both allowed American scientists to begin to make their mark in the broader community of exploration, and allowed the United States to assert more forcefully its status as an independent nation of standing.⁴⁴

By the 1800s, the formerly vast uncharted expanse of the ‘Spanish Lake’ had already come to be fairly defined as the Spanish, French, and English – as well as smaller European interests like the Dutch – had all staked claims, and worked to demarcate the boundaries of their holdings through scientific explorations. This process of Pacific Exploration had begun in 1764 when both Britain and France launched the first of their famed voyages into the Pacific. These voyages came to be because Britain, at the end of the Seven Years War, used its capture of both Havana and Manila to force the expansion of their interests “into... the South Sea.” While Spain

⁴⁴*Vermont Journal*, March 7, 1829, 3.

still viewed the Pacific as a closed sea, for the English and French, Spain's total control had been shattered, and explorers moved in. As historian David Igler shows "scientific exploration...factored into the quest for maritime power... [and] merged with the competitive drive for new geographic discoveries," that at this time emerged between these powers as they sought new markets. These explorers also marked the beginning of a scientific conceptualizing of the Pacific, as they sought to use "new instruments and mathematical calculations...for the precise plotting of longitude, transforming the Pacific...into a vast but manageable zone." With these precise measurements, the Pacific was coming to be truly known, and explorers and traders could reliably visit the same islands and the same people repeatedly.⁴⁵

Though the European powers were already heavily invested in the Pacific, there was still considerable uncharted space into which the United States could slip, as shown in 1820 when the crew of the destroyed whaleship *Essex* feared trying for the Society Islands, due to rumors of cannibals. While Nathaniel Philbrick feels that this was an odd conception for the crew to hold as the British had had a mission on the islands since 1797, the simple truth would appear to be that information on Pacific Islands, and their inhabitants, spread slower than would have been expected. Whether the crew of the *Essex* was simply sadly misinformed, or if the information was disseminated slower, the truth remains that those who found new lands could claim them, and any resources they contained. The established powers of Europe were heavily invested in this, and for the United States, it presented a unique opportunity to show that they were able to claim dominion over more than just lands they had won or bought from Europe. It would be here

⁴⁵Rainer F. Buschmann, Edward R. Slack, and James B. Tueller, *Navigating the Spanish Lake: The Pacific in the Iberian World, 1521-1898* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2014), 11; David Igler, *The Great Ocean: Pacific Worlds from Captain Cook to the Gold Rush* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 134; Harry Liebersohn, *The Travelers' World: Europe to the Pacific* (London; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 11.

that they could demonstrate not only the explorer spirit and scientific drive that defined the period, but form a collection of overseas holdings, just like every other major power had.⁴⁶

Whalers, who had been going to the Pacific for decades by this point, played a key role in facilitating this exploration as shown by the editor of the *Nantucket Inquirer* publishing “a list of about a hundred recently discovered islands, clusters of islands and reefs in the North and South Pacific Oceans...which he...obtained from manuscripts of whaling ships.” It was this general knowledge that led the federal government to send an agent to gather “the best and safest information” from whalers who had experience navigating the Pacific, at an expense of \$500 to \$1,000. Once in possession of this information, if not the sailors themselves, the United States’ exploratory ships were well-positioned to both avoid the kinds of pitfalls that would see the expedition ended in failure, and to be able to quickly, and surely exert their influence across a broad area by not entering it blindly, as those without prior information to draw on were forced to do. At the same time, these explorations would prove a help to American West Coast interests. As Representative Samuel P. Carson of North Carolina discussed in an 1829 circular letter, the British land claims on the coast overlapped with those held by the United States post-Louisiana Purchase. Thus, he said, “it appeared to me, that the occupation of the mouth of the Oregon would not only aid in settling that controversy...but would be highly important to our commerce and fisheries in the Pacific Ocean.” Not only would it provide an occupying force to keep the British from being overzealous in pushing their claims, but it would also help to establish a greater American claim for access to the Northern Pacific hunting grounds that were being

⁴⁶Philbrick, *In the Heart of the Sea*, 98-99.

hoarded by the Russians. Moreover, it would provide an American port which whalers could visit, and spend money at, on that side of the continent.⁴⁷

The period of 1785 to 1830 in the Early Republic was a time when the United States was not only seeking to find its feet – its definition of who they were and how they were going to comport themselves- but to assert itself within the international community as a power worthy of respect from those already established players such as England and France. American whalers existed within these desires, and maneuverings, as a particular collective that managed to carve for itself an independent status while still frequently playing into the larger disputes and discussions. Here were a people whose semi-independent society innately reflected the precepts of Jeffersonian Republicanism, and yet also in key factors turned away from the classical definition of republicanism, to embrace the rising liberal commercial society that focused on growing financial capitalism. Contrary to their standoffishness towards outsiders, these whalers often proved to be intimately connected with the international political-economic discourses of the period.⁴⁸

From struggles to establish independent American free trade with the nations of Europe – namely France and England- to being drawn into the military conflicts of the early 1800s between those powers due to the dangers presented by impressment and embargo, whalers and whaling could be found. Internally, they were also important, sparking and guiding discussions on when and where, not to mention how, the federal government should intervene when it came to promoting and protecting various economic interests, both independently and when one's

⁴⁷*New England Farmer* February 15, 1825. 1; *Vermont Journal*, March 7, 1829. 3; Samuel P. Carson, *To the Freeman of the Twelfth Congressional District of North Carolina*. February 28th, 1829, in *Circular Letters of Congressmen to Their Constituents 1789-1829*, Vol. III, ed. Noble Cunningham and Dorothy Hagberg Cappel. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Va., 1978, 1507.

⁴⁸Philbrick, *The Heart of the Sea*, 24.

success could harm another. This was particularly true for those communities whose entire existence was predicated on the success of the whaling ships, and whose community leaders were often those who were former whalers and/or relatives of current whalers. Lastly, the whalers helped establish the United States as a member of the international scientific and imperialistic community, by lending their knowledge to early government-sponsored explorations of the Pacific, which also provided incentive and abutment to efforts to establish western coast ports to protect their land and sea-based claims. Though certainly not representative of the greatest part of the American experience at this time, whalers were a recognizable part of the tapestry of mainland American culture. Further, they were a significantly more diverse collective than they would appear based exclusively on the popular conception that exists of who was a whaler.

Chapter Two

A Multicultural Community

The image that comes most readily to mind when speaking of an American whaler is that of a man whose skin is prematurely and permanently aged by the harsh conditions of a life at sea. Most likely he is imagined to be dressed in a fashion that is uniquely utilitarian mixed with global as various items have been acquired in various ports of call. He very possibly will even be envisioned as Ahab-esk, his eyes filled with obsessive wrath that will one day drive him, and those around him, to utter destruction. He almost certainly is envisioned as a white man. There is a truth to this vision as many American whalers, especially before about 1820, were drawn from white population centers in New England such as Nantucket, New Bedford, Fall River, and New London. These white New Englanders, worked side by side with whites from other parts of the United States and Europe, as well as Blacks, Native Americans, and Pacific Islanders, with each group molding the industry around themselves. The industry, a theoretical total meritocracy, offered non-whites opportunities for advancement and achievement not often readily available to them on land, but also demonstrated that skill was still not a total replacement for connection. Far from being a mono-racial and mono-cultural community, the American whaling industry and their whaleships were a vibrantly multiracial, multicultural world that was still shaped by biases from the American mainland.

Analyzing the racial and cultural makeup of whaleship crews is frequently a difficult exercise involving reading between the lines due to the relative deficiency of data generated by most whaleships' voyages. The ships' logs tend to focus primarily on the core aspects of the voyage, i.e. weather conditions, whales spotted and/or caught, ports and resupply points visited,

damages, and, possibly, other ships encountered. When the crew is discussed it tends to be in regards to either the eight Ds that could see a sailor removed from a crew (death, drastic disfigurement, disobedience, disease, detainment, desertion, and/or discharge) or the signing-on of replacement crewmembers. These entries are rarely extensively detailed, though are useful when it comes to the hiring of the new crew as they often name the location where those members signed on. More discussion of race, at least in broad and general terms, can be often found in various journals kept by those onboard whaling ships.⁴⁹ For example, Dr. John Wilson who served on board the British whaler *Gipsy* as her ship's surgeon for her 1839-1843 voyage, repeatedly makes observations about various native peoples that the ship encounters during her voyage. While not all-encompassing, these observations do allow insight into how various races and cultures interacted in the whaling trade.⁵⁰

Most useful are the crew lists, which after February 1803 all American ships were required by law to produce. These documents had to be certified under oath by the port's customs officer before a ship could leave on a foreign voyage, and upon its return, the captain had to submit the list to the first bordering officer they encountered with explanations for any

⁴⁹While it was not a whaling ship log, the Diary kept by William F. Davidson a midshipman on board the Navy Sloop of War *Dale* does include a brief listing of the mid-shipmen and when they received their appointments which highlights the potential value of such sources when attempting to learn about the crews of various ships.; William F. Davidson, "Names of Midshipmen," in *Diary of William F. Davidson, Midshipman, Dale (Sloop of War) US Navy Pacific Squadron, 1840-1842*, Henry E. Huntington Library, Huntington Manuscript Collection, HM 69950. 12

⁵⁰William Hunter, "Remarks on Wednesday 11th Oct. 1821", "Remarks on Thursday 12th Oct., 1821", "Remarks on Friday 13th Oct., 1821", & "Remarks on November 24th, 1821" in *A Journal Kept on Board the US Ship Franklin, Charles Stewart Esqr. Commander*, Henry E. Huntington Library, Huntington Manuscript Collection, HM 70857. 2-4, & 46; Isaac Howe, "Run from Monterey to Valparaiso, 61 days." in *An Abstract of a Cruise in the U.S. Frigate Constellation in the Years of 1840, 41, 42, 43, & 44, Commodore Laurence Kearney Commanding*, Henry E. Huntington Library, Huntington Manuscript Collection, HM 69805. 142-143; John T. Hudson, "Remarks on Sunday 26th January, 1806" & "Remarks on Monday 27th January 1806," in *Journal of the Schooner Tamana from Woahoo (Sandwich Islands) to the Coast of America*, Henry E. Huntington Library, Huntington Manuscript Collection. HM 30491. 17; John Wilson, "December 4, 1839", "January 16, 1840", "April 24, 1840", "May 13, 1840", "October 12, 1840", and "March 17, 1841" in *The Cruise of the Gipsy: The Journal of John Wilson, Surgeon on a Whaling Voyage to the Pacific Ocean, 1839-1843*. ed. Honore Forster (Fairfield, Washington. Ye Galleon Press, 1991) 16, 24-25, 52-54, 65, 117-119, and 164.

discrepancies.⁵¹ As such, there tends to be at minimum a baseline of information for all members of each ship's crew after 1803. Before that date, some ships made use of these lists allowing for some general insight into those ships as well. When looking at these lists there is still some amount of guesswork and intuition that must be used to determine the most likely race of some crew members due to the ambiguities of physical descriptions. A crewman who signed on in the Pacific and is listed with the last name of Kanaka (the Hawaiian word for a person and a frequent stand-in last name for Pacific Islanders on crew lists) is most likely a Pacific Islander. However, a crewman who signed on in the United States, and is physically described as having dark hair, and dark skin, could be Black, mixed-race, Native American, or even just a darker-skinned white (say from Portugal).⁵²

This was because many of these designations were determined by the person filling out the form and there was no consistent nature for many of them. For example, the *Elizabeth* which sailed out of Salem, Massachusetts in 1844 lists multiple crew members as having black skin, and woolly hair. One of them, Joshua Penn, who is listed as the Steward, and who is originally from St. Augustine, Florida, would seem to almost certainly be a Black man. Another, Samuel G. Brown, has a comment attached to his name that reads in part "Portuguese." Every other sailor who has a comment labeling them as Portuguese is either said to have light skin and dark hair (William Harris), or dark skin and dark hair (John Moore and Jose Pinto). Does this mean that Samuel Brown was a mixed-race person from Portugal, perhaps a Cape Verdean, or does it mean

⁵¹As these documents were secured with a \$400 bond there was a decent amount of pressure for a captain to be sure to keep as detailed as possible information on all crew members so that they could not be accused of violations.

⁵²*An Act Supplementary to the "Act Concerning Consuls and Vice-Consuls, and for the further protection of American Seamen,"* February 28, 1803, Acts of the Seventh Congress of the United States, Statute II, Chap. IX: 203-205.; Wilson, "March 30, 1841" in *The Cruise of the Gipsy*. 172; Jacob Adler and Mitford M. Mathews, "The Etymology of Canuck". *American Speech*, Vol. 50, No. 1/2 (Spring-Summer, 1975), 158-160.; Susan Lebo, "Native Hawaiian Whalers in Nantucket, 1820-60". nha.org. Nantucket Historical Association, 2004. <https://nha.org/research/nantucket-history/history-topics/native-hawaiian-whalers-in-nantucket-1820-60/>;

that he was a particularly dark-skinned white Portuguese man with hair that shared apparent qualities with black hair? Most likely he was at least part black, but that is in no way guaranteed. Further, two later additions to the crew (Ralph Newhouse and Antone Martin) are still described as having woolly hair, but their skin tone is said to be “Negro.” This is most likely the result of two different people using different terms to describe similar skin tone qualities. Because of this inconsistency, it can at times be hard to pinpoint every whalers’ exact racial and cultural membership. Rather, at times the best that can be achieved is educated guesses based upon broad terms that would appear to be used by particular list makers for particular races, as well as common naming conventions that were used for persons from particular places. What this means is that there is no guarantee that every finding that is drawn from these lists, as relates to racial makeup is entirely correct but, general patterns and threads can still be found and woven into a discussion of the tapestry that was the whaleship’s multicultural and multiracial community.⁵³

By looking at these crew lists, particularly the cross-pollination of terms for various races it is readily apparent that race in-of-itself was not necessarily a consistent consideration, or at least was more flexible. What it meant to be white, or Black, or Native, did not necessarily fully match with what today would be meant by those categorizations—though they would be roughly the same in many ways. For some families like the Cuffees there was a blurring of the racial lines as they existed in both Black and Native worlds at the same time, and could be said to shift back and forth depending on who was categorizing them. While, as will be shown, there was a definite racial line that made those who were seen as non-white less likely to be able to achieve the top

⁵³ Nancy Shoemaker, *Native American Whalers and the World: Indigenous Encounters and the Contingency of Race* (University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 4, 6, 18, and 21-22.; Crew List for the voyage of the *Elizabeth* to the Pacific Ocean and elsewhere, departing 1844-12-16, in the “Salem Crew Lists, 1799-1879 Database”, [mysticseaport.org](https://research.mysticseaport.org) Mystic Seaport Museum, Collections, and Research. <https://research.mysticseaport.org/databases/crew-lists-salem/>

level of captaincy, they were still able to frequently become ships-officers. This level of career mobility would lend a strong level of consideration to the contention that to an extent what mattered most for in the whaling industry was skill and not skin color—external appearance having little to do with whether or not a whale died or how well oil rendered down. Yet, it is equally important to recognize that this industry while largely centered on a vast expanse far from the shores of any society, was still crewed by people who came from those societies and thus carried with them, to one degree or another, cultural mores that would help inform their views. More importantly these crews were comprised of multiple racial groups who all brought their own variations of culture to the whaling ship.⁵⁴

The most predominant of these racial groups were whites, who can be broadly broken down into native-born and foreign-born whites. The vast majority of American whaling ships sailed from ports in the North, predominantly ones located in New England. In the early years of the industry, these ports were able to fulfill the crewing needs of their whaling fleets with locals (defined here as residents of those cities or nearby communities). For example, in 1827 when the *Clay* sailed out of Salem, Massachusetts, fourteen of her sixteen crew members are listed as residents of the town. The only exceptions are the Captain, who has no town of residence or origin listed, and the First Mate who is from Beverly, a town roughly three-and-a-half miles away. Further, while nine of the crew members are not originally from Salem, three of them (including the First Mate) are from towns within an easy day's ride (~20 miles), and another three do not indicate as to where they were born. The final three are two foreigners, and a man from Baltimore, all of whom list Salem as their current residence. As can be seen, the white

⁵⁴ Nancy Shoemaker, *Living with Whales: Documents and Oral Histories of Native New England Whaling History* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014), 2,4, 21, &24; Skip Finley, *Whaling Captains of Color: America's First Meritocracy* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2020), 67; "Salem Crew Lists, 1799-1879 Database"; "New London Crew Lists, 1803-1878 Database."

American populations of these early whaling vessels tended to be largely drawn from fairly tight areas around the port out of which they sailed. This meant that the white crew of an early American whaler brought with them a largely New England culture that was then often localized down to a particular part of New England.⁵⁵

This localization of the origins of individual ships' crews was important as living in relative proximity to one another in New England meant that they most likely shared several common cultural touchstones. One of these would have often been religious denomination—though as seen with the fracturing of Dedham, Massachusetts, religious dissension could lead to a single town fracturing into multiple co-local towns along denominational differences. While shared religious denomination in a majority Protestant nation would at one level appear of minor importance, it speaks to shared morals, and more importantly prevention of conflict over differing religious ideals. One major ideal that would have been common among New Englanders would have been the so-called Protestant work ethic. This would have pushed all members of the crew to work as hard as they could every day to get their shipboard tasks done, and may have been part of why later crews were viewed by many ships' officers as being lazier. Another ideal in some communities like that of Quaker Nantucket would have been staunch abolitionism, which would have made such crews more open in some ways to sailing with Blacks as at least semi-equal members. The idea of rough equality among the members of the crew was certainly an important contribution of the shared New England religion of the native-born white crew members.⁵⁶

⁵⁵Crew List for the voyage of the *Clay* to the Pacific Ocean, departing 1827-04-04, in the "Salem Crew Lists, 1799-1879 Database", mysticseaport.org Mystic Seaport Museum, Collections, and Research. <https://research.mysticseaport.org/databases/crew-lists-salem/>

⁵⁶Kenneth Lockridge, *A New England Town: The First Hundred Years* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1985), 5-6, 24, &97-103; Nathaniel Philbrick, *In the Heart of the Sea: The Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex* (Viking Penguin Press, 2000) 21

This rough equality can be laid at the feet of the Town Meeting (in which every member of the community was seen as having an equal voice) that existed in essentially every New England community of the period. As the Town Meeting served a political purpose, i.e. the running of the town, it would seem odd to credit its contributions to the culture of the whaleship to shared religious denomination. While political in nature, the Town Meeting was a product of structures put forth by the dissident religions that prevailed in New England—namely their desire to counteract the corruption that they saw in the hierarchical Catholic and Anglican churches. Significantly, as can be seen by looking at the history of Dedham, it was often the case that status in the faith and status in government were often linked in New England despite attempts to the contrary. Similarly, while whaleships tended to be meritocracies of skill where the best sailors could work their way to the top, there were particular families (such as the Coffins, Starbucks, Macys, and Folgers of Nantucket) who held positions of power and status within the community. The result of this often was that skilled sailors without connections found themselves topping out in the mate ranks while those, like the psychotic Captain Norris of the *Sharon*, who married right, could advance even when they lacked the character.⁵⁷

Beyond religion, another cultural touchstone that whites drawn from tight localities often shared was that of a common experiential background. As they grew up in port communities or communities that were close to ports, most of these whalers grew up in families with deep connections to the sea and sailing. This can be most clearly seen by looking at the people of Nantucket. The island of Nantucket was the earliest major whaling port in the United States, in large part because of the island's hostile nature. As discussed in the previous chapter there was

⁵⁷Lockridge, *A New England Town*, 5-8, 10-11, 23-24, 47-49, 55, &120-123; Philbrick, *In the Heart of the Sea*, 46; Joan Druett, *In the Wake of Madness: The Murderous Voyage of the Whaleship Sharon* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Algonquin Books, 2004), 2-5, & 29-30.

enough farmland to support about twenty families on the island, whereas its whaling industry (by 1791) employed roughly five to six thousand men. If a native of the island wanted to be able to eat, they would have to either go to sea as a whaler or find a niche that serviced the industry. Thus, every person who lived on the island was in essence a part of the whaling industry, and when they went to sea, they shared common skills and understandings. These understandings would not only have been about how ships worked but about how one should comport themselves and view the world. Even those who did not serve onboard a ship were exposed to those who had or did and thus developed as a part of their personality similar worldviews. The people of Nantucket provide an extreme example of this in their development of a language centered on whittling to show their level of seamanship skill and their distrust of those crew members who were not from the island. While this distrust can be partly attributed to their insulated nature, there almost certainly was a sense that because everyone who lived on the island was tied into the maritime trades, they could be trusted to have the proper skills necessary for the job. An outsider could claim to have the skills, and might very possibly be telling the truth, but knowing for certain would carry value all its own.⁵⁸

As the whaling industry grew in size, starting in the 1830s, both in the number of ships and the number of seamen needed, it became increasingly hard to crew a whaling ship with locals from a particular port. This was especially true when, as the nineteenth-century progressed, an increasing number of whalers did not go on repeated whaling voyages if they were able to avoid it. To fill these voids whaling ships would increasingly draw crew members from less desirable stock, such as those who came from communities farther away from the ports. In this way, the native-born whites who were involved in whaling increasingly came to be

⁵⁸Fisheries. Communicated to the House of Representatives, February 4, 1791, American State Papers: Commerce and Navigation 1: 10-11.; Philbrick, *In the Heart of the Sea*, 20, 22.

drawn from a wider variety of communities, many of which were further inland. This can be seen by looking at the 1840 voyage of the *Bengal* out of Salem and the 1833 voyage of the *Stonington* out of New London. In the case of the *Bengal*, seventeen of its twenty-four crewmembers appear to have been native-born whites, and of those, nine were local to the port (roughly half), while the *Stonington* shipped fifteen native-born whites among its twenty-six crew, three of whom were local to the port (exactly a fifth). The net result of this broadening of the recruiting pool when it came to native-born whites was a broadening in their cultural touchstones.⁵⁹

These new crewmen brought a near-certain guarantee of multiple faiths—or at least denominations of Christianity—and with them contrasting moral outlooks on the world. More significantly, the majority of these inland whites came from families and communities that were not constructed around the industries of the sea, but rather things like farm and factory work. While such industries still gave many of these men strong backs with which to haul lines and pull whaleboat oars, it was a fact that when they first set out to sea, they were largely without knowledge of how to be sailors. This naturally meant that more time and energy had to be given to teaching them the basics before the whaleship could be functioning at full capability. It also meant that they had an entirely different industry that they could fall back into if they did not like whaling. Those who grew up in communities that centered on the maritime trades knew mostly about those trades and thus were almost certain to work within them all their lives. Conversely, those who came from communities centered on farming and industry knew those trades and thus could more easily opt to leave the maritime trades all together if they did not enjoy them. This

⁵⁹Crew List for the voyage of the *Bengal* to the Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific Oceans on a Whaling Voyage, departing 1840-07-24, in the “Salem Crew Lists, 1799-1879 Database,” mysticseaport.org Mystic Seaport Museum, Collections, and Research. <https://research.mysticseaport.org/databases/crew-lists-salem/>; Crew List for the voyage of the *Stonington* to the Pacific Ocean departing 1833-08-30, in the “New London Crew Lists, 1803-1878 Database”, mysticseaport.org Mystic Seaport Museum, Collections, and Research. <https://research.mysticseaport.org/databases/crew-lists-new-london/>

meant that there was a particular churn among these sailors as many would go out for one voyage, and then, finding that it was not for them opt, to not sail again. Rather than them becoming eventually a part of the whaleship culture—either by adopting their ways or adding their particular ways to modify it permanently—these white sailors only temporarily altered it while they were there before others brought their spin to the culture.⁶⁰

The final group of whites that could be found on American whaleships consisted of those under the broad definition of foreign whites. These individuals came from several European nations and ended up on American whaling ships in three predominant manners. The first of these was the most straightforward in that they were sailors who had ended up in the United States without work, and so signed on where they could find it. Similarly, the second group was those who had deserted, been discharged, or lost their ships in the Pacific, and who signed on as a means of working their way home. Importantly, these "beachcomber" whites consisted of Americans as well as Europeans, and, as will be discussed later in the chapter, many to one degree or another had adopted Pacific Island culture. The last group was in some ways the most important foreign white group when it came to the American whaling industry; the Portuguese.

The cultural contribution of European whites in many ways was fairly localized down to the specific whaleships that they traveled on as, except for the Portuguese, they tended to not travel in large groups. In the case of those who came from nations like England, France, the Netherlands, and Spain this was fairly natural as those nations had sizable fleets that could, and did, retain most of their native sailors. As was seen by attempts on the part of France and England to entice American whalers to their fleets, a number of these nations needed additional

⁶⁰“Salem Crew Lists, 1799-1879 Database”; “New London Crew Lists, 1803-1878 Database”; Joel Turrill, *Turrill to the State Department*, October 1, 1847. State Department microcopy Department of State Records, National Archives of the United States, Washington D.C, M144/1; Philbrick. *In the Heart of the Sea*. 24

sailors. Similarly, many other European nationalities that pop up among American whaler crews such as the Germans were close neighbors, or in the case of the Irish crown-subjects, of those major nations. Simply, any sailor from those nations who could not find work within their nation could often find ready employment much closer than across the Atlantic in the United States.⁶¹

Those who did sign on thus tended to fall into the groupings of immigrants who could not find work in their preferred fields, and, like inland native whites, were brought on as the industry grew, and those sailors who for various reasons had become disconnected from their original ship of employment. This second group consisted heavily of less than ideal sailors as the two most common forms of separation for a sailor from their ship in a foreign land would be discharge and desertion. Both of these forms of separation while having perfectly reasonable and understandable explanations (prolonged illness/injury recovery for discharge, and a truly problematic ship's officer corps for desertion) implied at minimum the potential for authority issues from such crew members. Yet, given that such sailors continued to be signed on by whaler crew it would seem that if such issues did exist, they were at least not being fed into the culture of the whaling ship noticeably. The same cannot be said for the impact of the Portuguese who entered the American whaling industry in large numbers as the nineteenth-century progressed.⁶²

The Portuguese who entered into the American whaling industry were predominantly Azoreans and Cape Verdeans, both of which had extensive experience with the sea, and brought interesting cultural contributions to the industry. The Azorean people came to be involved in the American whaling industry due to the fortuitous placement of their island chain when it came to

⁶¹“Salem Crew Lists, 1799-1879 Database”; “New London Crew Lists, 1803-1878 Database”; Fisheries. Communicated to the House of Representatives, February 4, 1791, American State Papers: Commerce and Navigation 1:10.; & Fisheries. Communicated to the House of Representatives, February 4, 1791, American State Papers: Commerce and Navigation 1:11.

⁶²“Salem Crew Lists, 1799-1879 Database”; “New London Crew Lists, 1803-1878 Database”

the Atlantic sperm whaling trade. American whalers stopping at these islands picked up provisions as well as new crew members, many of whom would return with their ships to the United States, and after one or two voyages would bring their families over to settle there with them. It was because of this that by the start of the twentieth century the whaling port of New Bedford was home to the largest Portuguese population in the country. That there were numerous native Portuguese and Portuguese descended sailors in the American whaling fleet is plainly on view in the crew list records. In the Salem lists, there are around four hundred sailors who are listed as being definitively from Portugal, either by the name of the country, or a city within it. Further, there are well over a thousand sailors who either have no named birthplace or who are from the United States who carry common Portuguese first and last names.⁶³ Similarly, there are roughly one-thousand and twenty-two persons who list their birthplace within Portugal on the New London lists (and hundreds more with common names) and even around thirty on the Falls River lists.⁶⁴

The culture that these islanders brought to the American whaling ship was an interesting blend as while many Azoreans were Catholic like the mainland Portuguese⁶⁵, the islands had been settled by a mix of peoples. Because the settlers were Portuguese, Flemish, Italian, Scottish, English, Breton, and Jewish their cultures inevitably intermingled in the development of the

⁶³These include Antonio/Antone, Manuel, Francisco, and John, for first names, and Josef/Joseph, Souza/de Souza, Francis/Francisco, and Lopes/Lopez for last names.

⁶⁴“Azorean Whaleman Gallery,” New Bedford Whaling Museum, accessed July 13, 2020, <https://www.whalingmuseum.org/explore/exhibitions/current/azorean-whaleman-gallery/>; “Whaling Industry and Portuguese Immigration Centered in New Bedford, Mass.,” Library of Congress Ask A Librarian, last modified July 10, 2010, <https://www.loc.gov/rr/hispanic/portam/bedford.html>; “Salem Crew Lists, 1799-1879 Database”; “New London Crew Lists, 1803-1878 Database”; “Falls River Crew Lists Database,” [mysticseaport.org](https://research.mysticseaport.org/databases/crew-lists-fall-river/) Mystic Seaport Museum, Collections, and Research. <https://research.mysticseaport.org/databases/crew-lists-fall-river/>

⁶⁵To this day there are numerous Catholic celebrations, including many focused on the water and local ships, held in virtually every American port where they settled, oftentimes hosted by the local Portuguese Catholic Church and/or the local branch of the Holy Ghost Society—which is a Portuguese Catholic social organization/club that is found in most cities with a large enough Portuguese population, and which hosts the Feeding of the Masses (a yearly commemoration of the sixteenth-century feeding of famine-stricken Portuguese by Queen Isabella.)

Azorean people. At the same time, the core of their culture was Portuguese and it was this that they brought with them to the whaling ship, and the whaling communities, in the form of language, food, traditions, and dress. They also brought with them from Portugal a history of whaling as, along with the Basque region, it had been the site of a major whaling industry in the Middle Ages. This industry had been largely shore-based, much like early whaling in New England, but much like that industry the core skills that were needed for it fully translated to ship-based whaling. Because of this tradition, and the seafaring nature of the islands, many Azoreans shipped at the very least as Ordinary Seamen, and even if they did ship as a Green Hand/Landsman, they had skills and knowledge above that of most Green Hands. However, the experience and culture of the Azoreans were not indicative of that of all Portuguese groups who came into the American whaling industry.⁶⁶

The other major Portuguese group in the industry was those who hailed from the Cape Verde Islands off the coast of Africa. These islands had also long been a stopping point for whaling vessels, particularly British whalers heading for the Indian and then Pacific Oceans. In his December 4, 1839, journal entry Dr. John Wilson noted that Cape Verdeans were “a tall, robust, race, good strong oars-men, and are accustomed to a tropical sun.” It was these qualities that he felt made them enduringly valuable to British whalers, though he notes that in many ways they are fairly primitive in comparison to Europeans. Cape Verdeans also made it into the American whaling industry with fifty-three sailors listing it as their birthplace in the Salem Crew Lists, along with four-hundred and nine from New London, and two from Falls River. What

⁶⁶“Azorean Whaleman Gallery,” New Bedford Whaling Museum;” Whaling Industry and Portuguese Immigration Centered in New Bedford, Mass,” Library of Congress; Cristina Brito, Nina Vieira Vera Jordão António Teixeira, “Digging into Our Whaling Past: Addressing the Portuguese Influence in the Early Modern Exploitation of Whales in the Atlantic,” In: Joanaz de Melo C., Vaz E., Costa Pinto L. (eds) Environmental History in the Making. Environmental History, vol 7. (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing) 33-47.

made their culture different from that of the Azoreans was that due to their proximity to the African continent, the people of Cape Verde tended to be Black. When there is a physical description given for them in the Crew Lists, they are primarily said to have “black,” “dark,” “tawny,” “negro,” and “mulatto” complexions, while their hair is either “black” or “wooly”. While they may have been culturally Portuguese (with undoubtedly some African culture mixed in) their black appearance put them onto the cusp of the second major racial group of American whalers, Blacks.⁶⁷

The history of Blacks in the American maritime trades can be traced back to slavery and slave-owners who sought to squeeze every cent of profit that they could out of their slaves. In the off-seasons, many slave owners would lease their slaves out to ship owners to work as crew members, an agreement that allowed those ship-owners to save the cost of hiring free sailors, and made slaves profit-makers even when their normal work couldn't be done. Further, slave-owners would at times send trusted slaves up and down the inland waterways on rafts to carry out their business for them. Slaves who came from areas in Africa where there was already maritime trade, namely on rivers, tended to easily adapt to the American maritime system, and those who did not, came to be fairly proficient seamen after a few voyages. These skills in turn opened up new doors for slaves, and their descendants, as it afforded them a level of freedom while enslaved, and ensured a field of employment if and when they became free. Being a whaler was seen by many sailing communities as an undesirable profession, but Free Blacks embraced it as they had the maritime industry as a whole, as a means of achieving a middle-class lifestyle. It

⁶⁷Wilson, “March 30, 1841” in *The Cruise of the Gipsy*, 15-17; “Salem Crew Lists, 1799-1879 Database”; “New London Crew Lists, 1803-1878 Database”; “Falls River Crew Lists Database”.

was here that they could find steady, relatively well-paying employment and the promise of a meritocracy in which skill, and not race, determined your fortunes.⁶⁸

In reality, the idea of total equality within the whaling community had always been an overstatement, and when it came to race it was very clear that while non-whites could advance it was in the face of strong cultural blockages. In *Whaling Captains of Color: America's First Meritocracy* Skip Finley draws evidence from the careers of around fifty Black whaleship captains to show why the industry was so valuable to the Black communities of the North. In so doing he proves beyond a doubt that the industry was certainly a boon to Blacks, but most Blacks in the industry never got the chance to advance that far. Rather, they (like other non-whites) tended to be relegated to making it to the mate ranks, and never any further. In part, this was because of the importance of connections when it came to getting a captaincy. The industry could speak of meritocracy as much as it wanted, but the fact that particular families were prominent in the industry and that many captains were related to them cannot be ignored. Interestingly the three most prominent Black whaling families, the Cuffees, the Wainers, and the Bostons, were all mixed Black-Native American families. As these also tend to be cited as some of the most prominent Native American whaling families, there is a strong indication of a shared color line that kept these groups from often advancing above mate.⁶⁹

Beyond the minority of Black whaling captains, the place of Blacks in the whaling industry and its culture cannot be denied. A total of nearly three-thousand men shipped out of New London under the express descriptors of “Negro,” “Black,” or “Yellow”⁷⁰ with over five-

⁶⁸W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998), 2-4, 6, 17, & 26.

⁶⁹Finley, *Whaling Captains of Color*, 24.

⁷⁰While in more recent eras referring to a person's complexion as Yellow is a derogatory manner for describing Asian descent, in this period it predominantly was used to describe Blacks of lighter complexion. This is backed up in the lists with the frequent pairing of the Yellow complexion descriptor and the Woolly hair descriptor.

thousand more sailing from Salem. Countless more Black sailors certainly existed and simply are harder to spot due to either not being given descriptions or being described in less racially specific language. Their existence in the industry was a common enough occurrence for them to appear in the popular whaling fiction of the time. There has been recent debate among literary scholars as to whether the character of Ishmael in *Moby Dick* can be understood to be Black or mixed race—with part of the argument resting on the fact that half of the men in New England at that time with that name were of Black ancestry. Even if Ishmael was white, the book contains three expressly Black characters in Daggoo the harpooner, Pip the cabin boy, and Fleece the elderly cook. Melville had worked on whaling ships, and drew from his own experiences when he was creating his stories, and thus would have sought to ensure authenticity. That two of those characters are in servant roles (cook and cabin boy) is not entirely surprising. This is because putting Blacks into such roles was common in mainland white culture at the time, and it translated into the maritime trades as well. Five-hundred and ninety-five of the eight-hundred and seventy-three men who shipped out of Salem as stewards are definitively described in terms referring to blacks, including two uses of the word “Sambo”. Many of the others have no description or have one that is too vague to be conclusive. Similarly, while only fifteen men shipped from New London listed under the rank of steward (many ships didn’t bother to list positions), more than half of them would appear to be Black.⁷¹

Those Blacks who served in the American whaling fleet brought with them the culture that they and their ancestors had formed around themselves during the years of slavery in the South. This culture was a mix of various African traditions as well as some of those held by

⁷¹Robert J. O'Hara, "Was Ishmael Black? Facts Behind Herman Melville's Fiction," *The Journal of African American History* 102, no. 3 (2017): 380-86.; "Salem Crew Lists, 1799-1879 Database"; "New London Crew Lists, 1803-1878 Database."

natives both in the Caribbean and the North American mainland, a result of the cultural mixing that necessarily occurred within slavery. With this came a deep understanding of the land, and then the sea as a place of trial and hardship not only against nature, but against those who would harm them, and who looked down upon them for their race. At the same time, the sea was a place of freedom. For slaves when they were at sea they had been away from their masters and chains (a chained man cannot do most of the ship's labor) and while certainly not truly free they were freer. For Freeman, there came the respectability of being able to potentially advance into the mate ranks due to their skill, and the promise of a wage on par with other men at their rate. Thus, while other communities were actively rejecting the whaling industry as unrefined, Black whalers built their communities around the opportunities for continued prosperity it offered. A similar experience existed for many Native American whalers.⁷²

The American whaling industry truly originated with the various native peoples on both coasts who engaged in whaling not as a means of generating profit but of fulfilling their communities' needs. These peoples, who included various Alaskan native groups, the Makah of Washington State, and the Wampanoag of New England, shaped parts of their tribal culture around this practice. The importance of whaling to native culture was recorded as early as 1622 in *Mourt's Relation: A Journal of the Pilgrims in Plymouth*, and in 1643 Roger Williams⁷³ recorded a large number of words relating to water and fishing in the languages of the coastal peoples. The multiplicity of words shows how culturally significant the water and its bounties were to these cultures as each word represented time invested in differentiating items within a

⁷²Bolster, *Black Jacks*, 65.

⁷³Roger Williams was a Puritan minister who was a staunch advocate for the fair treatment of and dealings with the Native Americans, a position that put him into a confrontation with much of the New England establishment. He wrote the book *A Key into the Language of America* also known as *An help to the Language of the Natives in that part of America called New England* in which he recorded numerous Native American words and their meaning based on his interactions, primarily with the Narragansett and Wampanoag peoples.

broader category. Such an investment of time and energy would only be taken by those whose culture relied on being able to differentiate to such fine details, such as how a layperson does not necessarily need to know the difference between diced, minced, and chopped, but a chef does.⁷⁴

Spotting Native Americans within the American whaling industry is often difficult in large part due to the heavy Christianization and Europeanization that many New England tribes underwent. Because of these processes, many Native whalers by the time of mandatory crew lists went by white names, at least for when they were employed within the white majority industry. Further complicating their discovery is the fact that frequently descriptions of their complexion were hazy at best. The *Adeline* during its 1843-1846 voyage shipped ten apparently Native crewmembers (George and William Belain, Johnathan Cuff, William Weeks, Zacchaeus Cooper, Thomas Jeffers, Joel G. Juied, Lewis Dailey, Christopher Danzell, and Gideon Ammons). However, the complexion descriptions for those men ranged from “yellow” to “dark” to “light” to “mulatto,” with the Belain brothers being split between “Yellow” and “Dark” respectively. Similarly, only seven sailors from Gay Head, Massachusetts ever officially sailed out of Salem and New London, and all of them were described as Black men. As Gay Head was the center of Wampanoag culture, it is most likely that these men were mostly Wampanoag. While it is not outside of the realm of possibility that most of the Guy Head men who chose to list out of New London and Salem were mixed race, it is more likely that those who determined racial complexion descriptors were often thrown for a loop by Native persons. Despite this semi-invisible nature in the mainline history of American whaling, Native Americans were a keystone of its success, often at their own expense.⁷⁵

⁷⁴Robert Sullivan, *A Whale Hunt* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2000), 13, 15, 23, & 47; Shoemaker, *Living with Whales*, 2,4, & 21.

⁷⁵Shoemaker, *Living With Whales*, 68-70; Crew List for the *Adeline: 1843-1846* (WRI AV00254) from the “American Offshore Whaling Crew Lists Database” whalinghistory.org, New Bedford Whaling Museum and Mystic

When the Europeans arrived in New England, they encountered the Wampanoag who were already engaged in shore-based whaling, and it was these natives who taught the first European born whalers how to process beached whales into usable goods. When New Englanders in the mid-1600s initially began going out into the Atlantic in search of whales to process—rather than preying on whales that had beached or otherwise entered into the shallows near shore—it was often in small boats crewed by natives. These early native crewmen tended to often be employed through rather coercive indentured servitudes, engineered by the New Englanders who recognized a need for their skills. Not wanting to lose these skills they would put the natives into positions of being in debt for trade goods with whaling being the only way to pay them off. Similarly, in 1676 the Unkechaugs⁷⁶ of Long Island petitioned the colony of New York to allow them to start their own whaling company. Since the 1650s the colonists had employed these natives as whalers creating a lucrative industry for themselves, and the natives clearly understood the potential wealth to be earned. Thanks apparently to the pressures of King Phillip's War the governor approved the petition but the natives were never able to match the success of the whites. This largely was due to the existence of white monopolies over key parts of the industry, such as ironworking—for the production of new harpoons—shipbuilding, and most significantly the mercantile. An inability to break into these parts of the market meant that the Unkechaugs were still vulnerable to exploitation by white interests. These early extortive processes marked the beginning of a prolonged period of Native American involvement in the American whaling industry, often in on-going extorted positions.⁷⁷

Seaport Museum, Collections and Research. <https://whalinghistory.org/?s=AC002541>; “Salem Crew Lists, 1799-1879 Database”; “New London Crew Lists, 1803-1878 Database.”

⁷⁶The Unkechaugs are a Pequot related group who resided on Long Island, largely around the Poospatuck River, and whose modern reservation in the town of Brookhaven was recognized/created by the State of New York in 1777.

⁷⁷Shoemaker, *Living with Whales*, 26-32, 37, and 42; Daniel Vickers, "The First Whalemen of Nantucket," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (1983): 560-83; John A. Strong, *America's Early Whalemen*

As local whale populations were depleted, American whalers were forced to go farther to find whales for their hungry markets. This led to the construction of the first whaleships with onboard try-works which removed the need for returning to shore to process the whale. They also necessitated larger crews to travel with the ships. While these crews, particularly in the first few decades, were largely comprised of local-born whites there frequently were also a couple of natives shipping out with them. While some willingly shipped out with the whaleships—seeing them as offering opportunities for education and social advancement and/or stability, much as many Blacks did—many continued to be there as a result of debt. The government of Massachusetts had appointed several "trusted" whites to act as guardians for the native sailors. These guardians were theoretically there to ensure that the Native sailors were not cheated when it came to their contracts. However, many of these guardians were investors who would pay off parts of Native sailors' debts in exchange for a percentage of the sailor's future lay. Due to this, there was an inherent motivation for these “guardians” to not fully protect those under their care. They certainly wanted to ensure that they turned a profit off of their investment, but the key would have been repeated business. This came in the form of ensuring that the remainder was low enough that Native sailors needed to go to sea again, and that to do so they had to sell shares of their lay. As Native American (and Black) sailors were the most likely to sell percentages of their future lays and whites were the vast majority of investors, the racial wealth divisions within the whaling community were in line with much of the rest of the nation.⁷⁸

Indian Shore Whalers on Long Island, 1650–1750 (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2018), 99-124; David J. Silverman, “The Impact of Indentured Servitude on Southern New England Indian Society and Culture, 1680-1810.” *New England Quarterly* 74 (2001): 622-66.

⁷⁸Shoemaker, *Living With Whales*, 55-63; “Act for the Protection of the Indians and their Property in that Part of Dukes County known by the Name of Christian Town,” Approved 8 March 1805. In *The General Laws of Massachusetts, from the Adoption of the Constitution, to February, 1822: With the Constitutions of the United States and of this Commonwealth, Together with Their Respective Amendments, Prefixed, Rev. and Pub., by Authority of the Legislature, in Conformity with a Resolution Passed 22d, February, 1822, Volume 2*. (Boston: Wells & Lilly and Cummings & Hillard, 1823), 109.

Native Americans were not wholly without protection within the whaling industry. Much like whites, they tended to ship with other Native sailors whom they knew, and/or who were from their communities. This can be seen with how the *Adeline's* native crew included the Belain brothers, George and William, with elder brother George (who was the First Mate) certainly keeping an eye on William who had shipped as a Greenhand. Additionally, seven of the ten Native American sailors on that voyage (including the Belains) came from the Gay Head Wampanoag community. As the crew totaled out at thirty people, they comprised nearly a fourth of the crew for that voyage, jumping to a third for the natives as a whole. They were also able to protect themselves to a degree from the greatest harm through the meritocracy of the industry. Much as was the case for Black and Portuguese sailors, Native sailors continued to list for whaling voyages after many whites had come to see the industry as undesirable. By the sheer dint of repeated voyages and the skills they acquired therein, many of them came to occupy the ranks of ships officers. In the case of the *Adeline* George Belain served the entire voyage as the First Mate, while Jonathan Cuff was the original Third Mate until he died at some point before they reached Maui in 1844. In Maui, he was replaced by another Native whaler, Gideon Ammons, who had recently been discharged from his position as Fourth Mate onboard the *Roman* out of New Bedford. Interestingly, the Third Mate on that voyage of the *Roman* was Joseph Ammons who very probably was a relative of Gideon.⁷⁹

Native whalers too faced a largely indomitable wall of a semi-official color line when it came to Captaincies—with major exceptions for families like the Cuffees, Wainers, and Bostons—but increasingly dominated the mate ranks. In this way, they were able to make

⁷⁹Shoemaker, *Living With Whales*, 66, & 68-73; Crew List for the *Adeline*, “American Offshore Whaling Crew Lists Database”; Crew List for the *Roman: 1843-1845* (WRI AC124661) from the “American Offshore Whaling Crew Lists Database” whalinghistory.org, New Bedford Whaling Museum and Mystic Seaport Museum, Collections and Research. <https://whalinghistory.org/?s=AC124661>.

themselves valuable to the crews that they served with, and the ship owners and investors whom they served, while also putting themselves into a position to earn as much money and status as they could. It is because of this ability to achieve merit-based status in the whaling industry that their involvement's reduction to that of mythological bare-chested savages is rather confusing. Why was it that in *Moby Dick* the only Native Americans are the Harpooner Tashtego who is a stereotypical focused hunter, who kills whatever he sets his sights on, and the *Pequod* itself, a reference to a Native people who were genocided by the British over two-hundred years earlier? The simple answer is that this was most likely the result of how much the Native sailors were rolled into other races particularly as time progressed. Many who came from New England carried white names, and their culture had been heavily altered by the meddling of European and American society. When they were being classified for the crew lists, they often were lumped in with the other predominant non-white population on the East Coast, Blacks. As such they were in essence made to have no culture of their own; rather they were remnants of a culture that supposedly had gone by. In that form, it was not much of a stretch for authors like Melville (a man who certainly had encountered Native American whalers) to impose his vision of what they would have been like at their peak, and to name the ship as a wink-and-nod to the Native history within the industry.⁸⁰

The last major racial group that shaped the multi-cultural nature of the American whaling industry, were the Pacific Islanders, represented in whaling fiction by the cannibalistic harpooner Queequeg. Much like the Native American people, the Pacific Islanders had historical ties to the sea and to drawing upon its riches for their lives. Unlike the Native Americans who went to sea, not all Pacific Islanders came from cultures that held traditions of whaling, but many did. The

⁸⁰Shoemaker, *Living With Whales*, 68-70, & 102-118; Herman Melville, "Moby Dick or the Whale" in *Moby Dick (Third Norton Critical Edition)*, ed. Hershel Parker (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018), 140, 156, & 210.

Native Hawaiian people held that the rights to all beached whales fell to their chieftains and that only men were allowed to consume their flesh. These restrictions most likely stemmed from the belief that the whale or Palaoa (Pa-La-Oh-Ah) was the physical form of the god Kanaloa (Ka-Na-Lo-Ah) and thus carried his mana, or spiritual power. This certainly was the case with the Lei Niho Palaoa (Lay Ni-Ho Pa-La-Oh-Ah), or whale tooth necklace, which traditionally only high chiefs and chieftesses wore as a symbol of their status. While not all Pacific Islanders who shipped onboard American whaling ships were from Hawaii, the Hawaiians were heavily favored as crew members, and the islands' location in the Pacific made them an ideal provisioning point for Pacific whalers. Because of this, Hawaii and Hawaiians contributed a significant amount of the Pacific Islander culture that came to whaleships.⁸¹

Pacific Islanders' impact on the culture of whaleships pervaded beyond what they brought to the ships into the realm of what their world and culture represented to those who came from elsewhere. For many whalers the Pacific Islands, once they had been "discovered," often represented literal paradise. There were lands of temperate weather, sandy beaches, and lazy slow days, filled with beautiful brown women who were sexually loose. The idea of Pacific Islander women being sexually loose was the result of European misinterpretation dating back to the arrival of the first French explorers at Tahiti in 1767. These explorers developed their idea of a South Pacific hospitality centered on overt sexuality based on being presented with what they saw as the opportunities for sex almost immediately. The first was the arrival at the flagship of a young woman/girl (records seem to vary) who was dressed only in bark cloth. She ritualistically unwound this cloth from her body until she stood nude before the commander. While this was

⁸¹Susan Lebo, "Native Hawaiian Whalers in Nantucket, 1820-60," Nantucket Historical Association, accessed May 20, 2020, <https://nha.org/research/nantucket-history/history-topics/native-hawaiian-whalers-in-nantucket-1820-60/>; "Polynesian/Hawaiians," New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park Massachusetts, last updated February 1, 2019, <https://www.nps.gov/nebe/learn/historyculture/polynesian-hawaiians.htm>

intended as a sign of respect to a powerful and possibly dangerous leader, to the Europeans it was seen as an indication of sexual impropriety. This conclusion was reinforced by the arrival soon thereafter of additional canoes containing women who were disrobed by men and older women in the sight of the sailors. Descriptions of these events and the interpretations of those present were disseminated to a Europe, and an America, hungry for information on the Pacific. Similar experiences at other islands, and a willingness to accept that Pacific islanders were innately less moral,⁸² led to the popular vision of Pacific Islander women as “Aphrodite and her nymphs in Polynesian guise.”⁸³

Such visions led to large "beachcomber" populations on many Pacific Islands where whaling ships frequently made landfall. These men were whalers who were tired of their lives on board the whaling ships—often because of the inherent dangers and violence—and drawn to the fantasy of Pacific Island life. Opting to desert from their duties to live lives of presumed comfort and ease, these men dotted the beaches of many of the most popular island stopping points. Many of these men, would eventually tire of life on the islands and sign on with another ship when it came to port. They would return to the lands from whence they came, but they were inevitably and necessarily changed by their time among the cultures of the Pacific Islands. While living among the natives they had learned their ways, their beliefs, possibly some of their

⁸²Interestingly in his prolonged description of Honolulu, John Wilson expressed a belief that contact with the Europeans had severely degraded the native islanders in all aspects of their personalities. His justification for this belief was that those who came to the islands were not good, moral, people but rather the dregs of society. Because of this, they introduced a negative white society to the Hawaiians, and the only way to fix it would be for missionaries to come to the islands and properly instruct them on how to live as civilized westerners.; Wilson, “Honolulu IV” in *The Cruise of the Gipsy*, 232.

⁸³Alexander H. Bolyanatz, *Pacific Romanticism: Tahiti and the European Imagination* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2004), 95-96, & 109; Howe, “Friday August 25th”, *U.S. Frigate Constellation*. 128; Hudson, “Friday 7th February 1806” in *Journal of the Schooner Tamana*. 21; Samuel Miller, *Logbook for the Scottish Mariner, Henry E. Huntington Library*, Huntington Manuscript Collection, HM 47403. 126, 138, 149, & 152.; Anne Salmond, *Aphrodite’s Island: The European Discovery of Tahiti* (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 2010), 19-21.

languages, and even if they never openly spoke of them, they carried this with them forever. For other whites, the paradise of the Pacific Islands was not the supposed sexual freedoms, at least not alone, but rather the opportunity that they represented for trade.⁸⁴

The Pacific Islanders were very interested in certain items, namely iron goods, as they could not get them locally. As iron made for good weapons and tools, they were willing to trade sex as well as tangible goods to secure supplies of it. This provided European and American traders a means of making themselves valuable by facilitating the shipment of such goods to the islands for trade. Further, some of these traders set their sights on profiting off of the needs of the whaling ships that came into the Pacific ports looking to resupply and refurbish themselves. Far from their home ports and in need of goods that they could not carry in their holds without sacrificing too much potential profit, these whalers were at the mercy of the Pacific Island traders on pricing. A trader who had the right connections on the islands and back in the West could turn a healthy profit while keeping the general goodwill of the whaling captains. Not all Pacific Island traders were white, and in many ways, it was the native traders who had the greatest impact on shaping the culture that developed around the whalers. This was partly because as natives they were the first to interact with whites when their ships first started visiting a new island. A mutually agreeable interaction between themselves and these initial visitors would set a positive, if condescending, tone for ongoing trade with the whites. This can be seen by looking at the experience of the “first” ships to arrive at Tahiti.⁸⁵

⁸⁴“Salem Crew Lists, 1799-1879 Database”; “New London Crew Lists, 1803-1878 Database”; Bolyanatz, *Pacific Romanticism*. 109; Wilson, “Footnote 255” in *The Cruise of the Gipsy*, 214; Wilson, “October 31, 1841” in *The Cruise of the Gipsy*, 215;

⁸⁵Wilson, “Footnote 255” in *The Cruise of the Gipsy*, 214; Wilson, “October 31, 1841” in *The Cruise of the Gipsy*, 215.

When the *Boudeuse* and the *Etoile* arrived off of the coast of Tahiti around April 2, 1767, they were greeted in a manner that was traditionally reserved for chiefs of particularly high status and power. Not knowing this, the French assumed that this presentation of women - and to their minds, overt sexuality - was not only indicative of the low sexual mores of the islanders but that this was how they greeted everyone. In reality, the *HMS Dolphin* had visited the island in the recent past, and it was based on this interaction that the Tahitians formed their greeting for the French. The English sailors had turned violent before proving amicable to trading iron for sex, and from this, the Tahitians had altered how they interacted with whites. Under this new understanding, women willing to have sex had to be quickly offered or the threat of violence quickly increased. Further, while they soon confirmed that these white men who arrived in strange ships were not gods, they knew how dangerous they could be when they “blew into their weapons making them thunder and flash and hurl stones that killed many people.” Beyond protecting their people from such violence, they were quick to recognize the potential for powerful allies against the rival Borabora who had just recently invaded their most sacred site. Desiring iron, allies, and not to be killed, the Tahitians were quick to offer sexually ‘available’ women when the French arrived not long after the British had left. The French unaware of this sent their assumptions back to Europe and helped to establish the fantasy of the Pacific Islands in the minds of millions.⁸⁶

Moving from their shores and onto the whaling ships proper, Pacific Islanders were greatly valued for their perceived abilities as seamen and whalers. Some of these abilities stemmed from the realities of their existence in which many of these communities made use of animals, plants, and minerals from the sea in their day to day lives. While certain of these items

⁸⁶Bolyanatz, *Pacific Romanticism*, 95-96, 109; Salmond, *Aphrodite's Island*, 56, 458-459.

could be gathered from the shores, either when the tides fell or when they were washed in, others could only be gained by going out and seeking them. Combined with this need, was the long history of Polynesian peoples moving from island to island as population pressures dictated, thereby giving most if not all of their populations a history of seafaring to draw upon. Beyond these perceptions based in general facts, was a dense collection of generally racist stereotypes held by European and American whites. Much like how the idea of the “noble savage” arose during the nineteenth-century in regards to Native Americans, there was an idea that Pacific Islanders were both naturally better at seafaring and whale hunting than many others, and often dangerously savage. While every white sailor dreamed of the alluring sirens of the white sand beaches, they often held a terror of the headhunting cannibals that they were also convinced existed throughout the Pacific.⁸⁷

This perception of the Pacific Islanders as naturally savage can be most clearly seen in the case of the whaleship *Sharon* whose captain was killed in a mutiny by three Pacific Islanders in November of 1842. The captain had been extremely violent in his discipline during the entire voyage—leading to the desertion of nine sailors at Rotuma and twelve more at Ascension Island. This violence included beating his steward so badly that when the man fled to the foredeck quarters he was not only welcomed but the crew refused to hand him back over until his safety was assured.⁸⁸ When the story spread through various newspapers in the United States, based on

⁸⁷Lebo, “Native Hawaiian Whalers,”; “Polynesian/Hawaiians,” New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park; Ben Finney. “Myth, Experiment, and the Reinvention of Polynesian Voyaging.” *American Anthropologist*, New Series, 93, no. 2 (1991): 383-404.; Ben Finney, “Voyaging Canoes and the Settlement of Polynesia.” *Science* 196, no. 4296 (1977): 1277-285.

⁸⁸The social separation between those who were before and behind the mast was such that a steward, while not an officer, in normal circumstances, would not have been welcomed in the foredeck quarters as he would have been seen as not belonging. For the crew to feel that the injustice done onto him, particularly as a black man in a position of direct servitude to the captain, was significant enough to break these mores it almost certainly had to have been an incredibly bad beating—though given Captain Norris’ ongoing viciousness during the voyage it may have also been the result of a crew who were all too aware of his capriciousness when it came to the infliction of harm.

the initial reporting of Charles Hawes in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the violence of the Pacific Islanders took center stage over that of the captain. In some ways, this is not entirely surprising as the initial story would seem to have been based largely on the words of Benjamin Clough, the Third Mate who had retaken the ship. As with most any sailor Clough certainly took the opportunity to frame himself in the most heroic light possible, while also probably exaggerating some of the odds that he had faced. Further, it would seem that the ship's officers had agreed to a scheme with the captain to cover up desertions as they would have reflected badly on all of them. Thus, Clough very likely did not discuss anything that the captain may have done to cause the Pacific Islander crew members to decide to kill him.⁸⁹

Similarly, to these projections about Pacific Islander violence, the surviving crewmembers of the *Essex* overrode their captain when he sought to have them make for the Marquesas Islands expressing concerns that the natives there were cannibals. This decision meant that the survivors would have to make a journey of over twice the distance (1,200 miles vs. 4,000 miles), and saw the survivors cannibalizing their shipmates to survive.⁹⁰ Cannibalism in these situations (shipwrecks) was so common that sailors who did not resort to it made a point of letting their rescuers know. Thus, it is rather ridiculous for these whalers to have been afraid that they might run into cannibalistic islanders when they surely knew that it was very likely that the

⁸⁹Druett, *In the Wake of Madness*, 2-5, 29-30, 69-72, 78-79, &141; "Shipping Intelligence," *Sydney Morning Herald*, December 23, 1842; "Boston Post Marine Journal," *Boston Post*, April 3, 1843; "Strange Story," *The Star of Freedom* (Leeds, West Yorkshire, England), April 5, 1845; "Mutiny and Murder," *The New Bedford Mercury*, February 23, 1845; "Mutiny and Murder," *The Courier-Journal* (Louisville, Kentucky), March 14, 1845; "Mutiny and Murder," *The Public Ledger* (Philadelphia), March 4, 1845; "From Material," *Boston Post*, March 12, 1845; "A Duel in the Dark," *Boston Weekly Globe*, July 14, 1885; "A Duel in the Dark," *Huntsville Weekly Democrat* (Huntsville Alabama), September 9, 1885; "A Duel in the Dark," *Orange County Observer* (Hillsborough North Carolina), October 3, 1885; "A Duel in the Dark," *North Star* (Danville Vermont), August 7, 1885; "Dare-Devil Ben," *The San Francisco Examiner*, July 22, 1885.

⁹⁰That the first crew members to be eaten were the Black ones opens up a whole box of questions when it comes to race relations and how Black crew members while seen as roughly equal when onboard ship were still regarded as less than by their crewmates when the chips were down and it was every man for himself.

men they were sharing their boats with were themselves going to be cannibals before the end. What the "cannibals" on those islands represented then was the fear of native savagery due to ill-nature, whereas the cannibals that they crewed with would be the surviving victims of ill-fortune. Creating this division would be necessary for those who survived to not feel permanently marked by the choices that they had had to make.⁹¹

A final indication of the perception of Pacific Islander whalers being less than civilized, or simply savage, compared with their American counterparts, especially the white ones, is the simple question of what name they shipped under. While Native Americans and Black whalers can be often fairly difficult to separate from their white shipmates, Pacific Islanders are at least a little easier to spot. This is in large part because they often were shipped under last names that were semi to entirely meaningless. Sailors on the New London crew lists born in the Pacific Islands carry such nonsense last names as Tea, Milk, Coffee, O'Riper (Jack), Yarn 2nd, Taro, Harvest. These are not actual last names but rather random words very possibly determined by what the writer had for breakfast that morning. Similarly, many Pacific Islanders on both the New London and Salem crew lists carry last names like Kanaka (Kanaker, Kan(n)acka, Canacker), Maui (Mouee), Oahu, Tahiti, Raratonga, and Ascension. The first is the Hawaiian word for a person, while the rest would seem to indicate where they came from or were born in the Pacific. Paired with these non-last names is almost always a common English name such as John, Peter, George, James, Frank, or Tim. Pacific Islanders thus did not frequently ship out under their own names but under anglicized versions or names given to them by their captains; a means to fill required lines on documentation and saving non-native crewmembers from

⁹¹Philbrick, *In the Heart of the Sea*, 92, & 164.

pronunciational issues. They may have been valued for their skills, but they were not valued enough to be given the dignity of their names.⁹²

It is easy to envision the American whaler as a salty, possibly disfigured, white man, with a jaunty cap, and a foul attitude for the prey that he made his wages hunting, and there certainly is a truth to that. Many of New England's sons over the course of the industry boarded what were soon to be factories of death, and sailed out to turn their clothes salty and their faces into leather. Nevertheless, these New England whites were not the only crew members of the American whaleship. Joining them were whites from other parts of the United States and Europe, as well as Blacks, Native Americans, and Pacific Islanders, and each group molded the industry around in various ways. Additionally, the meritocracy of the industry offered non-whites, particularly non-white Americans, opportunities for advancement and achievement they did not have on land, though skill still did not fully replace the value of the right connection. The biases of the American mainland still were seen and felt within the multicultural industry; it was still a white man's world. Yet the culture of violence that existed onboard the whaling ships did not solely involve whites as its perpetrators, or its recipients; this culture permeated the entirety of the whaling ship, and served to shape its culture in multiple forms.

⁹²“Salem Crew Lists, 1799-1879 Database”; “New London Crew Lists, 1803-1878 Database”.

Chapter Three

A Community of Violence

On January 26, 1824, Samuel B. Comstock, a 22-year-old boatsteerer onboard the whaleship *Globe* instigated a mutiny that killed Captain Thomas Worth and three other officers and took control of the ship. Four days later, one of the mutineers, William Humphries (Humphreys), would be hanged from the fore-yard arm by the other mutineers on accusations made by Comstock of plans to steal the ship. Comstock, in turn, would die nineteen days later, killed by members of the crew who were concerned about what they perceived as his plans to destroy the ship and kill the rest of the crew. While mutinies were distinctly uncommon onboard whaling ships, violence was not. Whaling was an inherently dangerous and violent profession that sought to track down, kill, and render the largest mammals on the face of the earth into oil, a task that most whalers separated themselves from through the creation of a mental buffer. In the process of filling their ship's hold whalers frequently risked injury and death at the tail and jaw of enraged whales, the fickle whims of nature itself, the harsh discipline of ship's officers who became tyrants at sea, and at the hands of fellow crewmembers. Floating factories of death, the whaling ships served to inculcate whaling men into a culture of violence and death and provided numerous forms of kindling for eruptions of violence among the crew. The two most significant eruptions of violence would be the rare mutiny, and the subtly violent desertion—an act which fit tightly into the political and social mores of the time, and which threatened not the person but the honor/reputation of the deserter's officers.⁹³

⁹³ William Lay, and Cyrus M. Hussey, *A Narrative Of The Mutiny, On Board The Ship Globe, Of Nantucket, In The Pacific Ocean, Jan. 1824: And The Journal Of A Residence Of Two Years On The Mulgrave Islands; With Observations On The Manners And Customs Of The Inhabitants* (New London, Connecticut: William Lay & Cyrus M. Hussey, 1828), 12-46, Retrieved from <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/28955/28955-h/28955-h.htm>.

At its core, the whaling industry embodied violence; its products wrought from a series of violent acts by men who were driven to a casual indifference, if not outright callousness, by prolonged exposure to this violence. The whale hunt was a perpetuation of violence that far exceeded most, if not all, forms of hunting carried out on the land—notable exception possibly being the wholesale slaughter of the Plains Bison during westward expansion, and various pelt producing species in the colonial era. Once a whaleboat’s crew had managed to row extremely

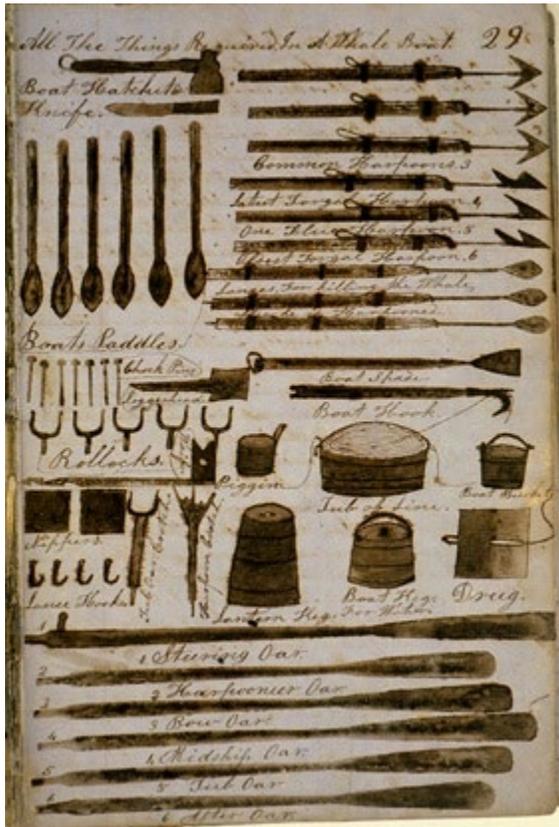


Figure 3.1 Illustrated page from Daniel C. Whitfield's journal kept onboard the bark *Dr. Franklin* of Westport, Mass, 1856-1859, showing the four harpoon types used onboard: The Common Harpoons, Latest Toggle Harpoon, One Flued Harpoons, Oldest Toggle Harpoon. KWM #1033. 2020. "Lewis Temple's Real Innovation," New Bedford Whaling Museum, New Bedford Massachusetts. <https://www.whalingmuseum.org/learn/lewis-temple>

close to their target whale (often coming to be right on top of the whale) the boatsteerer (or harpooner) would propel the harpoon as deep as he could into the whale. This blow was not intended to kill the whale, but instead to connect the whaleboat via a rope to the whale which upon being struck would react violently. A near-constant part of this reaction was for the whale to flee from the source of the pain, and thus whalers needed to be attached to the whale to be able to keep up with it.⁹⁴

Toggling harpoons (the middle three harpoons in Figure 3.1) were valued by European and American whalers as they had a greater chance of securely latching into a whale. This was because when pulled back upon once inside of something

⁹⁴ Nathaniel Philbrick, *In the Heart of the Sea: The Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex* (Viking Penguin Press, 2000), 62-65; Jim Murphy, *Gone A-Whaling: The Lure of the Sea and the Hunt for the Great Whale* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2004), 85-93, & 97-99.

the head would swing, or toggle, out perpendicular to the entry wound. This allowed for a higher percentage of successful harpooning versus the older, and more spear-like harpoons (the top three harpoons in Figure 3.1) which created entry wounds that commonly created entry wounds that left little to secure the harpoon head within the whale. In the design of the toggling iron, it is easy to see the calculated violence of the whale hunt. The weapon's increased damage to the target is not done out of any cruelty on the part of the whaler, but because it makes it a better tool for completing the task at hand.⁹⁵ Once the whale had tired itself, the whaleboat would close in



Figure 3.2 Page, William, "Capturing a sperm whale (from a sketch by C.B. Hulsart)," hand-colored aquatint print, 1835, Mystic Seaport Museum Art and Objects Collection – Digital Collection, 1975.7

for the kill. The boatheader, who was typically the captain or a mate on board the whaleship, would drive the killing iron (the bottom three harpoons on the upper right-hand portion of Figure 3.1) repeatedly into the whale. His goal was to strike a vital organ, namely the lungs and/or heart, of the whale, a task

that required a distinct amount of repetition due to the blubber of the whale. The crew would know that the task had been done when a bloody mix of viscera and water erupted from the whale's spout, a result that can be seen in Figure 3.2.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Even with the improvements of the toggling iron there was no guarantee that a single harpoon would not pull free from the whale as it fled due to the forces of the whale's movement and/or the whaleboat with six men inside of it. Because of this, numerous harpoons were often landed, if at all possible, which can be seen in paintings such as the one in Figure 3.2.

⁹⁶ Philbrick, *In the Heart of the Sea*, 62-65; Murphy, *Gone A-Whaling*, 85-93, & 97-99.

Following the demise of the leviathan, the whaleboat crew towed their prize back to the whaleship, where the carcass was secured to the ship via a series of ropes, and the trying out process—by which the whale was rendered down into oil and any other useable parts of the whale were also collected—began. This process, which could take days, saw sailors suspended over the side of the ship on a wooden platform known as the cutting stage. Making use of cutting spades the blubber was carefully carved away from the body in a style similar to “peeling an orange” until an adequately sized portion had been so removed. This “blanket piece” would then be hauled aboard the ship via the hook and tackle that had served to hold it steady during the cutting, and transferred to the blubber room where it was cut into smaller pieces. These pieces would then be placed into one of the “try pots” on the deck of the ship where they would be boiled until the oil separated, and any contaminants were removed, before they were poured into barrels and attentively sealed and stored. Ensuring a secure sealing of the oil barrel was crucial as oil that leaked out was worthless, as was oil that went bad, which would mean less profit if it was not caught in time, and very possibly longer time at sea if it was.⁹⁷

This process would continue until all the blubber had been removed, and any other items of interest had been gathered from the whale. For baleen whales, this meant the removal of the baleen from the whale's mouth with an ax, and for sperm whales, the removal of the entire head so that its teeth could be harvested and valuable spermaceti oil scooped out of its skull casing. Having removed everything of value that they could, the whalers would cut the mangled remains loose to be picked over by sharks and other hungry animals. Beyond filling a portion of the hold, this process served to turn a whaleship into a floating hell of blood, random bits of whale,

⁹⁷ Philbrick, *In the Heart of the Sea*, 62-65; Murphy, *Gone A-Whaling*, 85-93, & 97-99; Herman Melville, “Moby Dick or the Whale” in *Moby Dick (Third Norton Critical Edition)*, ed. Hershel Parker (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018), 138.

dripped oil, and belching black smoke. Equally hellish was the appearance of the whalers themselves who quickly learned to not bother changing clothes until the trying out was done, as to do otherwise was to merely ruin multiple pairs of clothing, and very likely risk being bilked by the slop chest. For a brief period, the bloody violence of the whaling trade was in stark evidence, the blood of its victims literally on the hands and decks of its perpetrators. More importantly for understanding how inherently violent the trade was, was the way that whalers compartmentalized the violence.⁹⁸

Rather than referring to whales as living, let alone sentient, creatures, whalers tended to speak of them in terms of how many barrels of oil they could produce, or even how much that oil was worth when sold at market. This mercantile valuation of whales can be seen in many whaling logs where anytime they killed a whale they would record the total barrels of oil added to the hold. In the case of the whaling logs, this reduction held a practical purpose of keeping an accurate, if often rough, record of how much oil the ship had at different points in its voyage. This was important as the logbook was technically a legallymissible record of the whaling ship's journey that could be called upon if a dispute arose. The mercantile valuation of whales demonstrated by whalers and their logbooks also served to provide a mental distance or buffer between themselves and the violence that they were committing upon whales. This was particularly essential as a successful whaling voyage required the repetition of the violent hunt and rendering process numerous times.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Philbrick, *In the Heart of the Sea*, 62-65; Murphy, *Gone A-Whaling*, 85-93, & 97-99; Margaret Creighton, *Rites and Passages: The Experience of American Whaling, 1830-1870* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 67.

⁹⁹ Philbrick, *In the Heart of the Sea*, 65; D. Graham Burnett, *Trying Leviathan: The Nineteenth-Century New York Court Case That Put the Whale on Trial and Challenged the Order of Nature* (Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 2010), 110; Nelson C. Haley and John D. Dimond, "November 10, 1860" and "November 11, 1860" in *Logbook of the Navy (Ship) out of New Bedford, Massachusetts, August 1859-April 1864*. 98-99. New Bedford Whaling Museum Archive, Call number: ODHS #749; Henry Gardiner. "November 30, 1822", "December 20, 1822", "December 23, 1822", "January 4, 1823", "January 6, 1823", "January 8, 1823", and "January 10, 1823"

The National Maritime Digital Libraries “American Offshore Whaling Voyages: a database” currently lists four-thousand nine-hundred and thirty-eight whaleship voyages to the Pacific between 1791 and 1927 logged. Table 1 shows the statistics for the number of barrels of oil landed for sample voyages drawn from every decade between 1791 and 1861.¹⁰⁰ Based upon these sample voyages a whaleship launched between 1791 and 1861 would be seeking to fill an average of roughly one-thousand eight-hundred and eighty-three barrels ($15,065/8 = 1883.12$). Given that the average whale would yield about forty to fifty barrels of oil (sperm or regular) this would require that a whaleship kill and render approximately thirty-eight ($1883/50 = 37.66$) to forty-seven ($1883/40 = 47.075$) whales. As can be seen, in the total number of barrels column, whaleships, as time progressed, were increasing in size, or at least carrying capacity.¹⁰¹ Because of this, as time progressed whalers had to kill larger numbers of whales to fill their holds, which translated to a greater culture of violence around whaling.¹⁰²

Year of Departure	Name of Vessel	VoyageID	Barrels of Sperm Oil	Barrels of Whale Oil	Total Barrels
1791	<i>Hector</i>	106290	700	500	1200
1801	<i>Leo</i>	108307	1000	500	1500
1811	<i>Barclay</i>	101568	1800	0	1800
1821	<i>Peru</i>	111429	1525	238	1763
1831	<i>Richmond</i>	112311	2000	0	2000

in *Logbook of the Dawn (Ship) out of New York, 1821-1824*, p.80, 82, and 84-85. Log 891, Manuscripts Collection, G.W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc.; Palmer Hall. *Log of the Thomas Williams 1838-1840*. “June 2-3, 1838”, “October 7-8, 1839”, “October 11, 1839”, “October 15-16, 1839”, and “October 18, 1839” Log 991, Manuscripts Collection, G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc. 4, and 26-29.

¹⁰⁰ The voyages sampled were determined by narrowing down the entries for Departure Year to the year ending in the number one for each decade, counting how many ships had recorded numbers for whale and/or sperm oil and then having a random number generator select a number between one and that total.

¹⁰¹ This is in line with the fact that by as early as 1803 Nantucket was struggling to handle modern whaling vessels due to the shallow draft into their harbor, and was seeking assistance from the United States government. (Survey of the Harbor of Nantucket. Communicated to the House of Representatives, February 16, 1803, American State Papers: Commerce and Navigation 1:526.)

¹⁰² Judith N. Lund, Elizabeth A. Josephson, Randall R. Reeves, and Tim D. Smith. “American Offshore Whaling Voyages: a database.” World Wide Web electronic publication. <http://www.nmdl.org>.

1841	<i>Martha</i> (Fairhaven)	109091	600	1000	1600
1851	<i>Ohio II</i>	110778	133	2307	2440
1861	<i>George and Susan</i>	105665	1204	1558	2762

Table 3.1

The culture of violence around whaling can also be seen in the tactic used repeatedly by whalers to increase their single hunt kills, by which they would seek to harpoon a calf or cow to induce the mother and/or other members of the pod to try to help them. In his April 8, 1842 journal entry, John Wilson—who was a surgeon on board the British whaler *Gipsy*—recorded observations of this practice. He stated that "it is usual if no better chance offers, to fasten to a calf, having a care to not kill it, in the expectation the cow...will come to its succor." He further argued that "there is strong affection shown by Sperm Whales...which is taken advantage of by the whaler." While the ship that he was serving on was a British whaler rather than an American one, it is clear that this was a broad practice within the whaling industry as a whole, and that whalers were perfectly happy to use whales' natural affections to their advantage. This reinforces the idea that they no longer saw whales as fully living entities due to their having developed a mental buffer around the violence of the industry. It would also suggest that the culture of violence within the whaling community was at least partly influenced by whether or not they (the whalers) sensed that they had other options available to them when it came to their livelihoods. They only struck the calf when they didn't have an immediate alternative because they knew that it would often produce another whale for them to process. More simply the culture of violence, at least as it pertained to the violence inflicted upon whales, was both calculated and bound to an emotional sense of wellbeing or prosperity.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ John Wilson, "April 10, 1842" in *The Cruise of the Gipsy: The Journal of John Wilson, Surgeon on a Whaling Voyage to the Pacific Ocean, 1839-1843*. ed. Honore Forster (Fairfield, Washington. Ye Galleon Press, 1991), 281.

The culture of violence within the whaling industry was not only focused on the whales but also can be found in the day-to-day lives and experiences of the whalers themselves. At the most basic level simply going out on the whaling voyage was to subject oneself to a world of numerous dangers, and multiple vectors for violence to be inflicted onto a sailor. Sailors of all stripes tended to find themselves trapped between, what Marcus Rediker calls the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea. On one side were the numerous dangers of being on the open water. A sailor could be swept overboard during a storm never to be seen again, or even trip and fall over the side. Alternatively, they could be killed, or severely sickened by various tropical and shipborne diseases such as scurvy and malaria to the point of being possibly left at a stopping point to recover. Finally, they could have the bad luck to be killed, injured, or maimed in a shipboard accident such as having crates and other goods that had been improperly stowed fall onto them, finding themselves tangled in the ropes at an inopportune moment. One such accident occurred on August 18, 1841, when the Gipsy's Second Mate had the hatch-cover he was standing on knocked loose dropping him into the hold on his head killing him. Another, crewman who died suddenly on February 25, 1842, was estimated by Wilson to be around forty years of age, although he had officially shipped as a twenty-six-year-old in 1839. Assuming that he was only around thirty years of age, it is clear that surviving the dangers of the sea meant that a sailor was marked not only by his distinct dress, speech, and walk, but by physiological changes as well.¹⁰⁴

Whalers were subjected to additional dangers from their work environment that no other sailor was likely to ever have to deal with. Explicitly, the whale hunt served to put them into the direct path of serious harm and death every time they lowered the whaleboats. As discussed

¹⁰⁴ Wilson, "August 18, 1841", and "February 25, 1842" in *The Cruise of the Gipsy*, 198-199, and 270; Marcus Buford Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (New York; Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1987), 11-13.

earlier, the whale hunt required the whalers to move extremely close to the whale to harpoon it. At that point, the whale would rather naturally react violently and attempt to flee from the source of pain, which was why the harpoon was attached to the whaleboat by a rope that was fed out as the whale fled. This so-called "Nantucket Sleigh Ride" posed multiple dangers to the continuing wellbeing of the whalers, such as the possibility that the light craft would hit a swell wrong and capsize, or throw the crew, or take serious structural damage and flounder. Furthermore, the rope that was attached to the whale was on a spool of rope, the intention of which was to prevent the boat from being dragged under the waves when the whale dove—as was often their first maneuver when fleeing. Whalers had methods for slowing the progress of the whale in the form of floats that could be attached to the rope, and the man who was responsible for making sure the rope didn't experience friction damage was trained on how to splice on additional lengths of rope if and when needed. This would ensure the relative safety of the boat and crew, but a rapidly moving rope, pulled by a multi-ton animal in a panic, is still a potential threat to the health and



Figure 3.3 General Research Division, The New York Public Library. "Boats attacking whales" New York Public Library Digital Collections. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/4a6058e0-9d36-0133-6935-00505686a51c>

safety of the boat's crew no matter what precautions are taken.¹⁰⁵

The most dangerous threat to a whaler, however, was not the harpooned whale that opted to flee from the pain, but the whale that turned against its attacker. A whale's tail or jaw could easily turn a whaleboat—which was designed

¹⁰⁵ John T. Barstow, "June 1, 1858," *Log of the William Lee, September 1856-May 1860*. Log 1028, Manuscripts Collection, G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc. 125.

to be nimble—into a pile of splinters as can be seen on the far right of Figure 3.3.¹⁰⁶ A whaler whose boat was destroyed by the tail of a whale first had to survive the forceful journey upward out of their boat, followed by an inevitable drop into the middle of the ocean. Assuming that they were conscious and unharmed they would have to either make their way towards another of their ship's whaleboats or their ship (assuming either was in sight and not too far away) or find wreckage to cling to. Injuries from the destruction of their boat could easily prove fatal either by putting their bodies into shock or by drawing the attention of nearby predators looking for their next meal. As can also be seen in Figure 3.3, the plan of attacking whales when they were tightly packed into their pods and/or intentionally drawing other whales towards the injured whale could be just as dangerous for the whaler as a struck whale that chose to fight rather than flee.

Particularly, any whale that had not been struck would not be distracted by pain, and as whales could identify oncoming whaleboats as a threat—whaleboats had padded oars and at times made use of sails to be able to approach the whales without being noticed—would most likely have a general sense of where the aggressor might be. As can be seen, the whale hunt was a violent activity that exposed whalers, as well as whales, to significant violence. For whalers life on-board the whaleship, beyond the activities and experiences tied to hunting and rendering whales, meant exposure to other parts of the community of violence, beginning with their officers.¹⁰⁷

The command structure of a whaleship, like most ships, was not a democracy, but rather a stringent hierarchy that began with the captain and ended with the greenest hand. This system was necessary in an environment where having everyone and everything in the place that it needs to be in when it needs to be there, can spell the difference between life and death for everyone on

¹⁰⁶ Given that a determined lone whale was able to sink the 238-ton whaleship *Essex* in 1820, even factoring in the poor repair that it most likely was in, a whaleboat would be a toy in a straight confrontation with a whale.

¹⁰⁷ Murphy, *Gone A-Whaling*, 85-93, & 97-99; Wilson, “April 4, 1842,” & “April, 8 1842,” in *Cruise of the Gipsy*, 280-281; Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 11-13.

board. Even the kindest and most egalitarian Quaker from Nantucket could turn into a harsh taskmaster of an officer when at sea. In large part, this hierarchy was accepted as whaling captains and their mates didn't buy their ranks but rather earned them through repeated whaling voyages, during which they learned the skills that they would need. That is not to say that occasionally officers like Captain George Pollard Jr.¹⁰⁸ of the *Essex* didn't advance beyond their abilities by virtue of family connections. It is to say that they were still skilled sailors with extensive experience which put them above those who had not sailed before and/or who had less skill. They also held rank, and would when they felt it was needed brutally enforce their position over those who worked and resided "before the mast", which what was made them the "devil" the common sailor had to contend with along with the sea.¹⁰⁹

As the nineteenth century progressed there was a general trend of harsher levels of discipline onboard whaling ships, which inherently also meant a growth in the community of violence onboard. This increase is evident in large part due to the legal requirement that formal punishments be recorded in the ship's logbook, and as the years progressed in the nineteenth century there is both an increase in the number of recorded floggings, and their intensity. For example, the log of the *Dawn* records one flogging, of roughly twelve lashes, for its entire voyage. Counter to this the *Alexander Barclay* during its 1837 to 1839 voyage recorded three floggings, of a dozen, twenty-one, and eight lashes respectively, and the *George and Mary* log of 1843 to 1845 also includes two, both of sixteen lashes. These increases are generally in line with what Briton Cooper Busch found in his analysis of over three-thousand whaling logbooks from between 1820 and 1919. Namely that starting in the five-year period of 1820 to 1824, in which

¹⁰⁸ Pollard was a skilled sailor who had been on several voyages, multiple times as a mate, with no issue. However, he demonstrated during his captaincy the peacemaker ability of a good first mate and not the divisiveness of a captain.

¹⁰⁹ Philbrick, *In the Heart of the Sea*, 25.

only 3.4% of whaling voyages recorded floggings, there was a general upward trend in floggings peaking in the period of 1845 to 1849 at 12.9%. Additionally, the floggings onboard the *Dawn*, the *Alexander Barclay*, and the *George and Mary* were in response to instances of disobedience and/or insolence, which is also in-line with Busch's findings that those were the most common reason for floggings to occur. A large part of this turn towards greater and harsher discipline can be laid at the feet of the perception held by numerous officers, as well as government officials, that the quality of sailor shipping out on whaling ships had declined. There was a significant amount of truth to this as mercantile shipping had proven to be an easier and more preferable job for many skilled sailors. Not only were the voyages considerably shorter on average, but there was no real risk of being harmed or killed by a whale, nor the requirement to live on what was frequently a floating chanel house. At the same time, the growing American whaling industry would prove to be too successful for its own good when it came to recruiting top sailors. In 1847 Joel Turrill who was the American Consul in Honolulu wrote to the State Department that "the rapid increase of the number of ships employed in the business has rendered it difficult to obtain men." This meant that the whaling industry not only had lost access to a percentage of the best sailors but that they had to fill a greater number of positions than they had previously, which necessarily reduced the average ability level of many crews.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Henry Gardine, *Logbook of the Dawn (Ship) out of New York, 1821-1824*. Entry for "March 3, 1822," Log 891, Manuscripts, G.W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc., 68; Thomas Norton, *Log of the Alexander Barclay 1837-1839*, Entries for "March 3, 1838," "December 1, 1838," and "December 23, 1838," Log 929, Manuscripts Collection, G.W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc. 18, 53, and 57.; Joseph L. Whitney, "February 3, 1844," and "November 6, 1844," in *Log of the George and Mary, 1843-1845*. Log 1057, Manuscripts Collection, G.W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc. 32, and 63; Briton Cooper Busch, *Whaling Will Never Do For Me: The American Whaleman in the Nineteenth Century*. (Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 2009), 25-30; Joel Turrill, *Turrill to the State Department*, October 1, 1847. State Department microcopy Department of State Records, National Archives of the United States, Washington D.C, M144/1.

There had been issues with filling a whaling ship's crew with skilled seafarers starting in the 1820s. The *Essex* had been held up in harbor because they could not fill a whole crew, and eventually, they had rounded out their crew with African-Americans—an act that the captain did not seem initially interested in committing given that they had to put out a separate call for African-American sailors. Despite this, it was not until the 1830s that seemingly gratuitous punishment truly appears to emerge as a favored tool of many whaling ship captains and officers. This increase would appear to be roughly in line with the uptick of sailors in the whaling industry who were not only less skilled and/or non-white but truly green hands/landlubbers. Having no prior experience as sailors would certainly have been a hindrance for whaleship captains as they needed men who were not only competent enough to get a ship from point A to point B with its cargo undamaged but who could successfully carry out the whale hunt. This meant that rigorous training had to be carried out to ensure that they could the entire process to the officers' satisfaction. As the officers tended to be skilled seamen themselves, with multiple voyages, and frequently family lineages, in whaling, the inadequacies of these largely unskilled sailors almost certainly irked their pride and their patience.¹¹¹

Beyond the general annoyance offered to whaler officers by unskilled seamen, the dangers of whaling, not to mention the lifestyle—which even many people from whaling families sought to avoid—heavily guaranteed that many whalers would never go a-whaling a second time unless they had no other option. As these were not men whom they had to keep interested in the business, tended to be seen as generally dim, and were a hindrance it is hardly shocking that officerial abuse would increase when it came to dealing with those sailors. They

¹¹¹ Philbrick, *In the Heart of the Sea*, 24; Wilson, “March 24, 1840” in *Cruise of the Gipsy*, 40; Joan Druett, *In the Wake of Madness: The Murderous Voyage of the Whaleship Sharon* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Algonquin Books, 2004), 84; Murphy, *Gone A-Whaling*, 42-44.

were disposable seamen, and as such, it was only right for an officer to squeeze as much work out of them as they could. An almost definite added incentive for officers to discipline harshly was an 1803 requirement regarding the discharge of sailors from their duties on board an American ship. If a sailor, or sailors, were to be discharged in a foreign port (which the majority of ports a whaling ship might hit in the Pacific were) they would have to be paid not only their back wages but also three additional months' worth of pay. By harshly disciplining those sailors that they wanted off the ship, an officer could potentially cause them to leave of their own volition, namely by desertion. In that instance, as the crewmember has left the ship without being formally discharged, they are not entitled to their three months' future pay, nor do they tend to leave with all, if any, of their back pay.¹¹²

Another key facet of the growing community of violence within the whaling community in the nineteenth century was the pressures of the industry itself, and how they impacted the members of the crew. These stressors were broadly speaking the location/environment of the work, the financial realities, and the length of the work period. While the whale ships would visit many of the islands in the Pacific to take on supplies, and/or replace crew members, they primarily were out in the middle of nowhere. This was because they needed to be out where the whales could be found, and the Pacific Ocean covers 62.46 million square miles of space. Even with the many small islands that dot the region, it was very possible to go for prolonged periods without even spotting land. The log of the whaleship *Dawn* lists in its daily entries not only what day out of homeport it is for them but, when they are close to land, how far offshore they are.

¹¹² Busch, *Whaling Will Never Do For Me*, 24.

Looking at the map of their journey (Figure 4) it is quickly evident why these distance measurements are infrequent as the ship's journey tends to cut away from many of the island clusters.¹¹³

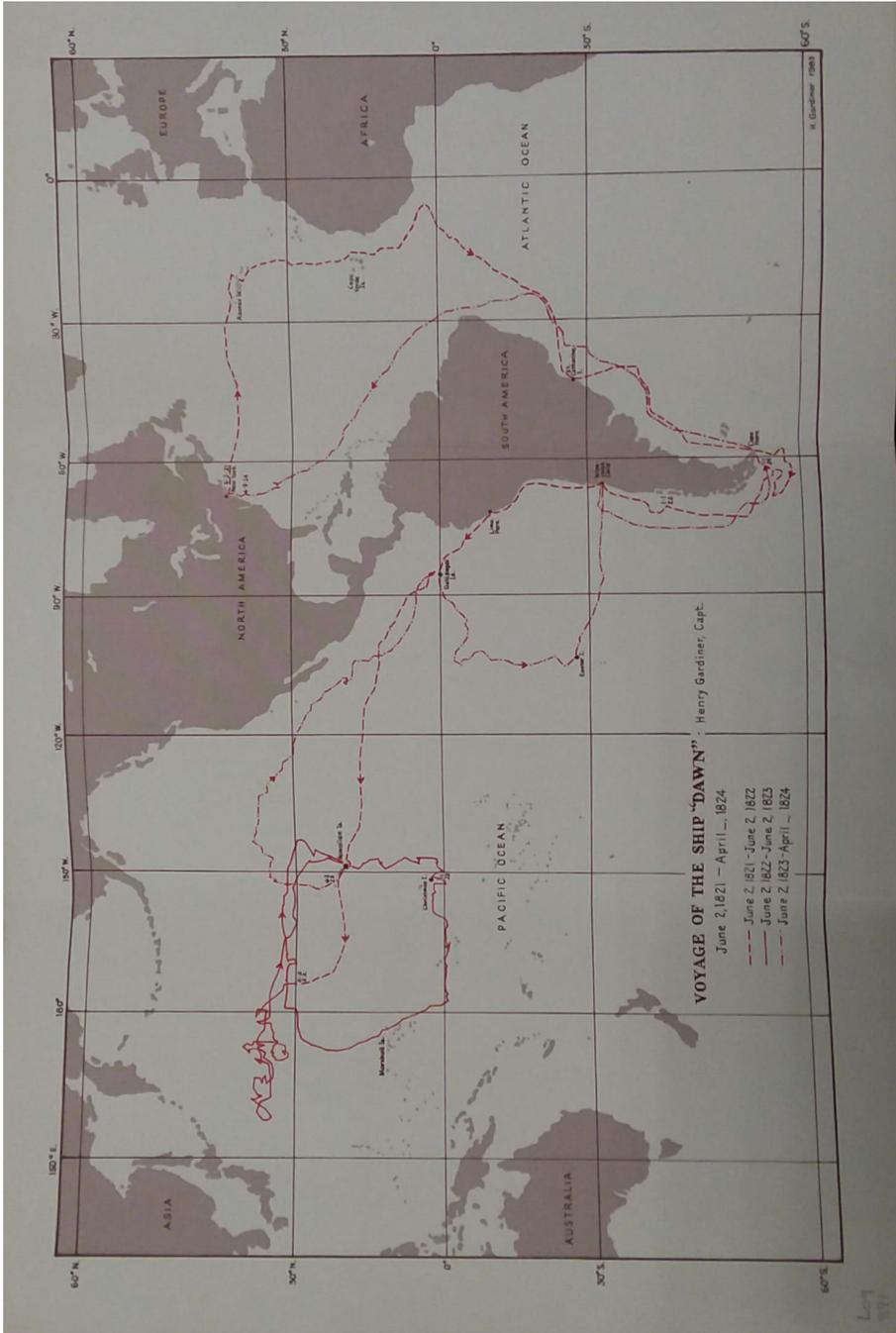


Figure 3.4 “Voyage of the Ship Dawn” from *Logbook of the Dawn (Ship) out of New York, 1821-1824*. p.1 Log 891, Manuscripts Collection, G.W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc.

Whaleships would occasionally encounter one another while they were out on the hunting grounds, such as when John Wilson mentioned that the *Gipsy* encountered the American whaler *Reaper* whose captain he describes as having “lost

¹¹³ Henry Gardine, *Logbook of the Dawn (Ship) out of New York, 1821-1824*, Log 891, Manuscripts, G.W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc.

the run of his own ship.”¹¹⁴ However, it was much more frequent for these encounters to be less in the form of the direct intersection of ships, and more in the spotting of distant sails, and even then those were frequently few and far between. Between the eighth of June and the thirtieth of June 1838, the *Alexander Barclay* recorded spotting twelve whales (nine of which they killed), but only made a single reference to seeing another ship, and that from afar. The following year, the *Thomas Williams* did not record spotting a single sail from the start of April until May fourteenth. Even the American frigate *Constellation* sailing in more occupied waters encountered a British Frigate on November twenty-ninth of 1843, and its next ship was a French Frigate on December twelfth. Beyond a lack of outside contact, the environment of the whaleship also helped to precipitate violence through potential periods of protracted boredom.¹¹⁵

These periods of protracted boredom were largely generated by two external forces within nature that the whalers held no control over; the weather and the whales. Before steam became the default for most ships, whalers like all ships were at the mercy of the weather. This was not only when they faced storms, but when it came to whether or not they were even able to move from one place to another. If they found themselves in calmed seas they would be stuck drifting with the current until the wind changed and they were able to use their sails again. During those times there was little for the crew to do except for the repetitious cleaning assignments—which while serving a sanitary and safety purpose were largely busy work—and

¹¹⁴As the captain of the *Gipsy* did not take any action against the *Reaper*, and her captain was able to travel back and forth between the two ships as a visitor, it would appear that any loss of control that he had experienced was not the result of a mutiny.

¹¹⁵ Wilson, “May 16, 1841” in *Cruise of the Gipsy*, 183-184; Thomas Norton, *Log of the Alexander Barclay 1837-1839*, Entries for “June 8 – June 30, 1838” Log 929, Manuscripts Collection, G.W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc. 29-32; Palmer Hall, *Log of the Thomas Williams 1838-1840*. Entries for “April 1 – May 14, 1839”. Log 991, Manuscripts Collection, G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc. 50-68; Isaac Howe, Entries for “Wednesday November 29 - Sunday 12th [1843]” in *An Abstract of a Cruise in the U.S. Frigate Constellation in the Years of 1840, 41, 42, 43, & 44, Commodore Laurence Kearney Commanding*. Henry E. Huntington Library, Huntington Manuscript Collection, HM 69805.142-145.

possibly drilling on launching and hauling in the whaleboats. As bad as having to deal with severe storms could be—with the soaking clothes, long hours of hurried work, and threat of death at any moment from a rogue wave—it was preferable, to many, to the threat of boredom and general discomfort offered by a calmed sea.¹¹⁶

Similar to the boredom of a becalmed sea was waiting for a whale to be spotted. Until one was spotted the crew had only their most mundane duties to attend to, and as whales are living creatures that habitually move around throughout the year, there could be prolonged periods of waiting for whales. For example, the *Alexander Barclay* spotted and chased twelve whales between the eighth and thirtieth of June in 1839, which would be one whale every two days. However, a number of these were pairs of whales which meant that they encountered whales on an average of one every four to five days. One whale every four or five days would still appear to be a rather good rate for staving off boredom, but it should be noted that they did not encounter any whales from May twentieth, until June eleventh. When there were no whales to chase or process, whalers were once again left to the mind-numbing monotony of busy work cleaning, and perhaps doing whaleboat drills—with the punishment for failing being having to run them again until their officers were satisfied.¹¹⁷

While boredom can produce positive results, it, for the most part, is tied to negative outcomes, particularly those of frustration and negative activity. These negative activities can include increased drinking, drug use, and violence—in the form of both outward aggression and the practice of counterproductive behavior such as work stoppage and property damage. John

¹¹⁶ John T. Hudson, “Remarks on Thursday 2 January, 1806”, “Remarks on Friday 3, January 1806”, “Remarks on Friday 10 January, 1806”, & “Remarks on Sunday 19 January, 1806,” in *Journal of the Schooner Tamana from Woahoo (Sandwich Islands) to the Coast of America*. Henry E. Huntington Library, Huntington Manuscript Collection. HM 30491. 6,11, & 13; Wilson, “December 27, 1839” in *The Cruise of the Gipsy*, 21; Howe, “Wednesday 15 [of November, 1843]” in *An Abstract of a Cruise in the U.S. Frigate Constellation*, 139.

¹¹⁷ Norton, *Log of the Alexander Barclay 1837-1839*, “June 8 – June 30, 1838” 29-32; Norton, *Log of the Alexander Barclay 1837-1839*, “May 20 – June 11, 1838”. 28-29; Murphy. *Gone a-Whaling*. 42-44.

Wilson observed that whalers long at sea often have a propensity to heavy drinking even if they rarely drink when ashore. More specifically he noted that they “will commit almost any folly to obtain the stimulus” and “Jack [as in Jack Tar] finds a temporary exaltation in a fit of drunkenness.” This all would serve to strengthen the idea that whaleships served as a breeding ground for boredom which could, and lead to whalers acting out. Beyond otherwise sober men becoming drunkards, the frustrations that emerged within whaling crews also could turn them physically against one another.¹¹⁸

Because of their isolation from both land and other ships whalers were largely confined to interacting with those they shared their ships with, and had limited space within which they could separate themselves if and when problems arose (as it was impossible, or at least highly inadvisable, to leave a whaleship when it was in the middle of the ocean). Inevitably what this would lead to was a buildup of anger and resentment over time that if not defused would erupt into physical violence. Wilson attributed such concerns to why Neptune did not appear when the *Gipsy* first crossed the equator. While the ceremony—which occurred traditionally on all ships when they first crossed the Equator during a voyage—was supposed to be a bonding, and even status quo flipping, experience that brought the crew of a ship closer together, on a whaler any sense of being wronged could very easily fester. Such concerns would appear to have come to fruition when on March twenty-fourth, 1840 “the armorer & one of the sailors came to high words, which soon merged into blows.” While it could have been merely a highly heated argument during the trying out process, the fact that the two had to be physically separated, and

¹¹⁸ Edwin A.J. van Hooft, and Madelon L.M. van Hooff, “The state of boredom: Frustrating or depressing?” *Motivation and Emotion* Vol. 42, no.6 (July 2018): p. 931-932; Wilson, “September 17, 1843”, in *The Cruise of the Gipsy*, 313.

then were “growling at each other like a couple of mastiffs!” would suggest that there were underlying issues between them.¹¹⁹

Another stressor for whalers would have been financial concerns. Whalers were not paid a fixed wage but rather were paid on the lay system which said that they would get a percentage of the ship’s eventual profits. This percentage was not equitable for all ranks on board the ship but rather it ranged based upon the value, both actual and implied, of each person. Captains who were particularly favored by their ship’s owners could earn as much as 1/8, while their mates earned somewhere between that and the 1/100 that was average for boatsteerers and coopers. A rate of 1/100-to-1/160 was normal for those of able and ordinary seamen rank, and those who served as stewards, cooks, and blacksmiths. Finally, those who were only green hands, or boys, got rates that frequented between 1/160 to 1/200, with drops as low as 1/250. This system was intended to motivate whalers by making the success of their voyage (coming back with a hull filled with barrels of oil) directly tied to the size of their paychecks. This would enhance the frustrations and boredom of having nothing to do when whales were not being spotted, by adding the knowledge that their profits were not growing as the days passed.¹²⁰

Adding to the financial pressures that were applied to whalers was that they were accruing debt even while they worked. Many whalers took an advance on their eventual pay

¹¹⁹ William F. Davidson, “January 12th 1841,” in *Diary of William F. Davidson, Midshipman, Dale (Sloop of War) US Navy Pacific Squadron, 1840-1842*, Henry E. Huntington Library, Huntington Manuscript Collection, HM 69950. 39; Howe, “Wednesday November 8, 1843.” in *An Abstract of a Cruise in the U.S. Frigate Constellation*, 138.; Wilson, “December 27, 1839”, in *The Cruise of the Gipsy*, 21; Wilson, “March 24, 1840”, in *The Cruise of the Gipsy*, 40-41.

¹²⁰ Elmo Hohman, “Wages, Risk, and Profits in the Whaling Industry.” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (August 1926), 644-645; Crew List for the *Adeline: 1843-1846* (WRI AV00254) from the “American Offshore Whaling Crew Lists Database” whalinghistory.org, New Bedford Whaling Museum and Mystic Seaport Museum, Collections and Research. <https://whalinghistory.org/?s=AC002541>; Crew List for the *Roman: 1843-1845* (WRI AC124661) from the “American Offshore Whaling Crew Lists Database” whalinghistory.org, New Bedford Whaling Museum and Mystic Seaport Museum, Collections and Research. <https://whalinghistory.org/?s=AC124661>.

before they left port to cover any debts that they had accrued at that time—given that they were signing on to potentially die, or slip away in a foreign port, most creditors were probably rather insistent that they settle up. Even if they did not need an advance to pay off debts before they sailed, they would almost certainly need one if they were going to take advantage of any amenities when they were allowed off their ships at their ports-of-call. Beyond the debts of pay advances, whalers at sea would be charged for anything and everything that they might need to acquire from the slop chest. These chests, owned by the ship's owners, were filled with items that sailors might need like extra clothes and medical supplies and were infamously expensive (after all they were a captive market).¹²¹ As such a sailor would find themselves in debt, often significantly, before their total lay was ever close to being calculated, a situation that would have only served to increase the internal pressure upon them to produce more oil for the ship's hold.¹²²

Ships officers would experience many of the same financial pressures as their seamen, as they too would want to maximize their earnings by bringing back the fullest hull possible. Beyond that, they faced the threat of losing future profitability if their ship did not perform well. Those who owned, and invested in, whaling ships did so because they could make a solid profit from selling the goods that those ships brought to market. If a ship failed to turn a profit it, in their eyes, reflected poorly on the ship's officers. When that ship returned to sea it would almost certainly have a different captain and mates, and its old captain and mates would be left to find places onboard other ships, most likely with some reduction in rank. This not only would cost them money, but pride, and status in the eyes of their community. As a means of preventing this,

¹²¹ The corruption of the slop chest was serious enough that Thomas Adamson Jr., the American Consul to Honolulu lamented, in an 1870 letter, his inability to prevent sailors from being taken advantage of by its use.

¹²² Thomas Adamson, *Thomas Adamson to the State Department*, February 1, 1870. Department of State Records, National Archives of the United States, Washington D.C., M144/12.

they would seek to push their crew if they felt that they were not performing well enough, through drills, general tongue lashing, or through harsher discipline aimed at turning their sailors away from being laggards.¹²³

The final stressor that the whaling profession exerted on its participants was that of the duration of the trip itself. Whaling ships were growing in size as the century progressed, which meant that an increasing number of barrels of oil had to be filled before the voyage could be completed. This required killing an increasing number of whales, which meant that the whaling ships had to be at sea for a longer period. Looking at the sample voyages in Table 2—which are the same that were used for the total number of barrels landed— it is easy to see that where a Pacific whaling trip originally lasted roughly two years, as the industry and the ships grew, the trip duration tended to also grow becoming three-to-four years in length by the second decade of the nineteenth century.¹²⁴

Ship Name	Year of Departure	Year of Return
<i>Hector</i>	1791	1793
<i>Leo</i>	1801	1803
<i>Barclay</i>	1811	1814
<i>Peru</i>	1821	1824
<i>Richmond</i>	1831	1835
<i>Martha</i> (Fairhaven)	1841	1845
<i>Ohio II</i>	1851	1853
<i>George and Susan</i>	1861	1864

Table 3.2

The extended nature of these voyages created stress and discontent that increased the community of violence via numerous pathways. First, it was a long time to be away from one's community, particularly if a sailor was married or of marriageable age, as many of them were.

¹²³ Philbrick, *In the Heart of the Sea*, 20-21; Murphy, *Gone a-Whaling*, 42-44; Wilson, “December 27, 1839” in *The Cruise of the Gipsy*, 21.

¹²⁴ Judith N. Lund, Elizabeth A. Josephson, Randall R. Reeves, and Tim D. Smith, “American Offshore Whaling Voyages: a database.” World Wide Web electronic publication. <http://www.nmdl.org>.

While there were certainly those who preferred to be away from their communities, even they would have most likely preferred to be able to go to some community other than the one that they were trapped in on their ship. Tying into this was the frequent perception that native Pacific Islander women were sexually loose, interested in and impressed by white men, and the general lack of female contact while out in the middle of the hunting grounds. A desire for the "sins of the flesh" as well as being able to drink and generally separate themselves from the community they had imposed upon them, made the islands that they passed most tempting for many sailors.¹²⁵

Second, given the debts that a whaler accumulated via advances and the slop chest, they frequently found that their final profit was reduced from several hundred dollars to amounts as low as tens of dollars. A sailor who could do the math in their head, even generally, would quickly come to realize that not only were they stuck on a voyage that lasted for years—during which time they could have almost certainly signed on for multiple merchant trips—but once they got home they would most likely have to immediately have to find another job. This would add to any anger that they were feeling, particularly towards officers whom they saw as cruel, and instill a potential sense of them having nothing to lose when it came to restraining their negative impulses. These growing impulses often led to sailors taking violent directed action towards their officers in one of two forms: mutiny or desertion.¹²⁶

When speaking of directed violent action and maritime history the term mutiny easily comes to mind, as to mutiny was to rise up and forcefully take control, and power, from those

¹²⁵ Anne Salmond, *Aphrodite's Island: The European Discovery of Tahiti* (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 2010), 19-21; Alexander H. Bolyanatz, *Pacific Romanticism: Tahiti and the European Imagination* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2004), 109.

¹²⁶ Elmo Hohman, "Wages, Risk, and Profits in the Whaling Industry". *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (August 1926), 645-646.

who were virtual kings away from port. Yet, while mutinies did occur on whaling ships—such as the *Globe* mutiny in 1824, and the murder of Captain Howes Norris of the *Sharon* in 1841—they were few and far between. There are numerous recorded instances in the whaling logbooks of sailors being punished for striking, or attempting to strike, their captain and/or mates, which could be referred to as mutinous behavior if an officer was feeling particularly petty. Actual mass violent uprising rarely made an appearance. The reluctance to mutiny can be explained by considering the logistical and societal limitations that whalers were working within. To engage in a mutiny was a very serious offense, punishable by death or other serious retribution, and to be successful required mobilizing a fair number of the crew to act against the command structure. If a captain was significantly harsh it might not be impossible to convince many of the crew to turn on them, but the threat of death if you were unsuccessful, and very possibly being hunted down and killed if you were was more than enough to deter most.¹²⁷

Further, most early whalers were drawn from New England. Even when their officers could be tyrants at sea, their home communities would not have prepared them for that kind of dissent. Instead, at best they would have been accustomed to communities where there were town council structures. This would have potentially caused them to anticipate that their voice should carry a value and weight that the strict shipboard hierarchy prevented, but it would have been completely out of character for them to physically attack those that disagreed. Even when the quality of sailors on board whaling ships began to decline crew members were largely, if not entirely, drawn from the northern states. Mob action in this period (and a mutiny certainly

¹²⁷ Wilson, “January 27, 1841”, “May 22, 1842” in *The Cruise of the Gipsy*, 150, and 290; William Hunter, “Remarks on Wednesday 29th Oct. 1821” in *A Journal Kept on Board the US Ship Franklin, Charles Stewart Esqr. Commander*, Henry E. Huntington Library, Huntington Manuscript Collection, HM 70857, 122; Joseph L. Whitney, “January 1, 1844” in *Log of the George and Mary, 1843-1845*, Log 1057, Manuscripts Collection, G.W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc. 27.

represented a type of mob action) in the North was generally directed not against the people that they disagreed with but their property. This was in contrast to the South where “social violence of most kinds was only rarely repressed or punished, [and] so it became a tolerated, even a sanctioned mode of social control.” While whalers were not socially conditioned to use direct physical violence against those with whom they disagreed, they did have a ready violent action in the form of desertion.¹²⁸

Desertion on the surface appeared to be a wholly non-violent action as the offending party removes themselves from the source of their anger/frustration. The violence of desertion came from its full rejection of the authority of those who were supposed to be in command. A mutiny is directed at removing someone from a position of power—often because they are supposed to have been acting in a manner that harms those under them—which means that it inherently affirms that the person(s) being mutinied against have a particular authority. Desertion, alternatively, firmly asserts that the power and authority of those in theoretical command over the deserter are no longer accepted or recognized. This attack on authority would have been more violent for many Americans at this time than a physical attack as it struck not at their body but their honor, which was a much more precious thing. The high value of honor can be traced to the fact that it was an entirely externally generated concept, which meant that it was based on how others saw the person, and how they judged them. For a subordinate to so completely reject their superior’s power over them that they not only fought their authority, but actively ignored, was to strike at that superior’s honor, and in so doing damage their reputation.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ David Grimste, *American Mobbing, 1828-1861: Toward Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 13, and 86.

¹²⁹ Joanne Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), xvi-xviii, and xx.

The idea that desertion could be harmful to a ship's captain can be seen in the story of the whaleship the *Sharon* whose captain actively sought to cover up how many crew members had deserted. This included actively trying to get the mate in charge of keeping the log to not mention the numbers at all, and swearing his officers to silence over anything he might have done (like excessively harsh discipline) that might have precipitated the desertions. His concern was that if ship-owners found out that he had large numbers of sailors deserting from his ship, they would see him as an unfit candidate for commanding their ships when he sought his next command. Thus, every sailor who deserted was committing a form of violence against him by striking a blow to his apparent competence as an officer. If noticed in time, officers or trusted sailors could be sent ashore to retrieve deserters and force them back onto the ship. This was only a temporary solution, as once a sailor had determined to desert the only way to truly ensure that they did not do so again was to either confine them to the ship whenever near a port, or to give in to the changes that they desired.¹³⁰

Captain Norris of the *Sharron* ended up being killed by three mutinous Pacific Islander crewmembers, whose exact reasoning will probably never be known¹³¹, but his violent tendencies on that particular voyage most likely played a role. Counter to this, when the *Gipsy* lost roughly six Portuguese crew members during a supply stop at Brava and Fogo islands in Cape Verde, the captain engaged in negotiations with them. As the ship was resupplying, and the winds were calm, he ignored their absence for a day and then sent the first and third mates the next morning to fetch them from wherever they had passed out after their drinking. Once they

¹³⁰ Joan Druett, *In the Wake of Madness: The Murderous Voyage of the Whaleship Sharon* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Algonquin Books, 2004), 8, 17-18, 29-30, 78-79, and 141; Wilson, "December 5, 1839," *Cruise of the Gipsy*, 17; Haley and Dimond. "March 21, 1862" *Logbook of the Navy*. 184.

¹³¹ As mentioned in the previous chapter their reasoning was determined by the Third Mate Benjamin Clough, and most newspapermen at the time to be their inherently violent nature as Pacific Islanders. As they all died in Clough's reclamation of the ship there was never an independent inquest—though given that mutiny and murder of a ship's officer were serious offenses, and they were not white, they very likely would have never gotten one anyone.

were back on the ship, he addressed the complaints that they brought up about their pay and general conditions onboard. It was only when an agreement had been made between all involved parties that he put them onto their punishment duties. In this way, the captain was able to save face by returning the crewmen to the ship, and punishing their trespass against his authority, while also ensuring that they were less likely to act against him again—at least not without first trying to address issues through the chain of command. The *Gipsy* was not an American ship, nor was her captain an American, yet the culture of honor for men of status was not an American ideal either. Rather, it was drawn from the aristocratic gentry of England, who had also perfected the art of condescension. It was this ability to interact with those socially below oneself in a manner that showed them respect even though they knew they were socially inferior that is on display with his listening to their grievances.¹³²

At the same time, his allowing them to have a night of drunkenness both made them easier to return to the ship, and allowed them to blow off steam that would potentially otherwise have gone into a mutiny. Because of this he not only prevented the violence against his authority that came with their permanent desertion but also the literal violence of a mutiny that could come from sailors not given the ability to leave a confining ship situation. The alternative can be seen in the case of the *Sharon* with Captain Norris dying in the middle of the Pacific at the hands of mutinying crewmembers. Looking beyond the idea that they were simple-minded primitives, the most likely reasoning for their killing him was that he had offended or angered them in some manner. Unable to get away from him due to being in the middle of the ocean the offended parties chose instead to correct the issue in the only means left to them. They did not share a

¹³² Druett, *In the Wake of Madness*, 3-5, 29-30, 69-72, 76-77, & 141; Wilson, “December 4, 1839,” & “December 5, 1839,” in *Cruise of the Gipsy*, 15-17; Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*. (Harvard University Press, 1967), xi, 56, 58, & 166-167; Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*, xv-xvii.

culture, or seemingly a language, with the white crew, and thus could not organize non-violent forms of protest such as work stoppage which left only overt and permanent violence. If they had been able to desert, they most likely would not have come back, but they also most likely would not have killed Norris, leaving only his honor harmed.¹³³

The use of desertion as a means of asserting independence from authority was reflective of populist American political thought. At the most basic level, the United States by 1816 had fought two wars with Great Britain asserting their rights to independence and to be respected. The nation as a whole was founded on the idea that a nation of people could actively remove themselves from under the authority of someone who they felt was not listening to their desires and concerns. A whaling ship was but a nation in miniature, with the officers serving as the government, and the seamen as the citizens and/or states that comprised the nation. Sailors opting to remove themselves from under officers that they felt were abusive, or otherwise not living up to their end of the social bargain that they engaged in during employment, was merely the Declaration of Independence on a reduced scale. Further, a keystone of Jeffersonian Republicanism was the idea that all men had the right to the liberty of earning their money by doing whatever job they chose to do. For whalers, this distinctly included the right to unrestricted movement including desertion.¹³⁴

At its heart whaling was an industry filled with violence. The very products that it produced required whalers to engage in a violent hunt that ended with the largest mammal on earth spewing blood from its blowhole, before the body was dragged back to the whaleship to be rendered into oil, and stripped for any other useable parts. As a successful voyage required

¹³³ Wilson, "December 4, 1839," in *Cruise of the Gipsy*, 15-16; Druett, *In the Wake of Madness*, 3-5 & 76-77.

¹³⁴ Paul A. Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront: American Maritime Culture in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 13.

repeated iterations of this hunt, whalers tended to insulate themselves from the impact of these repeated killings by reducing the whales to their value in oil. Further, the hunt did not only involve violence on the part of the hunters, but also served to expose those would-be killers to the dangers of an enraged whale turning its attention onto them, and the fickle and random threats of nature itself. Whalers were also increasingly threatened with violence from their officers, in the form of harsh punishment, the result of declining ability among those who signed on, combined with officers' opinion that harsher treatment would serve to motivate those sailors, or at least produce the most work out of them. Additionally, the long isolation in the middle of the Pacific, the confined space of the whaleship, boredom, and financial concerns provided plenty of tinder for eruptions of violence amongst the crew. While mutinies are the most iconic form of crew violence, they were rare, with desertion being the much more likely path forward for disgruntled sailors. This second form of violence was subtle, tending to strike not at the body but the intangible honor/respect of the ship's officers, but also was reflective of how American political culture asserted itself. While there was more to whaling than its violence, violence was deeply woven into its culture, and how whalers saw the world.

Conclusion

“On the second day, a sail drew near, nearer, and picked me up at last. It was the devious-cruising *Rachel*, that in her retracing search after her missing children, only found another orphan.”¹³⁵

In 1925 the *John R. Manta* set sail from New Bedford on a three-and-a-half-month whaling voyage to the Hatteras grounds off the coast of North Carolina. Returning with only 300 barrels (drawn from roughly thirty whales) this dismal voyage marked the ending of the New Bedford whaling trade—a victim of the dual threats of the petroleum age, and a modernized national transportation network that allowed West Coast ports to ship goods across the nation. This voyage had been advertised by its captain as a traditional whaling voyage making use of the traditional weapons of the hunt, an oddity in a time when whalers now were typically armed with bomb lances and guns. That it failed to be much of a success certainly should not be surprising given both the choice of hunting grounds and the antiquated weapons; whatever small portion of the whaling industry remained had moved well beyond the era they attempted to recreate. The American whaling industry would limp on in a minor fashion until the passage of the Marine Mammal Protection Act in 1972, which led to the shuttering of the Del Monte Fishing Company’s Richmond, California, whaling station.¹³⁶ With the closing of the last American whaling station came an end of what a century-and-a-half ago had been an industry that lit the world.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Herman Melville, “Moby Dick or the Whale” in *Moby Dick (Third Norton Critical Edition)*, ed. Hershel Parker (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018) 410.

¹³⁶ The core product of this whaling station, which opened in the 1950s, was Moby Dick 100 Percent Whale Meat, pet food that boasted of the nutritional quality of their fresh red whale meat. The cans for this product featured a smiling white whale blowing a billow of water out of its blowhole.

¹³⁷ William Henry Tripp, *There Goes Flukes: The Story of New Bedford’s Last Whaler, being the narrative of the voyage of schooner John R. Manta on Hatteras Grounds, 1925, and whalemens true yarns of adventures in old deep-sea whaling days* (New Bedford, Massachusetts: Reynolds, 1938), 2-4.

The importance of the American whaling industry from the late eighteenth century through the mid-nineteenth century cannot be overstated due to the sheer economic force that it represented within and for the nation. The men who went out onto the open seas, oftentimes for years on end, were in many ways what the cowboy would come to represent for Americans in the latter part of the nineteenth century: semi-mythical figures who went out into an untamed frontier to wrangle with the multiplicity of dangers that existed there. Rather than settling land or herding cows, the product of their efforts was the oils and baleen (whalebone) that allowed society to continue functioning and luxuries such as perfume and whalebone corsets to continue to be produced. Yet these men were not just characters in pulp books and legend, they were living individuals who resided in long-term if temporary communities in the form of their whaleships. These floating communities were themselves complex weavings of numerous sub-communities the three largest of which were the political community, the multicultural community, and the community of violence.

The American whalers were a people whose semi-independent society inherently echoed Jeffersonian Republicanism, yet also in fundamental aspects deviated from the classical definition of republicanism, embracing the rising idea of liberal financial capitalism. When it came to the politics of the young American nation, and its struggles to establish its free trade, particularly with the established nations of Europe, the American whaling industry often found itself involved. From the economic undercutting of British subsidized oil and overt attempts to lure American whalers into the British fleet to French laws closing their ports to all foreign oils—in the process severely harming American whalers who needed those ports to make much, if any, profit—the American whaler was involved in spirit, if not in person. Beyond this, when war threatened between the European powers (namely Great Britain and France) they could find

themselves becoming unwilling victims of embargo and impressment, their American identity too weak at that time to protect them fully. Those impressments would eventually help cause the War of 1812 with the United States seeking to once more assert its independence from, and neutrality between, the European powers. American whalers would also help to establish the United States as a power in the international scientific and imperialistic community, through their contribution of sailors and knowledge to the Pacific Expeditions. These voyages would allow the United States to not only assert its dominance over physical territory outside of its continental borders but its ability to engage in the scientific exploration that often-marked world powers of that time. Internally, whalers were also important in guiding the political discourse when it came to government expenditure on internal improvements, and which industries should be promoted at the expense of others.¹³⁸

¹³⁸ Lance Banning, "Jeffersonian Ideology Revisited: Liberal and Classical Ideas in the New Republic" *The William and Mary Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (January 1986): 5; Banning, *The Jeffersonian Persuasion*, 68, 154, & 205; Philbrick, *The Heart of the Sea*, 20; Fisheries. Communicated to the House of Representatives, February 4, 1791, American State Papers: Commerce and Navigation 1:10; Fisheries. Communicated to the House of Representatives, February 4, 1791, American State Papers: Commerce and Navigation 1:11; Letter of Gouverneur Morris, Esq. to George Washington, London, September 18, 1790. American State Papers: Foreign Relations 1:127; The Honorable D. Sheffey (Member of Congress from Virginia) to His Constituents, February 1813, in *Circular Letters of Congressmen to Their Constituents 1789-1829*, Vol. II, ed. Noble Cunningham and Dorothy Hagberg Cappel (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 818; Extract of a Letter from William Savage, Esq. Agent at Jamaica, August 21, 1800. American State Papers: Foreign Relations 2:293; Timothy Pickering. Instructions to Oliver Ellsworth, William Richardson Davie, and William VanMurry, Esquires, Envoys Extraordinary and Ministers Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the French Republic, October 22, 1799. American State Papers: Foreign Relations 2:302; Petition from the town of Nantucket to the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States in Congress assembled, January 15th, 1803. American State Papers: Commerce and Navigation 1:526-527; Rainer F. Buschmann, Edward R. Slack, and James B. Tueller. *Navigating the Spanish Lake: The Pacific in the Iberian World, 1521-1898* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2014), 11; David Iglar, *The Great Ocean: Pacific Worlds from Captain Cook to the Gold Rush* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 134; Harry Liebersohn, *The Travelers' World: Europe to the Pacific* (London; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 11; Survey of the Harbor of Nantucket. Communicated to the House of Representatives, February 16, 1803, American State Papers: Commerce and Navigation 1:526; Memorial of the Tallow Chandlers and Soap Boilers, in the city of Boston, and vicinity, Against duty on Imported Tallow and For Drawback on Candles, January 12, 1824. American State Papers Finance 4:390-391.; Memorial of the Tallow Chandlers and Soap Boilers, in the city of New York, Against Duty on Imported Tallow, January 12, 1824. American State Papers Finance 4:391-392.

While the American whaling industry was based out of the states of New England, with a particular emphasis on Massachusetts, the membership of this community was neither exclusively New Englander nor white. From the start, white New Englanders were reliant on Native Americans, first to show them how to whale, and then when their voyages took them away from shore to come and work their ships alongside them. These New England whites largely shared common communal touchstones, such as religion, politics, and industry, which they contributed to the whaleship's culture. At the same time the Natives, whose tribes had whaled for centuries if not millennia, brought their own contributions, even after they had been theoretically Christianized. As the industry grew, whites from other parts of the growing nation began to also join the industry bringing their own cultures to the whaleship. Along with them came Free Blacks, Europeans—including the Azoreans and Cape Verdeans—and Pacific Islanders, each of whose cultural identities also blended into the ever-developing whaleship culture. The industry, a theoretical total meritocracy, offered non-whites opportunities for advancement and achievement not often readily available to them on land, but also demonstrated that skill was still not a total replacement for connection. While they could advance into the ranks of mate, more often than not they would never achieve a captaincy, the result of a persistent, if invisible, color line within the industry that was guided by the racial biases of the American mainland.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ Nancy Shoemaker, *Native American Whalers and the World: Indigenous Encounters and the Contingency of Race* (University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 4, 6, 18, and 21-22; Crew List for the voyage of the *Clay* to the Pacific Ocean, departing 1827-04-04, in the "Salem Crew Lists, 1799-1879 Database", mysticseaport.org Mystic Seaport Museum, Collections, and Research. <https://research.mysticseaport.org/databases/crew-lists-salem/>; Kenneth Lockridge, *A New England Town: The First Hundred Years* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1985), 5-6, 24, & 97-103.; Nathaniel Philbrick, *In the Heart of the Sea: The Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex* (Viking Penguin Press, 2000), 21; Robert Sullivan, *A Whale Hunt* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2000), 13, 15, 23, & 47.; Nancy Shoemaker, *Living with Whales: Documents and Oral Histories of Native New England Whaling History* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014), 2, 4, & 21; Fisheries. Communicated to the House of Representatives, February 4, 1791, American State Papers: Commerce and Navigation 1: 10-11.; Philbrick, *In the Heart of the Sea*, 20, 22; Crew List for the voyage of the *Bengal* to the Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific Oceans on a

The whaling industry as a whole was built on repeated acts of violence in the form of the killing and rendering down of whales for the oil trapped in their blubber, and whalers isolated themselves from this violence by looking at whales as oil in need of conversion. Moreover, the whaleship was often a world beset by violence. From the violent interplay between members of the crew—particularly from officers onto crewmen—to violent natural environments that included not only the weather but resistant whales, every day promised multiple instances of potential violence that could largely not be escaped. Even escape from the community of the whaleship often could involve violence—such as mutiny or attacking ships officers, or punishment for attempted mutiny or attempted assault of an officer— with the most violent action quite possibly being the act of desertion which perpetuated violence against a person’s honor rather than their physical being. By rejecting the authority of their ship’s officers these deserters, while doing no physical harm, attacked something that in many ways was more vulnerable, the perceived societal value of those officers, chiefly their future ability to be entrusted with a vessel.¹⁴⁰

Whaling Voyage, departing 1840-07-24, in the “Salem Crew Lists, 1799-1879 Database,” mysticseaport.org Mystic Seaport Museum, Collections, and Research. <https://research.mysticseaport.org/databases/crew-lists-salem/>; Crew List for the voyage of the *Stonington* to the Pacific Ocean departing 1833-08-30, in the “New London Crew Lists, 1803-1878 Database”, mysticseaport.org Mystic Seaport Museum, Collections, and Research. <https://research.mysticseaport.org/databases/crew-lists-new-london/>; “Azorean Whaleman Gallery” New Bedford Whaling Museum, accessed July 13, 2020, <https://www.whalingmuseum.org/explore/exhibitions/current/azorean-whaleman-gallery/>; “Whaling Industry and Portuguese Immigration Centered in New Bedford, Mass.,” Library of Congress Ask A Librarian, last modified July 10, 2010, <https://www.loc.gov/rr/hispanic/portam/bedford.html>; Skip Finley, *Whaling Captains of Color: America's First Meritocracy* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2020); Shoemaker, *Native American Whalers*, 24; Susan Lebo, “Native Hawaiian Whalers in Nantucket, 1820-60,” Nantucket Historical Association, accessed May 20, 2020, <https://nha.org/research/nantucket-history/history-topics/native-hawaiian-whalers-in-nantucket-1820-60/>; “Polynesian/Hawaiians,” New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park Massachusetts, last updated February 1, 2019, <https://www.nps.gov/nebe/learn/historyculture/polynesian-hawaiians.htm>.

¹⁴⁰ Philbrick, *In the Heart of the Sea*, 62-65; Jim Murphy, *Gone A-Whaling: The Lure of the Sea and the Hunt for the Great Whale* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2004), 85-93, & 97-99; John Wilson, “April 10, 1842” in *The Cruise of the Gipsy: The Journal of John Wilson, Surgeon on a Whaling Voyage to the Pacific Ocean, 1839-1843*. ed. Honore Forster, (Fairfield, Washington. Ye Galleon Press, 1991), 281; Marcus Buford Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (New York; Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1987), 11-13; John T. Barstow, “June 1, 1858,” *Log of the William Lee, September 1856-May 1860*, Log 1028, Manuscripts Collection, G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic

While the end of the American whaling industry meant an end to the existence of these communities, their legacy still lingers in the places they once touched in the names of sports teams¹⁴¹, restaurants¹⁴², and even major national brands¹⁴³. In that way, the ghosts of those men can be said to linger in the communities that they once knew, and even today whaling is an occasional topic of conversation primarily in regards to illegal operations such as those covered in the film *Blackfish*. Thus, coming to understand the worlds that they spent so much time in—the whaleships— can only help to better educate us on a bygone but never quite forgotten aspect of our national history. By today's standards, it was a bloody, brutal, and unnecessary waste, but in their time, they illuminated the world.

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¹⁴¹ These include the New England (Boston) Whalers of the World Hockey Association, who then became the Hartford Whalers of the National Hockey League, the Danbury Whalers of the Federal Hockey League, and the current Connecticut Whalers of the National Women’s Hockey League. Also, the New Bedford Whalers who between 1914 and 1932 played in the Southern New England Soccer League, the American Soccer League, the International Soccer League, and the Eastern Soccer League, and the Sag Harbor Whalers of the Hamptons Collegiate Baseball League.

¹⁴² Probably the most notable on a national level would be the Moby Dick Brewing Company of New Bedford which draws not only on the town's history as a major whaling port but on the enduring legacy of Melville's novel.

¹⁴³ Folger’s Coffee and Macy’s Department Store were both founded by residents of Nantucket whose families were heavily invested and involved in the whaling industry. Similarly, the boat manufacturer Boston Whaler took its name from the history of whaling in the state of Massachusetts where they originally were manufactured.

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ABSTRACT
MULTIFACTED FACTORIES OF DEATH
THE THREE COMMUNITIES OF THE AMERICAN WHALESHIP

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By the 1840s the American Whaling industry in the Pacific had reached its zenith with hundreds of ships crewed by thousands of men plying the waters from the Arctic to the Antarctic seeking out whales to kill and turn into precious barrels of whale oil. These floating factories of death were both a major and crucial industry in the early American nation as the oil they produced not only lit the world but greased the gears of industry, and filled the bottles of the finest perfumes. Further, the bones of the leviathans that they killed were clamored for in the worlds of art and fashion.

The men who went to do this most dirty of deeds, the original oil industry, have acquired a mythos about them drawn heavily from popular imagination, and the book *Moby Dick* which much like its titular antagonist looms ever present. However, to truly begin to understand these men fully for who they really were, the community of the whaleship itself has to be understood, as that was where they spent a disproportionate amount of their time. This thesis argues that the whaleship can be understood as three distinct types of community. First, they were communities that were a part of, and apart from, the larger veins of society and politics, particularly in the early decades of the American nation. Second, the whaling ship was a multiracial and multicultural community with members drawn from across the globe. Finally, the whaling ship contained a widespread and perpetual culture of violence that permeated nearly every aspect of day to day life.