

In the heart of the sea



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Nicole Hart HIST 2300- Christopher Trobridge Writing Assignment One

October 16, 2010 " In the Heart of the Sea: The Tragedy of the Whale ship Essex" In order to understand the ramifications of an event such as the sinking of the Essex one needs too understand the community that produces the crew. Nantucket was an island community much more than the literal sense of word. The islanders of Nantucket saw themselves differently than the rest of the world. They learned the skills of whaling from the original Wampanoag tribe. They were Quakers with a stoic sense of standards and community.

The whale men from Nantucket saw themselves as superior to most other sailors of that time period. Hardship and perseverance were virtues held by the whale men and the women. The women ran the town while the whale men were at sea for years at a time. This type of work ethic and fortitude, and the worlds desire for oil, combined to make " the village of Nantucket one of the richest towns in America. " " In the Heart of the Sea" It also created a close-knit community with a few very successful and influential families that married with each other maintaining a strong central hierarchy.

The sinking of the Essex directly affected the community of Nantucket but it was also far reaching to the rest of the country. America was growing as a Nation and its consumption of oil was expanding. The events of the Essex were not only interesting to sailors of the world but also to the mainlanders that consumed the oil. America in the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century were considered "...a consumer revolution. " " Of the People" No one knew this fact better than the owners of the whale ships. They understood that whale oil was a commodity to be sold.

In order to harvest it at a profit they had to balance their expenses. Every mate on a whale ship received a fraction of the profit that the whale ship would return with the oil it found. The more responsibility a sailor had on a whale ship, the larger his cut. Every expense, food, gear, clothing, water had to be factored in of doing business. For example the captain received the largest share, due to him having the most responsibility, while Thomas Nickerson's share was the experience he received at a young age on a whale ship plus the room and board that he would receive for two to three years.

A situation that occurred early in their journey was a foreboding of things to come. Weeks into their journey the Essex experienced a " Knockdown", a knockdown is a severe weather event that led to damage of the Essex. Captain Pollard was slow to respond to the weather issue at hand. The result was damage to half of their whaleboats that they used to harpoon whales. After the damage was done Pollard felt it would be best to return to Nantucket to replenish the ship with a new compliment of whaleboats.

First mate Owen Chase convinced the Captain to proceed on with the whale boats they had with hope of getting more whaleboats of the coast of Africa. This dynamic exposed the type of sailor Captain Pollard was and the type of sailor first mate Chase was. Captain Pollard was proving to be " a Captain that had the skills of a first mate and first mate Owen was showing to have the skills of a Captain. " " In the Heart of the Sea. " These two personalities would continue to show themselves later in their journey after the Essex had sunk. When the Essex was rammed and destroyed by the sperm whale, the crews Nantucket heritage served them well.

The officers of the Essex were able to maintain order and stifle any panic by the crewmen. They devised a strategy that first mate Chase had championed. Once again Captain Pollard's initial plan was shelved for first mate Chase's plan. The remaining twenty-five crew members of the Essex were split into three twenty-five foot whaling boats. Captain Pollard, First mate Chase, and Second officer Hendrix were in charge of the three boats. Even in this situation, a strong sense of the Nantucket community was resident in the division of each boat.

The majority of the Nantucketers ended up in Captain Pollard's boat. A few of the remaining Nantucketers ended up in First mate Chase's boat and the majority of African American sailors ended up in second mate Hendrix's boat. First mate Owen Chase proved to be a relentless advocate for hope. Thomas Nickerson saw another side of First mate Chase when their journey first began by seeing how curt Chase was to the crew. On the island of Nantucket Owen Chase was a gentleman but at sea Chase took a role of being very demanding and wanting things done correctly.

After the sinking of the Essex the crewmembers were struggling with the situation they were in and Chase changed his method of handling of the crew. When Chase saw the crew was losing spirit he showed a more "maternal" side. This change in attitude was critical in the survival of the crewmembers that made it. The events that led to the cannibalism of crewmembers of the Essex were presented differently to Captain Pollard's boat and first mate Chase's boat. Captain Pollard's and Hendrix boat became separated from Chase's boat.

The African American crewmembers having a low body fat content and a mineral deficient diet became prone to death before the Nantucket crewmembers. As the African American crewmembers died the living crewmembers consumed them. When there only living crew members left on Pollards boat they resorted to drawing lots to see who would give up their life as food and who would kill that sailor. On first mate Chase's boat one of the sailors passes and the elect to consume his body. It appears that cannibalism was a common event that occurred in these situations.

To this day human beings get presented with this dilemma, such as the plane crash in the Andes. As for me I would rather chose death than the consuming of my mates. Spending months at a time with these men I would feel as though I was eating a family member and would rather wait for death than eat a fellow mate. Although I would have the pressure of supporting my family and wanting to return home, eating a human being I believe would be a lot easier said then done. In the grief that Captain Pollard experienced having to eat his nephew then facing his Aunt would be something I don't think I could endure or ever live with.

For Nantucket and the men involved in whale hunting it is more than just a hunt. It was a way of life, a way of survival, and the entire focus of a town. This novel contained more than just the story of the ramming of the Essex, it was more of a story of the hardships faced, the dedication that comes with the job of whaling, and the raw emotions of the men involved. This novel proved the importance of whaling in that time period to not only Nantucket but to the entire Nation, and how it foreshadowed how our economy would be today.

Lastly to end with the mission of the Nantucket Quakers "...to maintain a peaceful life on land while raising bloody havoc at sea. " This was their life, their survival and it now is their history. Works Cited James Oakes, Michael McGerr, Jan Ellen Lewis, Nick Cullather, Jeanne Boydston. " Of the People: A history of the United States. " New York: Oxford University Press. Nathaniel Philbrick. " In the heart of the sea: The tragedy of the Whaleship Essex" New York: Penguin Books, 2000.