

swept away

MEME FORMS

dramaturgy packet

speakeasy stage company

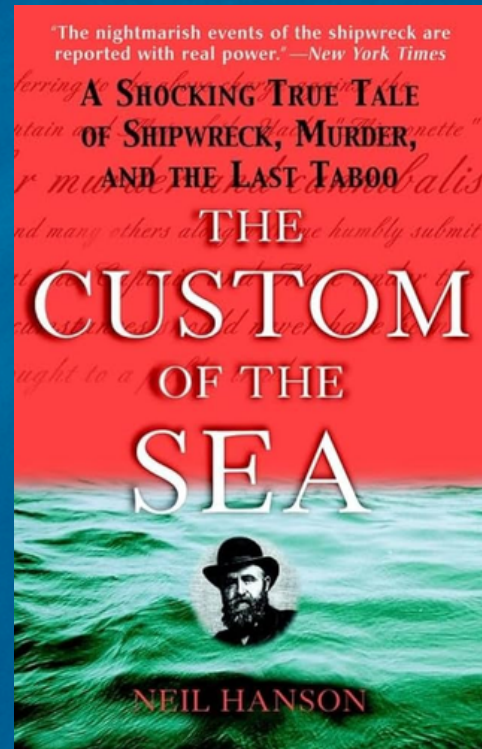
directed by jeremy johnson

april 24 - may 23, 2026

created by

shira helena gitlin

the source material



the custom of the sea neil hanson

On May 19, 1884, the yacht **Mignonette** set sail from Southampton, England, bound for Australia. Halfway through the voyage, the Mignonette was sunk by a massive forty-foot wave. The few survivors were left with with no food or water. Faced with certain death, the captain, Tom Dudley, killed the cabin boy, Richard Parker, and his body was eaten. This practice was commonly known among seamen of the time as the "custom of the sea", but was actively frowned upon by the British government. This nonfiction account follows the ordeal at sea, as well as the subsequent trial, where Dudley confessed to the account and was convicted of murder.

mignonette the avett brothers

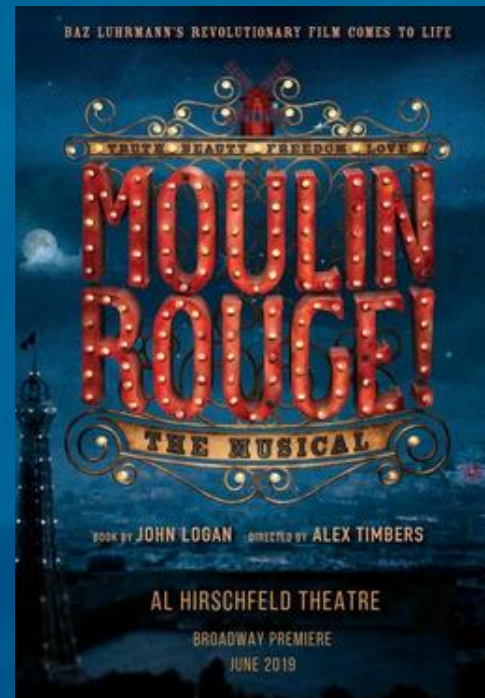
Mignonette (2004) is a folk-rock concept album, loosely based on the book **The Custom of The Sea**. In the early 2000s, Scott Avett read the book after his dad recommended it. Avett says he was moved by Dudley's honesty, even though it meant confessing to a heinous act, "because at the end...although the truth was the right thing, it was going to be a cause of suffering."



the librettist

john logan

John Logan was born in Canada but immigrated to the United States at a young age. He studied theater at Northwestern University and went on to become a prolific playwright, screenwriter, showrunner, and producer. His most famous theatre works include **Moulin Rouge!** (2018), which won 10 Tony Awards, and **Red (2009)**, which earned him both a Tony Award for Best Play and a Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Play. He is well known for his screenwriting credits, which include **Gladiator** (2000), **The Aviator** (2004), **Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street** (2007), **Hugo** (2011), and **Skyfall** (2012). His TV show, **Penny Dreadful** (2014-2016) received critical acclaim and was nominated for multiple awards.



"I knew I needed to bring in other songs to create characters [...] I spent about two months, listening to every Avett Brothers song and making note cards on every single one of them. As I was considering each song, characters started emerging. I didn't want to tell the historical story of the Mignonette - I thought that was too constricting, but I love the idea of four men in a lifeboat against impossible circumstances. And so the songs, characters began to emerge, plot began to emerge."

– John Logan, [The Road to Now](#)

the composers

the avett brothers

The score of *Swept Away* was written by The Avett Brothers. The band is made up of **Scott Avett**, **Seth Avett**, **Bob Crawford**, and **Joe Kwon**. All of the members of the band are multi-instrumentalists. Touring members include Mike Marsh, Tania Elizabeth, and Bonnie Avett-Rini.

Brothers Scott and Seth grew up on a farm in North Carolina, where they took piano, banjo, and guitar lessons. They began performing early, recording original music on cassette tapes. Their first band was called Nemo, but they quickly started performing under the moniker The Avett Brothers. Their music took influence from folk, country, bluegrass, rock, and even punk music. Bob joined in 2007 and Joe joined officially in 2007.

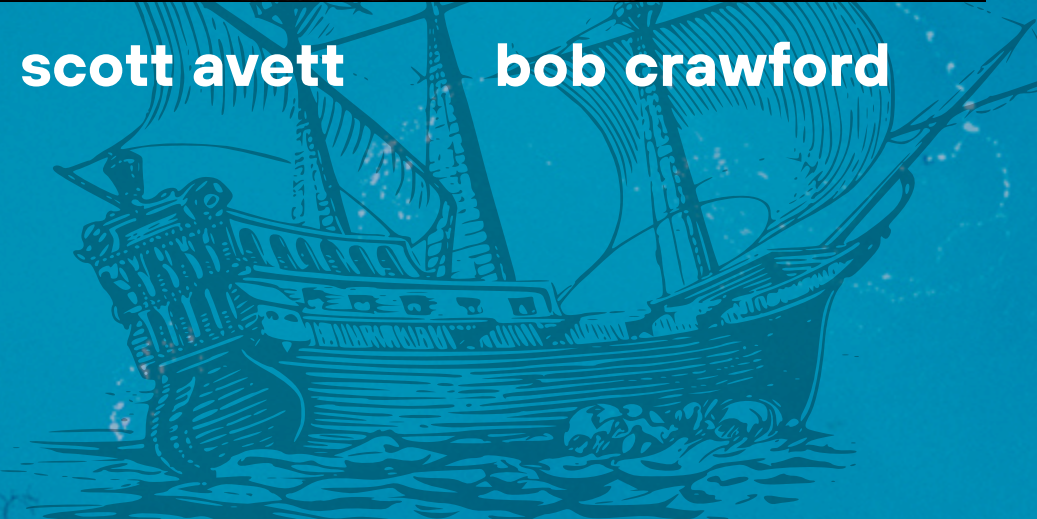
The Avett Brothers are one of the most well-known Americana bands and have won multiple awards at the Americana Music Honors & Awards. They made mainstream waves with their 2009 major label debut, *I and Love and You*, which landed at #16 on the Billboard 200 and garnered critical acclaim. In 2016, the band was inducted into the North Carolina Music Hall of Fame.



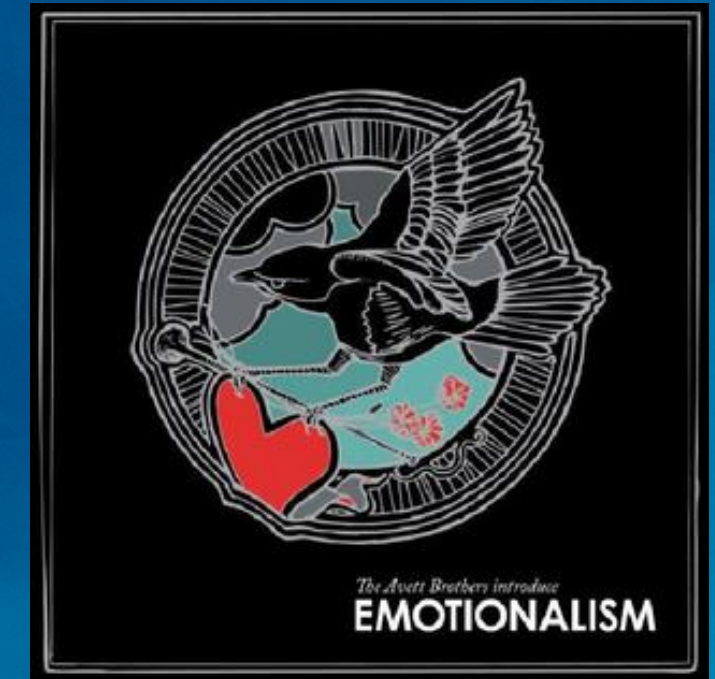
seth avett

scott avett

bob crawford



the songs



Hard Worker
Nothing Short of Thankful
Complainte d'VN Matelot
Mourant
A Gift for Melody Anne
Swept Away.

Ain't No Man
May It Last
Satan Pulls the Strings
No Hard Feelings

Through My Prayers
The Once and Future
Carpenter

Go to Sleep



Murder in the City

Lord Lay Your Hand is the only song in the score that was written specifically for *Swept Away*. It is also the only diegetic song in the musical, meaning that the crew hears the music out loud as part of their fictional world.

the history of swept away

berkeley rep

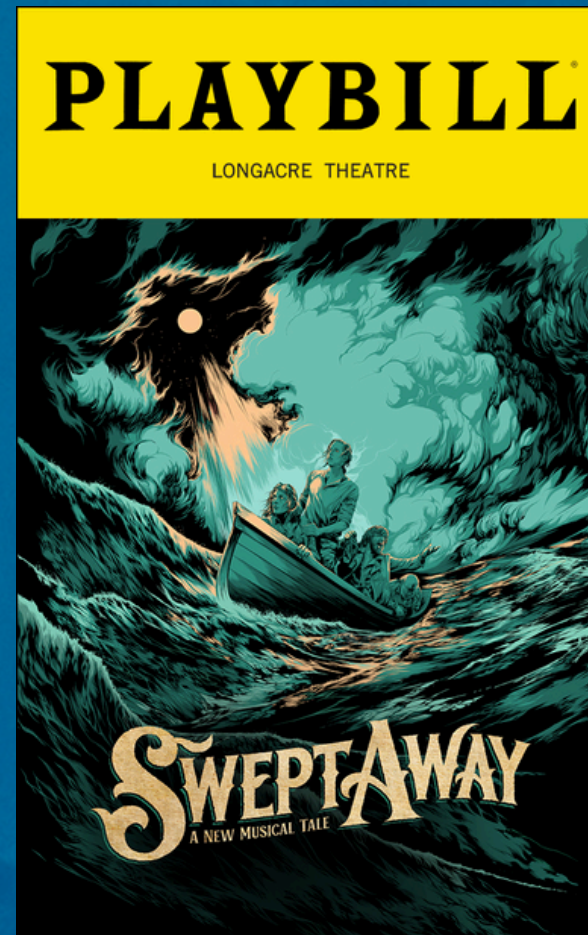
berkly, california
jan 9 - march 13, 2022

arena stage

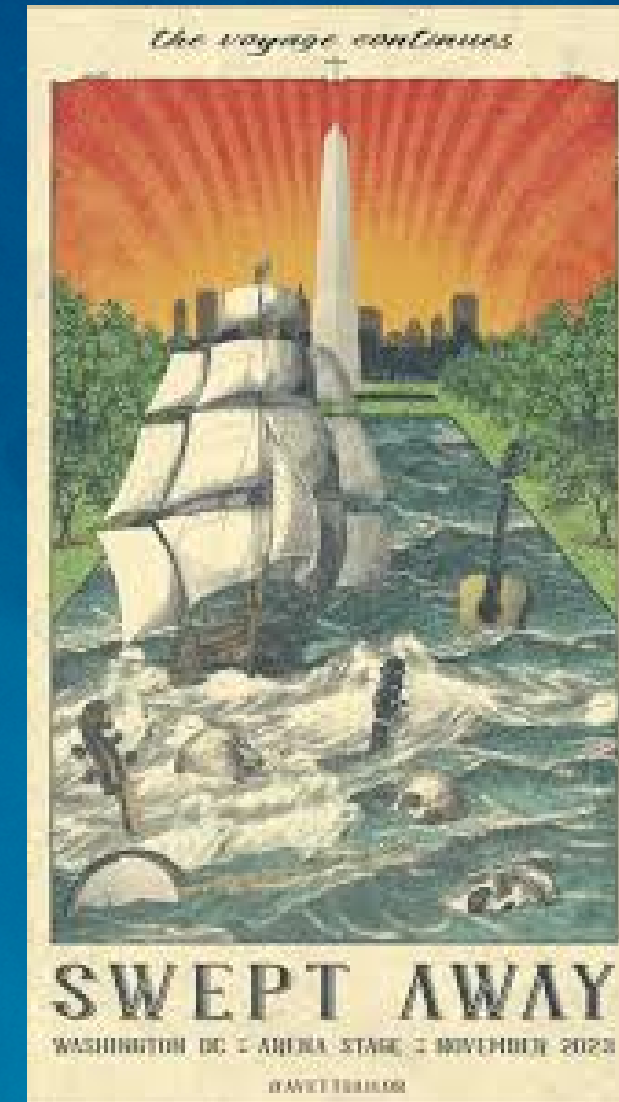
washington dc
nov 9, 2023 - jan 14, 2024

broadway

new york city
oct 29 - nov 19, 2024



broadway



arena stage



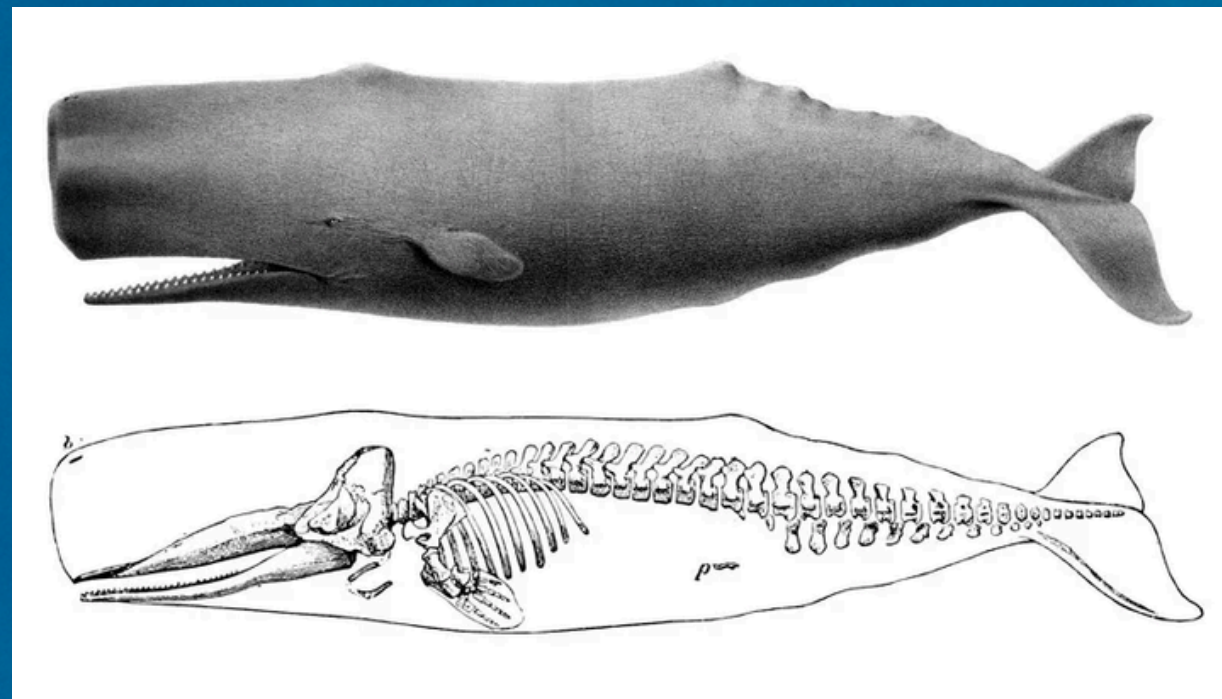
berkeley rep



whaling

what is whaling?

Whaling is the act of hunting whales for their meat and blubber, which can be turned into oil. This oil was essential during the industrial revolution before the widespread use of petroleum. The US whaling industry peaked in the mid 1800's,



Moby Dick was a **Sperm Whale**. During the peak of the American whaling industry, whalers targeted sperm whales, right whales, bowhead whales, and humpback whales

moby dick

herman melville

The public perception of whaling was greatly influenced by *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* (1851). The book centers the maniacal quest of Ahab, captain of the whaling ship Pequod, for vengeance against Moby Dick, the giant white sperm whale that bit off his leg. The book features detailed descriptions of sailing, whale hunting and of extracting whale oil, as well as life aboard a whaling ship.

new bedford, ma | 1888

history of whaling in new bedford

1760's - 1860's

Nantucket had been the main whaling port through the late 1700's, although Boston and Providence were the centers of commerce. In the 1760s, Nantucket's most prominent whaling families moved to New Bedford and started refining their oil whale oil. New Bedford had plenty of room to build ships and was more protected than Nantucket. During the early 1800's New Bedford's population grew from 4000 to 24,000.

Whaling in New Bedford was greatly influenced by the Quakers who lived there. Quakers are known for egalitarianism and community-building, which proved successful tactics when building and running ships.

1880's and beyond...

By the 1880's, petroleum had replaced whale oil as the predominate power source in the US. Ships were retired or utilized for military functions. In New Bedford, Textiles overtook whaling as the main industry.



ship hierarchy



captain

The captain is in charge of the ship. He would manage the voyage, update the agents, deal with discipline, and sometimes even provided medical or religious service

mates

3-4 mates per ship, descending from 1st mate to 4th mate. Each commanded their own whaleboat, and acted as the captain's supervisors for the rest of the crew.

boatsteerers/ harpooneers

3-5 crew members rowed the whaleboat, one threw the harpoon, hoping to latch onto the whale. They enjoyed more liberties than the average crew member.

mechanics

These craftsmen, including blacksmiths, coopers, carpenters, steward, and the cook, ranked higher than the average crewman.

foremast hands/ crewmen

The majority of the crew was made up of foremast hands. They performed daily duties of cleaning the vessel and taking turns on watch. These men rowed the whaleboats.

greenhands/ cabin boys

The newest crew members ranked the lowest. They had a lot to learn and many would abandon ship before the end of the voyage.

[read more](#)



Whaling ships

types of boats

ships

A ship had three masts, each with topmast and topgallant mast and square-rigged on all three masts. Ships often carried four boats, sometimes five and had the largest number of crew (there could be as many as 37 people on board a ship.)

berks

Similar to a ship, a sailing vessel with three masts, square-rigged on the fore and main masts and fore-and-aft rigged on the mizzenmast. Smaller crew.

schooners

The schooner was the smallest of the whalers, usually with two masts and fore-and-aft rigged sails and carrying two or three whaleboats.

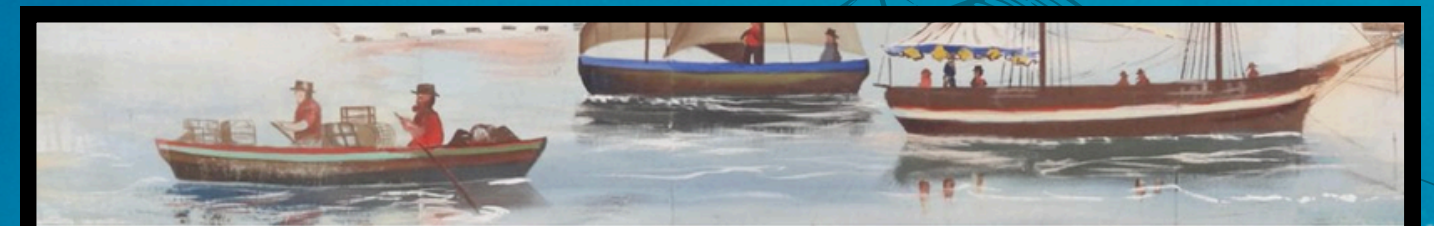
shipboard terms

Bow: (Pronounced like "take a bow") The front end of a boat or ship.

Starboard: The right side of a ship, as the steersman stands facing forward.

Port: The left side of a ship, as the steersman stands facing forward. In earlier times, called "larboard."

Stern: The rear of a ship.



VESSELS AND TERMINOLOGY

New Bedford Whaling Museum
Vessels and Terminology

maritime myths

monsters & myths

superstitions

women on the water

women were considered bad luck at sea (unless they were naked, like the women on the bows of ships).

renaming a ship

bad luck will follow those who rename a ship without permission from poseidon

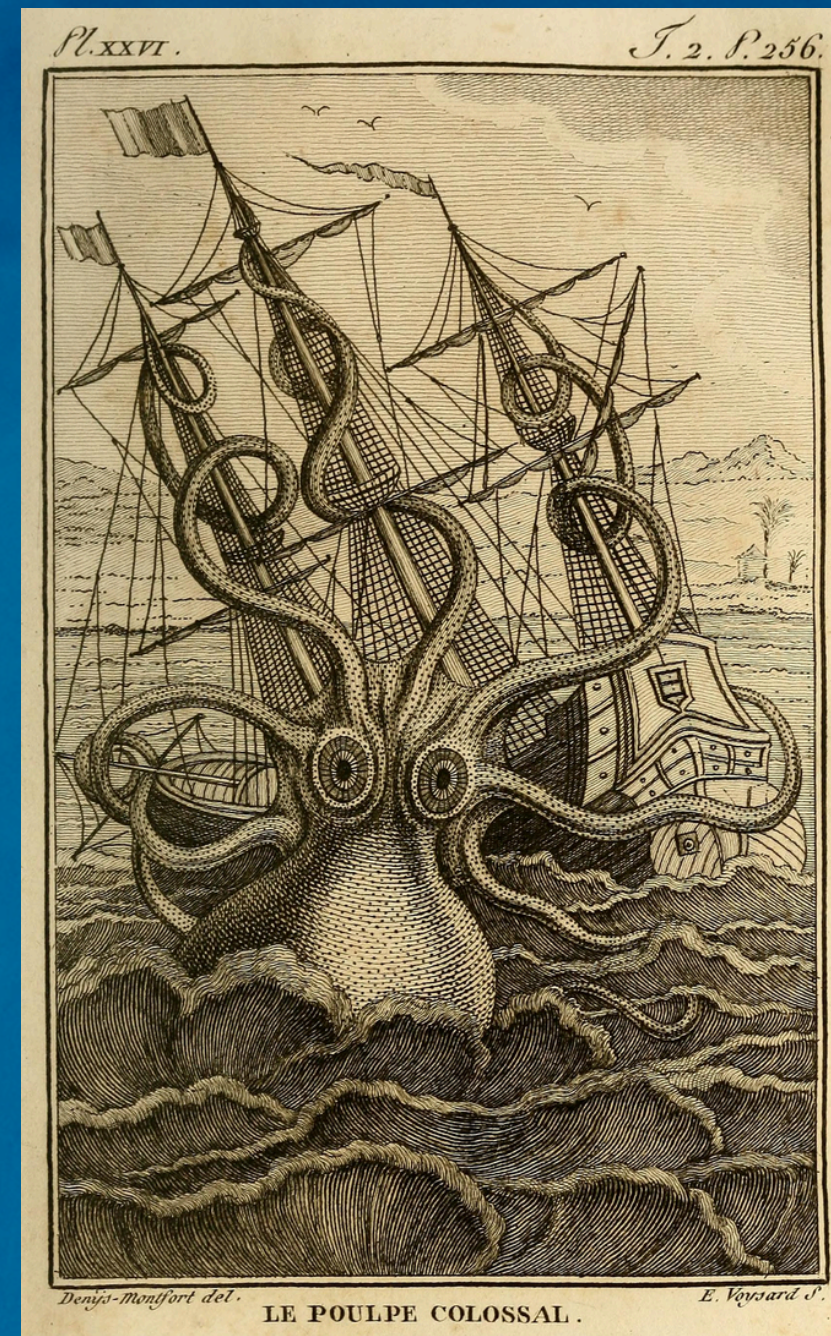
coins under the mast

based on greek tradition of needing a coin to cross the river styx.

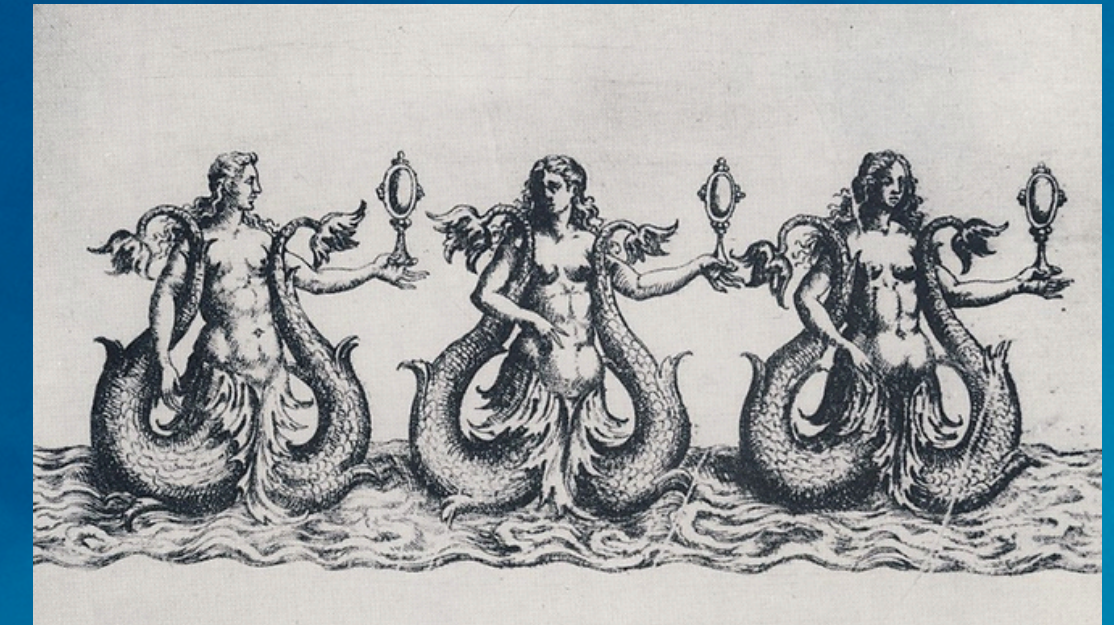
no bananas onboard

bananas were often blamed when something went awry because banana oil acts as a fish repellent

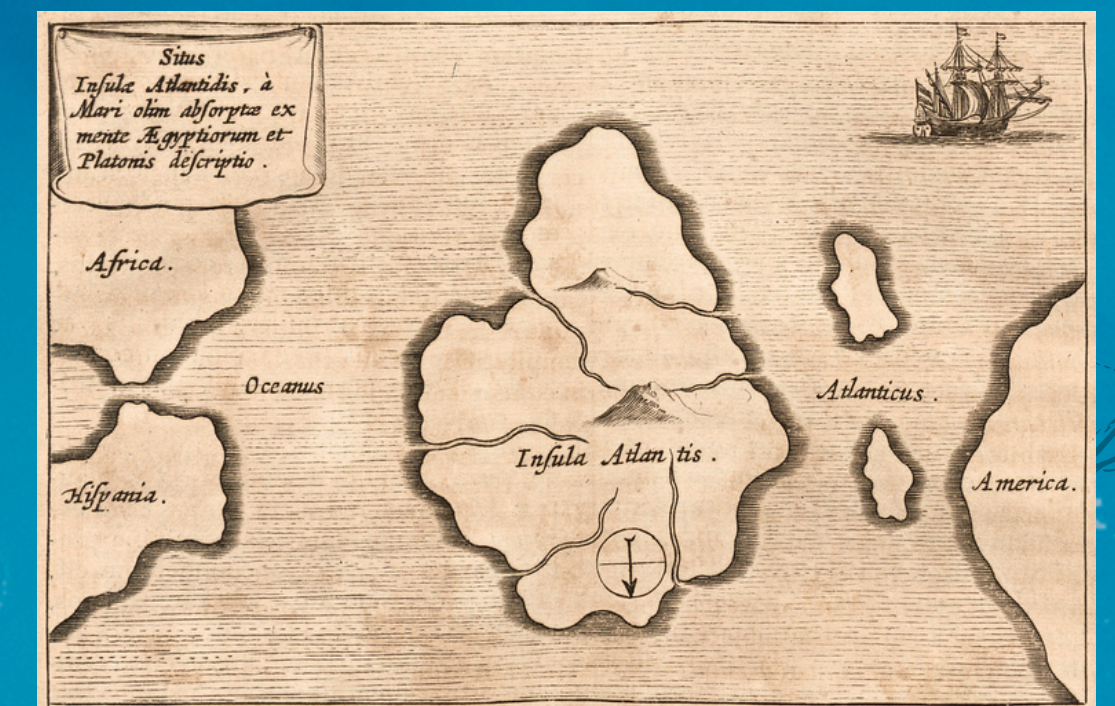
[read more](#)



sea monsters



mermaids



atlantis

death at sea

crossing the veil

- A thin boundary between the living and the dead.
- A metaphor for mystery, hiddenness, and transition.
- A liminal passageway
- If the dead are not properly sent on, they linger.

davey jones locker

A metaphor for the oceanic abyss, the final resting place of drowned sailors and travellers. It is a euphemism for drowning or shipwrecks in which the sailors' and ships' remains are consigned to the depths of the ocean.

the flying dutchman

A legendary ghost ship, allegedly never able to make port and doomed to sail the sea forever.



Davey Jones Locker



The Flying Dutchman (in Spongebob)

definitions

confession

A formal statement **admitting that one is guilty of a crime.**

A statement setting out essential **religious doctrine.**

redemption

The action of **saving or being saved from sin, error, or evil.**

The action of **regaining or gaining possession of something** in exchange for payment, or clearing a debt.

salvation

Preservation or deliverance from harm, ruin, or loss.

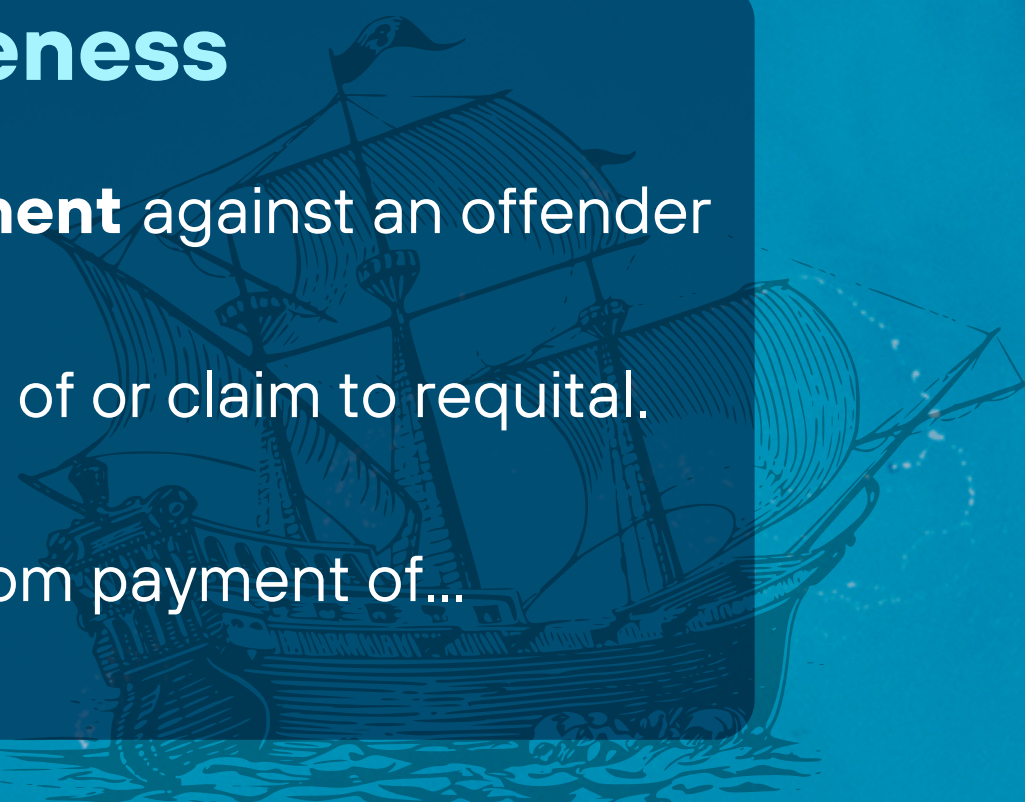
Deliverance from sin and its consequences, believed by Christians to be brought about by faith in Christ.

forgiveness

To **cease to feel resentment** against an offender

To **give up resentment** of or claim to requital.

To **grant relief** from payment of...




glossary & reference guide

charnel house	pg 3	a building or vault in which corpses or bones are piled.
indigent	pg 4	poor; needy.
tubercular	pg 4	relating to or affected with tuberculosis.
veteran of shiloh	pg 4	veterans of the battle of shiloh (April 6–7, 1862) consisted of both blue (union) and grey (confederate) forces.
consumptive	pg 4	affected with a wasting disease, especially pulmonary tuberculosis.
scapegrace	pg 9	a mischievous or wayward person, especially a young person or child; a rascal.
main chance	pg 9	the best chance for personal or financial gain.

glossary & reference guide

gang's aweigh	pg 14	another way of saying “anchor’s away”, meaning “set sail”
hardtack	pg 15	a simple, extremely durable cracker made from flour, water, and salt
sportin' lady	pg 15	a woman who engages in sexual intercourse for money.
blizzard of '82	pg 16	there was no blizzard of 1882, but this reference may be based on the great blizzard of 1888.
planting time	pg 16	generally, spring (after the last frost) and fall (before the first frost)
pagans and idolaters	pg 21	people who don't believe in god or worship idols
pox-ridden port	pg 21	a town suffering from a smallpox outbreak.



glossary & reference guide

**tahiti, java, and
siam**

pg 25

tahiti is the largest island in french polynesia, java is an island in indonesia, and siam is a prior name for thailand.

six bells

pg 25

the ship's bell keeps time at sea, so 6 o'clock.

phosphorus

pg 25

present in plant and animal cells and is vital to all plants for harvesting the sun's energy and converting it into growth and reproduction.

paraffin

pg 27

a white, odorless, tasteless, and colorless soft solid derived from petroleum, coal, or oil shale through fractional distillation.

kerosene

pg 27

a combustible hydrocarbon liquid which is derived from petroleum, another name for paraffin.

scrimshaw

pg 27

a traditional maritime folk art involving intricate engraving and carving on bone, ivory (specifically sperm whale teeth), or shells.

grog shop

pg 31

a term for a bar, pub, or saloon, especially a cheap or disreputable one, where alcoholic drinks (grog, often rum-based) are sold.

glossary & reference guide

**webster's
schoolhouse
dictionary**

pg 31 the first webster's dictionary was edited in the early 19th century by noah webster (1758–1843), the schoolhouse version was shorter.

**chinese
bathhouse**

pg 31 traditional bathhouses that were once widespread in china, as most houses used to be built without running water or sanitation.

squall

pg 36 a sudden, brief, but violent burst of strong winds, often accompanied by heavy precipitation.

threnody

pg 37 a wailing ode, song, hymn or poem of mourning composed or performed as a memorial to a dead person, a lament.

whip-poor-will

pg 38 a medium-sized bird within the nightjar family, caprimulgidae, from north america

the badger game pg 41

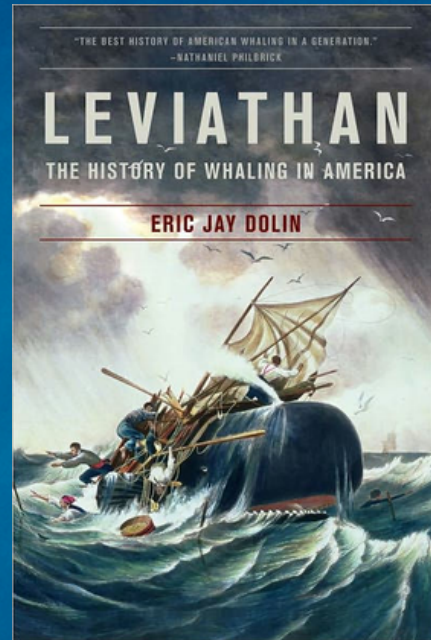
an extortion scheme or confidence trick in which the victims are tricked into compromising positions in order to make them vulnerable to blackmail.

glossary & reference guide

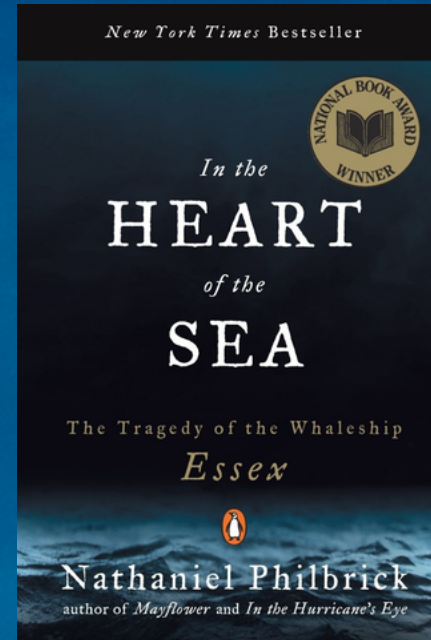
- card sharp** pg 41 a person who uses skill or deception to win at card games, similar to a card shark.
- five points** pg 41 a 19th-century neighborhood in lower manhattan, new york city
- abattoir** pg 45 a slaughterhouse.
- "they stove in the lifeboat"** pg 45 "stove" is often the past tense of "stave," meaning to break inward, smash, or crush
- dipsomaniac** pg 46 a historical term for an alcoholic.
- "dreams of sevens"** pg 48 refers to the lucky straight 7's one might achieve while gambling.



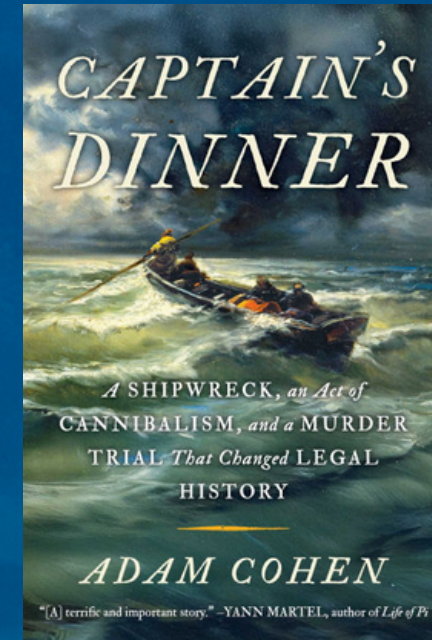
books



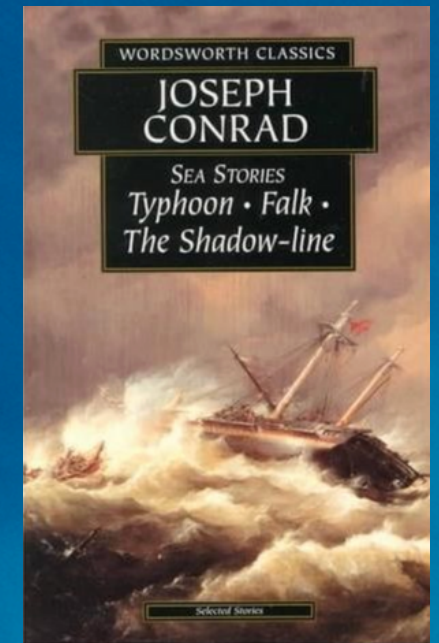
Leviathan: The History of Whaling in America
by Eric Jay Dolin



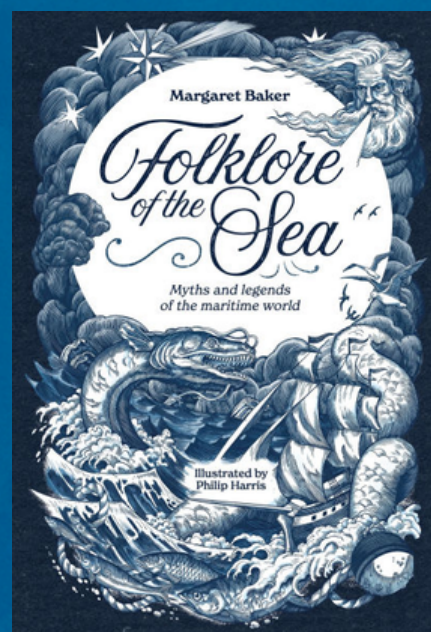
In the Heart of the Sea: The Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex
by Nathaniel Philbrick



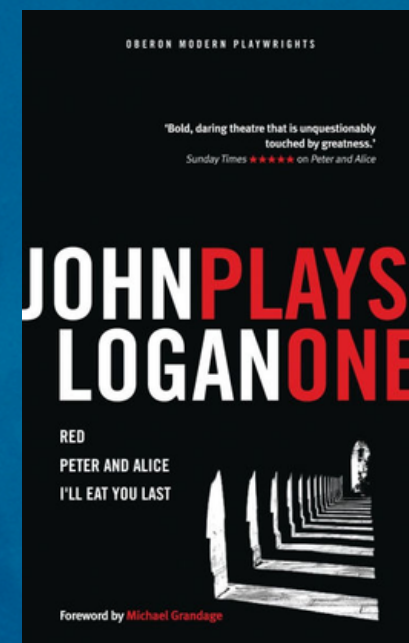
Captain's Dinner: A Shipwreck, An Act of Cannibalism, and a Murder Trial That Changed Legal History
by Adam Cohen



Three Sea Stories
by Joseph Conrad



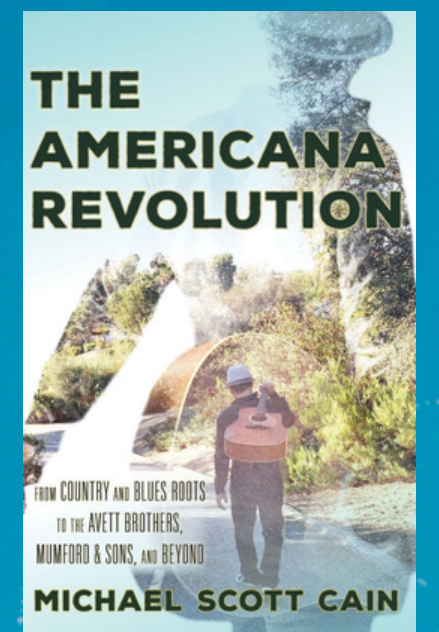
Folklore of the Sea: Myths and Legends of the Maritime World
by Margaret Baker



Plays One (Red, Peter & Alice, I'll Eat You Last)
by John Logan



Theology and the Avett Brothers
by Alex Sosler



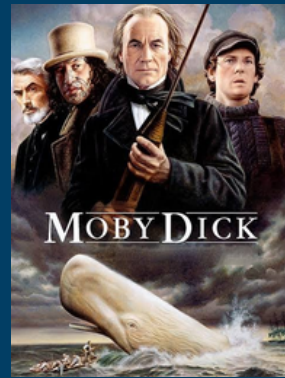
The Americana Revolution: From Country and Blues Roots to the Avett Brothers, Mumford & Sons, and Beyond
by Michael Scott Cain

movies & videos

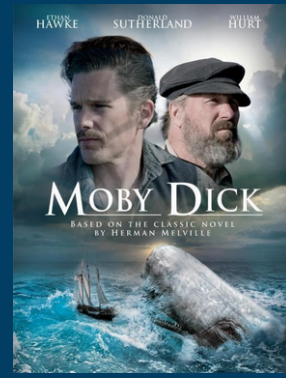
whaling



1956



1998



2011

[Moby Dick](#)



Leviathan

Leviathan is a thrilling, immersive documentary that takes you deep inside the dangerous world of...

amazon.com

[Leviathan \(Documentary\)](#)



In the Heart of the Sea

An inspiration for 'Moby-Dick,' this epic drama tells the story of the sinking of an American whaling ship...

amazon.com

[In the Heart of the Sea](#)

swept away



[May it Last: A Portrait of the Avett Brothers](#)



[On Story: A Conversation with John Logan](#)

other inspiration



Lifeboat

A freighter is sunk by a German U-Boat. Eight survivors and the Nazi U-Boat commander get into ...

amazon.com

[Alfred Hitchcock's Lifeboat](#)



[Robert Eggers' The Lighthouse](#)

JAWS



Jaws

A giant great white shark arrives on the shores of a New England beach resort and wreaks havoc with...

amazon.com

[Steven Spielberg's Jaws](#)

[Francis Ford Coppola's Apocalypse Now](#)



art

Théodore Géricault



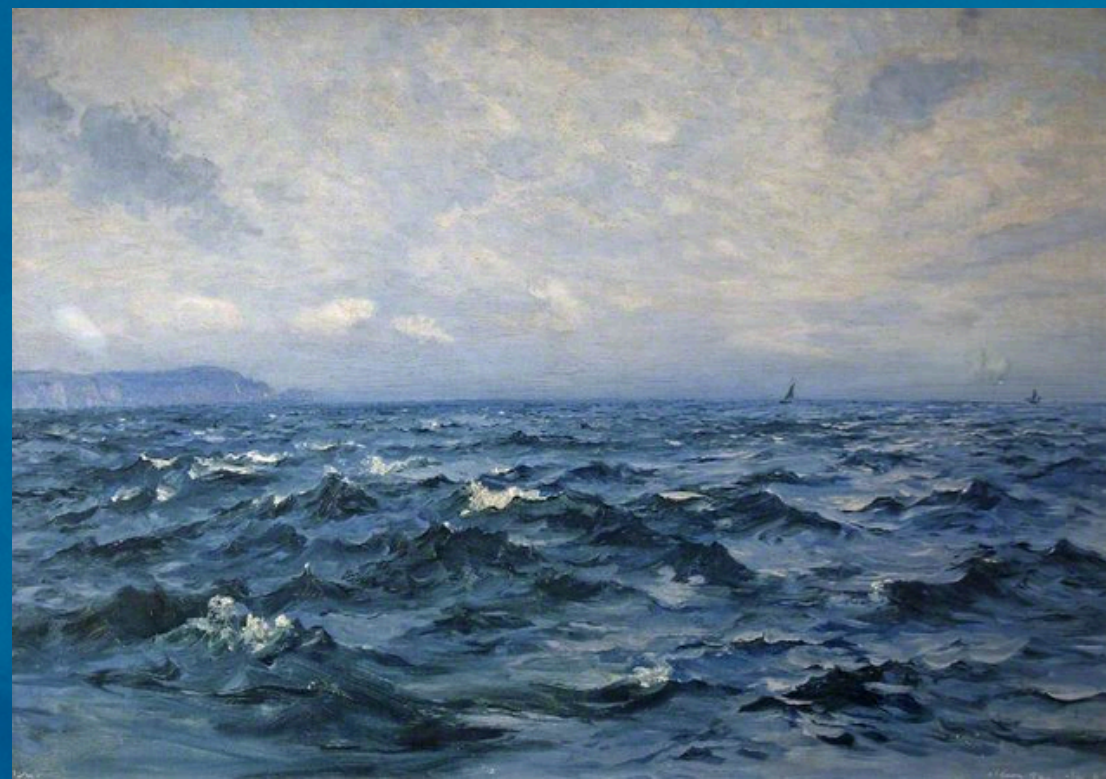
J.M.W Turner



Casper David Friedrich



Winslow Homer



Henry Moore



Ivan Aivazovsky

& more



Everything You Might Want to Know about Whaling

I think whaling is really cool. I can't help it. It's one of those things like guns and war and space colonization which hits the adventurous id. The idea that people used to go out in tiny boats i...

 Matt Lakeman / Jun 1, 2021

[More Information on Whaling](#)

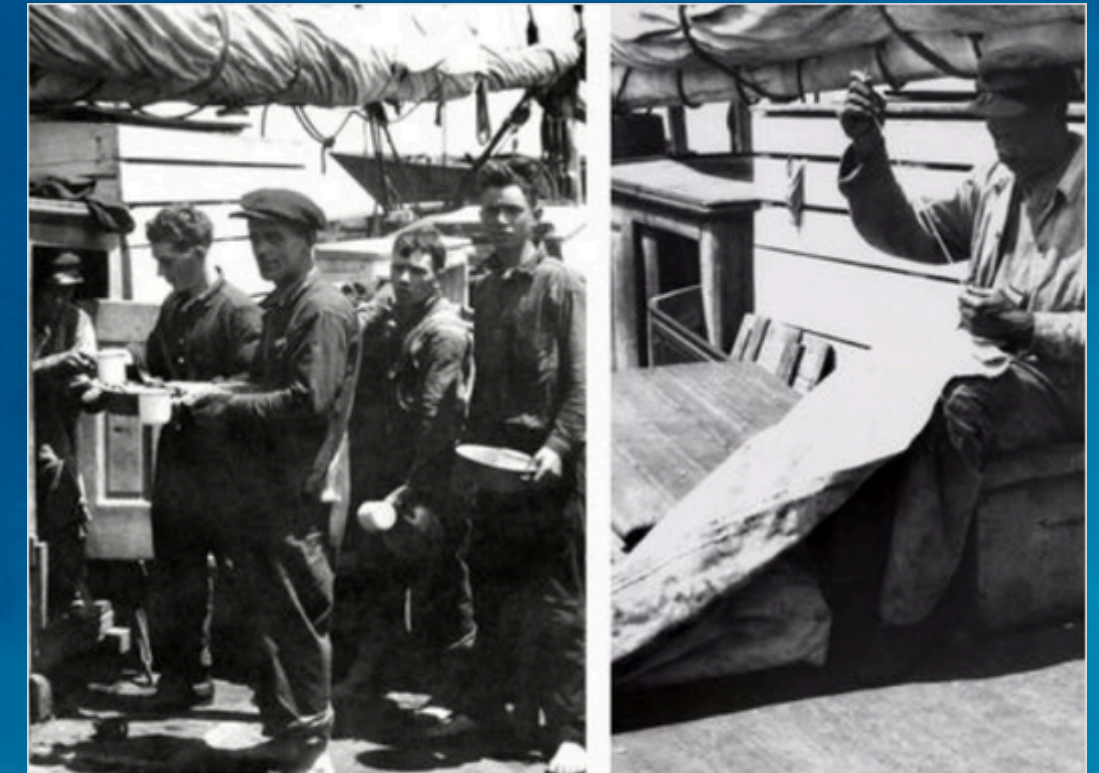


The History of Whaling in America | American Experience

For hundreds of years, whale oil lit up the world and powered industry. Explore a timeline of major events.

 American Experience / Sep 9, 2017

[The History of Whaling in America](#)

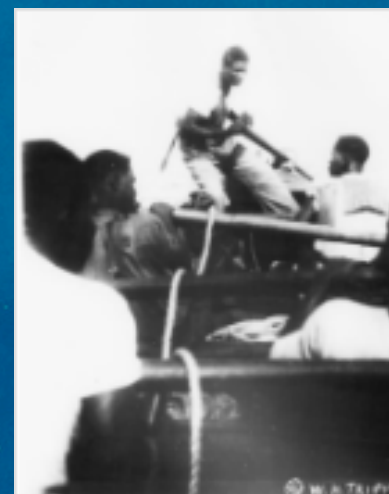


Life onboard a Whaleship - New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park (U.S. National Park Service)

Official websites use .govA .gov website belongs to an official government organization in the United States.

 nps.gov

[Life Onboard a Whaleship](#)



Pay, Ranks, and Roles Aboard — Silas J. Costello

The greenhand is indignant at the agent's suggestion that he'll be paid with the 180th lay. ...

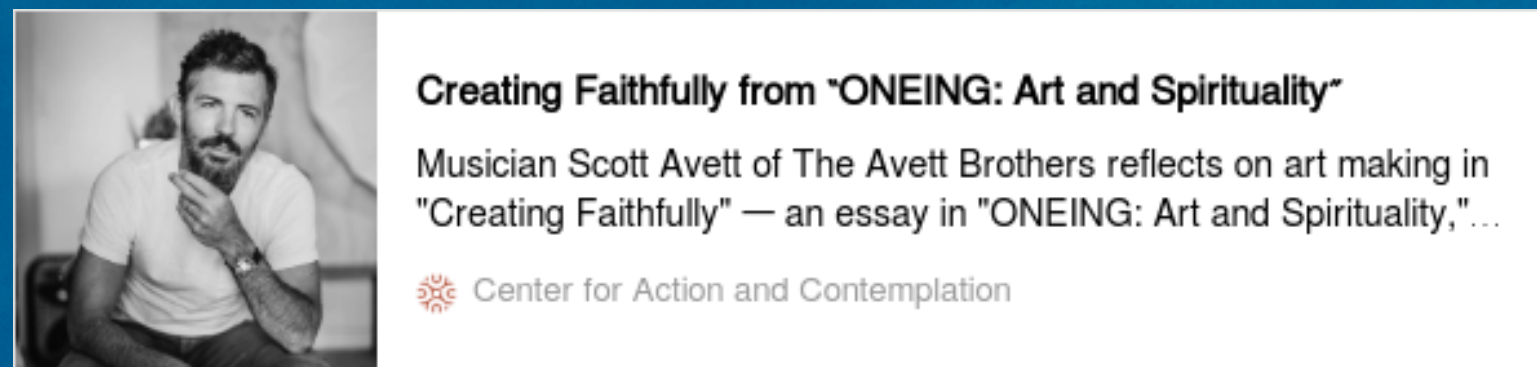
Silas J / Jun 8, 2023

[Ranks & Roles on a Whaleship](#)

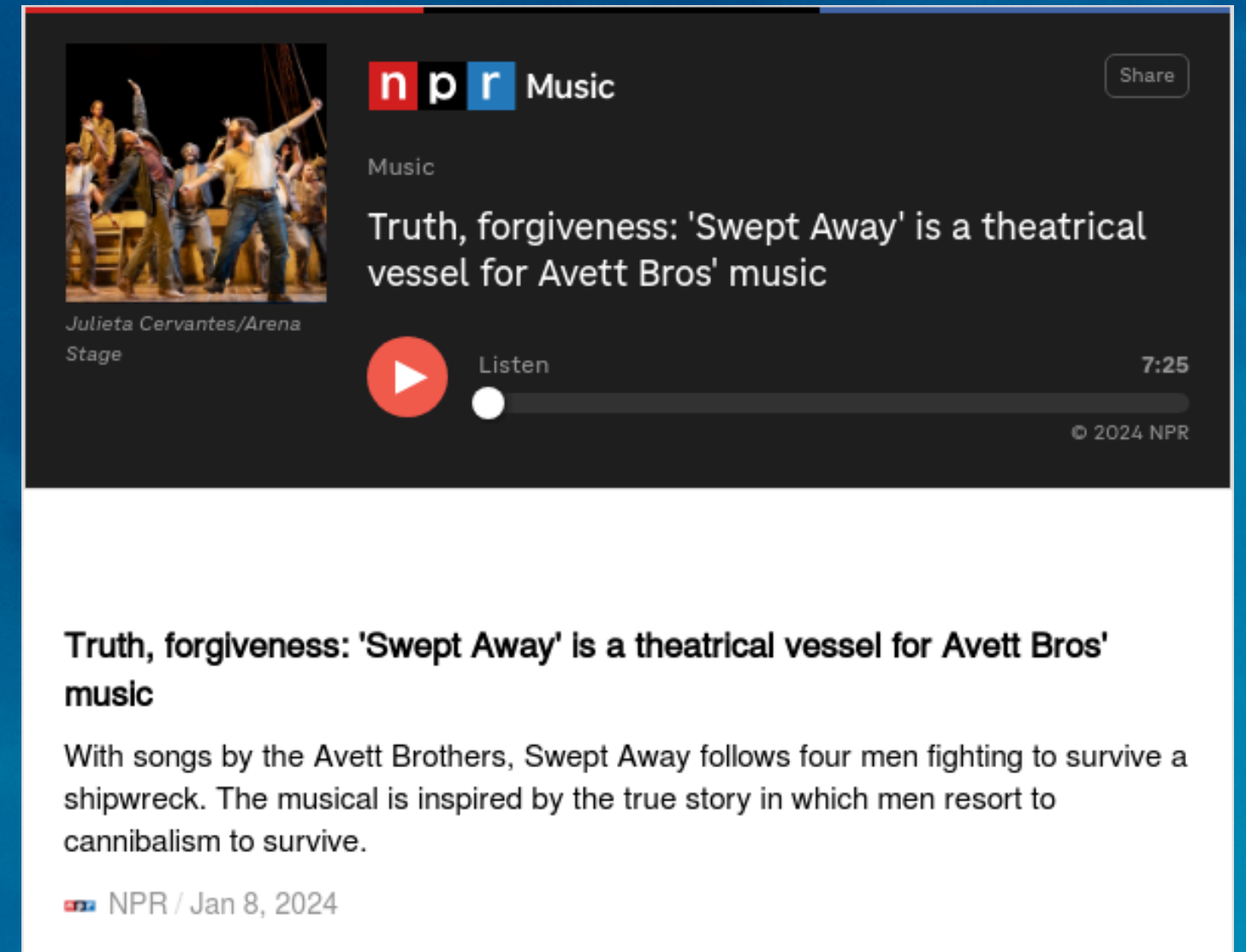
& more



Notes on Male Friendship & Masculinity



Scott Avett on Art & Spirituality



Article on the Arena Stage production of Swept Away



An Interview with John Logan & John Gallagher Jr. about the Berkeley Rep Production of Swept Away

& more

museums



New Bedford Whaling Museum
Bethel & Mariner's Home

New Bedford, Massachusetts




Home of the Seamen's Bethel & Mariner's Home

The New Bedford Port Society has served as a steward of the city's seafaring soul through the preservation of Seamen's Bethel & the Mariners' Home.

New Bedford Port Society /

The Last Wooden Whaleship, Mystic, Connecticut



Charles W. Morgan - The Last Wooden Whaleship in the World!

The Charles W. Morgan is the last of an American whaling fleet and is now is the only wooden whaleship ship still...

Mystic Seaport Museum

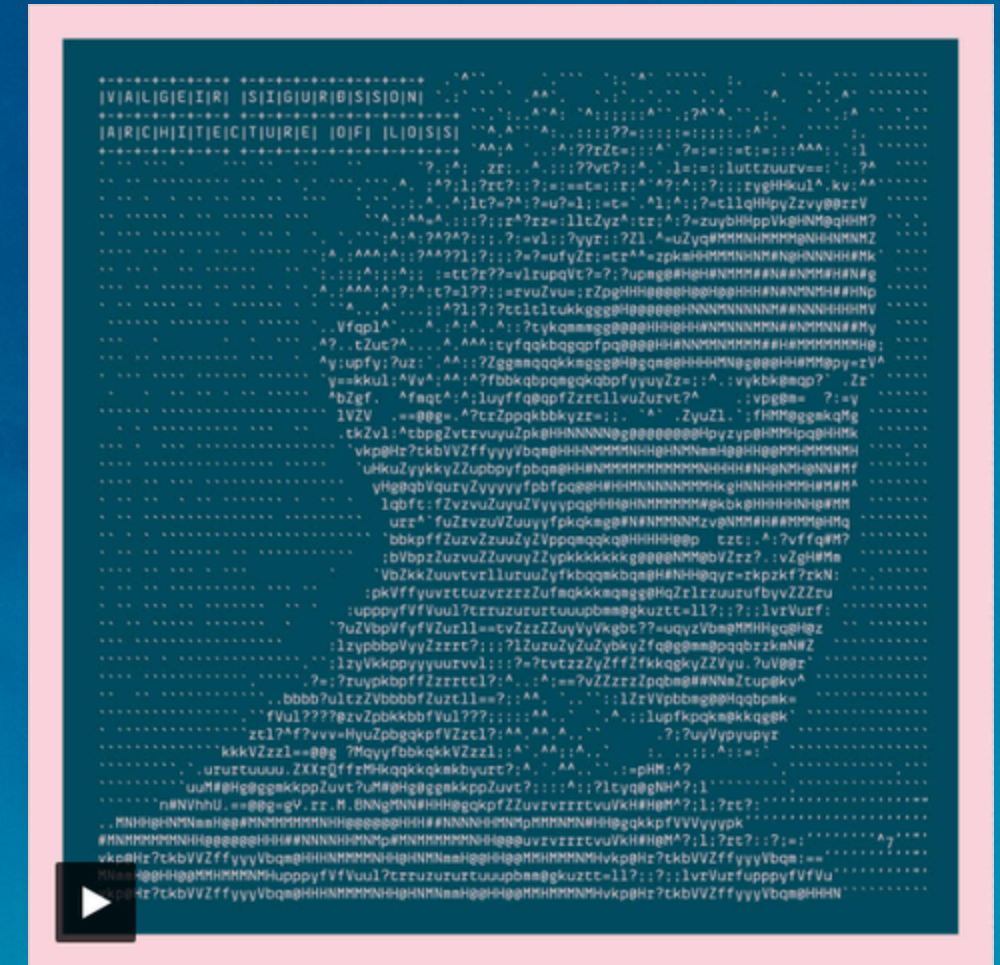


Whaling Museum

Explore eleven unique galleries and exhibit spaces featuring thousands of artifacts and art pertaining to Nantucket life, art, and ideas and Nantucket's unique place in the world.

Nantucket Historical Association /

Whaling Museum, Nantucket, Massachusetts



Architecture of Loss by Valgeir Sigurðsson (Music Inspiration from Jeremy!)