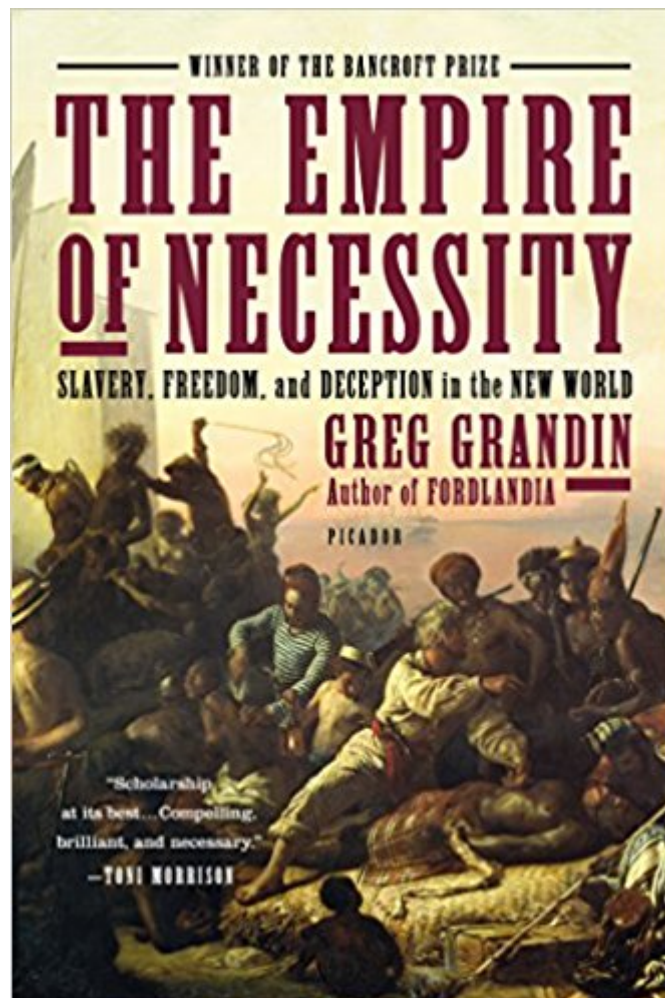




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# The Empire Of Necessity: Slavery, Freedom, And Deception In The New World



## Synopsis

NEW YORK TIMES EDITOR'S CHOICE  
SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE RECOMMENDED

BOOKWINNER OF THE BANCROFT PRIZE  
One morning in 1805, off a remote island in the South Pacific, Captain Amasa Delano, a New England seal hunter, climbed aboard a distressed Spanish ship carrying scores of West Africans he thought were slaves. They weren't. In fact, they were performing an elaborate ruse, having risen up earlier and slaughtered most of the crew and officers. When Delano, an idealistic, anti-slavery republican, finally realized the deception—that the men and women he thought were humble slaves were actually running the ship—he rallied his crew to respond with explosive violence. Drawing on research on four continents, *The Empire of Necessity* is the untold history of this extraordinary event and its bloody aftermath. Delano's blindness that day has already inspired one masterpiece—Herman Melville's *Benito Cereno*. Now historian Greg Grandin returns to these dramatic events to paint an indelible portrait of a world in the throes of revolution, providing a new transnational history of slavery in the Americas—and capturing the clash of peoples, economies, and faiths that was the New World in the early 1800s.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Amasa Delano was a widely traveled mariner who recounted his exploits in a memoir. One of the brief, seemingly minor experiences he described was actually rather extraordinary and revealed much about racial attitudes in the early nineteenth century. In 1805, Captain Delano and his crew were hunting seals off the coast of South America. They encountered and came to the aid of an apparently damaged and distressed ship carrying a cargo of West African slaves. A few of the

slaves seemed to stick surprisingly close to the ship captain, but Delano was initially prepared to see nothing amiss. Then the captain escaped the presence of the slaves and revealed the truth to Delano: there had been a slave rebellion, and after seizing control of the ship, the slaves had slaughtered most of the crew and passengers. Delano was a New Englander imbued with republican ideals and even abolitionist sympathies. Yet when he discovered the ruse, he and his crew reacted with outrage and visited extreme violence upon the rebels. Grandin, a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize and a professor at New York University, delves into Delano's motives and examines the broader contradictions between theoretical and actual commitment to political liberty and equality in this thoughtful and unsettling work. --Jay Freeman --This text refers to the Digital edition.

“Scholarship at its best . . . Compelling, brilliant, and necessary.” Toni Morrison  
“Engaging, richly informed . . . Grandin has produced a quietly powerful account that Melville himself would have admired.” The Wall Street Journal  
“Powerful . . . A remarkable feat of research . . . A significant contribution to the largely impossible yet imperative effort to retrieve some trace of the countless lives that slavery consumed.” Andrew Delbanco, The New York Times Book Review  
“Engrossing, well researched, and beautifully written . . . A rigorously sourced work of scholarship with a suspenseful narrative structure that boomerangs back and forth through time. Grandin has delivered a page-turner.” Chicago Tribune  
“A great and moving story.” The Washington Post  
“Grandin writes with the skills of a fine novelist. . . . I am thrilled and amazed by this inventive, audacious, passionate volume.” H. Bruce Franklin, Los Angeles Review of Books  
“Engaging, richly informed . . . Mr. Grandin ranges so freely through history that his book has a zigzagging course, like a schooner tacking constantly with the wind. But the voyage he takes us on is hardly directionless. . . . he describes his unsettling panorama in a restrained manner, avoiding exaggeration and allowing facts--many of them horrific--to tell the story. In doing so, he has produced a quietly powerful account that Melville himself would have admired.” Wall Street Journal  
“Elegant . . . a wonder of power, precision and sheer reading pleasure . . . Grandin takes readers on a tour of the hell of the slave trade, a tour so revelatory and compelling, we readers, unlike Captain Delano, can't fail to see the truth before our eyes.”  
Maureen Corrigan, NPR's "Fresh Air"  
“An exciting and illuminating narrative . . . Grandin's pen is exquisite, the descriptions are lively and sensuous. But he is also deeply reflective.

The book has import that extends beyond the interest of the story.

“I can’t say enough good things about *The Empire of Necessity*. It’s one of the best books I’ve read in a decade. It should be essential reading not just for those interested in the African slave trade, but for anyone hoping to understand the commercial enterprise that built North and South America.”

Victor Lavalle, Bookforum

“A remarkable story, one that unravels the American encounter with slavery in ways uncommonly subtle and deeply provocative.”

The American Scholar

“Fascinating . . . a gripping, lavishly researched account of high seas drama . . . compulsively readable.”

The Christian Science Monitor

“Fascinating and engaging.”

Seattle Times

“In this multifaceted masterpiece, Greg Grandin excavates the relentlessly fascinating history of a slave revolt to mine the enduring dilemmas of politics and identity in a New World where the Age of Freedom was also the Age of Slavery. This is that rare book in which the drama of the action and the drama of ideas are equally measured, a work of history and of literary reflection that is as urgent as it is timely.”

Philip Gourevitch, co-author of *The Ballad of Abu Ghraib*

“Greg Grandin has done it again. Starting with a single dramatic encounter in the South Pacific he has shown us an entire world: of multiple continents, terrible bondage and the dream of freedom. This is also a story of how one episode changed the lives of a sea captain and a great writer from the other end of the earth. An extraordinary tale, beautifully told.”

Adam Hochschild, author of *King Leopold’s Ghost*

“Rooted in an event known primarily through the genius of Herman Melville’s transcendent *Benito Cereno*, *The Empire of Necessity* is a stunning work of research done all over the rims of two oceans, as well as beautiful, withering storytelling. This is a harrowing story of Muslim Africans trekking across South America, and ultimately a unique window on to the nature of the slave trade, the maritime worlds of the early nineteenth century, the lives lived in-between slavery and freedom all over the Americas, and even the ocean-inspired imagination of Melville. Grandin is a master of grand history with new insights.”

David W. Blight, author of *Frederick Douglass: A Life* (forthcoming)

“Greg Grandin is one of the best of a new generation of historians who have rediscovered the art of writing for both serious scholars and general readers. This may be his best book yet. *The Empire of Necessity* is a work of astonishing power, eloquence and suspense--a genuine tour de force.”

Debby Applegate, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Most Famous Man in America: The Biography of Henry Ward Beecher*

Greg Grandin signs here a masterwork, both very well written and extremely well documented,

about the structure, effects and history of slavery in the Americas, concentrating on Latin America more than the US. The author starts from the historic slaves rebellion on the slaver ship *Tryal* described by Hermann Melville in his "Benito Cereno" and from there pulls all the threads he can. He artfully retraces the path of the slaves involved from their shipment from Africa, through their capture by the French pirate "Citoyen" Mordeille and their sale in South America, their journey through the continent and across the Andes until their rebellion on the *Tryal* on their way to Lima. Greg Grandin masterly describes Connecticut's Amasa Delano's journey as a sealer, massacring the hapless mammals by the thousands in south pacific islands until his arraignment of the *Tryal* (I will not spoil the details here). All this bathed in exquisitely depicted cultures, with the philosophical effects of slavery on the various ones he describes - be them in South America, Spain, England, the thirteen colonies or later the United States. He explores for us the influence of the French and Haitian revolutions, the demise of the Spanish control, even to the influence of Islam on some of the slaves sent to the Americas or through 770 years of Arabic presence in Spain. This book is a page turner, both a collection of great stories intertwined in a magnificent fresco and a well of culture and philosophy, all written in a very clear and compelling style. Very important to me, Greg Grandin supports all his narrative with extensive notes on his researches in archives on four continents (both Americas, Europe and Africa). This denotes the most serious of analysis - that it remains so pleasant to read testifies to the author's skills. A note about the Kindle edition, which is the one I read. It is hard to jump back and forth between the text and the notes, and I essentially did not because of that fact. The original book also contains interesting illustrations which appear in the Kindle edition, but I have no way to know where they are located in the paper form of the book - in the Kindle edition they are all collated right after the main text - this is quite a pain as they would support the text very well were they be properly placed. All in all, even in the Kindle edition I rate this book a deserved 5 stars.

One of the best history books I've ever read. Reads like a novel. Based on the Herman Melville story "Benito Cereno," which concerns a rebellion by slaves being shipped to South America in 1804, this work fills in the background, recounting the experiences of the captains, sailors and slaves who were involved before and after the incident and the general conditions existing in merchant shipping in that era. Deals with the slave trade as well as whaling, sealing, sugar, etc. Slavery was certainly a grave crime against humanity, but life was nasty, brutish and very often short for everyone involved in ocean-going commerce. Fortunes could be made but also lost. Shipwrecks. Pirates, etc., etc. Great reading and a great reality check for people who think life is

tough now.

This is a marvelous book about the slave trade in the Americas that expands its horizons virtually worldwide and show the massive extent and value in monetary terms of the practice. Not read anything like it before. The author takes one mutiny by slaves at sea -- made memorable by a book by Melville -- and creates a "world" of greed, pain and some occasion heroism out of it.

Fascinating, gripping in-depth exploration of the players and context of the 1805 event where Captain Amasa Delano (FDR ancestor) & ship encounter a Spanish ship, off the coast of S. America, whose slaves mutinied and enacted a ruse that captain Cerreno was still in charge, and not them actually calling the shots. The incident was immortalized in a Herman Melville (\*Moby Dick\* author) novella, though it takes some liberties with Delano's memoir recollection of the event. Grandin possesses a compelling writing style as he profiles the principle players, politics of the age, the prism of which Melville was peering from almost 50 years later, the paradox of the dawn of Age of Liberty coinciding with the massive uptick in slave trade, the life of a sealer (and whalers) captains and crew, the seeds of liberty blown by American revolution, etc.

As we start to talk seriously about slavery, I have noticed that the scholarship has gotten better. Grandin does an excellent job of connecting the dots in a period where few dots are suppose to connect. He weaves the lives of West African slaves and their slave journey that ebbs and flows until finally they collide with an American in the Pacific. His life and voyage is also given depth and credibility, so much so that it is part of an American novel, written by Herman Melville. We are confronted with real people caught in events that mirrors the real world and each is (knowingly and unknowingly) contributing to the other. The saga is a unique look into the slave economy that is spinning all around them. Each is struggling in different ways with what it means, what are the rules, the consequences and the impact of this under the radar institution on their lives and destinies. The deception is the glue that holds it all together. Fascinating! Much more needs to be said and done to get this massive, worldwide, continually unfolding deception exposed. Author of *Through the Lens of the Transatlantic Slave Trade*

This is a truly important book, which covers a subject neglected by many, if not most historians: the importance of slavery (in particular in the southern hemisphere of the Americas) in the world economy. Grandin touches on a multitude of subjects, including literature, the effect on white North

Americans, the actual travels and tribulations of mostly West African slaves, the fur trade, whaling and ship-building, and the supremacy of slavery within the European economy. Don't expect a page-turner pot-boiler, rather a well-researched and -considered evaluation of an institution that was so established that its demise was unthinkable at the time...not unlike the fossil fuel industry today.

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