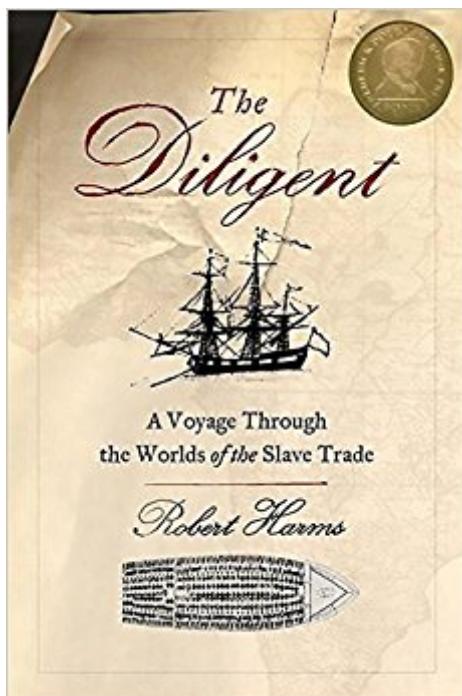


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# The Diligent: A Voyage Through The Worlds Of The Slave Trade



## **Synopsis**

The Diligent began her journey in Brittany in 1731, and Harms follows her along the African coast where her goods were traded for slaves, to Martinique where her captives were sold to work on sugar plantations. Harms brings to life a world in which slavery was a commerce carried out without qualms. He shows the gruesome details of daily life aboard a slave ship, as well as French merchants wrangling with their government for the right to traffic in slaves, African kings waging epic wars for control of European slave trading posts, and representatives of European governments negotiating the complicated politics of the Guinea coast to ensure a steady supply of labor for their countries' colonies. The Diligent is filled with rich stories that explain how the slave trade worked on all levels, from geopolitics to the rigging of ships.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

From the 16th to the 19th century, more than 40,000 slave ships plied the waters of the Atlantic, bringing human cargo to the Americas. Drawing on a memoir by a lieutenant, historian Robert Harms tells the story of one such ship, a story that, although shocking to modern readers, "was distressingly ordinary in its own time and place." Designed to transport grain over short distances, the Diligent was perhaps not the most seaworthy of vessels. Still, by ship's officer Robert Durand's account, it transported nearly 300 victims at a time from the African coast to the French colony of Martinique, often at a terrible cost in life because of disease, malnutrition, and harsh shipboard discipline. Harms carefully reconstructs episodes in the ship's life, including the curious trial that ended its 1731 ocean crossing. More than that, he untangles the complex business of the slave

trade, which was far from monolithic, depending instead on ever-shifting alliances and private agendas in the race for profit. As Harms notes, though more than 17,000 ships' logs from the slaving voyages of the 18th century have been recovered, only a few shed light on daily life aboard those vessels. His troubling narrative does just that, and it gives new evidence of the ordinariness of evil. --Gregory McNamee --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Yale historian Harms (*Games Against Nature*) explores the global scope of an odious industry by tracking the slave ship *Diligent*, which sailed from Vannes, France, in 1731. Using First Lieut. Robert Durand's journal, Harms fleshes out the multinational web of trade relationships and transactions, both legal and illegal: European countries competing for profits; government-sanctioned monopolies giving way to private enterprise; African rulers vying for their share of the profits. The *Diligent*'s cargo of 256 Africans was destined for Martinique's plantation industries, and the profit-and-loss ledger was the lieutenant's primary concern, writes Harris: "Durand mentioned the African captives only twice during the entire sixty-six days of the middle passage, and then only to record deaths." Paradoxically, given the nature of his business, Durand complained when having to leave a hostage in Elmina after a Bordeaux slaver abducted several African merchants, that such deceit made it difficult for "honest men" like himself to conduct trade. Most of the book offers observations based on Durand's journal rather than a patchwork of quotes from it. His reflections blend with other surviving accounts to reconstruct the events of the voyage, and copious footnotes document the extensive research Harms has done to tell the story. By fixing the French ship within the context of its 18th-century world, Harms explores part of a multilayered story "how the slave trade operated in certain places at a certain time... during a crucial period of economic and political transformation." In doing so, he extends our understanding of the Atlantic slave trade by shedding light on new aspects of its tragic history. 65 illustrations, many by Durand. (Jan. 15)Forecast: The middle passage has been a subject of interest in recent years; this should refocus attention on it and achieve good sales. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This book was wonderful. So many aspects of the slave trade are left out when you learn about it in school. This filled in the gaps. This put everything in perspective and it made sense. Especially the profiteering, everyone wanted a cut from the Africans that enslaved to the African kings that sold to the Europeans who bought and sold to the crews on the ships. Well worth the read to be further educated.

This is a most interesting book. It is edited from the journal of a ship's officer on his first slaving tour. This narrative indicates that the traders were at great pains to keep their cargo healthy and relatively happy! A healthy slave would, not surprisingly, fetch a higher price at the dock in the Americas. This account turns most of the "Middle Passage" stories upside down. An essential read, I should say.

My daughter ordered this for her college class. I picked it up after she brought it home in the summer. It is a wonderful retelling of the slave trade from the deck up, including discussion of French slave-versus-free laws and the business risks. Shows how well we can compartmentalize our morals when needed for economic gain.

Hard read for a descendent of African captives. This book provides insight into the inhumane nature of the society/people/world that allowed this to happen.

perfect thank you

This is certainly a worthwhile read, however, the Kindle edition is flawed due to a hard-to-read, seemingly damaged font. The printed letters seem to be missing bits and pieces. While the words are identifiable, the reading experience is much more strenuous than it should be. This is really just a technical problem, and /the publisher should really fix it.

Don't be put off by the fact that this book is written by a professor from Yale University; it is a very readable and approachable book. It's also the unvarnished truth about this rather unpleasant subject. While the author did extensive research from many sources -- as you would expect from a respected historian and Yale professor -- the author's core source is the personal diary of an officer on The Diligent, a slave trading ship, who aspired to become a captain himself. This aspiring officer kept these notes for himself, basically a practical how-to manual for running a slave-trading ship. The whole truth about how the slave trade actually worked is A) not pretty, B) complex, and C) different from how it is often taught and explained. The whole truth about how the slave trade actually worked is complex; it's not something that can be told in a sound-bite. It's not as simple as, "the evil white Europeans with their guns enslaved the poor, innocent, helpless black Africans and hauled them to rich plantations to pick cotton." The truth about the slave trade also doesn't fit well into anyone's current-day political, blame-setting agenda. It's messy and unclear. There's blame for everyone,

blood on everyone's hands. Regardless of what you think about the slave trade, this book will challenge you, so be prepared for that. But what the story of *The Diligent* is is the truth about how the slave trade worked. If you'd like to cut through the politically-charged rhetoric -- and if you have the intestinal fortitude for it -- this book will take you to the times and places and show you that unvarnished truth.

The individual who has read *AFRICA AND AFRICANS IN THE MAKING OF THE ATLANTIC WORLD, 1400-1800* by John Thornton & *THE SLAVE TRADE: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade: 1440-1870* by Hugh Thomas will likely find *THE DILIGENT: A Voyage Through the Worlds of the Slave Trade* to be a welcome addition to their reading material while the individual for whom this is an introduction to the subject will likely find the work both stimulating and informative. Nominally, *THE DILIGENT* is a history of the 1731 -32 journey of the slave ship *THE DILIGENT* from the Ile aux Moines near the port of Vannes, in Brittany, France to the Guinea Coast, then to Martinique and back to Vannes. It is, however, much more than that. The reader is treated to a rather informative economic and social history (especially as it relates to the slave trade) of France at the beginning of the 18th century, including the "reforms" of John Law. It is also a brief history of the involvement of the European powers with the native peoples of the Gold Coast, a much more detailed history of Whydah and Dahomey (for the slightly gory origin of the name see Harold Courlander's *A TREASURY OF AFRICAN FOLKLORE*) and the effects of the slave traders on those States, a brief history of the status and struggles of free blacks under mulatto control in Principe and Sao Tome (focusing on the life of the black Archdeacon Pinto during this period), a study of daily life for both crew and human cargo on a slave ship - especially during the arduous Middle Passage, and a brief look at the struggles and dangers facing slaves and, to a lesser degree, coca and coffee growers in Martinique. The work finishes off by examining the questionable benefits of the various parties (including the financiers, suppliers and the officers of the ship) from the slaving voyage. This is an excellent work (aside from a couple editing errors which aren't worth mentioning but, going by reviews written elsewhere, may be greatly exaggerated by some future detractor of the work) and should be read by any serious student of slave trade.

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