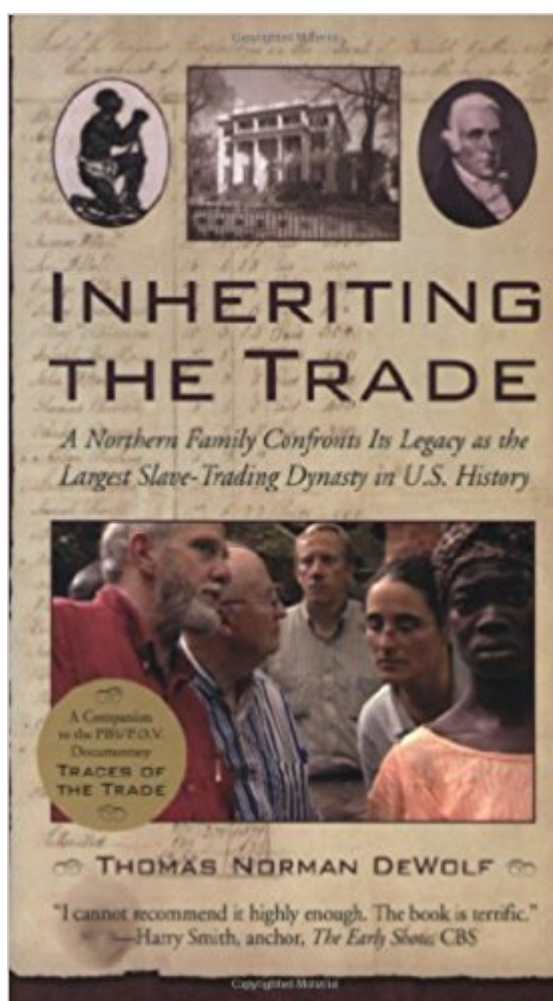


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# Inheriting The Trade: A Northern Family Confronts Its Legacy As The Largest Slave-Trading Dynasty In U.S. History



## Synopsis

In 2001, Thomas DeWolf discovered that he was related to the most successful slave-trading family in U.S. history, responsible for transporting at least ten thousand Africans. This is his memoir of the journey in which ten family members retraced their ancestors' steps through the notorious triangle trade route—from New England to West Africa to Cuba—and uncovered the hidden history of New England and the other northern states.

## Book Information

Paperback: 280 pages

Publisher: Beacon Press; Reprint edition (January 1, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0807072826

ISBN-13: 978-0807072820

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.8 x 8.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.7 out of 5 stars 45 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #468,676 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #72 in [Books > Travel > Caribbean > Cuba > General](#) #109 in [Books > History > Africa > West Africa](#) #135 in [Books > History > Americas > Caribbean & West Indies > Cuba](#)

## Customer Reviews

In the summer of 2001, Katrina Browne led nine distant family members on their own triangular passage as she made a documentary film (*Traces of the Trade: A Story from the Deep North*) about their DeWolf ancestors, the largest slave-trading dynasty in early America—who transported 10,000 Africans to America and the Caribbean between 1769 and 1820. DeWolf, one of Browne's cousins, traces the journey in this soul-searching memoir, beginning in Bristol, R.I., the hub of the late-18th-century trade, and continuing to Ghana, Cuba and back to New England. At each station of the trip, the Family of Ten visits historic sites, and distinguished historians address the group about aspects of the slave trade. DeWolf's account gains immediacy as he reports these presentations and the ensuing group discussions, along with their personal struggles to come to terms with an ignominious family history and his own sharp learning curve. His narrative, however, bogs down toward its conclusion in an irrelevant account of allegations of sexual harassment made against him and a digressive though thought-provoking discussion of reparations for slavery. Nevertheless, DeWolf promotes conversation about truth of the past and its impact on the present.

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I cannot recommend it highly enough. The book is terrific. — Harry Smith, anchor, The Early Show, CBS "DeWolf's intimate confrontation with white America's 'unearned privilege' sears the conscience." — Kirkus Reviews "This soul-searching memoir . . . promotes conversation about 'truth of the past and its impact on the present.'" — Publishers Weekly "Required reading for anyone interested in reconciliation." — Myrlie Evers-Williams, civil rights leader and author of The Autobiography of Medgar Evers "[It's] like a slow motion mash up, a first-person view from within one of the country's founding families as it splinters, then puts itself back together again." — Edward Ball, author of Slaves in the Family "An eye-opening volume. It not only dispels myths about slavery but also shows how that history haunts this country to this day." — Katie Schneider, the Oregonian "It is [this] spirit of honesty and the willingness to confront the ugly parts of human experience that give Inheriting the Trade its value." — Marjorie Kehe, the Christian Science Monitor "An artful merging of historical explication with biography and travelogue." — Mary Donnarumma Sharnick, America magazine "A candid, powerful, and insightful book." — Professor Charles J. Ogletree, Jr., executive director, Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race and Justice at Harvard Law School

I had seen a video of the family's journey of discovery. What courage one must have to take a journey that was common for an 18th century ancestor who happened to deal in slave trading. The early DeWolf was the prosperous New England captain of a ship that traded in slaves and "other goods". I had already heard Thomas DeWolf's cousin James speak about the journey, so perhaps my less-than-spectacular reaction to the book was because of repetition. A reader fresh to the story will probably be more engaged. A New England family, proud of its rich heritage, has a few descendants willing to delve into this 18th century saga with a journey that traced their ancestor's trading route. There are photos and personal impressions of this journey. Furthermore, the family has founded an organization to share its ties to this horrid part of our history in hopes that it will aid in the healing process as people acknowledge this bit of our collective past. Some of my ancestors were lumbermen and ship builders in Maine, so perhaps they were a part of this trade as well. The whole American economy was built on the backs of these people from Africa, a fact we do not respect enough. The descendants who survived slavery have much to be proud of when the history is examined. They are the strongest of the strong among us, a light in the journey of America.

I think that it's great that DeWolf's family wants to confront their family history as descendants of a former slave trader who made an incredible amount of money from it, but this book was definitely a disappointment. It left me wondering what DeWolf and his family got out of their journey, and honestly I don't think they really learned that much. This was an opportunity for them to acknowledge slavery, in a personal way that most Americans choose not to today and I don't think that there was any real takeaway for the family as a whole. We grow up learning and understanding certain things in everyday life, especially when it comes to interacting with other races. I appreciate the effort of the DeWolf family to try and change this by traveling to other countries where they were able to interact with other cultures but I don't think that writing a book about it was necessary. At points, I felt like there were moments when I should have felt pity as a reader, but in the end I only questioned the reason why I was reading this book more. It may be worth a look for some, but there are definitely better ways to spend your time.

Having read Edward Ball's "Slaves in the Family," I was interested in learning what another family felt about their heritage. The DeWolf family members' journey to understanding the legacy that underpinned their wealth and success led to the jarring realization that every one of us has benefited, in some way, from the slave trade. None of us can say "It was long ago and I wasn't a part of it." We were and still are. Journeying from the ostentatious wealth of the 18th century DeWolfs to the slave pens in Ghana to the sugarcane plantations in Cuba, the narrator shares how he came accept this truth. Angels Unaware

This is a story of a family descended from Rhode Island slave merchants. The author is a member of the extended DeWolf family who joins an effort to understand their past and try to find some redemption. They don't find much of a silver lining, although the author does some soul-searching and learns that he is a member of a very privileged group: White and male. Later in the book he recounts a painful lesson regarding his own sexism when he is accused of making unwanted advances on a female coworker, which was the result of a kind of ignorance that comes with accepting one's elevated status without humility. Also, DeWolf considers the thorny question of reparations and concludes that repair makes more sense than indemnification. A main point of the book is that many people were involved in the slave trade, and that a huge portion of Rhode Islanders benefited from it (by selling to the traders, etc.). The evil of importing slaves is thoroughly explored as the DeWolf descendants journey to Africa and visit the slave dungeons. The horrors of

the Middle Passage are described, and the family members feel guilty. This book illustrates the participation of Northerners in the slave trade. The audiobook is clearly read by the author.

Very interesting and enlightening story.

I really wanted to like this book, but I have to agree with the other one-star reviewers. It was self-indulgent and navel-gazing in the extreme, with way too much angst and far too little history.

I send kudos to the DeWolf family members who decided to make public what could have remained a private shame. By standing up and being counted in the struggle against racism they offered a way for many of us to heal. A large part of the wound of slavery are the overt and covert acts of cruelty that dominated the trade and still dominates the behavior of whites to this day. I want to join in the dialogue the Family of Ten has begun. Their website is also deeply affecting.

This is a rare find. For a family to acknowledge and go back in their history to understand as much as possible their ancestors involvement in the slave trade is truly remarkable. The story is told well with clarity about what the trade was actually all about. This is not a 'Southern' book about slavery, but a book that sites a major part of slave trade in Bristol, Rhode Island. It is a sensitive, fair, and thoughtful book for everyone.

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