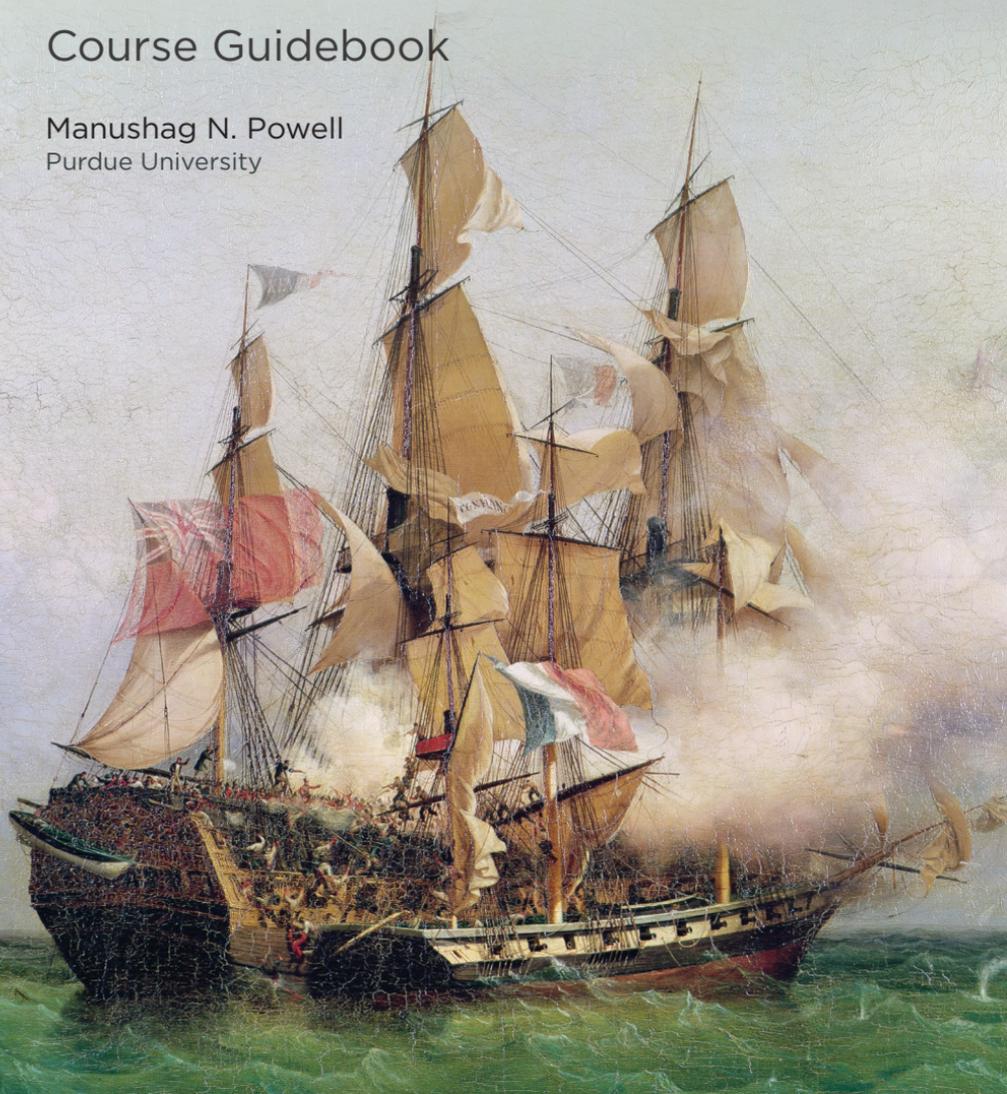


The Real History of Pirates

Course Guidebook

Manushag N. Powell
Purdue University



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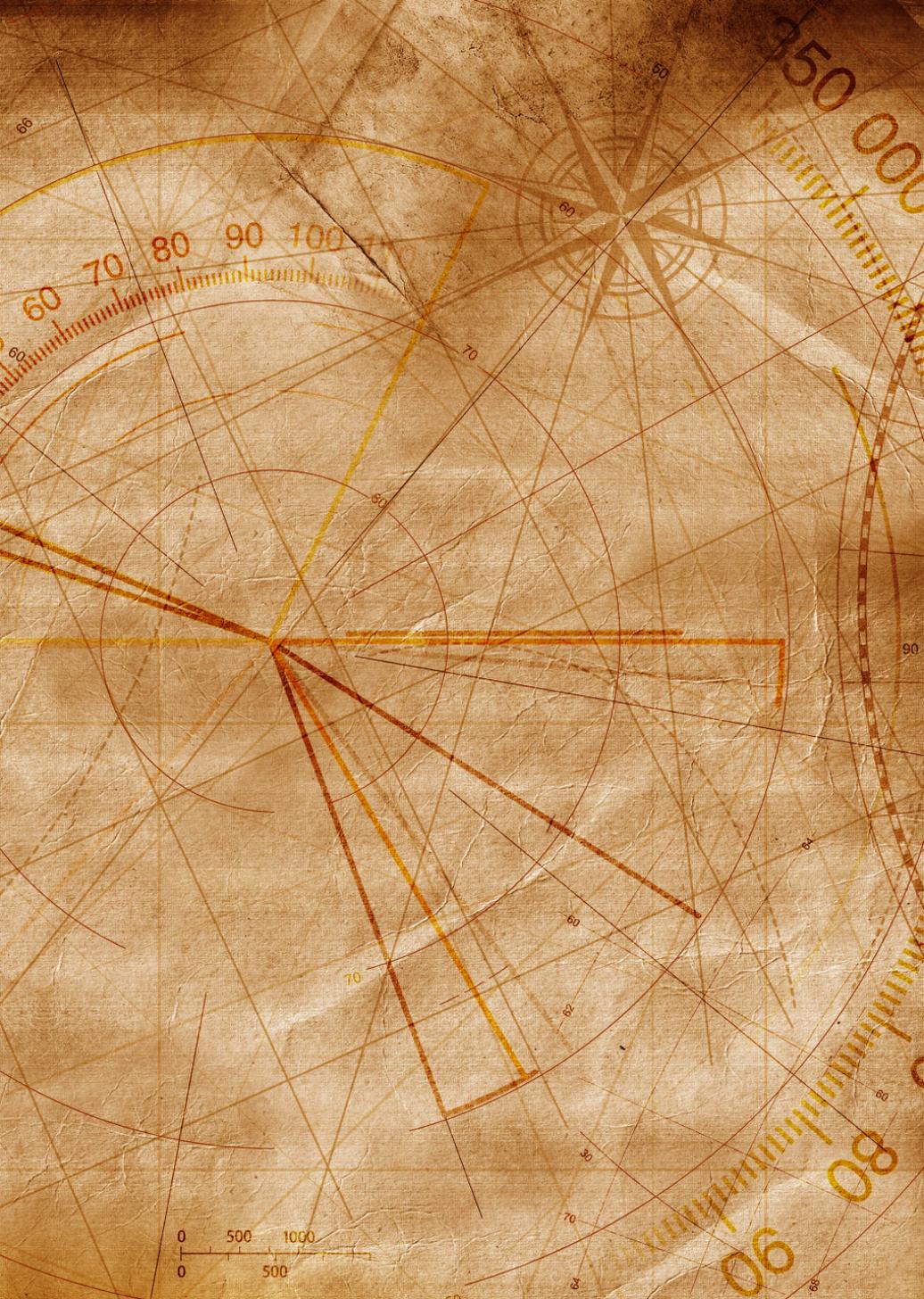
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THE REAL HISTORY OF PIRATES

“**W**hat makes pirating so addictive?” asks the old joke. “Once ye try it, ye’ll be hooked.” It’s not wrong. Pirate legends, pirate yarns, pirate facts, and pirate fictions are culturally omnipresent; many people learn about the mystique of pirate while they’re still babies. But the real histories that give rise to the myths are just as addictive. This course is a comprehensive introduction to the historical and international scope of piracy that also seeks to untangle cultural commonplaces about pirates and piracy from what the historical record actually tells us. The course’s core focus is the pirates of the Caribbean during the Golden Age of piracy (roughly 1650–1730). However, it also registers the truth that piracy is wide-reaching, ancient in provenance, and still with us today.

The first seven lessons of the course establish important vocabulary, covering what a pirate, privateer, buccaneer, corsair, and more are. These lessons also sketch out the fundamental relationship between piracy and storytelling about piracy. They provide information on the Golden Agers, who they were, and how they lived, fought, played, and failed to live up to many of the more romantic modern ideals that have been attached to pirates. An important point to be emphasized is the inseparable connection between pirate routes and networks and enslavement.

The next seven lessons explore different groups of pirates in more detail, including the Sea Dogs who served Queen Elizabeth I of England by exploring and opening trade routes, propagating English involvement in the trade in African captives, and endlessly harassing the Spanish; the Maghrebi and Maltese corsairs whose captive-taking practices terrorized the Mediterranean; the buccaneers of America who terrorized the Spanish Main; the Pirate Round raiders who preyed on Mughal and Ottoman targets in and near the Red Sea; and the complex, heterogeneous, and widespread versions

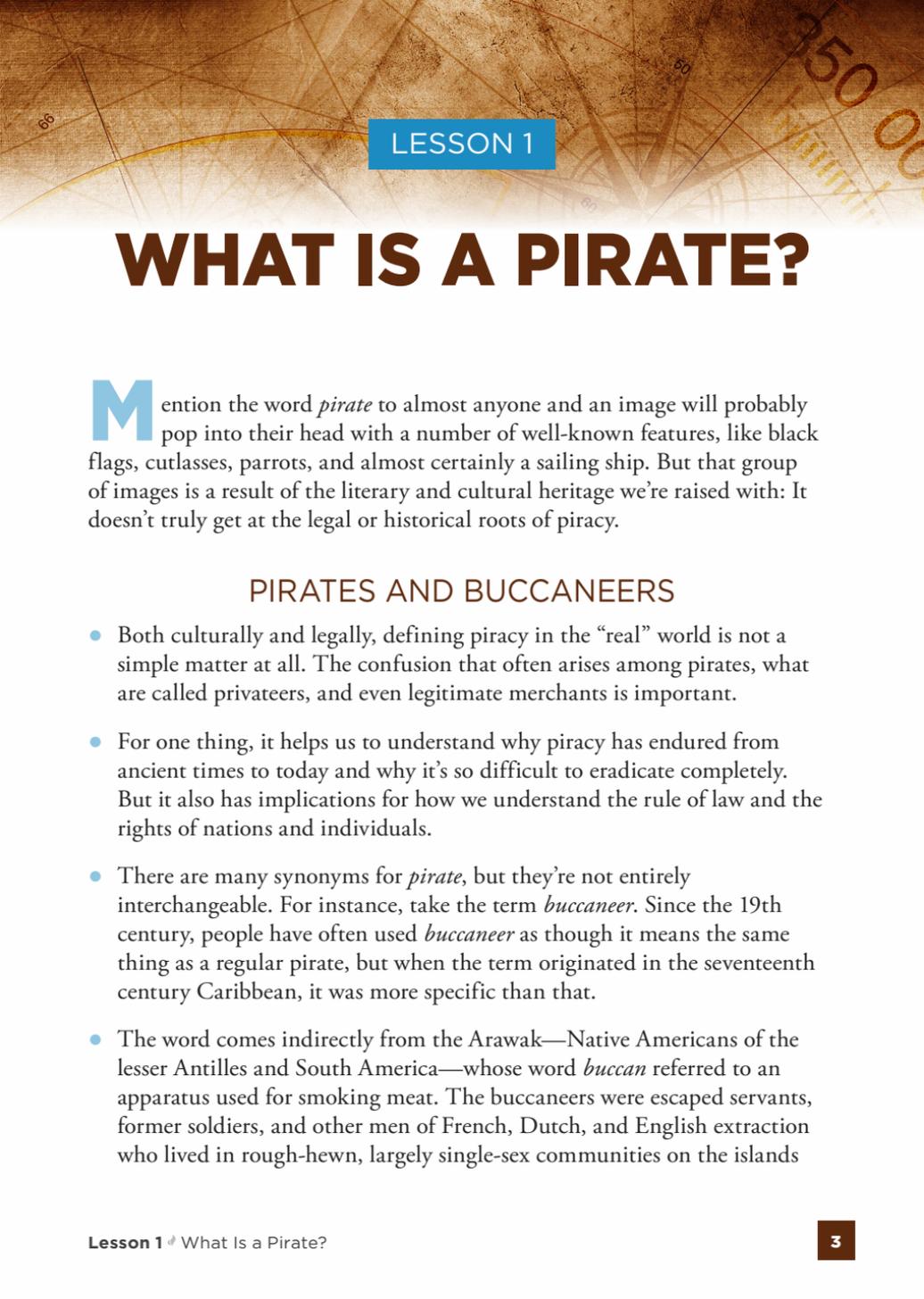
of piracy known in the eastern Pacific and waters near China. The final two lessons in this group take a wider view on how piracy interacts with colonial exploration and the pressures of empire.

Lessons 15 and 16 return to life onboard a ship: what it took to be a sailor and the food, culture, and peculiar rituals of life (not to mention the major hazard of scurvy). This unit also looks outward to how life on ship can influence life on land, with an example being the 19th-century phenomenon of pirate musicals.

Lessons 17, 18, and 19 explore the special cases of men and women who become more than pirates: the founders of empires or dynasties, commanders or legitimate politicians on land, and those who cross from history into legend. This unit also addresses the perennially interesting question of whether there were women pirates (yes, but rarely) as well as whether women had any influence in pirates' worlds (yes, definitely).

The final five lessons engage most strongly in the crossovers between piracy and other cultural matters: famous literary pirates, piracy and the law, the question of whether we can end piracy once and for all, and the forms piracy takes in the modern world. These include standard piracy, river piracy, Somalian-style hostage-taking, deep-sea fishing piracy, and piracy of copyright and intellectual property. The concluding lesson is an assessment of the ways piracy inspires and produces cultural resonances.

By the end of this course, learners will have a strong appreciation for the complexities of piracy and pirate history, the legal nuances involved in defining and addressing piracy, and the many ways piracy touches both our imaginations and our real lives.



LESSON 1

WHAT IS A PIRATE?

Mention the word *pirate* to almost anyone and an image will probably pop into their head with a number of well-known features, like black flags, cutlasses, parrots, and almost certainly a sailing ship. But that group of images is a result of the literary and cultural heritage we're raised with: It doesn't truly get at the legal or historical roots of piracy.

PIRATES AND BUCCANEERS

- Both culturally and legally, defining piracy in the “real” world is not a simple matter at all. The confusion that often arises among pirates, what are called privateers, and even legitimate merchants is important.
- For one thing, it helps us to understand why piracy has endured from ancient times to today and why it's so difficult to eradicate completely. But it also has implications for how we understand the rule of law and the rights of nations and individuals.
- There are many synonyms for *pirate*, but they're not entirely interchangeable. For instance, take the term *buccaneer*. Since the 19th century, people have often used *buccaneer* as though it means the same thing as a regular pirate, but when the term originated in the seventeenth century Caribbean, it was more specific than that.
- The word comes indirectly from the Arawak—Native Americans of the lesser Antilles and South America—whose word *buccan* referred to an apparatus used for smoking meat. The buccaneers were escaped servants, former soldiers, and other men of French, Dutch, and English extraction who lived in rough-hewn, largely single-sex communities on the islands

of Hispaniola, Tortuga, and Jamaica. They survived by hunting and preserving the flesh of wild cows and sometimes pigs, which they could then eat and sell.

- The buccaneer groups were living on Spanish islands illegally, at least as far as the Spanish colonizers were concerned. Spain demanded a virtual trade monopoly in the Americas. The Arawak Indians and increasingly the buccaneers thought the Spanish were the ones who shouldn't be there.
- Since the Spanish were rich, and the buccaneers were poor, it started to seem like a good idea to the buccaneers to prey on the Spaniards' shipping and their coastal settlements. And when they ran out of Spanish targets, the buccaneers got less choosy. Eventually groups like the English, who had approved of the buccaneers' actions when they were primarily anti-Spanish, had to admit they had a pirate problem on their hands.
- To complicate matters, there are some words that were originally synonyms for *buccaneer*, not for *pirate*, that eventually came to be used interchangeably with those terms: *freebooter* and *filibuster*. *Freebooter* has a Dutch root, and *filibuster* has a Spanish root, but they mean approximately buccaneer: Both are terms that indicate someone who's waging an unofficial or guerrilla war against an enemy state.

MAROONS

- Another set of communities that were independent of buccaneers and pirates but sometimes allied themselves with them were the maroons. Maroons were independent groups of refugees who had escaped slavery, typically Black Africans but often including Amerindians, who banded together to form self-governing communities.
- The word *maroon* may come from the Arawak word *simarabo*, which meant something like "fugitive." Like the buccaneers, maroon communities were at odds with the colonists and planters whose appetite for land in the Caribbean grew ever more rapacious. While they could be preyed on by European pirates, they also sometimes worked with them.

PIRATES AND PRIVATEERS

- Another distinction is that between a pirate and a privateer. Privateers are privately- or company-owned ships that are hired, or at least encouraged, by one government to prey on another nation's ships during times of war. Privateers must carry legal documents testifying to the fact that they're operating within the rules of legal warfare.
- Privateers are typically a quick and easy way for a nation whose navy is stretched thin to fill out its maritime power against an enemy of greater strength. They not only harass the enemy, but they also generate profit, and if their crews work on the "no purchase, no pay" system (that is, no prey, no pay), they are probably highly motivated,
- Some privateers were so good at their jobs that they became national heroes, like Sir Francis Drake or Henry Mainwaring, a quintessential gentleman pirate who was knighted post-retirement.
- Privateering seems like an advantageous setup, right up until it isn't. Privateers tend to turn into pirates. Some privateers knowingly exceed the bounds of their commissions, which is at least their own fault.
- But there's a bigger threat represented by the privateer population: They're hired to work in times of war, but sooner or later, peace will come. This means that unless the government that hired them has a step-down plan in place,



SIR FRANCIS DRAKE

the privateers are all immediately decommissioned and their crews are unemployed when the fighting stops—as are, at the same time, many naval workers.

- The maritime labor market floods. Desperate men with nautical skills who can't find legal work may simply turn pirate to feed themselves—and many do.
- Pirate motives, cultures, and practices are different depending on time and place. That caveat in place, however, is the fact that mass maritime unemployment leads to piracy is a stunningly predictable one.
- Pirates emerged when Ming-dynasty China cracked down on legitimate marine trade, when James I of England cracked down on English privateering, and at the end of the War of the Spanish Succession. And at the end of the Napoleonic Wars and even when 1990s Somali fishermen found themselves harassed out of a living by larger ships, the result was the same: pirates.
- There may be something particular about life at sea that makes it especially difficult to be forced into a landlocked labor market. But the bottom line is that if rulers don't want pirates attacking, rulers should not fire their privateers without providing some kind of retirement or reemployment option.

TRANSITIONS IN ROLES

- Quite a few of history's most famous privateers are also vile pirates, depending on who is being asked. Take the Scotsman John Paul Jones, whom US students are taught was a naval hero during the Revolutionary War and the father of the American navy.
- He was knighted by the French and awarded the Order of St. Anne in Russia. He was also so reviled by the British that popular prints literally depicted him wearing a hat emblazoned with the skull and crossbones, something no historical pirate was ever tacky enough to do.

- The quarrel over who is and who is not a pirate is not limited to European and American actors. Kanhoji Angre, a mariner from the Indian subcontinent, was so successful at harassing the shipping of the British East India Company that he terrified the colonial powers and was promoted to admiral of the Maratha Navy—a major force in the 18th century.
- One of Angre's masterful strokes was to hire Europeans, like the pirate who went by the colorful name John Plantain, to command some of his ships, using their colonists' skills against his colonial enemies. The British press dubbed him "the pirate Angria." Their accounts of his actions persisted well into the 19th century, where he was blithely painted as the common enemy of all local shipping rather than an effective military leader working under his government's commands.

THE BARBARY CORSAIRS

- A much broader example of regional tensions over privateering versus piracy is the Barbary corsairs. The term *corsair* originally meant "privateer." It's through its association with the privateers of the Barbary Coast that the term came to be synonymous with *pirate*, not because those corsairs were pirates per se but because Europeans and Americans insisted on understanding their religiously motivated, state-sanctioned operations as piracy.
- Barbary corsairs were privateers, commissioned by their governments to make war against Christians but not Muslims. The Barbary Coast, also called the Maghreb, runs along the north of Africa. Much of it was nominally but not firmly under the control of the Ottomans into the early 19th century.
- The so-called Barbary pirates could be Ottoman, Berber, independent, or, occasionally, European renegades. While their depredations were not united under any particular flag, they were regulated businesses answerable to local governments.
- Their operations menaced Mediterranean shipping and coastal settlements, and they sometimes menaced areas quite far away from the Mediterranean. This occurred on and off from the 16th through the 19th centuries.

Famously, in 1631 Algerian corsairs attacked the village of Baltimore, Ireland, in the North Atlantic, taking hundreds of captives, most of whom were never redeemed.

- The Barbary Corsairs' primary function was taking captives rather than other forms of loot. Barbary captives were essentially held hostage, awaiting ransoms to be paid. This could take many years, and they were often sold and forced to live as slaves, though they were immediately freed if they were willing to convert to Islam.
- From 1622–1642, 300 English ships and 7,000 English subjects were taken by corsairs, and then between 1660 and the 1730s, 6,000 more Britons were captured by Barbary corsairs. A contributing factor to Barbary attacks was the implacable hatred of Spain by the Moorish people in Salé, on modern-day Morocco's Atlantic coast, as a result of Spain's incursions and slaving among the Barbary states.

READING

Earle, *The Pirate Wars*.

Lehr, *Pirates*.



LESSON 2

PIRATE FACTS AND FICTIONS

This lesson looks at some of the most common things we hear about pirates and piracy, and it also examines what the historical record actually has to say about them. Much of our sense of the pirate's appeal originates in literary rather than historical texts, although if we go far back enough, the distinction between the two becomes pretty blurry.

PIRATE FLAGS

- One predominant piece of pirate imagery is a familiar black flag, perhaps emblazoned with a skull-and-crossbones image in white. We call this the Jolly Roger. However, pirates did complicated things with their flags, and a well-stocked pirate ship would ideally have far more than just a single black flag with a death's head on it.
- Possibly the first pirate to try out the effect of what is now the traditional Jolly Roger was Emanuel Wynn, who in 1700 unfurled what one source describes as “a sable ensign with cross bones, a death's head, and an hour glass.” Black flags, either plain or decorated with bones, can be found going back at least to the medieval period.
- It's also possible that the Caribbean use of such flags was inspired by the designs on the flags of Barbary corsairs in the Mediterranean. Whatever the origin, these black flags caught on quickly in the 18th-century Caribbean, and many pirate ships personalized them with symbols such as skeletons, skulls, daggers, hearts, initials, or hourglasses.



- The skull-and-crossbones symbol was effective: Unfurling it was an act that claimed the identity of piracy, and its main use was to frighten victims into giving up without much resistance. This worked so well in part because real pirates used both red and black flags.
- A black pirate flag meant that quarter would be given if the enemy surrendered, meaning they'd spare lives after rifling through the cargo. Red, though, was the traditional nautical symbol that no quarter would be given. It was favored by Maghrebi corsairs and used in the Caribbean as well.
- As a letter to the *British Journal* about a 1724 pirate attack explained, "When they fight under Jolly Roger, they give Quarter, which they do not when they fight under the Red or Bloody Flag." The purpose of the Jolly Roger, then, was actually to remind pirate victims that things could be worse if they didn't cooperate.
- In any case, such tricks were for special occasions, and pirates most frequently sailed under national colors, both true and false, disguising themselves as law-abiding European ships. The practice of using false

flags at sea was commonly accepted for lawful vessels as well as pirates. Privateers, of course, were supposed to use national colors like the Union Jack.

BURIED TREASURE AND PIRATE WEALTH

- Another popular piece of pirate imagery is the trove of buried treasure. This wasn't very likely to happen. Most standard golden-age pirates did the maritime equivalent of robbing a couple of convenience stores, sold what they could, and then drifted away into a quiet, mostly law-abiding retirement.
- The average length of a pirate career was no more than one to three years. A few pirates did strike real wealth. Some of the men who followed Thomas Tew, Henry Every, and William Kidd walked away with hundreds of pounds even by conservative estimates, but this was not the common case.
- Such lucky pirates had no predilection for burying their hoards like maritime dragons. What money they acquired they tended to spend quickly. The medieval and Viking hoards we still find from time to time are usually theorized to be either burial treasures or treasure buried to protect it from pirates rather than done by pirates.
- In mid-19th century, Kidd became a feature of melodrama like the highly popular *Captain Kyd, or the Wizard of the Sea: A Romance*, which led credulous audiences to believe his sunken treasure ship lay somewhere in the Hudson River. Robert Louis Stevenson also contributed to the myth of the buried treasure hoard. His bestselling 1882 boys' adventure story *Treasure Island* and, to a lesser extent, the 1889 *Master of Ballantrae* both revolve around buried treasure plots.

BLACKBEARD

- The pirate Edward Thatch or Teach, alias Blackbeard, stands out both as a figure who generated extraordinary fear in his day for his notorious deeds and as an instance of the way pirate fact and pirate fiction could merge to

become something entirely new. Remarkable for his ferocity and defiance, the historical Blackbeard does not appear to have been an especially wealthy pirate.

- He managed to accumulate fame even without wealth; his name recognition is probably the highest among all the golden-age Caribbean pirates. Blackbeard was perfectly real, reportedly terrifying, and he did actually have a memorable beard.
- Blackbeard was believed to be violent. He was reportedly smart about using his reputation for violence to strike fear into both his enemies and his own men.
- Blackbeard was a successful pirate in terms of the damage he wrought. His legend grew partly because he destroyed ships when many other pirates would have just let them go after a bit of plundering.
- For example, when Boston hanged six pirates in 1717, Blackbeard vowed to burn all New England ships he came across as a punishment for the coastal colonies' effrontery, and he is known to have burned the ship *Protestant Caesar* and all its cargo to the waterline. Interestingly, he was not particularly murderous for a pirate, even with all the unparalleled property destruction.
- He seemed to get along a bit better with the colonies to the south, at least for a time, though he certainly annoyed the coastal planters. Governor Eden of North Carolina was a great deal less active in suppressing piracy than the governors of neighboring Virginia and South Carolina.
- That may be related to the inconvenient fact that some of Blackbeard's loot was found in the barn of the governor's secretary after he was finally defeated. Eden hotly contested the well-published implication that he was being bribed by a pirate, but his reputation never really recovered.
- As for his beard, in the 1720s, western European men wore their faces cleanshaven. To the English, wearing a beard at all marked a man as alien and maybe a bit barbaric.

- The most vivid description of his appearance comes from *A General History of the Pyrates*: “Captain Teach,” we are told, “assumed the Cognomen of Black-beard, from that large Quantity of Hair, which, like a frightful Meteor, covered his whole Face.”
- Blackbeard’s image understandably captured the imagination of the public, and it circulated in woodcuts and engravings as well as words. As it circulated, it was embellished. For example, the notion arose that Blackbeard lit his own beard on fire before battle, and he is often depicted that way in later illustrations.

DEATH OF A PIRATE

- Edward Thatch’s death was as extreme as his life, and it predictably generated accounts with varying degrees of adherence to reality. In fact, the American author and statesman Benjamin Franklin claimed that one of his first publications, done at the tender age of 13, was a popular ballad about Blackbeard’s death, entitled “The Downfall of Piracy.”
- In contrast to ballads that depicted pirates as bold rebels, like those centered on the Englishmen John Ward or Henry Every, Franklin’s aim was to glorify not the pirate but Lieutenant Robert Maynard and the sailors of the Royal Navy. They defeated Blackbeard and the crew of his ship, the *Adventure*, in 1718 near Ocracoke Island, North Carolina.
- The battle appears to have been bloody and dramatic. As Maynard’s men strained to board Thatch’s ship, at least according to Maynard’s self-serving account later published in *The Weekly journal, or, British Gazetteer*, the pirate raised a glass and “drank damnation to me and my men, whom he styled Cowardly Puppies, saying he would neither give nor take Quarter.”
- The *Boston News-Letter* supplies the detail that after Blackbeard had wounded Maynard’s sword hand and apparently survived a pistol shot, he was brought down by a powerful Scottish Highlander who beheaded him. The *General History*, in contrast, suggests that Blackbeard simply succumbed suddenly to his wounds, but it’s certain Blackbeard fell in battle.

As far as nautical and popular historians can tell, the notion that all pirates stomp around growling “Arr” didn’t exist until movies and books in the early 20th century, and it was truly popularized in 1950 by the actor Robert Newton. In Disney’s blockbuster film *Treasure Island*, Newton used his native Dorset accent when he played Long John Silver, and it included a rolled “rrr” sound.

X

- Maynard recorded that Thatch’s corpse showed at least five bullet holes and some 20 sword cuts all over his body. Though we are not sure who beheaded him, we do know the lieutenant hung his disembodied head from the ship’s prow.
- Blackbeard’s legend rapidly morphed to incorporate any number of outlandish claims. In 1724, for example, Charles Johnson depicted him as a despoiler of virgins and a polygamist, although there are no other contemporary claims about his sexual proclivities being anything remarkable.
- As his name recognition grew, it became curiously detached from the man himself. Instead, into turned into something of a free-floating signifier for anything pirate-like at all.

READING

Little, *The Golden Age of Piracy*.

Pérotin-Dumon, “The Pirate and the Emperor.”



LESSON 3

REAL PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN

The lion's share of what we think we know about pirates is rooted in the history and stories about the Caribbean marauders of the so-called Golden Age of piracy. This discussion introduces some of the major trends and names attached to that group—beyond Blackbeard, that is, who is covered in lesson 2—and get some sense for why they feel so familiar.

BACKGROUND ON THE GOLDEN AGE

- The Golden Age lasted approximately from 1650 to just before 1730, or from the rise of the buccaneers to the near eradication of Atlantic piracy. Early on, imperial Spain was the largest European presence in the Caribbean by far, though there were also significant French and Dutch bases. Each of these powers scrambled to exploit the people and resources of the Americas more thoroughly than their rivals.
- England's base of power in the Caribbean was Jamaica. Later, Tortuga and the Bahamas became important for England as well. Still, because Spain was initially the most dominant European power, men from other nations would sometimes band together against their common enemy. Once Spanish power was broken, the Caribbean waters became more of a free-for-all.

- Many historians divide the Golden Age roughly into three chunks. The first, from about 1650–1680, took place after the Thirty Years' War—a messy conflict that altered the map of Europe and ended in 1648. It was dominated in the Caribbean by buccaneering.
- Next, through the 1690s, came the period of popularity for the Pirate Round, which was a seasonal deep-sea sailing route. By 1680 or so, the English and French governments had made their policies hostile enough to Caribbean piracy that some of the piratically inclined started venturing into deeper waters, including the Red Sea and South Seas.
- The pirates we know best come from the last period of the Golden Age. The 1700s saw a new rash of pirating that lasted until the end of the 1720s, becoming especially severe at the end of the War of the Spanish Succession. As we've learned, peacetime makes pirates.
- Spain claimed a trade monopoly in and around its colonies and would treat even peaceful merchants like pirates. England, meanwhile, wanted to be able to trade within the Caribbean and the Americas unmolested.
- Most pressingly, the English wanted to gain a stronger foothold in the trade in enslaved African people that had been conducted primarily by the Spanish and Portuguese. This effort had begun prior to the Golden Age, but it was during the Golden Age that England gained the dubious distinction of its own monopoly in the transatlantic chattel slavery business.
- In 1713, the British South Sea Company was granted the *asiento*, or Spanish license to transport enslaved Africans to Spanish colonies. The same events that led to this shift in white supremacist power also gave rise to a big upswing in piracy: that is, the War of the Spanish Succession was over, and all the privateers who'd fought a semilegal proxy war in the Caribbean waters were thrown out of work.
- One of the few places experienced mariners could find legal work was in the West Indian trade in enslaved people, but conditions in that line were notoriously awful. Many men moved from there into openly illegal piracy.

- Crews at this point were often multinational and mixed race. The captains were, at this point, uniformly white men, most of them capable but many of them grappling with what seem in retrospect to be significant anger management problems.

TWO TEXTS

- Before Hollywood came along, there were two texts that sat right on the bleeding edge of history and mythologizing that set the ground for most of the Anglophone world's pirate beliefs. They both featured Golden Age Caribbean piracy prominently.
- First is *The Buccaneers of America* by Alexander Exquemelin, a Franco-Dutch surgeon who had fled his indenture and taken up with the buccaneers of Tortuga, eventually falling in with Henry Morgan, whom he describes as a violent, vain, destructive pirate. *The Buccaneers of America* was published first in Dutch in 1678 and was widely translated.
- Even more important is *A General History of the Pyrates*, which appeared 1724. By 1728, it was already in its fourth edition, and it has never been out of print since. The *General History* was published with a probably pseudonymous attribution to Captain Charles Johnson.
- The *General History* is an amazing, gripping blend of fact, exaggeration, and straight fiction. The captain who takes up the most space in the *General History* is Bartholomew Roberts. From 1719–1722, he captured hundreds of ships and fishing vessels.

BARTHOLOMEW ROBERTS

- Roberts was a Welshman, born in 1682 in Pembrokeshire; he later somehow acquired the nickname Black Bart, which at the time would most likely have indicated he was dark-haired with an olive complexion. In 1719, in his late 30s, he was the second mate aboard a Guinea trader, the Royal African Company's ship *Princess*.

- Their slaving voyage was interrupted, however, when the ship was captured by the pirate Howel Davis, another Welshman from the same area as Roberts. Roberts at first resisted becoming a pirate, but he seems to have come around quickly, and after Davis died at the hands of pirate hunters a month or so later, Roberts was elected by the remaining pirates to replace Davis.



BARTHOLOMEW ROBERTS

- Roberts turned out to be very good at pirating. Aboard his flagship, the *Rover*, he set sail for Brazil and discovered a huge convoy of 42 Portuguese merchant ships. Roberts stealthily picked off a ship from the edge of the convoy to serve as a decoy, and he then boldly attacked the richest ship in their midst, the *Sagrada Familia*, with 40 guns and 150 men. Roberts used here. The prize was a rich one, full of gold, sugar, tobacco, and a cross encrusted with diamonds that had been on its way to King João V of Portugal.
- Typically, pirates favored shock-and-awe tactics, which is what Roberts used here. The prize was a rich one, full of gold, sugar, tobacco, and a cross encrusted with diamonds that had been on its way to King João V of Portugal.
- Roberts soon undertook another attack; he left his flagship to make what he thought would be a quick voyage in a different vessel to snap up a passing prize laden with much-needed provisions. But Roberts missed the prize; contrary winds sent his sloop back leeward.
- Roberts sent to the *Rover* for help. However, Roberts's lieutenant, Captain Kennedy, had absconded to Barbados with the *Rover* and the loot from the *Sagrada Familia*, leaving Roberts and his fellows with little money and nothing to eat.

ARTICLES OF THE SHIP

- Roberts survived, and perhaps looking to prevent betrayals such as Kennedy's in the future, he and his remaining band of piratical brethren affirmed their loyalty to each other by signing a set of rules to govern their society. In this, Roberts reflected common Golden Age pirate behavior.
- Most lawful ships had articles of governance, and pirate ships behaved similarly. Roberts's supposed articles are printed in their entirety in the *General History* not because they are unusual, but as a typical example. Similar articles are also described in the *Buccaneers of America*.
- The first rule decrees that the ship's rules are to be decided on democratically, and everyone has the same right as everyone else to fresh food and drink, including the captain and officers.
- The second article indicates that pirates expected an orderly and equitable division of booty. Other articles banned gambling aboard the ship, established bedtime as 8:00 pm, required that weapons be kept clean and ready, banned fighting on the ship (but not ashore), and arranged hazard pay for men who were disabled as pirates.

ROBERTS'S CAREER CONTINUES, THEN ENDS

- After Kennedy's betrayal, Roberts rebuilt, sailing to Barbados for men and prizes, then cruising the Caribbean before heading to Newfoundland, back to the West Indies, and then off to the coast of western Africa to attack the bustling slave port Ouidah. His career, which by some estimates involved the capture of up to 400 vessels, finally ended near Cape Lopez, when he was found by a pirate hunter.
- Captain Chaloner Ogle, commander of the 50-gun HMS *Swallow*, had been sent to deal with pirate ships near the coast of West Africa. Roberts, aboard his flagship *Royal Fortune*, was shot early in the battle. He bled to death, and his body was tossed overboard, as he had apparently requested, still dressed in finery. The *Royal Fortune* was shortly dismasted and forced to surrender.

- The fate of those on his ship is instructive of the Golden Age pirate experience. In all, 13 pirates were killed in the battle; taken alive were 188 pirates and 70 African prisoners. Nineteen of the pirates died before trial.
- All but four of the remaining pirates were tried at Cape Coast, on the seaboard of modern-day Ghana, in a rather problematic mass proceeding. Most of them claimed to have been forced into piracy—a common tactic at piracy trials but also sometimes the truth. Indeed, 74 of Roberts’ men were acquitted. Most of the others hanged.

STEDE BONNET

- This lesson concludes with a look at Stede Bonnet, whom we might consider the opposite of Roberts: altogether more genteel and less dashing. Bonnet was born in Barbados to a wealthy plantation family; he was educated, prosperous, and a major in the colonial militia to boot.
- In his middle age, though, something went wrong. For some reason, the major decided he’d rather be a captain, so he bought a small sloop, fitted it out, named it the *Revenge*, hired a crew, and set out to terrorize Chesapeake Bay and the North American coast. Bonnet took seven prizes, but heading back to the Caribbean, he ran afoul of a Spanish man-of-war and was badly mauled.
- Bonnet, though a military man and a man of letters, was no mariner, and he had trouble keeping command of his men. He eventually fell in with Blackbeard and was overwhelmed by the more dominant personality.
- Blackbeard eventually reassigned command of the *Revenge* and took Bonnet onto the *Queen Anne’s Revenge* as a passenger. Bonnet was witnessed striding around comfortably in his bathrobe and reading rather than pirating in the more usual sense.
- In 1717, Bonnet accepted a royal pardon and promised never to pirate again. Instead, he snapped up a group of men Blackbeard had marooned and recommenced pirating, renaming his ship the *Royal James*. His comeback didn’t last long.

- In October 1718, Bonnet was captured by the pirate hunter William Rhett after a disastrous battle. After an abortive escape attempt, Bonnet was tried in Charleston. He pled not guilty, claiming his men had forced him to act as a pirate against his inclinations 13 times. Judge Trott was not convinced, and Bonnet was hanged.

READING

Johnson, *A General History of the Pyrates*.

Pestana, “Why Atlantic Piracy?”



LESSON 4

PIRATE ATTACKS AND TACTICS

The majority of the accounts of pirate attacks we have are pieced together from trial testimony, newspaper stories, and some less reliable sources like ballads and popular histories. Even the eyewitness versions often add their own spin if they are writing for the public. Still, enough verifiable details can be gleaned from all of these sources to give us some solid ideas about pirate behavior. And helpfully, we also have a handful of private journal entries and letters about pirate encounters, which are worth examining carefully to see if they back up the more public narratives.

ATTACK ON THE *PROSPEROUS*

- The British National Archives holds a letter written in 1720 by a merchant named David Aubin from Barbados to his brother back in London, describing both a pirate attack and its aftermath. Aubin's ship, the *Prosperous*, was at anchor near Dominica, an island in the Lesser Antilles, when a large sloop approached flying French colors. The ship first passed casually by to windward—that is, upwind—and then suddenly tacked and headed downwind for the *Prosperous*.
- Aubin's ship was in a bad position because it was anchored when the French flag suddenly headed aggressively for it; it seems clear in retrospect that the aggressor ship had been positioning itself for an attack run. Aubin fired at her twice, but she ignored the warning, closed the distance, and then fired.

THE WEATHER GAGE

A basic principle of fighting in the age of sail, at least according to English naval traditions, is that sailors want to have the weather gage—that is, they want to position their ship so that the wind, and where applicable, the current and shore, are all helping them more than the opponent. Ships can't sail directly into the wind, but they sail very well with the wind behind them. A ship sailing upwind of another one can choose to either hold off or to turn downwind and attack at any point; a ship that is already downwind of another vessel, which is known as having the lee gage, has fewer options because it has to tack or zigzag into the wind in order to engage, unless it plans to flee. X

- The attacking sloop was the *Unique*, which carried six great guns—large mounted cannons—plus 20 lighter swivel guns. Aubin returned fire once, but there was no time to reload. The sloop boarded him, he reported, “with her Bowsprit over our Stern”—that is, with the front of her ship extending over the rear of the *Prosperous*—“and Entered upwards of 50 of their Men.”
- Aubin's crew was only eight plus himself after two of his men deserted at the start of the fight. Outnumbered, they barricaded themselves under the quarterdeck. Eventually, his men surrendered before he did.
- It was relatively uncommon for pirates to murder entire crews that have called for quarter. The pirates were pointedly not flying the red flag, and the merchantmen were hopelessly outnumbered.

- Still, the pirates were furious, for 13 of their own number had fallen in the assault, and many more were wounded. When the doors were opened, they rushed in, and though one kindly pirate assisted Aubin, the merchant sailors were stripped, robbed, and beaten.

AUBIN'S GOAL

- Aubin wrote to his brother and sister-in-law hoping they could help drum up some political pressure to redress his wrongs. Aubin was careful to note in his letter that the pirate ship flew French colors the entire time of the battle.
- After his ship's surrender, Aubin and his remaining crew were transported to Martinique, where he headed straight for the governor to complain of what had happened. A French privateer had no obvious right, in 1720, to be meddling with an English merchantman.
- But the governor and intendant insisted that the *Unique* held a Spanish commission, which they suspiciously refused to show to Aubin, instead allowing the avowed privateer captain to sell off Aubin's ship and wares. This shows the slippery boundaries between privateer and pirate and how the connivance of local Caribbean colonial governments kept those distinctions blurry.

PENELOPE AUBIN'S NOVELS

David Aubin's brother Abraham, the London merchant to whom the letter was directed, had married a woman named Penelope. In the 1720s, she wrote a number of sexy, exciting adventures about heroines being abducted at sea. Some of David's seemingly very grounded account influenced her much more romantic writing.

X

EXPECTATIONS OF PIRATE BEHAVIOR

- Pirates did employ terroristic tactics, but even so, there were some loose and general boundaries. Sometimes the people on the ship were actually the main booty: murder then became unlikely, although so did an easy release.
- This was true of both European and Ottoman or North African Mediterranean corsairs. It was also usually the case when pirates encountered a slaving vessel; pirates sold captive Africans without compunction, often driving down prices when they did so.
- The worst-case scenario for most merchantmen, though, would be that the pirate ship was flying the red flag, metaphorically or literally. If the pirates were serious about the red flag, everyone aboard the ship was going to be killed, and the ship would perhaps be destroyed, too. This terrible outcome was at least uncommon enough that when it did happen it raised eyebrows.
- While pirates were nasty men, clearly to be dreaded, sailors often made the calculation that surrender was safer than an all-out resistance that might fail. Not all pirate attacks—nor even most—meant that all was lost.
- Most of the time, pirates would try to avoid a pitched battle. They wanted a speedy surrender. Pirates were willing to use beating and torture to find valuables on the ship. The target of such treatment was more likely to be the captain, officers, and perhaps any passengers than the sailors, who in most cases weren't paid enough to have a lot of concealed treasure lying around. (Their pocket money, of course, was probably a lost cause.)
- Plank walking was extremely unlikely, but beating, cutting, various forms of hand and foot tortures, threats, psychological torture, and imprisonment were all very much on the table. Included among these was the nautical practice of woolding, the extremely unpleasant technique of twisting a knotted rope encircling the victim's head or neck and slowly tightening it.

- Pirates were often willing to use violence against the rare woman who fell into their power, although not always. Genteel women—those of the middling and higher classes—if attacked by pirates would have a reasonable expectation of decent treatment. Working-class women and women who were not white Europeans had no such likelihood of safety, however.
- The 1695 assaults of Henry Every’s crew on the Muslim women they captured in the *Ganj-i-Sawai* are well documented. In that brutal case, socioeconomic status mattered far less than the fact that the women were non-Christian. In the early 18th century, religious identification was something like a racial category. Complexion and geography were also factors in making women more vulnerable to pirates.

PIRATES’ GOALS

- Pirates usually were most interested in a ship and its contents. They “practiced violence against the prize ship’s cargo,” to borrow the historian Marcus Rediker’s phrase. They dismayed the owners and captains by looting, breaking open, slashing, and overturning anything in their reach.
- Smaller ships like fishing vessels might be burned simply to keep the word from spreading about the pirates’ presence or for caprice or revenge. But burning a large ship was an atrocity that could be particularly hard to swallow. A third-rate naval vessel cost some £15,000 to build—a moderate fortune—and that was before outfitting her with rigging, sails, guns, and so forth.
- Even smaller vessels were worth thousands. When Blackbeard took to burning ships from Boston because of Boston’s anti-pirate actions, he was being deliberately shocking in the painful waste of the vessels.
- Sometimes pirates would take the whole ship for their own use, if it were larger, more powerful, swifter, or simply in better shape than their own. The original crew of the new vessel might be partly conscripted, partly marooned, or mostly just dumped into the pirates’ cast-off ship to make their way home.
- Yet often, a captured ship was returned to its master only a little the worse for wear. Rediker estimates that in the end of the Golden Age, about 11% of prize vessels were destroyed or damaged beyond use. This is a terrible number but still a minority.



- Pirates took what was useful to them, but while much of what was on a ship was not useful, not everyone saw their compasses thrown overboard and their other belongings damaged. Often, pirates would take supplies—food, water, spirits, cables, and money—and leave the rest and let the prisoners go, perhaps taking the precaution of tearing up the rigging to hobble the ship for a bit.

STEALTH ATTACKS

- Stealth was an important tool in the pirate's arsenal. It was important to see another ship before she detected a pirate ship; many pirate articles promised bonuses to the lookout who was first to see a potential prize.
- The earlier a pirate made its prey feel alarmed, the worse the odds of catching her if she ran. Pursuit in the wide ocean could easily take hours, both ships propelled by the same wind at similar speeds, and if the chase could be fended off until nightfall, it was very easy to lose track of even one's allies in the dark.
- Surprise attacks were best because they did less damage than firing, large-scale boarding, or any combination of the two. Small forces could capture much larger ones if they could sneak aboard and quickly subdue the captain and officers.
- A famous example involves the French pirate Pierre le Grand, who in 1665 used a large open canoe to sneak on board a Spanish galleon one evening, subdue its officers, and steal the ship. Pierre then returned to France and left piracy, probably assuming he'd never top what he just pulled off.

READING

Lehr, *Pirates*.

Little, *The Sea Rover's Practice*.

BURIED TREASURE AND PIRATE ECONOMICS

Even though the concept of buried pirate treasure is largely a fiction, acquiring loot in one form or another was and remains a key part of pirate life. This lesson looks at the realities of pirate treasure and pirate economics. In particular, it examines questions such as: How did the pirate lifestyle work out for them financially? How often did pirates manage to retire with a hoard of pilfered gold—or any kind of money?

THE NATURE OF TREASURE

- The description of treasure in *Treasure Island* is relevant, fictional as it is, because it's the inspiration for so many that have followed it. In *Treasure Island*, the heterogeneity of pirate gold was a repeated plot point—it comes from all over the known world, and calculating the exchange rate isn't easy.
- Historical accounts of pirate treasure, meanwhile, focus on this question: What was the bottom line of the pirate's take? Instructive here is one of the most famous English pirates of all time, Henry Every, popularly known as Captain Every.
- In 1695, Every stole somewhere in the neighborhood of £100,000 to £300,000 worth of treasure from a pilgrim ship belonging to the Mughal emperor Aurengzeb, making his men, by the standards of a sailor's wages,

ridiculously rich. Yet a captured pirate from that voyage, William Philips, described the booty in his testimony when he was brought to trial in a dispassionate manner.

- Some of Philips' dispassion was no doubt due to the fact that his account comes from legal testimony. There's ample evidence elsewhere that at least some pirates dared to dream. Henry Morgan's buccaneering articles began with the following:

Imprimis. It's agreed and concluded upon by and between the above-said parties that whatsoever gold, silver, pearl, jewels, rings, precious stones, ambergris and brazer, or other merchandises which are, or shall be, within the term of this voyage taken on shore, shall be equally divided man for man as free plunder.

- But while the articles opened with this aspirational vision of gold and jewels equally shared, they didn't stop there. Pirates were practical, and most of their booty came in the form of consumable or fungible spoils. Other articles explained how to divide up ships and their cargo and disability pay.
- With few exceptions, pirates did not end up retiring atop vast piles of gold, much as they might hope to. That hope was a dangerous one. Pirates could be driven to their trade by desperation, particularly when privateers were thrown out of work during the economic downturns that often followed the cessation of war. But others were truly led astray by golden (or silver) dreams.

PIRATE CAREERS

- Most pirates avoided the fate of hanging and retired from piracy itself to find another line of work, at least temporarily. The majority of European pirate careers were short, about one to three years on average. In contrast, a Chinese pirate might spend most of his life at sea.

- After a few years of raiding, a pirate typically would either retire into obscurity, or be caught and/or killed. Data about a pirate's career pathway is hard to come by, but in general what we know doesn't support sustained high living.
- However, there are some stories about pirates coming across huge scores. The English pirate known as Captain Christopher Congdon supposedly enjoyed shares of up to £3,000 per man after they retired in 1720 to the island of Nosy Baraha, off the coast of Madagascar, following an illustrious career of raiding.
- Congdon's ship had the memorable name of the *Dragon*, and he had surrendered to a general amnesty act driven by the Bahamas' first royal governor Woodes Rogers. That act persuaded another notable pirate, Captain Henry Jennings, to apparently shift into retirement.
- Unlike Jennings, though, Congdon's retirement evidently didn't take. After ending up in Madagascar, Congdon and his crew likely engaged, illegally, in trading captive Africans; they also snatched up a number of ships of various nationalities until the haul from a particularly rich East India ship convinced Congdon he had enough to break up the company and end his roving life.
- According to the account in the *General History of the Pyrates*, Congdon and his men petitioned the French governor of the Mascarenhas Archipelago, in the Indian Ocean east of Madagascar, for protection. The men were permitted to become ex-pirates after paying a sufficient amount in bribes and agreeing to fire their ships.
- The *General History* indicates that Congdon married the governor's sister-in-law before moving to France as a respectable merchant. Others, such as the pirate historian Baylus Brooks, assert that he married in France to a strong-minded merchant woman. In any case, he reintegrated himself into mainland European society, a pirate no longer. With stories like this, it is not hard to imagine why an overworked, underpaid, or perhaps completely unemployed sailor might think piracy was worth the risk.

- As for Congdon's crew, most of the surviving men remained in the Indian Ocean, where residents who did not respect them much did their best to part them from their remaining spoils. The former pirates most likely either ended up penniless or spent the rest of their lives as farmers or small-time traders, unable to return to their former friends or families. This kind of fate certainly is not the sort that gets talked about much in pirate legends.

THE TYPICAL FATE OF PIRATES AND PRIVATEERS

- There are other examples to be found of huge scores, but such episodes stand out because they were not necessarily the typical fate of a pirate. True privateers might have expected some basic wages. They might even have sometimes received wages that were higher than average compared to merchant sailors, but a true pirate operated on a no-prey, no-pay system, and the risk of no pay was real.
- The ocean is a big place, and travel in the age of sail was dangerous; the winds were unpredictable, and there was always the danger of dehydration or scurvy to contend with as well. Moreover, a pirate ship might cruise for weeks or even months without encountering a suitable target.
- All in all, it was possible to hit it big, but most pirates did not, and those who did rarely held on to their wealth for long. No one buried their giant chests of golden treasure and gemstones on desert islands to later pick each other off in subsequent quests to retrieve them.

OTHER HISTORICAL ARRANGEMENTS

- This lesson concludes with a look at other arrangements, both from the past and from modern times. Here, an important distinction is that between privateer and pirate, which was not just a legal issue but could be a complex economic and cultural one as well.
- Privateering was usually not as lucrative as outright piracy. Men's shares were smaller and lessened by the cuts taken by the owners and, often, the government, yet the majority of the piratically inclined sailors preferred privateering given the choice. It was less disreputable and less risky.

- Also relevant here are the complex networks of corsairing in the Mediterranean and Levant, which were strongly linked to periods of economic recession or scarcity. In general, these operations were efficiently run and regulated. Stolen ships, goods, and captive people were shared out according to fixed rules.
- Some of the profit went to the port and the government. After such fees were paid, half of the take went to the owners and the other half to the crew. Even the captive rowers in the galley received some small share of the prize money, although they received no wages otherwise.
- We don't know as much about the policies of the powerful medieval Baltic pirate groups like the Likedeelers, but their name, meaning “equal sharers,” certainly suggests there may have been an expectation of equitable division of booty. (It may also have pointed to the fact that such pirates shared their prizes with the coastal communities who sheltered them.)
- It's even less clear how Vikings might have handled immediate questions of booty distribution. Their society largely did not have a system of minted money, but it did engage in extensive global trading networks, and they must have had reliable ways to value the precious metals they looted.
- Some pirate groups made such significant land incursions that piracy was only a part of their economic practice. This was true of the longstanding multiethnic Wakō raiders in Asia, a force to be reckoned with between 1350 and the early 1600s, whose practices also included major land incursions, maintaining coastal forts, and engaging in fishing and trade. In these cases, the distribution of booty was only a small part of the puzzle.
- Chinese pirates of the 19th century, operating in a vast network, had their own version of a pirate code. Booty was carefully cataloged and registered. Twenty percent went to whomever had captured it, and the rest went into a general fund where it could be distributed as needed by the commander of the fleet. Withholding or pillaging from the central fund was—as it had been in the Caribbean—considered a potential capital offense.

MODERN ARRANGEMENTS

- Among modern pirates, practices regarding profit may be as varied as they were among historical rovers. In a 2011 interview with Reuters, the Somali pirate Saeed Yare claimed to have made \$2.4 million from participating and investing in piracy. According to Yare, Somali pirates use an economic model reminiscent of classical privateering: half the take goes to the hijackers themselves, and the other half is split between the investors who outfit the raids and the guards.
- They also contribute philanthropically to their coastal homes. (No pirate network can survive long without a friendly base somewhere to provide shelter and trade.) These operations are typically orderly, and hostages are usually unharmed, since there are strong economic reasons to ransom them.
- In contrast, Brazilian pirates operating from poverty-stricken areas along the Amazon River are possibly more analogous to Golden Age pirates than Elizabethan or Somalian privateering types. These groups favor violent shock-and-awe tactics, attacking at night, robbing and sometimes murdering crews more often than taking hostages.
- They make off with cargoes as varied as clothing, drugs, food, and especially gas and fuel. No doubt gold and jewels are welcome if they're available, but Amazon pirates are more often looking for goods they can use and easily sell on land.

READING

Anderson, "Piracy and World History."

Leeson, *The Invisible Hook*.

PIRATES AS FREEDOM FIGHTERS

Aboard the Golden Age pirate ships and many of those that sailed after that time, an organizational structure emerged that became a key reason that scholars are so fascinated by these groups. This structure, which the philosopher R. B. Braithwaite calls a hydrarchy, was unique. The historians Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh define it as “the organization of the maritime state from above, and the self-organization of sailors from below.” In piracy’s Golden Age, in other words, sometimes the sailors from below organized to overthrow the maritime powers above in order to live lives according to rules that they had a greater say in making.

PIRATES, LABOR PRACTICES, AND FREEDOM

- One idea about piratical defiance is that pirates were an early, important form of labor resistance—freedom fighters attempting to spread labor rights and democratic values across the oceans. Some pirate ships did work under fairly democratic principles, under which most men had a vote and the quartermaster was—except during battle—as powerful or more powerful than the elected captain himself.
- But there were always important exceptions. Captain Bartholomew Roberts and his men, for instance, excluded Irishmen from the vote, and they certainly weren’t interested in the rights or labor conditions of the African prisoners they enslaved, sold, or murdered.

- The story of Captain George Cusack, whose 1675 biography was memorably titled *The Grand Pyrate*, underscores the complicated ways pirates engaged with their own freedoms and those of other men. Cusack—an Irishman, as it happens—took to privateering, but he displayed a personality one of his captains called “very mutinous.”
- A captain named Edward Spragge set Cusack to work as a press master. This means that Cusack, who could not bear any check to his personal freedom, found a job whose purpose was to kidnap men and force them to go to sea on warships in the name of the country’s good during wartime.
- Still, he did so rebelliously. At one point, he impressed a man who had already been arrested and was condemned to die, which, along with his penchant for mutiny, got Cusack thrown in prison.
- When he gained his liberty, he turned pirate almost immediately, leading a mutiny aboard the first ship that employed him as a gunner. Pirates like Cusack could know what it was to lose their freedom in every possible way and still be capable of taking it from others. The freedom a pirate most valued was his own.

TYPES OF REBELLION

- There was such a strong connection between mutiny and piracy—mutiny so often being the first step to a piratical voyage—that in 1700, English law actually coded mutiny or attempted mutiny as piracy. Yet there were ways besides mutiny to rebel on board a ship.
- Marcus Rediker notes that the term *strike* itself comes from a 1768 labor stoppage when London sailors struck, or hauled down, the high-set and highly visible topgallant sails of the merchant ships they served. The vast majority of mistreated sailors never mutinied or became pirates.
- Mutineers themselves had to be perpetually on guard against further mutiny. A good example is the small-time pirate William Fly. Fly was the boatswain on the *Elizabeth*, which was a Guinea trader that sailed from Jamaica toward West Africa. A Guinea trader was a ship involved in enslaving people.

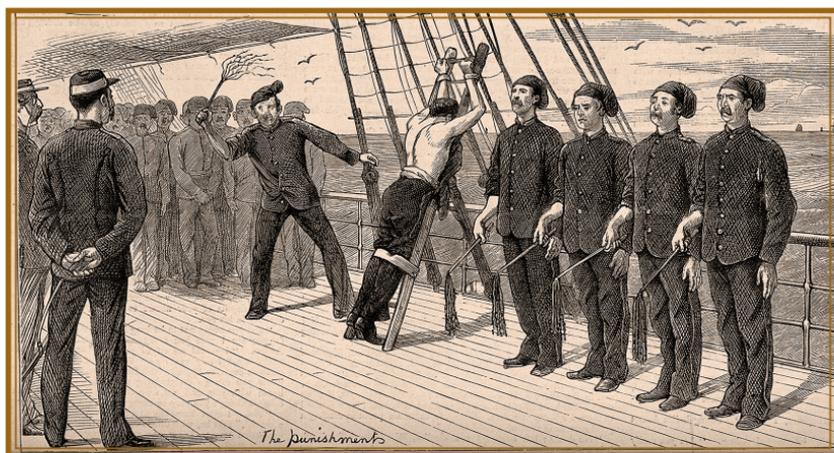
- Finding himself ill-treated, Fly organized a mutiny against the captain, during which the captain and the first mate were murdered. The crew turned its focus from slaving to piracy, renamed the ship, and sailed off in search of prizes. They had some moderate success until Fly impressed too many men into the pirate crew, and they, in turn, led a successful mutiny against him.

PIRATE MOTIVATIONS AND REVENGE

- This is an important consideration regarding the temptation to see pirates as labor heroes: Some pirates are motivated by fiscal desires, and some are more overtly political. Others still are motivated by greed but capitalize on the appearance of political motivations to facilitate their robberies.
- Some pirates are violent by preference; some are pragmatic and fight only if it's unavoidable. But none, in the Caribbean Golden Age, were doing anything coherent to overthrow the system against which they rebelled. When they took revenge against cruel officers, or when they burned New England ships because New England had been too active in hanging pirates, it was a personal vengeance.
- Even so, there are many stories of pirates interrogating officers to see how they treated their sailors, and then meting out their own version of justice in turn. This didn't necessarily spell doom for a captain; sometimes, it could even result in his exoneration.
- Many legal ships' captains, however, were aware of previous pirate depredations and had good reason to dread being captured by pirates. Alexander Spotswood, the lieutenant governor of Virginia who hired the hunters that finally brought down Blackbeard, heard that Captain Roberts wanted to punish him for his pirate hunting.
- Spotswood fretted over "what inhuman Treatment must I expect, should I fall within [the pirates'] Power," for, he complained, the barbarity of pirates would allow them to "cut off the Nose & Ears of a Master for but correcting his own Sailors." Spotswood's concern for his own welfare was understandable, but he seemed to take for granted that it was unreasonable for pirates to resent a captain disciplining the men who worked under him.

PUNISHING SAILORS

- Most sailors were from humble backgrounds. In particular, those driven to work on board enslaving merchant ships, which were not desirable jobs, had virtually no social protections.
- Meanwhile, on board the ship, the captain's authority was essentially absolute. This environment was a terrible breeding ground for tyranny, and it is hardly surprising that the result was sometimes mutiny or punishment at the hands of pirates who had themselves often worked under such brutal conditions before going rogue.
- One of the most popular tools for punishing sailors was the cat-o'-nine-tails, a whip made of nine knotted thongs, but sailors could be flogged with a variety of implements as well as beaten, punched, and kicked. Threats of nose slitting and ear cutting were far from unknown on legal ships, but they were directed top downward.
- Many men died of such treatment, and while legal redress of grievances was theoretically possible, it was not common or easy to pursue. Captains could also imprison sailors or abandon men on shore in any convenient port.



- Captains could stop grog or rations, or offer only spoiled, scant food. In short, a merchant ship could be hell afloat, quite as horrific as anything a violent pirate might conceive of.
- This, of course, was not universal. Some merchant ships were places of brotherhood and conviviality. And even when they weren't, sailors had many means of resisting even physical abuse that stopped short of manslaughter or murder. Mutinies, argues Rediker, were almost always the result of accumulated grievances.

PIRATE HETEROGENEITY

- While a pirate's freedom always came at the cost of someone else's safety or liberty in the end, their hypocrisy was somewhat tempered by the special circumstances of pirate community standards. For one, while ships in general tended to have polyglot, heterogeneous crews, the general belief is that pirates were even more likely to feature international and interracial mixing.
- It's difficult to get good numbers on the racial makeup of the average pirate crew, but by some estimates, pirate crews were often as much as 20 to 30% Black. Five of Blackbeard's 14-man crew were reportedly Black men; a quarter of Roberts's 267 were non-white.
- That may simply reflect the demographics of the Caribbean itself rather than any preference among pirates for some 18th-century version of inclusivity among their ranks. There is some limited evidence, though, that Black pirates were more likely to be free than Black sailors on other kinds of ships.
- Black men at sea, if they were not among the enslaved, generally experienced a little more freedom from overt racism than those on land. Life at sea meant a form of captivity for many different people, and the shared experience of maritime labor, forcible confinement, and brutal management could create bonds among white and Black sailors.
- At the same time, it's important to remember that the plight of, for example, an impressed white sailor cannot fairly be compared to the plight of a captive African bondsman during the Middle Passage. The white



seaman, however miserable, at least received wages—as would a free Black sailor working on a slave ship. Bondsmen working on ships would by contrast see any wages they earned directed to their captors.

- Furthermore, life at sea was different, and the rigid customs of hierarchy meant that to some extent the concerns of role, skill, and status in a ship's crew could crowd out racial distinctions. Highly skilled Black mariners could outearn unskilled common seamen, regardless of race or ethnicity.
- On the other hand, there were hard limits. Black sailors were unlikely to be officers.

PIRATES IN CHARGE

- Pirates, like everyone else, tended to act in self-interest. They were also as easily tempted to acts of tyranny as anyone else. An interesting example of what a pirate might do if given the opportunity to create his own society

might be found in Abraham Samuel, a man of mixed-race ancestry from Martinique who rose from pirate quartermaster to a self-styled colonial king of Madagascar.

- Madagascar was an important land mass for pirates heading between the Atlantic and Red Sea and oceans beyond.
- Samuel was elected quartermaster aboard a pirate ship named the *John and Rebecca* that anchored at Tôlanàro bay toward the south part of Madagascar in 1696, on its way back home from Red Sea predations. The French had tried to establish a small settlement they called Fort Dauphin there.
- The settlers had evacuated two decades earlier, but some traces of the fort remained, and the pirates took shelter in them when a storm wrecked their ship. A royal woman of the Antanosy, a Malagasy ethnic group, claimed to recognize Samuel as her long-lost son, taken from her during the French evacuation. Her claim allowed Samuel to name himself king of the region.
- A small pirate settlement—no more than a few dozen rovers—was thereby founded, and from their base in the abandoned fort, they managed to snatch up the occasional prize, enriching themselves and the Antanosy among whom they lived. They also charged protection money to ships passing through—and sometimes even provided the protection.
- Samuel gained a reputation for treating French visitors “very barbarously,” so much so that some Europeans began to avoid the port. But Samuel also quarreled continuously with his neighbors, and his was no long reign. By 1705, he was dead, and his followers were gone. None but the Antanosy knew what happened.
- Samuel’s story is more or less true, but the apocryphal story of Captain Misson, the idealistic freedom-loving pirate from the *General History*, shows a number of parallels to it. Misson, like Samuel, supposedly solidified his status through kinship to a royal woman, in his case by marrying a princess from Anjouan Island in the Indian Ocean north of Madagascar.
- Both put together pirate settlements in Madagascar—Misson called his Libertalia—and seemed to live successfully, if not always peacefully, for a few years. Both increased their colonies’ populations by inviting

passing pirate groups to stay and join them. And both were wiped out abruptly: Misson's people were massacred by their neighbors, Misson himself drowning at sea, and Libertalia was overnight rendered as if it had never been.

- But the resonance between the fictional and historical founders of pirate nations in Madagascar is superficial. Misson, for example, was monogamous and devoted to his wife; Samuel seems to have taken enthusiastically to polygamy.
- Misson went to great pains to establish an elective government in his colony. Samuel, meanwhile, retained his pirate crew about him as heavily armed bodyguards, and he seems to have relied largely on might to make right during his brief reign. Additionally and importantly, Misson stopped stealing things from other people. Samuel did not.

READING

Hill, "Radical Pirates?"

Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*.



LESSON 7

PIRATES AND ENSLAVEMENT

In his diary of 1833, Charles Darwin made this remark: “It is commonly said, that a Sealer, Slaver & Pirate are all of a trade.” Darwin was principally concerned with sealers—that is, seal hunters—because he had just encountered one with a nasty reputation in the Falkland Islands. But the link his statement identified between pirates and people in the slave trade raises a question for us: What kind of connection runs between pirates and enslavement?

IMPORTANT DIFFERENTIATIONS

- At the outset, we need to differentiate between the captivity in which, for instance, the crew of a merchant ship might find itself if it were seized by pirates, on the one hand, and race chattel enslavement, on the other. The former situation occurred quite often but rarely lasted long. Having too many captives on a pirate ship was dangerous; an unhappy crew might well mutiny.
- Pirates might attack the captain and officers of a captured ship out of a general principle of not liking authority or torture them to find their money, but they had less quarrel with the common sailors. That generally applied unless they were shorthanded or if they came across sailors with certain special skills: Pilots, navigators, carpenters, coopers, surgeons, or musicians were often forced to remain behind when their fellows went free.

- They also not uncommonly treated Indian or African men as their captives or slaves, assuming their resistance was less meaningful than the dislike of white men for being forced to be a pirate. This is where the relationship between captivity and race chattel slavery becomes more complicated.

THE STEDE BONNET TRIAL

- The trial of the pirate Stede Bonnet and his followers shows how these issues could play out in real life. Eventually, Bonnet had cast aside the royal pardon he had received for his pirate past, picked up a crew of pirates that Blackbeard had marooned, and returned to piracy until he and his crew were captured in a chaotic battle.
- All of the pirates at the trial agreed on some principles: Blackbeard had marooned them, and Bonnet offered to transport them to St. Thomas, saying he would apply for a privateer's commission to honor the terms of his pardon. One pirate, named Neal Paterson, gave this explanation for his actions:

Sir, it was in a strange Land, and I had no Money, nor nothing left, and I was willing to do something to live; but it was against my will to go a pirating.

- The evidence, however, worked against them. It appears that Bonnet and his men started attacking ships even without a commission. Also, Paterson turned out to have stolen money on his person, so he hanged. Bonnet, despite making the claim that he didn't actually take any booty but was just holding some shares for other people, also hanged.
- However, other men were acquitted. One interesting case is Thomas Gerrard, who was from Antigua. Gerrard was found to have signed the articles of piracy aboard Bonnet's ship. He was an able seaman, a man with a reputation for honesty, and also a free man of mixed-race descent. This gave the pirates leverage.

- According to Gerrard, after he was taken by Bonnet's pirates:

One of the Men came and asked if I would join with them? I told him, No. He said, I was but like a Negro, and they made Slaves of all of that Colour, if I did not join. So I did it with a Design to get clear of them the first Opportunity; and I never shared any of the Goods.

- Juries would take seriously a man's claim to have been forced into piracy, but if he could be shown to fight willingly during boarding or to use stolen goods, his chances of acquittal were poor. Interestingly, the other pirates to a man corroborated Gerrard's claims. Gerrard was acquitted.
- The takeaway point is that captivity and race chattel slavery were indeed two different things in the 18th century, but both concepts could be and were applied to Black people who found themselves on pirate ships, sometimes at the same time. Bonnet's pirates held Gerrard captive by threatening him with being sold into slavery if he did not work as a member of their crew.

INEXTRICABLE LINKS

- Piracy and various forms of slavery were absolutely inseparable at any era and particularly so during the Golden Age. There was no way for men traveling the Caribbean, let alone the deep-sea routes through the Atlantic, to avoid the presence of the transatlantic slave trade.
- During the time that the transatlantic slave trade was more or less exclusively a Spanish and Portuguese operation, slaves were mostly brought from Africa to Spanish and Portuguese colonies in the Americas and forced to labor there. Once the British got into the act, their trade route became known as the triangle trade because it typically involved three legs.

- The first was a journey from the British Isles to West Africa, carrying brandy, guns, and other goods to be exchanged for captives. The second was the brutal Middle Passage taking the Africans from West Africa to the West Indies and North America, where those who survived were sold. Colonial goods such as rum and sugar were taken on board, and then commenced the third leg back to England, where those goods were sold.
- Many pirates had experience aboard slave ships. For some, it was this experience that led directly to piracy. The conditions on ships engaged in the transatlantic slave trade were often grim, and the risk of death from disease and harsh conditions was high for both the captive bondpeople below decks and their captors.
- Mutiny was a constant risk, both on the part of the enslaved people and the seamen who held them captive, but when the latter rebelled or deserted, it was against the captain, not against the grotesquerie of the transatlantic slave trade. Indeed, pirates who encountered enslaved people among their prey were more likely to murder them or sell them than to free them.
- Slave ships were attractive targets: They were often speedy vessels, with crews that were poorly motivated to put up a fight to defend abusive captains and owners who shared little of their profits. The available evidence suggests that pirates had no particular interest in righting wrongs when they captured slaving vessels.

CAPTAINS ROBERTS AND MISSON

- Captain Bartholomew Roberts was engaged in the slave trade himself when he turned pirate, and he periodically returned to the trade. In 1722, he crowned a campaign of terror along the West African coastline by attacking Ouidah harbor, a notorious hub of the transatlantic slave trade, and captured and ransomed 11 ships, although he stole one of the ships he had ransomed.
- The captain of the 12th ship, called the *Porcupine*, refused to pay the ransom, although the ship was almost full of bondpeople. Roberts ordered his crew to set fire to the ship, killing the 80 captives on board because



Roberts' crew was in too much of a hurry to free them. The author of *A General History of the Pyrates* found this appalling, calling it “a Cruelty unparalell'd” for which everyone involved deserved to die.

- The *General History* does include one story of a pirate who could not abide the trade in captive humans. This would be Captain Misson, the fictional character who appears in the later-added second volume of the popular pirate history.
- Eventually, Misson forms a colony based on radical democracy in Madagascar. He calls it Libertalia, and briefly it is a utopia. However, no pirate like him ever existed. We don't really know why he is included in a largely realistic compilation of pirate histories.

PIRATES AND SLAVERY THROUGHOUT HISTORY

- Throughout history, pirates have very often been willing to treat human beings as saleable objects. Indeed, some pirates regarded prisoners as the main object of their raids.
- In its least permanent form, this captive taking might amount to a ransom scheme, which was common among the Wakō pirates of East Asia, the Orang Laut of Singapore, and the Barbary corsairs alike. In other cases, pirate captives had little to no chance of ransom.
- Taking captives with the goal of enslavement has been a global phenomenon. Moro pirates in the Sulu Sea waged a privateering campaign against the European and American colonial presence well into the 20th century, but during the 18th and 19th centuries, their main form of wealth procurement was in enslaving prisoners.
- As far back as the Viking age, which stretched from the 700s to about 1050 or so, taking slaves seems to have been a major goal for seafaring raiders. It is estimated that as much as 10% of the Scandinavian population in this period consisted of thralls—that is, slaves or serfs.

ENGLISH PRIVATEERING AND SLAVERY

- For their part, English pirates did not become rovers specifically to take captives and sell them, but that doesn't mean they didn't want to be in the slave trade. Instead, to a significant extent, the English were inspired to privateering and to piracy out of anger that the Spanish would not allow them more freedom to participate in enslaving and selling people from the African continent.
- Privateering is essentially state-sanctioned piracy. England relied heavily on privateer forces from the 16th through the early 18th centuries as a major component of its presence at sea. Elizabethan privateers helped to flesh out England's overstretched navy.
- Queen Elizabeth's Sea Dogs were crucial to harassing Spain at the end of the 16th century, and the more successful among them were hailed as patriots and heroes, although the Spanish understandably considered them foul pirates. And yet they were also enslavers as well as explorers—early pioneers in the triangle trade that would later consign millions of Africans into American bondage.

LATER EVENTS

- This interconnectedness of pirate voyages and enslaving ones would only increase with time. For instance, the Red Sea Men (the pirates who sailed the so-called Pirate Round) were absolutely dependent on the transatlantic slave trade: Without slave ports along the African coasts, they would have had nowhere to take in supplies or fence goods.
- The attacks on treasure-heavy pilgrim ships that made the pirates Thomas Tew and Henry Every legendarily wealthy could not have happened without slave ports. Every in particular began his career as an unlicensed trader in African captives.
- Not all of the Black and other nonwhite men aboard pirate ships were enslaved. Bart Roberts's crew was as much as a 20% Black, for example, and at least some of them were free. But during the Golden Age, what evidence we have suggests that they were also not necessarily equals,

and there is little evidence of Black pirate captains in the Caribbean at this point, although a few commanded anti-Spanish raids in the buccaneering age.

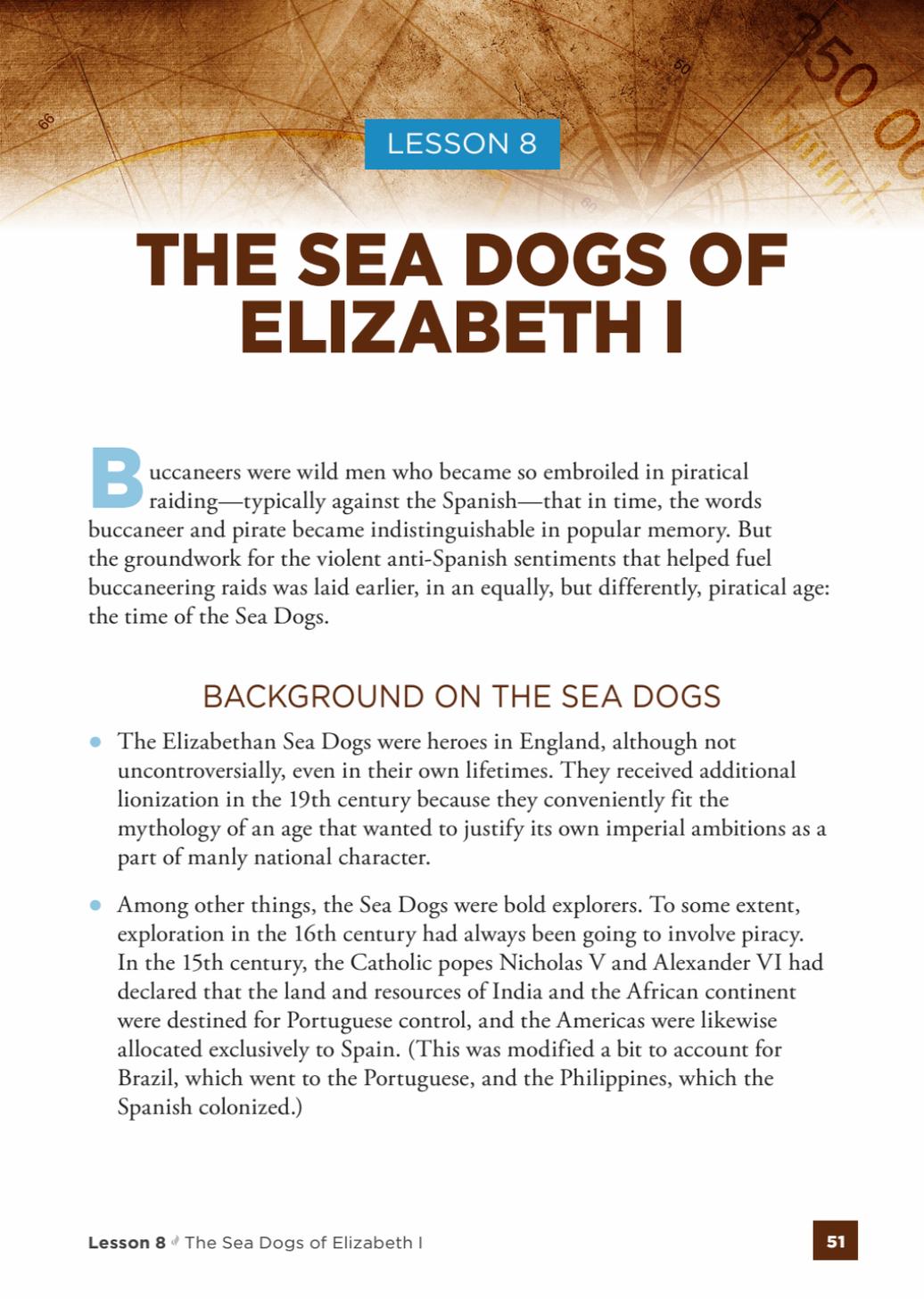
- That changed in the early 19th century. Between the 1720s and the end of the 18th century, the Atlantic pirates were relatively quiet. Then came the French Revolution and the Napoleonic era that it ushered in. From the 1798 rise of Napoleon to the final end in 1815 of his wars, there was a huge scaling up in both naval and privateering forces; once the wars ended, many of those men, forced out of work, would be tempted to piracy.
- In the territory that would become the sovereign state of Haiti, there was the first successful revolution against race chattel slavery. The First French Republic had declared all men to be free and equal. The Black people living in Haiti tried to hold them to their word. White enslavers refused to comply, and on August 21, 1791, there was a massive revolt of bondspople against their enslavers.
- By 1804, Haiti was the first independent postcolonial nation in Latin America. In the years that followed, Haiti hired privateers from South and Latin American nations—ships whose Black crews had rebelled against their white commanders to turn pirate. The years up to 1825 witnessed a second age of Caribbean piracy.

READING

Bialuschewski, “Black People under the Black Flag.”

Bolster, *Black Jacks*.

Mustakeen, *Slavery at Sea*.



LESSON 8

THE SEA DOGS OF ELIZABETH I

Buccaneers were wild men who became so embroiled in piratical raiding—typically against the Spanish—that in time, the words buccaneer and pirate became indistinguishable in popular memory. But the groundwork for the violent anti-Spanish sentiments that helped fuel buccaneering raids was laid earlier, in an equally, but differently, piratical age: the time of the Sea Dogs.

BACKGROUND ON THE SEA DOGS

- The Elizabethan Sea Dogs were heroes in England, although not uncontroversially, even in their own lifetimes. They received additional lionization in the 19th century because they conveniently fit the mythology of an age that wanted to justify its own imperial ambitions as a part of manly national character.
- Among other things, the Sea Dogs were bold explorers. To some extent, exploration in the 16th century had always been going to involve piracy. In the 15th century, the Catholic popes Nicholas V and Alexander VI had declared that the land and resources of India and the African continent were destined for Portuguese control, and the Americas were likewise allocated exclusively to Spain. (This was modified a bit to account for Brazil, which went to the Portuguese, and the Philippines, which the Spanish colonized.)

- In the 16th century, the other monarchies of Europe, some of which by then were Protestant, made clear that they also were not thrilled with these colonial trade monopolies. Nations began to develop clandestine triangle trading routes, which were risky but often hugely profitable.
- By the 1600s, most trading routes that involved Africa meant trading enslaved captives. Meanwhile, privateers and pirates picked off whatever they could—captives, goods, or gold—from the “legal” Portuguese and Spanish ships, ventures that were likewise both risky and rewarding. Not infrequently, the sailors who engaged in the illegal trading and the sailors who did the pirating overlapped.
- Nowhere was this overlap so marked as it was in England. In the 16th and 17th centuries, England garnered a reputation among her trading partners for being something of a nation of pirates.
- The mercantile system that dominated European trade focused on closed markets, high profits, and protectionist measures like import bans and high tariffs; it also tacitly encouraged poor working conditions for sailors. It was a system set up, however unintentionally, to goose black market trading.
- Privateers and pirates thrived because they could easily find merchants willing to back them and trade with them. And there were plenty of politicians who were willing to protect them.

ENGLISH AND IRISH PIRACY

- Piracy, as far as the English were concerned until the 1670s or so, had many commendable features: It encouraged trade routes, trained mariners, and brought home profits. English privateers—from a Spanish or Portuguese point of view—were hard to distinguish from pirates. But from the English perspective, English pirates were often hard to distinguish from privateers; they most often ran disciplined, accountable ships with regular crews, and they rarely harassed English targets.
- Francis Drake is an on-point example here. While his circumnavigation of the globe—the first ever completed by an Englishman—was in many ways an openly piratical trip, his ships were by no means run like a buccaneering

venture. Indeed, he kept taut discipline, at one point putting one of his noble commanders on trial. Thomas Doughty, imprisoned by Drake on very thinly supported charges of witchcraft and mutiny, was ultimately beheaded.

- The early 17th century also saw an expansion of Irish deep-sea piracy. James I, who succeeded Elizabeth I, did not share her liking for pirates, but while he cracked down considerably on the operational ease of English piracy on the English coastline, Ireland was barely troubled by naval patrols at all. Southwest Ireland became for a time a safe haven for pirates.

ELIZABETH I'S ADMINISTRATION

- The administration of Elizabeth I had a complex problem to navigate when it came to maritime crime. Regional pirates in Cornwall and Devon, many based in Plymouth, attacked vessels indiscriminately, seizing anything they could grasp from Spain, France, Scotland, the Dutch Republic, Denmark, and most anyone else. Supported by an extensive smuggling network and patronized by powerful residents, such networks eluded the control of crown officials or the admiralty court, sometimes by employing them directly.
- Elizabeth made claims to be a scourge of pirates, which were difficult to support in the aggregate. English monarchs had long used privateers' commissions—called letters of marque—to profitably harass enemy forces during times of war, which were frequent. The economy and admiralty of England were by no means set up to be hostile to goods filched from other people's vessels.



QUEEN ELIZABETH I

- The Sea Dogs were authorized in 1560, during Elizabeth's reign, to carry anti-Spanish commissions. This privateering use appears to be the origin of the term *sea dog*, which did not come to be generally synonymous with an old, experienced sailor until much later.
- The Sea Dogs were varied, colorful men who could be hard to control at times, certainly. Martin Frobisher, for example, who also probably worked as a spy for the English government in between sea raiding gigs, garnered such a reputation for piracy that he was repeatedly seized on suspicion of illegal activities.
- In particular, Frobisher was accused of slave trading, even when he had a valid commission to attack Spanish or French ships. The moment he was released, he inevitably returned to attacking vessels that his paperwork did not cover.

SIR JOHN HAWKINS AND SIR FRANCIS DRAKE

- Sir John Hawkins was a shipbuilder and eventually treasurer of the Royal Navy, and he came from an important, but not noble, seafaring family. He started out as an enslaving merchant. Because he often ran afoul of various Spanish and Portuguese monopolies, he was constantly at risk of having his cargo seized and condemned, which it sometimes was.
- This required him to force his trading partners to the table by shooting at them, which he sometimes did, and they not infrequently shot back. Even so, Hawkins generated enormous profits; Elizabeth I granted the commission for his first enslaving voyage and became a shareholder for his second and third ones.
- In 1595, he was partnered by Queen Elizabeth with the Sea Dog Sir Francis Drake, his erstwhile cousin, foster brother, and mentee, who had abandoned him decades earlier when they faced dire odds on the Mexican coastline. Drake was impulsive, improvisational, and occasionally paranoid; it was a bad combination of personalities.

- Together, Drake and Hawkins set out to attack Panama, failing where Captain Morgan would later succeed: Both men died in the course of their mission. Hawkins was buried at sea, as Drake would be later after he, and many of his men, succumbed to a bloody flux.

DRAKE'S EARLIER LIFE

- Drake, although clearly unable to profitably share command with Hawkins, did learn from him, including how to shake down entire cities on his avowedly patriotic voyages. He gained renown not only as the first Englishman to circle the earth but as one of the saviors of Britain when it was faced with Spain's so-called Invincible Armada of 1588. He also took great pains to expand his own reputation, and he murdered people in the service of the transatlantic trade in enslaved people.
- Drake had become radicalized against the Spanish in 1568, when he and Hawkins faced consequences for their extralegal attempts to sell goods and captives in the Caribbean. Hawkins and his ships had captured the Spanish fort at San Juan de Ulúa near Florida.
- A Spanish fleet came into port, and while the Spanish initially agreed to allow the English to complete their repairs, they later launched a surprise attack. The English sank three Spanish ships but lost four of their own; only two of the English flotilla managed to escape, with Hawkins in the *Minion* and Drake in the *Judith*. Drake inexplicably disappeared in the night and left his cousin and commander to make his way home alone.
- Drake made good on his vows to seek revenge against the Spanish, and he spent the early 1570s raiding the Spanish Main, losing two of his brothers but gaining a good sum of silver. Spain was famously supported by the gold and silver it stole from South America, particularly the silver mines of Potosí.
- To transport that wealth, though, the precious metals had to be marched across the Isthmus of Panama, through territory controlled by understandably hostile maroon groups—*cimarrones*, in Spanish—and on the guard for English or French pirates. Their worst-case scenario was

for these different hostile forces to combine against them, which Drake realized in 1572 when he led the combined forces of all three groups against the mule trains at Nombre de Dios.

- In 1577, Drake set out to raid the Spanish Main again, but this time on the Pacific side. Drake did not get along with his co-commanders and ultimately ended up with only a single ship, the *Golden Hinde*. Aboard the *Golden Hinde*, Drake had a string of highly successful piracies and began bragging to his captives that Elizabeth I had authorized him to rob the Spanish in vengeance for San Juan de Ulúa. She hadn't.
- But she did keep her cut of the treasure, minus some of the booty that the English returned to Portugal to avoid war. She also commissioned Drake to act as a pirate hunter and rid her of some of the irritating small-time pirates, without compromising his abilities as a big-time pirate.

THE SEA DOGS AS ENGLISHMEN

- The Sea Dogs differed from the Golden Agers in that they by no means sought to present themselves as living in a world apart on the high seas. They were, above all, Englishmen. In one famous case, Thomas Fleming, a very active piratical type, spotted the Spanish Armada in 1588 and immediately sailed to the lord high admiral of the navy, turning himself in so that he could convey his intelligence.
- Attacking the Spanish and Portuguese, from this point of view, was a means of affirming one's identity and one's Protestant faith; this would become a particular part of Drake's legend, that he was a great Protestant warrior mostly motivated by veneration for God and Elizabeth, and just every now and then rewarded by some lovely treasure.
- Another part of the justification for preying on Spanish trade in particular was the atrocious way Spanish conquistadores treated indigenous peoples of the Americas in their pursuit of that same treasure that rewarded Drake. These abuses were becoming better known to English readers of the 16th century thanks to popular works like Richard Hakluyt's *The Principal Navigations, Voyages and Discoveries of the English Nation*, which legitimized English expansionist policies by playing up stories of Spanish depravity.

- Such writing, in England and elsewhere, gave rise to a broad cultural phenomenon sometimes called the Black Legend, which posited that the real Spanish atrocities in the so-called New World were somehow unique to Spain. The English who bought into the Black Legend often managed an oblique logic in which they saw themselves as entitled to profit off of the trade in African bondpeople because Spaniards murdered Indians.
- As firsthand accounts like that of Alexander Exquemelin make clear, the English were in some areas latecomers to the subjugation of other peoples, but they were amply capable of exploitation and brutality. Pointing to Spanish abuses as a means of justifying English imperialism would become a longstanding English tradition.

SIR WALTER RALEGH

- Sir Walter Raleigh was another famed Sea Dog whose story has a slightly different form than those of Frobisher, Hawkins, or Drake. Like Drake, though, he was famous for being an outstanding enemy of Spain. He was a colonial thinker and queenly favorite.
- Raleigh was among the incorrigible Sea Dogs who kept on raiding after Spain and England were finally, at least nominally, at peace. This eventually backfired, and he was imprisoned for many years, finally being executed by James I.
- Raleigh dreamed of colonizing North America and was the mastermind behind Roanoke Colony, although he never went to visit it himself. That's just as well: Roanoke went badly, and Drake had to rescue the survivors.



- Raleigh had another bad idea when he impregnated and then married one of the queen's maidens without her permission, which infuriated the queen. (For what it's worth, Raleigh and his wife, Bess Throckmorton, do seem to have been in love, and Bess was tough and capable.) The queen would later forgive him, at least in part, but when Elizabeth died, Raleigh was never trusted as a proponent of James I's succession.
- Convicted on highly dubious grounds of treason, Raleigh was locked in the Tower of London from 1603–1616, where he read and wrote. Oddly, his trial turned him into popular hero because he held himself well, and the prosecutor didn't.
- He was released in 1616 to voyage to Orinoco and find El Dorado; he had spent 20 years collecting stories and rumors of the fabled golden empire. But he also seems to have missed that while he was in prison, the court had committed to the idea of peace with Spain.
- The mission was an almost total failure, but the expedition included the bloody capture of the Spanish town of San Thomé. The last of the great Sea Dogs, Raleigh was executed for endangering the peace with Spain, and the long-suffering Bess, who had accompanied Raleigh on the voyage, carried his head home with her in a red leather bag.

READING

Appleby, *Under the Bloody Flag*.

Ronald, *The Pirate Queen*.

LESSON 9

THE CORSAIRS OF THE MAGHREB

This lesson's main topic is the Maghreb corsairs. Unlike the Sea Dogs, the buccaneers, or most Golden Age pirates, captive taking was their primary business: The captives were the booty because of labor-poor North Africa's need for workers and ransom money. They worked for their governments and did not see themselves as pirates, although Europeans disagreed about that. Notably, their raids against European targets were frequently assisted by Europeans.

A SHOCKING RAID

In 1631, shockingly, corsairs raided the little village of Baltimore, Ireland, carrying away most of the population: an estimated 109 people, almost half of them children.

BACKGROUND ON THE CORSAIRS

- Mediterranean corsairs were privateers, commissioned by their governments to make war primarily against non-Muslims. A contributing factor to this corsairing was the implacable hatred of Spain by the Moorish people in Salé,

located on the coast of modern-day Morocco, following the 16th-century expulsion of Muslims from Granada. Spain's incursions into and enslaving among the North African and Ottoman regions also generated ill will.

- Religion is part of why the corsairs are considered pirates: To the Europeans, an individual could only be a privateer if their government was officially at war with another government in the European sense. Jihad didn't count to them.
- The Barbary Coast, also known as the Maghreb, runs along North Africa; the region was called Barbary by the Europeans for the Berber people who lived there. It includes what we'd now call Tunisia, Algeria, and Libya. It was nominally, but not really very firmly, under the control of the Ottomans; Morocco was the other dominant power to treat with. The major corsair ports were in Algiers, Rabat, Tripoli, Tunis, and Salé.
- The religious issue is also what made the assistance to the corsairs provided by some Europeans, who came to be known as renegades, so objectionable to other Europeans. The term *renegades*, or *renegados*, was applied specifically to Europeans who chose to work for the interests of a Barbary or Ottoman state against the interest of their fellow Europeans, often converting to Islam.

CORSAIR ENCOUNTERS

- There came to be robust public interest in the interactions of Britain and Ireland with North African corsairs. That was with good reason. From 1622–1642, an estimated 300 ships and 7,000 English subjects were taken by corsairs. Between 1660 and the 1730s, 6,000 more Britons were captured.
- Elizabeth I was proud of her strong diplomatic relationship with the Moroccan sultan Ahmad al-Mansur, which was beneficial to English trade interests and detrimental to Spain, as much of the trade was swapping Moroccan sugar and spices for timber, arms, and ammunition. James I struggled to keep up the relationship but did not abandon it.

- Still, the oceans were far from peaceful. Across the 17th to 18th centuries, there were something along the lines of 20,000 English-Maghrebi corsair interactions. That figure for Britons is much lower than the one for Europeans generally for geographical reasons.

BARBARY CAPTIVITY

- Barbary captivity, while terrifying and often brutal, was not analogous to African race chattel slavery for white captives. Indeed, in the 19th century, pro-enslavement Britons and Americans found themselves in the outlandish position of trying to justify one form of enslavement while decrying another.
- Corsairs took non-Muslims—including Christians and non-Christian eastern Europeans, western Africans, and others—as captives and held them hostage for ransom, often selling them and forcing them to labor until the ransom was paid. The captives might have converted to Islam, in which case they were freed and given gifts, although they were also usually barred from returning home.
- High-status captives might be treated simply as hostages, not sold repeatedly or obligated to work. The author of *Don Quixote*, Miguel de Cervantes, was captured and held captive in Algiers as a young veteran and finally freed after five years in his early 30s. His ransom was 500 gold escudos—an enormous sum, and Cervantes was not a famous author at that stage in his life.
- Others could be sold in the slave markets but were redeemable if someone would pay their ransom. Obviously, a person did not want to be a galley slave, mine worker, or a sex worker. But people with skills could earn money and a certain amount of social comfort. People who survived long enough had an excellent chance of being ransomed, especially after 1650 or so.
- The captivity and slavery practices of the Maghreb were far from the only instance of pirate captive-taking that used religious difference as its pretense. Europeans, especially the Spanish, routinely enslaved their Muslim captives as well.

THE KNIGHTS OF MALTA

- In the 16th and 17th centuries, the Knights of Malta—formerly the Knights Hospitaller, who were originally an 11th-century monastic order—decided to act as an anti-pirate force in Mediterranean waters. Seeking to protect or free Christian ships under Ottoman or Barbary attack, theirs was a war in which they very much adopted the tactics of their enemy.
- Maltese galleys were even rowed by Muslim captives. Like the Barbary corsairs, Maltese corsairs were licensed, well-organized, and usually profitable. Soon, they started outright raiding Muslim ships rather than acting defensively, attacking North African ports and capturing Muslims and Moors.
- When trade was down, or when Europeans saw little reason to fund what had become a wealthy independent privateering force, the Knights of Malta were quite apt to turn pirate and harass Europeans as well. Many also worked for the French navy, even when France and the Ottoman Empire were enjoying good relations.
- The Knights of Malta were finally put out of business for good when the French National Assembly abolished their order and grabbed their money in 1789, and Napoleon captured Malta in 1798 before heading for Egypt. A group descended from the Knights of Malta, officially recognized as the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, exists to this day and provides humanitarian assistance to many areas of the world.

CORSAIR VESSELS

- In the cases of both the Maltese and the Maghreb, corsairing in the Mediterranean region was a huge business; it was disciplined and efficiently run, much like the corsairs' swift-sailing galley ships.
- These were light, shallow vessels that could be propelled by sail or oar. It was difficult for them to travel deep into the ocean, and they were fairly vulnerable to heavy bombardment, but they were also very fast and highly maneuverable.

- In the early 17th century, though, and with the help of *renegados*, corsairs started adding captured square-rigged, heavy sailing ships to their fleets, making them much more of a menace.

TURNING RENEGADE

- Why did Europeans turn renegade? In 1603, the year James I took the throne, England and Spain found peace, and the privateers were out of work. James was shrinking the navy and stopping the issue of letters of marque, and there was no step-down plan for the sailors suddenly thrust ashore.
- Many retired, but many more simply needed employment, and moreover, they knew and liked seafaring. In this case, one option was to seek out non-European employers.
- One example of this phenomenon was John (Jack) Ward, who converted and took the name Yusuf Raïs. (*Raïs* is another word for *captain*, which is why corsair names often adopt it.)
- Ward came to prey mostly but not exclusively on European ships. He became a corsairing admiral, eventually retiring to Tunis very wealthy.
- One of his contemporaries was the Dutch renegade Zymen Danseker, also known as Simon the Dancer and later Simon Raïs. The two worked sometimes as allies, with Ward based in Tunis and Danseker in Algiers.
- Danseker's short career was enormously successful. He captured 29 European vessels in 1607, his first year of piracy.
- In 1609, he suddenly decided he wanted to go home, perhaps missing his wife and children—in-law troubles had been part of his reason for turning pirate in the first place. He betrayed his Algerian allies, freeing their Christian captives, and steered for Spain. He captured a rich Spanish prize along the way, which helped smooth his pathway home to Marseilles with a large bribe for Henri IV.
- He was later persuaded to return to sea to assist a French mission in the Gulf of Tunis. During negotiations, he was tricked ashore and rapidly beheaded.



SAYYIDA AL-HURRA

SAYYIDA AL-HURRA

- The stories of some of the keystone originators of Maghrebi corsairing easily eclipse the deeds of Ward or Danseker. Chief among the early pirates was Sayyida al-Hurra, the formidable, early 16th-century corsair queen of Tétouan, in what is today north/central Morocco.
- She was an Andalusian noblewoman raised in exile after the fall of Granada to Spanish forces. Evidently both highly intelligent and educated, she succeeded her husband as the governor of Tétouan, allied with the powerful corsairs of Algiers. She commanded an intimidating corsairing fleet of her own.
- Her influence extended over the western side of the Mediterranean. The Spaniards who had dispossessed her family were forced to negotiate with her when they wanted to redeem their captive citizens.

THE BARBAROSSA BROTHERS

- Her Algerian allies also made quite a name for themselves. In Europe, their name was pronounced “Barbarossa.” The Barbarossa brothers appear in numerous plays, poems, and ballads.

- Their origin story is certainly the stuff of legends. An Ottoman merchant from the Greek island of Lesbos by the name of Oruç was captured by the Knights of Malta; he also lost a younger brother, İlyas, in the battle.
- Once freed, he and another younger brother, Khayr al-Din, turned corsair in revenge, attacking both European tradesmen and the Knights of Malta. The brothers were first based on the Turkish coast; when political instability made a change of scenery wise, they relocated to North Africa and joined the anti-Spanish efforts there.
- Among other things, like taking over Algiers in 1516, Oruç made an effort to assist the Muslim populations fleeing Spain. The brothers' power base in Algiers helped establish an Ottoman authority in the region because in pushing out the Spanish, they also helped to push out local leaders who had been tolerant or resigned to the Spanish presence.
- In 1518, Oruç and his brother Ishak died in battle against the combined forces of the Spanish and Bedouin troops in Algeria. Khayr al-Din, however, inherited his older brother's authority and carried on his legacy, promising to bring the Maghreb under Ottoman control.
- Khayr al-Din made Algiers a formidable naval base from which to launch corsairing campaigns against the coasts of Italy and Spain. He was then made admiral of the entire Ottoman fleet as well as governor of their North African territory, and he successfully allied with France against Spanish power.
- Under al-Din's watch, Algiers withstood even the direct assault of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. The Ottomans became the dominant force in the Mediterranean, challenging both the Spanish and the Holy Roman Empire.
- The imperial admiral Andrea Doria lost to Barbarossa in the Battle of Preveza in 1538. In 1545, in his 60s, Khayr al-Din retired to Constantinople and wrote his memoirs before dying peacefully.

LATER EVENTS

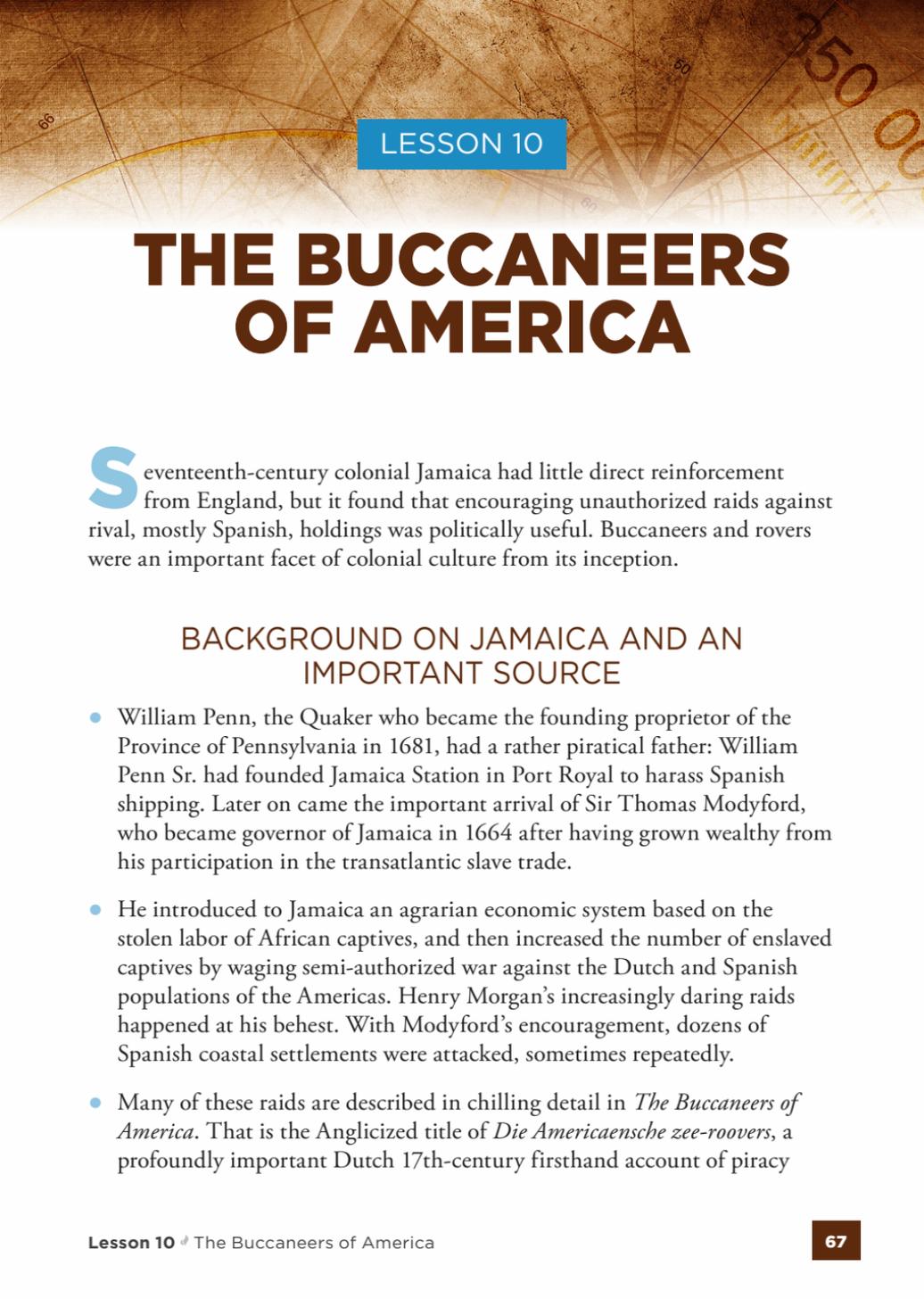
- His successors wrested Tripoli and Tunis permanently from Spanish control. The independence of the Barbary region from Spain was established, although its relationship to the Ottoman Empire would remain something of a contest.
- Moreover, by the latter part of the 16th century, the Barbary region had established able naval forces, strong port cities, and a predilection for an economy reliant on corsairs and captives. The Moroccan states remained independent of the Ottomans, but thanks to rulers like Sayyida al-Hurra, their corsairing situation was similar.
- As time went by, the European powers largely came to the conclusion that negotiating with Morocco and the other Barbary powers worked much more effectively than fighting the corsairs. Change came gradually. As international trade became more important to the European economies, navies were grown to protect merchant ships in powerfully armed convoys.
- By the 1683 treaty with Algiers, a combination of steadily improving naval forces and tactics as well as steadily improving diplomacy meant that the Barbary corsairs were—for the most part—contained as far as harassment of English shipping. Later on, in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, there was a resurgence of Maghrebi corsairing.
- After the war for American independence, American ship crews were chagrined to discover that they were no longer protected by treaties between corsairs and Britain. The new US government just didn't have the cash, at first, for big ransoms or tributes; they needed to find their own combination of diplomacy and bombardment in the early years of the 19th century.

READING

Matar, *Britain and Barbary, 1589–1689*.

Medieval and Early Modern Orient, available at <https://memorient.com/>.

Tinniswood, *Pirates of Barbary*.



LESSON 10

THE BUCCANEERS OF AMERICA

Seventeenth-century colonial Jamaica had little direct reinforcement from England, but it found that encouraging unauthorized raids against rival, mostly Spanish, holdings was politically useful. Buccaneers and rovers were an important facet of colonial culture from its inception.

BACKGROUND ON JAMAICA AND AN IMPORTANT SOURCE

- William Penn, the Quaker who became the founding proprietor of the Province of Pennsylvania in 1681, had a rather piratical father: William Penn Sr. had founded Jamaica Station in Port Royal to harass Spanish shipping. Later on came the important arrival of Sir Thomas Modyford, who became governor of Jamaica in 1664 after having grown wealthy from his participation in the transatlantic slave trade.
- He introduced to Jamaica an agrarian economic system based on the stolen labor of African captives, and then increased the number of enslaved captives by waging semi-authorized war against the Dutch and Spanish populations of the Americas. Henry Morgan's increasingly daring raids happened at his behest. With Modyford's encouragement, dozens of Spanish coastal settlements were attacked, sometimes repeatedly.
- Many of these raids are described in chilling detail in *The Buccaneers of America*. That is the Anglicized title of *Die Americaensche zee-roovers*, a profoundly important Dutch 17th-century firsthand account of piracy

written by Alexander Olivier Exquemelin. Exquemelin described himself as an indentured servant in Tortuga in the service of the French West India Company.

- Finding his existence insupportable, he ventured to live among the buccaneers, probably as a surgeon, as one of his bondholders had been of that trade. At some point in the middle of the 1670s, he left the Caribbean for Amsterdam where he did two noteworthy things: He became professionally certified in surgery, and he wrote a book about his experiences, which was printed in 1678 in Dutch. His volume, slim and eminently readable by the standards of the time, combines reportage, politics, lurid violence, geography, travel, botany, and adventure as it relates its tales of terrifying pirates.

THE BUCCANEER COMMUNITIES

- The buccaneer communities were parallel to and sometimes allied with the maroon groups. Both were made up of people who fled, eschewed, or revolted against the labor camps of the expanding plantation system.
- Buccaneers were overwhelmingly male groups, although they could be multiethnic. They were primarily English and French, but also included Dutch, Scottish, Welsh, Irish, Carib and Mosquito Indians as well as African members. Their heterogeneous national mix gave the nations they benefitted some plausible deniability, which placed them at constant risk; pirates at sea could be condemned as men of no nation, meaning that no law or power protected them.
- Exquemelin figured out very quickly that the men he had joined were not law abiding, but he felt he has no better options, and he raided with them. His experience took place toward the end of the era of buccaneers, when, to supplement their raiding and hunting, English, French, and Dutch men set up camps to harvest logwood. Logwood was an incredibly important dye component and therefore a major European trade item.
- Logwood grows near water, along rivers and in marshes. There was unsurprisingly a great deal of crossover between logging and piracy.

- Modyford, the Jamaican governor, encouraged the logwood trade, particularly in areas settled by Indian groups hostile to the Spanish. This logwood cutting was illegal, according to the Spanish, who sent privateers to take back the logwood, which encouraged more self-styled private seafarers and privateers to attack those privateers.
- There were also many complicated interactions between pirate logwood cutters and Mosquito populations nourished by anti-Spanish sentiment. Of course, guerilla anti-Spanish resistance and profiteering had begun earlier than the 17th century.

BUCCANEER SOCIETY

- Exquemelin's feelings about the buccaneers were mixed at best. He records much of evil. According to virtually all the documentation we have, though, planters were just as bad and just as merciless to their indentures and captives.
- Among buccaneers out of the state of indenture or enslavement, things were different. Reportedly, men like the Brethren of the Coast, a loose confederacy of buccaneers based on Tortuga and later Port Royal, were "civil and charitable" with each other.
- They practiced an interesting form of business partnership. Exquemelin described buccaneers as holding "three sorts of employment: hunting, planting, and privateering." He goes on:

When a man has finished his three years of indentured service, he seeks out a partner, and they pool all they possess. They draw up a document, in some cases saying that the partner who lives longer shall have everything, in others that the survivor is bound to give part to the dead man's friends or to his wife, if he was married.

- Some historians interpret this form of contractual partnership as a form of same-sex marriage, particularly given that the buccaneer communities tended to be single-sex both at sea and, for long periods of time, on land as well. On the other hand, there is ample evidence that when it was possible, most buccaneers were enthusiastically interested in heterosexual relationships. Caribbean sex workers seldom had any difficulty separating these men from their money.
- When passionate disputes arose among the buccaneers, they had their own form of managing as well. Murder was punished by being tied to a tree and shot dead; the murderer got to pick the marksman who would end his life. On the other hand, wrote Exquemelin:

If he has killed his opponent like an honourable man—that is, giving him time to load his musket, and not shooting him in the back—his comrades let him go free. The duel is their way of settling disputes.

BUCCANEER PERSONALITIES

- Some of the better-known names to appear in Exquemelin's pages include François l'Olonnais and Rock the Brazilian (also known as Roche Brazilliano), who was actually a Dutchman possibly named Gerrit Gerritszoon, although Exquemelin had no way of knowing that. Rock, we are told, "made all Jamaica tremble," for "he had no self-control at all," chopping off limbs and burning prisoners alive if they displeased him.
- L'Olonnais's given name was Jean-David Nau; he was born in France but came to the Caribbean when young as an indentured servant. Once he had gained his freedom, he joined the buccaneers, and he was apparently brave, resourceful, and one of the most violent sociopaths among them.
- Another important figure was the Welshman Henry Morgan, who came to Port Royal to make his fortune. He would later become a prisoner in the Tower of London, then a knight, then the lieutenant-governor and briefly the acting governor of Jamaica. Perhaps most outrageously for a former pirate, he was also a judge in the admiralty court.

- In Morgan's day, the English and French governments were essentially encouraging piracy as a strategy toward imperial domination. Anything that weakened the Spanish was good for their trade, and encouraging privateers and pirates was cheap, often profitable, and allowed for some degree of diplomatic deniability.
- Although his commissions from the governor of Jamaica authorized him to attack only maritime targets, Morgan was not notable for particular navigational ability or seamanship. His particular genius was for land-based surprise attacks, and he indulged it, claiming as necessary that his attacks on land were preventative strikes.

MORGAN'S ATTACKS

- In 1688, after an attack of only meager profit in Cuba, the ambitious Morgan proposed sacking the apparently well-protected Portobello. The French privateers he'd been partnering with backed off, wanting no part of the dangerous and illegal venture, but Morgan opted to press on, regardless, and—always adept at managing his men—convinced the English forces to keep following him.
- The unexpected attack began in the dead of night and was quickly successful. Morgan's behavior during the occupation of the city is disputed. According to Morgan, he was a paragon of military nobility.
- Exquemelin's account was at the opposite extreme. According to him, the buccaneers immediately fell to wine and women. Looting and torture followed in the sober light of day.
- Morgan's next campaign was a daring assault on the coastal city of Maracaibo in modern-day Venezuela followed by a thrilling escape against the odds. The Maracaibo attack was extremely profitable, and it drew nearly every privateer in the Caribbean to follow Morgan as a corsairing admiral in a fleet of nearly 30 ships.
- His final major plans, which were militarily the stuff of legend but disappointing treasure-wise, involved a march through the rainforests of the isthmus of Panama. One account of the sacking of Panama City, written by a man named William Fogg, states:

Our party entered the town and found the houses fired by the enemy and all in flame, lodging that night in the churches and monasteries, which were of stone ... and lay there a week searching victuals, etc., of which was plenty, but all the goods burnt and the plate conveyed away. ... After this our men marched out ... and took prisoners every day, but never saw an enemy to face them.

- Exquemelin concurs in the major points here, but he describes more violence and lays much of it at Morgan's feet. It's probably best to remember that for whatever reason—and he may well have had good ones—Exquemelin clearly hated Morgan.
- As for the prisoners brought back from surrounding areas, Exquemelin said that Morgan's men "tortured [them] day by day in an effort to make them disclose where they had hidden their wealth." The tortures included strappado, a painful form of hanging by the arms; woolding, which was another rope torture; burning; and other atrocities. They "did not spare the women either."
- Morgan, relates the revolted narrator, "should have set a better example as their commander, but he was no better than the rest. Whenever a beautiful prisoner was brought in, he would dishonor her at once."
- The whole truth of the invasion's brutalities probably lies with neither account in its entirety. Spanish documents of the attack support Exquemelin's version of events as far as the torture, which seems to have been especially vicious, although they also blame the vice admiral, Edward Collier.

MORGAN, MODYFORD, AND ENSLAVEMENT

- At least publicly, Morgan did not consider himself a pirate, and his most important patron, Modyford, considered himself no pirate master. While their actions often lacked the blessing of the home government, they were

ostensibly undertaken in England's interest, although the healthy dose of profit-minded motivation was impossible to hide.

- Modyford and Morgan were both arrested for their piracy but not convicted. Morgan was knighted for enriching England through violence and enslavement. The colony on Jamaica was founded on the enslavement and looting they perpetuated.
- Modyford's commission to Morgan on his voyage to Panama specifically required him to murder any enslaved men who spoke Spanish but to make all "Women-slaves Prisoners to be brought hither and sold for account of your Fleet and Army."
- During Morgan's political career, anti-Spanish raiding continued, and privateers could count on a safe haven in Jamaica as long as a hefty share of their prizes were paid to Morgan's administration. To his political enemies, this had the look of "countenancing pirates."
- Eventually his commission was revoked, in large part because, in continually aggravating the Spanish, Morgan was making it difficult for financiers who wanted to try to partner with the Spanish to make money in the expanding transatlantic trade in captive Africans. Morgan was no abolitionist—far from it—but he hated the Spanish more than he cared about the profits of distant stakeholders in proslavery corporations.



HENRY MORGAN

- Looked at another way, he sided with the small private enslavers over England's Royal Africa Company. It was common for buccaneering raids, particular earlier ones, to enslave nonwhite people from Spanish settlements. When Morgan died in his early 50s, apparently of liver damage, his estate included 122 enslaved Black captives, seven enslaved Indian captives, and 11 white indentured servants.

CONCLUSION

- By the 1690s, buccaneers had become wild and troublesome enough that Caribbean governments were trying to bring them in line. Their presence gave way to the deep-ocean pirates of the middle part of the Golden Age.
- Even so, it was the Brethren of the Coast who founded a great many of the cultural traditions we have come to see as essential to the pirate *legend*.

READING

Exquemelin, *The Buccaneers of America*.

Frohock, *Buccaneers and Privateers*.



LESSON 11

THE RED SEA MEN OF THE PIRATE ROUND

This lesson looks at the presence of pirates in the Indian Ocean during the period of about 1690–1700, which was the most popular period for the sea route known as the Pirate Round. Vessels sailing the Red Sea and Indian Ocean were often well-stocked and weakly defended in the late 17th century—which, conveniently, was just the point of time that Spanish gold and silver was starting to run dry in the Americas. Some particularly venturesome pirates from North America and the Caribbean started pursuing new opportunities via a new sailing route.

BACKGROUND ON THE PIRATE ROUND

- The Pirate Round started in the western Atlantic, sometimes in the Caribbean or sometimes farther up the Atlantic coastline—sometimes even as far as New York and New England. The pirates sailed east and ultimately went around the southern tip of Africa. Madagascar was a key stopping point along this route.
- They would then head north to target ships in the Red Sea. This pattern was most popular at the end of the 17th century, but it also saw a brief revival in the 1720s.



- The geopolitical situation in this Red Sea region was complex in the 17th and 18th centuries. On the one hand, European nations were trying to push out Asian, Indian, and Arab shipping powers for their own trade benefits, while on the other hand, the Dutch, French, Portuguese, and increasingly the English were simultaneously also fending off challenges from each other.
- In 1600, Queen Elizabeth had chartered the British East India Company, or BEIC, and granted it a monopoly to trade with India. By the early 1700s, the company had established a good toehold on the subcontinent but was by no means a dominant authority.
- Later, the BEIC would make aggressive attempts to take control of the Indian subcontinent, and it would colonize parts of southeast Asia and Hong Kong. But the beginnings of those days were still decades away.
- At the same time, there was a general belief on the part of at least some of the pirates that preying on Islamic shipping was somehow more excusable than attacking European merchants; Islamophobia remained a motivating factor for piracy well into the 18th century.

- Profit-minded colonial American governments often backed the Red Sea ventures, which complicated diplomatic relationships between Asia and Europe. However bigoted the European governments might also have been, they could not openly approve of any piracy that interfered with their nascent colonial ambitions in the east.
- The North American transatlantic slave trade was crucial to enabling the Red Sea depredations. It was the phenomenon that ensured there would be trading outposts, supply depots, and easy passages home for successful pirates.
- In the time of the Pirate Round, the BEIC still very much depended on the goodwill and forbearance of the Mughal rulers. English piracy in the Red Sea was a public relations disaster for the BEIC, which wanted them hunted to extinction.

THOMAS TEW

- One of the first pirates to sail this route was Captain Thomas Tew, a notable figure from Rhode Island. Tew, like so many others, started his career with at least the fig leaf of a commission.
- In 1692, the governor of Bermuda and other backers, including the Royal African Company, contracted with him to harass French shipping near the Gambia and the factory at Goreé Island, off the coast of Senegal. It's not clear whether Tew ever intended to honor the strictures of his charge, but whatever his early intentions, he never went to western Africa. Instead, he turned south for the Cape of Good Hope.
- Tew had a better idea than bothering the French for uncertain profit. Red Sea vessels presented a compelling case for piracy. Most enticing were the large pilgrim ships bound for Mecca, which often carried wealthy merchants.
- According to *A General History of the Pyrates*, Tew made a rousing speech urging his men to join him in piracy. Their apocryphal but memorable response was, "A gold chain or a wooden leg, we'll stand with you!"

- Rounding the Cape, they steered north to Bab el-Mandeb, the opening of the Red Sea, where, as the *General History* put it, “he came up with a large Ship, richly loaden,” which “*Tew* had the Hardiness to board.” *Tew* scored big. The captain, enamored of this success, wanted to keep raiding in the hopes of finding other ships from the same convoy, but his quartermaster disagreed.
- They headed instead to Nosy Boraha, which they called St. Mary’s, where the English ex-pirate Adam Baldrige had an enslaving and pirate-trading settlement. Having, with Baldrige’s assistance, careened and resupplied the ship, *Tew* returned to Rhode Island in triumph, securing Governor Caleb Carr’s complaisance with a hefty gratuity.
- The now-wealthy *Tew* charmed the governor of New York, the pirate-friendly Benjamin Fletcher. Fletcher sold *Tew* a new commission in 1694, and he set out again on his ship, the facetiously named *Amity*. By then, though, word of his exploits had spread, and he encountered a number of other aspiring pirates at Bab el-Mandeb, including Captain Henry Every, who would soon eclipse him in fame.
- It’s not entirely clear what happened then. By some accounts, the *Amity* engaged in battle with one of the ships Every was chasing, and *Tew* was fatally wounded. By other accounts, the *Amity* missed the ships that Every would famously engage because it was lost or a slow sailor; *Tew* died in battle with a different ship in 1695. Whatever really happened to *Tew*, he passed out of the historical record on his second Red Sea voyage.

HENRY EVERY

- Every was born in Devon near Plymouth, around 1659; he would have been in his mid-30s during his pirate career. He started out in the Royal Navy, but he left it in 1690.
- He spent some time in the enslaving business. In 1693, he attempted to leave off enslaving for privateering. That year, Spain commissioned several vessels funded by London backers to prey on French ships in the Caribbean, and maybe, it was hoped, to recover some wealth out of Spanish wrecks as well.

- The ships they had signed on to were held up in the Spanish port city of Coruña awaiting some paperwork that didn't appear. Months went by. To save money and prevent their sailors from deserting for home or better berths, which they probably would have done if they had possessed any travel money, the owners stopped paying the men. They also fed them cheap, short rations.
- On May 7, 1694, after waiting more than half a year for their mission to begin, they had had enough; a strike was called. Every provoked a mutiny. Some threescore men were persuaded to join him, and they seized the *Charles II* and made a break for the open ocean. Every argued for sailing to the Indian Ocean, inspired by the success Tew had had there, and most of the men agreed.
- Reportedly Every attempted to persuade the *Charles II's* captain, John Gibson, to join them. Gibson refused, and so he and another 14 or 15 reluctant souls were given a boat to return to Coruña. Every renamed the *Charles II* the *Fancy*.
- The *Fancy*, clean and fast sailing, headed for the Indian Ocean, pausing at the Cape Verde islands to get supplies, which the pirates managed by kidnapping the governor and holding him hostage. They used English colors and may have passed themselves off as a Guinea trader as they worked their way down the coast of the African continent, picking up new recruits and battling ships of various nationalities as they went.
- They stopped again on Madagascar to careen and resupply and wait for the Mocha treasure fleet of the Red Sea, a convoy belonging to Mughal India and carrying pilgrims, merchant goods, and imperial treasure from Mocha to Surat.
- Having teamed up with but outsailed Captain Tew as well as several other like-minded would-be pirate ships, Every's group eventually captured the pilgrim ship *Ganj-i-Sawai* and its consort, the *Fateh Muhammed*. The *Ganj-i-Sawai* turned out to be the rich prize, worth £100,000 to £300,000, most of it in precious metals.

- We have accounts of the battle both from pirates who were there and from the Indian historian Khafi Khan. The latter wrote that the *Ganj-i-Sawai's* captain panicked, attempting to arm his concubines and send them to fight off the pirates. The English pirates do not record this, if it happened.
- Unfortunately, accounts from both sides agree on the rest: days of looting, torture, and rape. Some of the women killed themselves.
- The pilgrim ship had belonged to the Mughal emperor Aurengzeb, and there is some evidence that a relation of his was one of the women on board. He was understandably furious and reluctant to believe Every had acted without the connivance of the notoriously piratical English government.
- To avoid the destruction of their factories, the BEIC paid reparations, slapped a bounty on Every's head, and launched a global manhunt. Every, however, was never captured.
- After taking Aurengzeb's ship, Every and much of his crew eventually sailed to the Bahamas, where a bribe got them ashore, and the men scattered, most heading to North America and its pirate-friendly colonies. Every himself made it to Ireland under the alias Bridgeman and then disappeared. Of more than 100 pirates, only two dozen were captured, and only five were executed.
- Men like Tew and Every were atypical. Most of the Red Sea men made a single voyage and then headed home with whatever booty they had acquired. Some, afraid to return or perhaps preferring the relative liberty of colonial life to law-abiding Anglophone societies, stayed in settlements like Baldrige's on Madagascar.

ROBERT CULLIFORD

- Robert Culliford stands out as a particularly incorrigible example of the kind of pirate who could neither retire quietly nor make the big time. Culliford was a frequent mutineer: in 1689 he mutinied against the privateer for whom he was supposed to be working and voted for William Kidd in command; the next year, he mutinied against Kidd in favor of a different captain.

- Eventually, he ended up on St. Mary's, where he encountered another crew under the command of Captain Kidd and convinced many of them, too, to betray Kidd in his favor. Finally, in 1698, Culliford took a great Mocha prize called the *Great Mohammed*.
- He returned to St. Mary's and accepted a pardon in 1699, but the British arrested him anyway because of the bad public relations caused by the attack on the *Great Mohammed*. He saved his neck by testifying against other pirates, and that's about all we know of his fate.

WILLIAM KIDD

- Much more famous but less successful is the Scotsman William Kidd, whom Culliford twice vexed. Kidd's biographer, Robert Ritchie, links Kidd explicitly to Henry Every, since the kerfuffle kicked up by Every's infamous piracy led to the messiness of the adventures of Captain Kidd.
- Kidd plied the Pirate Round in his brief pirate career. A sometimes-privateer living in New York, Kidd obtained a commission and a number of wealthy London backers for a scheme to hunt down the pirates of the Indian Ocean and bring them to justice.
- In 1696, he set sail in a ship named the *Adventure Galley* to capture Captain Tew and his ilk. He had no way of knowing that Tew was already dead.
- Kidd had a reputation for courage but not for diplomacy. He seems not to have been an able commander of men, using violence rather than rhetoric to maintain control.
- He also apparently had a short fuse. In a fit of rage, he murdered his gunner, William Moore, for some back-talk on deck. Kidd bashed the man's skull in with a bucket.
- In any event, early in 1698, Kidd captured a rich Armenian ship on its way to Surat, the *Quedah Merchant*. The ship's cargo belonged to an important ally of Aurengzeb, who was still upset about Every and the *Gang-i-Sawai*.

WRECK OF THE *QUEDAH MERCHANT*

The sunken hull of the *Quedah Merchant* was discovered off the coast of Catalina Island, near the Dominican Republic, in 2007. A cannon from the ship is held by the Indianapolis Children's Museum.



- The attack on the *Quedah Merchant* created an international incident. To appease the outraged Aurengzeb and to disgrace the Whigs who had backed him, the new Tory government that had come into power in England demanded that Kidd be arrested and tried. The Tories sought to make an example of him, and he was hanged at Execution Dock in 1701.

READING

Aditi, "Mughal Perception of English Piracy."

Kempe, "The Pirate Round."

Rogozinski, *Honor among Thieves*.



LESSON 12

PIRACY IN THE CHINA SEAS

After the first third of the 19th century, piracy was not a widespread menace in the Atlantic or the Mediterranean. But the period of semi-permanent pirate decline in those areas was also roughly the period of an explosion of piracy in Asia. The West was forced to take serious notice.

CHINA-RELATED PIRACY

- Chinese ports were highly desirable trade destinations. While Chinese interaction with other nations was cautious and heavily regulated, merchants from all over the world went to great lengths for access. There was plenty of shipping around for enterprising pirates to consider plundering.
- As in the Atlantic, piracy in the China Seas during the Caribbean Golden Age and afterward was mostly the undertaking of desperate individuals and small groups. But in the 19th century, Qing pirate groups became immense forces preying on maritime trade and coastal settlements alike.
- From 1796 to 1810, for example, the historian Dian Murray has charted an exponential expansion and then even faster collapse of pirates along the Pearl River Delta in the South China Sea. At its height, this piracy involved in excess of 50,000 individuals and 1,200 sea vessels, the batten-sailed type termed in English as *junks*.
- Trade for valuable commodities—rice and iron, chiefly—was forbidden between Vietnam and China, but protectionist trade policies tend to create incentive for smuggling, black markets, and pirates to supply their

goods. Furthermore, the Tay Son uprising in Vietnam that began in 1772 encouraged Chinese pirates to act as privateers. When the rebels were finally defeated in 1802, the privateers, having no further protections, turned pirate.

- Rather than dissolve into amoeba-like chaos, though, as happened in the Caribbean, these Chinese pirates were organized and administrated, first by seven charismatic leaders such as Cheng I and then by his thoroughly remarkable piratical widow, Cheng I Sao and her adopted stepson/partner Chang Pao, whom we will get to know better in the future. They had squadrons organized by flag color: red, for the mighty Cheng I Sao, and black, yellow, blue, green, and white as well.
- The Pearl River Delta pirates raided coastal villages for supplies, laborers, and women. They forced any ship in their region to pay for protection passports, essentially functioning as a large, tax-levying body, although not one with nation-founding ambitions.

WRITINGS ABOUT THE PIRATES

- Much of what Anglophone pirate historians know about the culture of this remarkable if short-lived pirate organization comes from Richard Glasspoole. Glasspoole was an East India Company employee who was captured by the red-flag squadron right at the end of these pirates' era of dominance.
- His account of his experiences with them, "A Brief History of My Captivity," was prepared for his employer and has been repeatedly published. In it, curiously, he calls the pirates *ladrones*, the Portuguese word meaning "thieves," underscoring the extent to which he sees the world through a lens that centralizes European colonial practice.
- Much of Glasspoole's record is corroborated by a Chinese-language source, Yuan Yun-Lun's *History of the Pirates Who Infested the China Sea from 1807 to 1810*, which was imperfectly translated into English and published—bundled with Glasspoole's account—by Karl Friedrich Neumann in 1831. This account, like Glasspoole's, paints the pirates as terrible and bloodthirsty, but also almost admirably determined.

THE WAKŌ

- There is a robust, long history of piracy in the China Seas, which picked up steam in the 10th century and developed a truly large scale with the Wakō. They were originally a Japanese-based group who raided from perhaps as early as the 13th to as late as the 16th century.
- Launching raids against the Korean and Chinese mainlands from the Sea of Japan, the Wakō would also venture past the coastlines and up rivers like the Yangtze, sometimes acting as inland raiders, killing and stealing both goods and people. Like the buccaneers, the Wakō were ethnically and culturally diverse.
- Their members included Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Mongolian, Siamese, and even Portuguese and Dutch crewmen. Each had regionally specific skills and in combination, they were a deadly and determined mix.
- Both the Ming and Qing dynasties attempted to regulate all sea voyaging near their coastlines, putting extreme restrictions on foreign trade—as, later, did Korea and Japan. This move was a significant spur to piracy, and the Wakō's reputation for fearsome predation grew.
- It was not until trade eventually opened up that Wakō piracy began to decrease. But the relative quiet of the early 16th century did not last, and piracy ascended again in the 17th century.

ZHENG ZHILONG AND THE BUSINESS OF PIRACY

- Zheng Zhilong, also known by the Christian baptismal name of Nicholas Gaspard, was among the mightiest of pirates in his day, from about 1628–1661. He used his fleet to force nearly all traders to pay him protection money. Up to 90% of Chinese shipping sailed under his “protection.”
- The Qing tried violently depopulating their own coastlines to hurt his stature. In some ways, it seems more accurate to say he was a businessman than a pirate.

- This is an example of how the term *pirate* is not a precise one; a better word for the people we've been discussing might be *bandit*, as they were smugglers and raiders as well as, quite often, extralegal merchants.

SOUTHEAST ASIAN PIRACY

- Much of Southeast Asia—including Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines—can lay claim to a rich variety of pirate groups and cultures in its regional history. A complex global trade network was in place as early as 100 CE.
- This network included spices, textiles, wood, porcelain, and other goods. Enslaved captives also became part of it.
- Pirates with bases established in straits like Malacca tried to pick off unwary merchants. Further, it was common practice for groups of armed ships to demand that anyone passing through their region pay a fee for the privilege.

THE MORO PIRATES

- The Sultanate of Sulu was ineluctably linked to the infamous Moro pirates, particularly the service of specific Moro ethnic groups like the Iranun and Balangingi. The Moro raiders, Islamic sea people in the Mindanao region, sometimes acted as privateers for other governments, and sometimes acted on their own.
- They used swift, agile ships termed *prahus* to terrorize the Spanish vessels and settlements in the maritime region near Mindanao until the end of the 19th century. One of the chief aims of these raids was captive taking.
- The Sulu Archipelago was relatively labor poor given the scope of the sultanate's ambitions, and so it was rapacious for prisoners whose labor it could steal. Women and children were taken more than men because of a widespread belief that they were more biddable.
- Most of the enslaved people sold in the Sulu markets were fellow Asians. However, this fate also befell European captives.

ANTI-PIRATE EFFORTS

- Attempts to free European bases in Asia from the presence of pirates often required local partnerships. A famous example of anti-pirate collaboration is the Battle of Tonkin River, which lasted for three furious days. The British allied with the Qing and the Tonkinese to take on a pirate who had been raiding coastal European settlements as well as international shipping.
- The spark for the conflagration was the pirate Shap-ng-tsai, who commanded a fleet of 70 or so vessels. Shap-ng-tsai had become such an impressive problem for Chinese authorities that they offered him a post in the navy. He declined this honor to keep on pirating, until he ill-advisedly sank some British merchant ships.
- The British were sufficiently upset to put together a coalition pirate hunting force of three warships and eight Chinese junks. They found their pirates in the Gulf of Tonkin in October of 1849.
- Although the pirates significantly outnumbered the squadron, they suffered heavy casualties initially, losing their flagship and 27 others. They retreated to shallower waters up the Tonkin River, chased by smaller boats once the heavier war ships could not follow them.
- Eventually, many of the pirates headed for the shore, where they could fire on the Sino-British forces, but there, they were routed by the Tonkinese militia. Shap-ng-tsai fled farther up the river, living to fight another day, but knowing that his pirating career was over.
- The British commander John Hay was promoted as a result of the smashing success of the expedition. Shap-ng-tsai was also promoted: He accepted amnesty and rethought that previous offer to join the Chinese navy by way of retiring from piracy.
- Other pirate commanders were granted similar opportunities. In all, 58 pirate ships were destroyed and 2,000 men died, but the pirates' leaders came out fine.

- Interestingly, at least one of the pirate commanders who transitioned to military rank alongside Shap-ng-tsai was a woman named Liu Laijiao. Little is known about her beyond this fact, but it's worth noting that women often served on China Seas pirate ships, even if history forgets to record them.

THE OPIUM TRADE

- The merchant ships of the British that touched all of that off were laden with opium. The British nation in the 19th century was hot to consume Chinese luxury products: tea, silks, porcelain, and so on, which were thought to be of finer quality in China than from other sources.
- China was cautious about foreign trade. The British were allowed to buy and sell only in Canton, and because their Chinese trading partners were not especially interested in woolen textiles or other British wares, they generally had to pay for their teas and silks in specie. But there wasn't much silver coming from North America anymore because of colonial rebellions and pirate predations on shipping previously mentioned.
- To get that specie, the East India Company developed a new triangle trade based not on transporting human captives but on encouraging drug addiction. Opium cultivated in Bengal was smuggled and sold illegally in China; the silver paid for the drugs could then be used to fill East India ships with Chinese goods for home markets.
- The British spent the 1830s and 1840s flooding Canton with cheap opium, something in the neighborhood of 1,400 tons annually. American merchants with Turkish opium also joined in this game, with the Anglophone drug dealers driving down each other's prices. As drug addiction became a serious social ill, the Qing government appealed in vain to Britain to stop.
- The Chinese began seizing their opium stockpiles in 1839 and imposing restrictions on traders who would not pledge to bring in no more. Tensions rose for months, with the British attempting to blockade their own ships to prevent them from participating in legal trade under Chinese-imposed conditions.



- Ultimately a shooting war broke out, with the British offensive beginning in earnest in 1840. The British had heavier, better armed warships, and they were increasingly using steam-powered vessels that could maneuver against the wind.
- They were able to force the Qing into the unequal Treaty of Nanjing in 1842. This opened more ports to trade, required reparative payments from the Qing, and formalized the colonization of Hong Kong.
- The loss of naval power and economic downturn that resulted from the Treaty of Nanjing made Chinese piracy a more appealing option than it had been for decades, and there was a sharp increase in the pirate population. The rise of Shap-*ng*-tsai and other famous and powerful pirates like his prodigy Chui A-poo happened in this environment.
- In other words, the extremely successful Sino-British partnership to curb the pirate escapades that were happening within less than 200 miles of Hong Kong was necessary in the first place because the British had started and won a war over their right to be opium dealers.

READING

Antony, "Pirates on the South China Coast through Modern Times."

Murray, *Pirates of the South China Coast, 1790–1810*.



LESSON 13

PIRATES AS EXPLORERS

Pirates played a significant role as explorers, bringing back not only coins and stolen market goods but also charts, logs, and sometimes publications that describe what we might call topography as well as geography, botany, and anthropology. In this, they were significant actors in the machinery of empire, colonialism, and commerce.

PIRACY AND HOT CHOCOLATE

- Piracy played an important role in the worldwide dissemination of hot chocolate consumption. The important figure here was William Hughes, an amateur naturalist who was key to popularizing the habit of drinking chocolate in England.
- As a lower-level member of a privateer crew, Hughes in his youth traveled to Barbados, Jamaica, Hispaniola, and generally throughout the West Indies. He retired from piracy and became a gardener and then an author.
- A version of what we'd now call hot chocolate had become popular in Spain due to that nation's extensive colonial contact, but other Europeans were slower to adopt the beverage. Hughes wrote a 1672 botanical treatise that included the essay "A Discourse of the Cacao-Nut-Tree, And the use of its Fruit; with all the ways of making Chocolate."

- Hughes was adapting the highly specialized knowledge of American Indians, who had been drinking chocolate for thousands of years, for European benefit. The Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington DC has adapted one of Hughes's recipes for modern use. It is available online for those who wish to try it.

CIRCUMNAVIGATION

- Notable pirate exploration was not all between the Americas and Europe. Most major pirate groups showed themselves capable of serious range. We know, for example, that the Vikings made it as far as North America, and that they both raided and traded with the Middle East.
- The Barbary corsairs made limited raids as far north as Ireland and Iceland. Wakō pirates started out in the Japanese archipelago and made it at least as far as the Philippines.
- In early modern England, there was significant overlap between pirates and circumnavigators. Francis Drake's anti-Spanish expedition between 1577 and 1580 turned into the second successful circumnavigation of the globe—and the first in which the captain survived the entire voyage (Magellan died in the Philippines more than 50 years earlier).
- The privateer Thomas Cavendish repeated Drake's voyage, raiding and circumnavigating in 1586–1588. He was knighted, but when he tried to repeat the trip again, he died en route.
- Nearly a century later, though, William Dampier, who was a buccaneer, completed three circumnavigations and wrote a best seller about the first one, *A New Voyage Round the World*, in 1697. His third circumnavigation happened alongside the privateer and later pirate hunter Woodes Rogers.

DAMPIER'S STORY

- Dampier's account is rich with fascinating natural and botanical details. *A New Voyage Round the World* contains the first instance in printed English of the word *avocado* as well as early detailed descriptions of the banana, bread-fruit, and iguana, plus the machete knife and the Miskito Indians.

- In general, Dampier's account shows a strong dependence on and sometimes exploitation of the indigenous peoples and their irreplaceable knowledge of the local landscape, shores, and how to use their environments to find food.
- Dampier spent time with the logwood cutters of Mexico and then among the raiding buccaneers; he followed Bartholomew Sharpe and his allies when they attacked Portobello. Then, in 1686, he followed Captain Swan of the *Cygnets* on a raiding voyage that would allow him to see the Pacific. The ship went so far into the Pacific that it became the first English ship to land on Australia.
- After Dampier lost his source of income through the death of Prince Jeoly, a captive from Miangas (in what is now Indonesia) whom he had brought to display in England, his career intersected with Henry Every's. Dampier was the second mate of one of the privateering ships that ended up trapped in Coruña when Every mutinied and launched his own career as the most famous of the Red Sea men.

THE BUCCANEERS

- The legends of the buccaneers in America were partly solidified by their own literary contributions, which included valuable geographical and anthropological observations. Alexander Exquemelin's *Buccaneers of America* contains a wealth of description of landscape and peoples.
- Exquemelin describes Indian culture, marriage practices, and diet. He draws careful pictures of their weapons and offers a few recipes for a number of "delicious drinks" made from banana, pineapple, and honey, which he says "is most delectable."
- At other times, Exquemelin reports with a colonizer's eye. For instance, the trees of Hispaniola he describes mostly in terms of what they're good for.

THE PACIFIC ADVENTURE

- In the late 17th century, there occurred a somewhat sustained campaign of unauthorized buccaneering attacks in the isthmus of Panama, sometimes collectively called the Pacific adventure. This paradoxically generated a significant amount of popular and scientific literature thanks to a number of members of the expedition who kept detailed journals.
- The Pacific Adventure was legally problematic from the start, as Spain and England were at peace. Scotland, meanwhile, was actually trying to establish a colonial settlement in the area, making things even more awkward between Spain and England. In all, it was a chaotic affair. Woodes Rogers wrote in his *Cruising Voyage* of the buccaneers of the Pacific adventure living “without Government; so that when they met with Purchase, they immediately squander’d it away.
- At the same time, among the buccaneers were Dampier himself as well as the English buccaneer and privateer Bartholomew Sharpe and the accomplished navigator and author Basil Ringrose. They were all dedicated journal writers and sharp observers. They also supplied charts of their own making as well as others captured from their prizes.



WOODES ROGERS

- A large force of 300-odd buccaneers set out in 1680 to cross Darién on foot and attack Panama. Their captains included John Coxon, Richard Sawkins, Peter Harris, Edmund Cook, and Bartholomew Sharp.
- After crossing the isthmus but finding no gold, the group used canoes and the element of surprise to attack a Spanish fleet. They seized several warships. Coxon was deposed, Sawkins was killed, a number of men left the group entirely, and Sharp ended up commanding the remaining sea forces of about 140.
- They headed southward along the coastline of Costa Rica, eventually making their way down to Cape Horn in a largely unlucky search for new prizes.
- After a disastrous attempt to raid Arica, a city at the northern tip of Chile's western coastline, about 50 of the men, including Dampier, grew unhappy with the voyage and split off. They sailed back to Panama and then marched across the land again to head back to Europe. Both the return home by sea and over land yielded important journals that would eventually become essential travel reading for anyone who wanted to know about South America.
- The buccaneer journaler Basil Ringrose, who was also an accomplished navigator, remained with Sharp; his account of the voyage was later published as a second volume of *The Buccaneers of America*. Meanwhile, Lionel Wafer was with Dampier's group and wrote an important account enhanced by the information he could gather from his colleagues of his time in Darién, which he spent with the Guna people recuperating from an injury.
- In 1684, Philip Ayres published a collection of accounts called *The Voyages and Adventures of Capt. Barth. Sharp And others, in the South Sea*. The collection opens with the journal of John Cox, one of Sharpe's men, who describes gold, buccaneering, masculine adventures, and camaraderie and provides a quick lesson in geography and local politics.

SHARPE'S SUBSEQUENT ACTIONS

- In 1681, while cruising around in the Pacific, Sharpe fought and subdued a Spanish ship called the *El Santo Rosario* near the coast of Ecuador. In haste or for some other reason, the crew of the ship somehow neglected

the important step of seizing their important papers and tossing them overboard—a standard procedure that typically was accomplished using a sailcloth bundle weighted with shot.

- As a consequence, Sharpe got hold of the ship's *derrotero*—that is, a book full of Spanish sea charts of the Pacific. This was an extremely lucky stroke, as the Spanish guarded such information closely, and Sharpe conveyed it with great care back to England.
- In fact, it may have been Sharpe's best moment. He had not had a great deal of success in his raiding, and he had already suffered and recovered from one mutiny and numerous desertions. He also missed the large quantity of silver hidden aboard the *El Santo Rosario*.
- He turned out to be a more noteworthy explorer than a buccaneer. On the way home around Cape Horn, he sailed farther south than probably any European had before, skirting glaciers and making extraordinary time in the frigid and fast currents.
- Ringrose, who was also present at the attack on the *El Santo Rosario*, made a careful copy of the *derrotero's* contents of his own. Officially, it was the cartographer William Hack who translated the maps into what became known as the *South Sea Waggoner*. *Waggoner* was a colloquial term for a sea atlas, after the 16th-century Dutch hydrographer Lucas Janszoon Waghenauer.
- Sharpe eventually made his way back to England, and upon landing in Plymouth was seized and tried for piracy and murder—both of which he absolutely committed. The charges were instigated by the angry Spanish ambassador.
- The value of the maps he carried turned both public and governmental opinion in his favor. He was acquitted thanks to his majesty Charles II, whose intervention persuaded the jury to discover a technicality.
- However, Sharpe would later die in prison for debt in St. Thomas. The *Waggoner*, though, seemed to open the South Seas to Britain as they never had been opened before. This is the root of the chain of events that would end in the disastrous South Sea Bubble, an immense stock exchange crash in 1720.

READING

Dampier, *Memoirs of a Buccaneer*.

Hakluyt, *Voyages and Discoveries*.

Nicosia, Marissa. “The ‘American Nectar.’”



LESSON 14

PIRATES AND EMPIRES

This lesson focuses on pirates and imperial ambition. There are two main ways that historical pirates intersect with imperial ambition. One is that they are used as cats' paws on the international stage—proxies for nations trying to dispute each other's colonial prowess or expansionist goals. The other lies in the fabled idea of a pirate empire—that pirate forces, if not controlled, might grow to become a serious threat to the nations that had birthed them. These two lines of narrative often intersect, but there is much more truth to the first than to the second.

THE PIRATE THREAT

- This lesson begins with an example of the second, more dubious notion. Captain Johnson's *A General History of the Pyrates* uses its introduction to repeat a famous story from Plutarch about how Mediterranean pirates, their ranks swelled by war refugees, grew to threaten the Roman Empire until Pompey patriotically suppressed them.
- The warning being given here is that “while Rome was Mistress of the World, she suffered Insults and Affronts, almost at her Gates, from these powerful Robbers” until Pompey raised a force to crush them. Pompey took away their ships and executed some, but he offered many of the pirates amnesty and resettled them in areas of the Roman outskirts that needed more human capital.

- Elsewhere, the *General History*, like many contemporary pirate writings from the law-and-order side, goes to lengths to depict pirates as petty, violent, scurrilous, and at best a lamentable waste of potential. However, in introducing them to us, it suggests they can shake great empires and have done so in the past.
- Inevitably, pirates as individual agents and small groups have been key forces in both propagating and resisting imperial powers. But on the occasions that pirates start to morph into larger, organized groups that set their sights on a home base, that's not welcome news to the imperialists around them.
- This happened with the Victual Brothers and Likedeelers in the 14th- and 15th-century Baltic and with the Wakō pirates controlling Tsushima at about the same time in the Sea of Japan. It also occurred with the later Wakō in the 16th century and the Knights Hospitaller, who became the Knights of Malta when they wrested possession of Malta from the Holy Roman Empire. Rather than founding empires, though, these groups appear simply to have been taking advantage of situations created by existing empires themselves.

IMPERIAL AMBITION AND EUROPEAN PIRATES

- Imperial ambition was the major reason for the 16th-century privateering buildup that led to major 17th-century pirate infestations in the Caribbean. Essentially, Europeans were fighting battles by proxy there while their navies were busy elsewhere.
- The buccaneers and semi-legal privateers of the early Golden Age never established anything as organized and durable as the aforementioned examples, but there was a persistent fear that they might. This was particularly true in light of a period in the Bahamas known as the republic of pirates, from 1706–1718 or so.

- During that time, Nassau essentially didn't have a colonial government and was instead a pirate base loosely organized by a series of dominant personalities such as Benjamin Hornigold and Henry Jennings. It all ended, however, when Hornigold and Jennings were brought back to England by Woodes Rogers and his acts of amnesty.
- From the 16th century onward, piracy for Europeans was a fact of life at edges and boundaries, such as port towns, colonies, and other such margins of the empire.
- In these places, merchants and market conditions, which relied heavily on protectionist policies and monopolies, encouraged piracy. Piracy is a short-term, locally oriented solution to bad market conditions, and one that has major opportunity costs, but it's only profitable if land-based society will go along with it.

IMAGES OF EMPIRE

- The 18th century saw growing resistance to pirates, which came about because pirate incursions were threatening the bottom lines of England's big colonial corporations instead of just annoying those of rivals. They also encouraged the independence of colonial cultures; the home government had to learn to break apart the interests of pirates and others who lived on the edges of European influence before it would become possible to suppress deep-sea piracy.
- Nassau fell into the hands of pirates because fleets of Spanish ships and French buccaneers had attacked the Bahamas in 1703 and 1706 during the War of the Spanish Succession, which was being fought because continental Europeans could not agree on their succession politics. This was a matter that could have been of very little interest to the Indians, Maroons, or Africans living in the Caribbean.
- As the *General History* explains,

The French and Spaniards ... invaded them, took the Fort and Governor in the Island of Providence, plunder'd and destroy'd the Settlements, & carried off half the Blacks, and the rest of the People, who fled to the Woods, retired afterwards to Carolina.

- In fact, the Spanish had carried off half the English residents along with the governor, but in the history of piracy’s retelling, the attention is focused on the Black prisoners, whom the Spanish coveted for labor. The English government thereafter essentially abandoned their interest in the colony. The pirates moved in because no one else wanted to.
- In 1716, a man named John Vickers gave a warning in a deposition to Lieutenant Governor Spotswood of Virginia, claiming that among the pirates of Providence Island, “One Thomas Barrow” had plans to create “a second Madagascar.” The implication is that Barrow would raise an independent raiding nation settled by pirates.
- However, in reality the first piratical Madagascar was mostly imaginary, like Barrow’s nascent empire. The latter was rapidly quashed by Woodes Rogers.

PIRATE SETTLEMENTS

- The pirate settlements on Madagascar—and the islands near it, on Nosy Boraha and Anjouan—were real, but they were not in any position to be considered founding empires. They were small, grubby, and prone to annoy their more powerful neighbors rather than pose a serious threat to them.
- Adam Baldrige, a pirate trader, was a successful pirate lord on Madagascar, with his own fort armed with something along the lines of one or two dozen guns, as many as 100–200 pirates under his watch, and backing from the New York government agent Frederick Philipse. But he had to run for his life in 1697 when he betrayed a number of local Malagasy people into enslavement.
- From 1680 to 1725 or so, people like Baldrige—pirates, survivors of shipwrecks, and so-called separate traders (who were often essentially pirates) used the absence of European powers on Madagascar to negotiate little pockets of influence, trading arms to their hosts and procuring from them captives whom they could sell illegally to other Europeans. The population of pirates on Madagascar was transient, never greater

than 1,500 and often far fewer. Most pirates did not intend to settle permanently, and those who did apparently often did so out of fear of being hanged if they went home.

- The primary source of knowledge about Madagascar in English did not come from any pirates, and it did not appear until 1729, when their Madagascar presence was very much reduced. *Madagascar: Or Robert Drury's Journal During Fifteen Years' Captivity on That Island*, is the account of an Englishman who was shipwrecked as a young boy and spent years in different forms of royal captivity among the island's Antandroy people.
- To Drury, who would later transform from slave to slave trader, Madagascar was a place where Africans were very much in charge. Pirates were certainly present but were also kept on the margins of power.
- The most common context for pirates in Drury's journal involves pirates behaving badly, angering the people of Madagascar and thereby making Drury's life harder. At the same time, pirates would offer Drury himself no direct threat.
- Pirates never did start a new, durable English colony in Madagascar; without alliances to elite Malagasy people, they had no authority. But they were very much responsible for the huge number of Malagasy people



who ended up forced onto ships and sent to Barbados and other American destinations. Meanwhile, toward the end of the 18th century, the Malagasy themselves took up corsairing and began raiding their neighbors.

LATER EVENTS

- The events of the 1790s—the French Revolution and the violence it sent across the oceans—led directly to a rash of violent piracies the likes of which had not been seen in the Atlantic since the Golden Age a century earlier. In 1799, Napoleon seized control of France, and during a short-lived European peace attempted to reestablish control in Haiti, which had been in a state of contested revolution since 1791. Napoleon would finally concede defeat in Haiti in 1804.
- War again broke out in Europe, and Napoleon, open about his imperial plans, occupied Spain in 1808, giving an opening to Spanish Latin American colonies to revolt against European control. National leaders and allegiances became very complicated.
- The new Latin American governments began augmenting their navies with privateers to fend off and prey on European shipping. Good mariners were available on the cheap after 1815, when Napoleon was permanently exiled to Elba and naval forces began to stand down all over. Privateers would sometimes try to hold commissions from multiple governments if they could, so as to have as many potential targets as possible.
- While at first the privateers followed their commissions, the more chaotic and crowded the corsairing field grew, the more neutral vessels were preyed on as well. By 1818 or 1820, there was a bad Atlantic pirate problem going on, once again as a direct result of European imperial ambitions and their frustration.
- Pirates and mutineers threatened the Baltimore coastline. Once again they were based in the Caribbean, in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Haiti. They had names like Diabolito and Cofresí. Particularly frightening to racist Europeans were the Haitian privateers, who were often Black or mixed-race mutineers.

- The notion of Black pirates was portrayed in white media as especially terrifying. These were the pirates who, according to newspaper accounts, sometimes employed walking the plank as a terroristic weapon.
- Some historians, such as Peter Earle, argue that the 19th-century pirates were more consistently cruel and murderous than their ancestors. This is debatable—all pirates steal people’s valuables and employ torture when they can’t find enough of them—but they were depicted this way in news media and by politicians seeking resources to address their depredations.
- This heightened attention is why so many pirates in 20th-century movies seem to have giant moustaches and Spanish accents—those that don’t have British West Country accents, that is. It’s a dim American cultural memory of the Cuban pirates who launched raids from their coastal land bases and were protected by local politicians and merchants.
- One of the first major collaborations between the US and British navies happened when both nations faced off against the new Caribbean pirates of the 19th century. These pirates, those based in Cuba in particular, had launched around 100 attacks against their vessels between 1821 and 1824, seizing or destroying entirely 36 vessels—and the Anglophone governments had had it.

IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

- In the Mediterranean, the long Greek War of Independence against the Ottoman Empire had begun in 1821. Small-scale Greek piracy among the islands already had a long history. Because the lion’s share of Greek piracy was directed against Ottoman shipping, the Greeks were willing to regard it as patriotic. And since western European nations generally favored Greek independence, the Greek pirates met with little determined opposition from elsewhere, either.
- Predictably, at the start of the war many of these pirates joined the naval and legal privateering forces. Several years into it, however, the Greek navy suffered supply problems and began to fail, particularly once Egypt sent naval reinforcements to the Ottomans.

- At this point, the pirates went a bit wild, attacking British, French, Italian, and any other ships in their pathway. They brought the stolen goods back to their various island communities, which helped to protect them from hunters. Travel became all but impossible except in large armed convoys.
- However, the situation did not last long; the western European presence in the Mediterranean was different from what it had been a century and more before. Malta had been under British control since 1800, and as a result of both imperial expansion and the Napoleonic wars, Britain and France now kept a considerable naval presence in the Mediterranean waters.
- In the Battle of Navarino in 1827, a joint force of British, French, and Russian ships massacred the Ottoman fleet. The extremely unambiguous results encouraged the Greek pirate problem to quiet itself down while it still could. In the 19th century, most British encounters with piracy would thereafter take place in the Far East; pirates were no longer remotely a local threat.

READING

Brooks, *Sailing East*.

Hanna, *Pirate Nests and the Rise of the British Empire, 1570–1740*.

Lane, *Pillaging the Empire*.



LESSON 15

LIFE ON A PIRATE SHIP

This lesson discusses day-to-day life onboard a ship. It covers some of what was common to all mariners, pirate and non-pirate, and also some of the differences—the divergences that made pirate life unique and, to a few, preferable to legal seafaring. Mostly people turned to piracy at least in part for the profit potential, but there were arguably other incentives.

MARINER TRAITS

- To be a skilled mariner in the Age of Sail required talent, toughness, and quite a lot of knowledge. An able seaman would have years of experience and could hand, reef, and steer—that is, manage the sails and act as helmsman to direct the ship.
- Other skills included the ability to knot and splice the rigging aloft, keep a lookout, use the lead (which was a means of sounding the depth of the ocean), work on a gun crew, manage the machinery of the deck, and probably sew moderately well. There were also so-called idlers: carpenters, coopers (who were trained in making barrels, casks, and the like), surgeons, and pursers (who handled the money on board). These were men with indispensable specialist abilities.

- Officers would be able to do all of an able seaman's duties, plus order the setting of the sails, stand watch, and, in some cases, perform the difficult mathematics of celestial navigation using a sextant. There was no reliable way to calculate longitude until the 1770s, thanks to John Harrison's marine chronometer.



- Large naval ships, for example, would carry a contingent of people ranked as landsmen. These were people who had never been to sea and had none of the aforementioned skills but were still needed to haul on ropes, sand the deck, carry burdens, work the pumps, turn the capstan (the large axle used to raise anchor), and so on. Their work was unskilled and grueling but necessary.
- It may have been the fact that anyone of sufficient physical strength could perform a ship's crude physical labor that lured at least some women, who would not have been bred up to a landsman's trade, to board ships in the first place. It seems at least some of them then acquired the more advanced skills from their shipmates.
- Pirate crews tended to be on the whole more expert than other types, composed as they were mostly of experienced sailors instead of impressed landsmen. They also tended to be larger compared to a comparable merchant man's complement so that the work could be more lightly shared out.
- Even so, because the lighter labor loads were part of the appeal of piracy, many pirate crews were not overeager to do such hard labor as turning the capstan if there was a way not to. If they could, pirates not uncommonly forced prisoners or enslaved people from Africa or the Indian subcontinent to perform the hard labor. In the Mediterranean, corsairing ships were frequently rowed by captives.

LIFE AT SEA

- In general, life on the high seas was seen as a hard lot, for the common marine laborer unquestionably, but for the officers as well. As the 18th-century moralist and lexicographer Samuel Johnson famously put it:

No man will be a sailor who has contrivance enough to get himself into a jail; for being in a ship is being in a jail, with the chance of being drowned.

- Johnson's trusted assistant, Francis Barber, a freed Black man from Jamaica, once voluntarily enlisted as a landsman in the navy, but Johnson was frantic and went to great lengths to get him discharged. This was despite the fact that Barber himself gave no indication of wanting to leave the service.
- The division between Barber and Johnson is a good microcosm for the general takes on life at sea: For many, it seemed unforgiving, filthy, cramped, smelly, and dangerous—and it essentially was all of those things. On the other hand, for those who adapted, it represented routine, familiarity, and constant companionship; perhaps freedom from debt, legal entanglements, or family obligations; and certainly a culture that was different from the culture on land.

PIRATE FOOD

- Pirating had its own appeal, and the potential for profit and greater freedom were just two of its enticements. Another important one was food. The food situation on long naval and merchant sea voyages was terrible, often featuring insufficient provisions.
- There is every reason to think that pirates often ate better than naval crews, merchantmen, or their prisoners. They stuck to local waters, often shores and inlets they knew well, and therefore had access to better cuisine.

- In general, they had more variety in their diets, and more frequent landfalls. This meant fresher provisions and far less scurvy than merchants limping into port from West Africa or the men who were sent to hunt pirates all the way from Portsmouth.

PIRATE RUM

- Rum was culturally important both as a drink and as a trade good. Holds full of golden treasure were uncommon; most booty consisted of cargo. Rum was among the most fungible of goods, as it could be used directly as currency at many points along the coast of the African continent to purchase goods and captive humans.
- As a beverage, it was both popular and problematic. Tales of sailors' and piratical drunkenness abound. But rum was also a practical necessity at sea.
- Fresh water on a ship was fresh in the sense of not being salt water. It was not, typically, fresh in the sense of smelling clean and not being full of algae and other unwholesomeness.
- Water was imperfectly stored in wooden casks, and it was not filtered or pasteurized. To make it more palatable and less hazardous, water was mixed with alcohol—usually, after the 17th century, rum, thanks to the British slavery plantations in Jamaica and their ability to produce sugarcane molasses for the empire.
- This concoction is sometimes termed *grog*, but that term was not in wide use until the last portion of the 18th century. The fact that we associate it with piracy is one of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* anachronisms.
- Pirates and other mariners alike were used to the drink, and they often added citrus juice if they could to improve the dubious taste. The buccaneers, pirates, and merchants of the Caribbean favored a concoction called bumbo: water, rum, sugar, lime, and sometimes nutmeg or cinnamon.
- That is a delicious mixture. It was not, though, adopted specifically to ward off scurvy, which is another seafaring tall tale.

SCURVY

- The threat of scurvy, however, was very real. Without fresh meat and greens in their diets for months on end, mariners were at high risk for this disease of nutritional deficiency. It was the leading killer of mariners, and for long voyages a 50% mortality rate due to scurvy was not uncommon. Sometimes the rate was much higher.
- Kenneth Carpenter estimates that 2 million people died of scurvy in the early modern period. People suffering from scurvy could display listlessness, lethargy, depression, sore and swollen gums, tooth loss, foul breath, and joint pain, unhealing wounds, and ulcers on the legs, among other symptoms.
- The cause and cure for scurvy were not agreed on until well into the 20th century. We know now that it is caused by a lack of dietary ascorbic acid (vitamin C).
- Humans cannot produce their own vitamin C and must get it by ingesting other life forms that can; without it, one of several disadvantages is that humans cannot produce collagen. The good news is that this exists in quite a lot of other life forms: many fruits and green vegetables are rich in vitamin C, as are root vegetables.
- An orange is not necessary to fend off scurvy; potatoes will do it. Most fresh meats contain some as well. Liver contains vitamin C, as do oysters.
- Cooking tends to decrease the vitamin C content in foods, though. If seafarer's only diet is ship's biscuit, dried peas, aged salt pork, and perhaps the occasional fish (which do not produce vitamin C), then scurvy may emerge.
- Many sailors and surgeons privately believed that fresh food would ward off scurvy, even if they did not understand why. But fresh food was expensive and difficult to come by, particularly in the quantities a crew needed for a long voyage of exploration or exploitation. Another problem was ineffective preservatives.

SHIP CONDITIONS AND TRADITIONS

- A ship was a small, cramped space. The decks were often too close together to stand up. There was virtually no privacy, and there were usually few or no women. Sailors slept, when their watch was called to rest, close together in hammocks, a convenient practice that travelers had learned from indigenous Arawak people of the Caribbean and South America.
- In spite of its many challenges, life at sea also included a culture of closeness and clannishness among the sailors, with traditions of sea-specific language, dancing, music, and strange rituals.
- This culture served a purpose, especially on a pirate ship. Crews tended to be nationally, ethnically, and even religiously diverse, with pirate crews even more so. Yet if a crew could not bridge those differences and work together in the face of stresses and dangers, their collective chances of survival decreased, and so it was in everyone's interest to promote a certain amount of bonding.
- One of the most common rituals was the ceremony of crossing the line. The first time a ship crossed the equator from north to south during a voyage, everyone on the ship who had never made the crossing was forced to undergo a ceremony.
- With great pageantry, they were summoned by Neptune (a sailor in a Neptune costume) and ducked into the sea—unless they paid a fine to escape it. The naturalist Joseph Banks described having to pay for not only himself and his servants but also their dogs to avoid this tradition.
- Did pirates perform the ceremony of the line? If they happened to cross the equator, which not all did, and if there were inexperienced men among them, they very likely would have. The practice seems to have been nearly universal, and it continues in various forms to this day.

READING

Lamb, *Scurvy*.

Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*.

PIRATE MUSIC AND PERFORMANCES

If life at sea wasn't all luxury and ease, neither was it all tedium and suffering. Music, dancing, theatricals, boxing, storytelling, and other pastimes were encouraged by some commanders as a means of keeping their men happy and engaged. This lesson looks music, dancing, and theatrics aboard pirate ships as well as songs and stage performances inspired by the pirate life.

MUSIC AND DANCING

- Unpleasant as it may have sounded, the bizarre line-crossing ceremony discussed in lesson 15 actually ended in dancing for all hands far into the night. It stands to reason that pirates would not be less interested in fun on board than their lawful counterparts.
- We know from trial records that musicians were likely to be kept as prisoners by pirates who came across them. The pirate captain John Taylor had musicians on his ship who had to “play their tune or be beat” while the pirates worked, so that “the [pirates’] days pass very agreeably” for them.
- A ship’s musical culture could serve three purposes, to borrow James Seth’s phrase: “diversion, discipline, and [when important guests came aboard] diplomacy.” Pirates, fishermen, merchantmen, and dockworkers all used rhythmic music or singing both to keep rhythm and pass the time during arduous labor such as raising the anchor.



- Even naval ships, which were staid in terms of work songs, used drums and pipes. They often allowed music and dancing in the evenings.

SONG FUNCTIONS AND MUSICIANS

- The term *sea shanty* was not in wide use until the end of the 19th century, and anthropologists did not begin collecting these folksongs until a bit earlier in that same era. However, the practice of investing songs at sea with particular power or significance is ancient.
- Music and chanting were used often during labor. *Heave ho*, which is short for the phrase “with heave and how,” meaning roughly “with as much effort as possible,” appears in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as early as 1400. This almost certainly means it was in common parlance well before then.

- There's a distinction to be made between the Golden Age pirates, who liked music for pleasure, and the 19th-century sailors who used shanties more frequently in their labor. Closer to the Golden Age, the work chants heard and sung by pirates were potentially influenced by Afro-Caribbean culture as well as folk songs and Old English ballad traditions.
- According to W. Jeffrey Bolster, while musicians might easily come from any background, it was especially common for Black men to serve as musicians. Black slaves and servants with such skills were valued as status symbols.
- Moreover, sea shanties from the late 18th and early 19th centuries were strongly influenced by the contributions of Caribbean stevedores and Black sailors used to communal working songs, sometimes from past experiences of enslavement. The sea shanties most known to people today, such as "Spanish Ladies" and "Drunken Sailor," largely date from the Atlantic 19th century.

THEATRICALS AND WRITING

- We can also find stories of pirates finding means beyond song to indulge their need for creative expression. A number of anecdotes in Charles Johnson's *General History* show them indulging in theatrical performance.
- The accounts of both Bartholomew Roberts and Thomas Anstis, who served under Roberts before captaining his own pirate crew, include mock trials, for example. Johnson also includes stories of pirates putting on real theatricals, instead of merely playacting at lawful ritual.
- There is no reason to believe pirates wouldn't have aspired to acts of authorship as well. Indeed, Sir Walter Raleigh and William Dampier were both celebrated for their writing as well as their roving. The Elizabethan Welsh pirate David Gwyn has the unusual distinction of being a rover who was also a published poet, albeit not a very popular one.

SONGS ABOUT PIRATES

- People sing about pirates quite a bit. In the 19th century, pirate melodrama was a hugely popular stage genre on its own terms. An important connection between pirates and song is that the exploits of the most famous pirates were long immortalized in popular ballads.
- Simply defined, a ballad is a song that narrates a story. The ballad was a popular form that did important work communicating stories among the marginally as well as highly literate. They were often topical, propagating news on current events and political opinion.
- Ballads that glorified pirates while they were still marauding could be unnerving to the government, precisely because of their reach. From the 16th century onward, they were often sold in the street as broadsides: cheap single sheet prints of the lyrics, often with a woodcut illustration.
- The ballad hawker would sing the tune to attract buyers. The number of ballads sold in England alone is estimated in the millions.
- Some, though not most, of what these ballads had to say about their subjects was true, but often they served simply as a call to adventure on the high seas. A good example is the late-16th-century sea ballad of Francis Drake, “Upon Sire Francis Drake’s Return from His Voyage about the World.” It holds forth Drake as a patriot hero whose example is to be emulated for the glory of Queen Elizabeth.
- More moralistic takes appear in ballads about pirates who’ve been caught. “Captain Kidd’s Farewell to the Seas,” a ballad commemorating Kidd’s execution (and in fact sold to the crowds who had gathered to see him hanged), became popular when things had gone awry for that erstwhile pirate hunter-turned-pirate.
- Verses cover Kidd’s murder of the gunner William Moore, his attack on the *Quedah Merchant*, and harassment of French and Moorish ships in Kidd’s career. The later American version adds in an extra flourish about hidden treasure: “Come all ye young and old / You’re welcome to my gold.”

- There are also ballads about pirating in general, rather than specific famous pirates. In such ballads, the pirate is often a defeated foe. “The Coast of High Barbary,” for example, versions of which date back to the 16th century, describes an English ship encountering and bravely defeating a pirate.

PIRATES AND BALLAD OPERAS

- Pirate musicals have great reach and influence. The great melodrama vogue that swept through the 19th century began taking on piracy as a favorite theme, and there were even a number of wildly popular pirate operas.
- That is how we ended up today with popular entertainments like *The Pirates of Penzance* or Germany’s Störtebeker Festival. The festival is an annual open-air theatrical celebration of Klaus Störtebeker and the Victual Brothers, 14th-century privateers who eventually turned to out-and-out piracy.
- There is, arguably, a line to be traced between pirates and the modern form of musical theater in English from its outset. At the very end of the Golden Age of piracy, in 1728, John Gay staged his runaway hit *The Beggar’s Opera*, which was a new musical form called ballad opera.
- In that form, the songs consisted of new words sung to already popular tunes; a song about hanging criminals set to the tune of “Greensleeves” would be example. Much of the fun was in the contrast between the tune and the content. *The Beggar’s Opera* was in part a reaction against the popularity of Italian opera, but it was also a broad, biting social satire.
- The play takes place in the wake of the scandalous stock market crash referred to as the South Sea Bubble, which was enabled by a pirate’s theft of Spanish maps of the South Seas. It is about the adventures of the polygamous gentleman highwayman Macheath.
- But its general message was that decay in the government and the upper ranks of society had spread so thoroughly down through the ranks that it was no longer possible to tell a robber from a member of Parliament. The play’s *deus ex machina* happy ending, in which Macheath unexpectedly escapes punishment, emphasizes this equivalency.

- *The Beggar's Opera* had a sequel called *Polly*. In that play, Macheath has been indentured and transported to the West Indies, but he escapes his indenture and is terrorizing the countryside disguised as a Black pirate while being hunted by two of his erstwhile wives.
- One of those wives is Polly Peachum, who was the heroine of the *Beggar's Opera*, and she turns pirate herself without ever recognizing him. The general idea is that the rot and corruption of the first play is now being exported via the engines of colonialism and enslavement.
- The British government, led by the notorious Robert Walpole, was still upset by the success of *The Beggar's Opera*, and it banned the performance of *Polly*. But this did nothing to slow the sale of the print version of the play. Ironically, Gay, who sold it by subscription, was infuriated by pirated copies that cut into his profits.
- The British government's efforts to stifle Gay did nothing to slow the popularity of ballad opera, either. Ironic musical theater featuring outlaws and other scurrilous subjects was here to stay. And *Polly* would eventually be performed toward the end of the century, when melodrama was starting to take off and open new avenues for pirate musicals.

MELODRAMAS

- From the ballad opera, it was a short skip to melodrama. Melodrama was originally a late-18th-century French form; some of its bigger hits were quickly adapted for the London stage, and they caught on.
- Melodrama features easily recognizable plots and characters, music, singing, and dancing; its register was sensational and emotional. Often even the spoken dialog was accompanied by music. There was a special reason the English stage was ripe for melodrama.
- In 1737, Walpole's government was fed up with stage satires, which continued to flourish. The Licensing Act of 1737 required all new plays to be approved by the Lord Chamberlain's office before performance—a remarkable example of censorship. Theaters, however, were permitted to stage pantomimes and musicals, and they flourished.

- By the 19th century, the English environment was primed for melodramas, plays that combined bits of recitation with musical, orchestral, and dance interludes. These spectacular entertainments were both commensurate with public taste and legally more convenient to stage because as musicals they skirted the censorship requirement.
- The audiences for many of the melodramatic theaters were full of merchants, sailors, and members of the laboring classes. The stage reflected their interests back to them by developing play after play about the sea, sailors, pirates, exploration, and increasingly such serious issues as labor abuse, colonialism, and slavery. As a form, it could be both conservative and radical, including abolitionist.
- These melodramas most often featured pirates as villains, although pirates also made appearances as tragic heroes and/or wistful lovers. The melodramas return to a couple of common piratical tropes: Pirates are introduced accompanied by music and are shown drinking. In fact, in a plurality of pirate melodramas, the pirates are introduced economically via a drinking song.
- For example, one of the most popular musical entertainments of the early 19th century, John Cartwright Cross's *Blackbeard: Or, The Captive Princess*, raises the curtain on a pirate band singing these words: "While the jolly jolly grog's afloat / We bid care push off his boat."

READING

Gay, *The Beggar's Opera*.

———, *Polly*.

Hugill, *Shanties from the Seven Seas*.

PIRATE KINGS

An important question is what to call a pirate who moves beyond the business of plundering to establish himself as ruler of a territory, or one who becomes a member of a recognized government. These kings among pirates are the focus of this discussion.

GOVERNMENT PURPOSES

- One way in which a pirate might come to some form of “legitimate” rule is when a government decides that a pirate has been serving its purposes all along. Numerous pirates and buccaneers were knighted, including Michael Geare, John Hawkins, James Lancaster, Henry Mainwaring, and Walter Raleigh.
- Not only was Francis Drake knighted, but his nephew managed to snag a baronetcy. Such honors moved their recipients into the ranks of lesser nobility.
- Other appointments placed their recipients directly into significant government posts. Sir Henry Morgan became lieutenant-governor of Jamaica, and Woodes Rogers was appointed to govern the Bahamas. Each eventually ran into trouble, but they did hold power over land and people for a time.
- There were also pirate governors whose paperwork was less official than Morgan’s or Rogers’s. One example was Henry Jennings, the wealthy treasure hunter who started a ruckus over the wreck of the *Flota de Indias* right after the War of the Spanish Succession.
- He shared an unauthorized governance of New Providence, the island in the Bahamas where Nassau is located, with fellow Golden Ager Benjamin Hornigold. Both accepted amnesty when Rogers offered it to them on behalf of the king.

- Jennings retired to private life, and Rogers sent Hornigold off to recapture the fugitive Charles Vane. Hornigold tried, but he was killed in a hurricane.

THE TITLE OF KING

- A few took the title of king. For instance, the pirate Abraham Samuel for a brief time set up on Madagascar as the king of Fort Dauphin. That lasted until he was replaced or, as perhaps is more likely, deposed by a Malagasy successor.
- Similar in approach was James (or sometimes John) Plantain. Plantain sailed with Captain England in 1720, and he decided to settle in Rantabe on the northeast coast of Madagascar.
- Plantain was a Jamaican-born Englishman of no remarkable background; his only contemporary biographer claimed he was illiterate. Lettered or not, he had been privateering and pirating from age 13. To hear him tell it, in Madagascar, he became the king of Ranter Bay.



- Most of what we know about Plantain comes from the narrative of a naval sailor named Clement Downing. He would eventually write *A Compendious History of the Indian Wars; With an Account of the Rise, Progress, Strength, and Forces of Angria the Pyrate* in 1737.
- Downing's is a remarkable narrative that brings together a number of highly disparate characters. But what he says of Plantain should be taken with a grain of salt, since his source is mostly Plantain himself.

ZHENG ZHILONG AND KOXINGA

- Zheng Zhilong was active in 17th-century Southeast Asia. He allied his pirate fleet with the Ming imperial navy. Zhilong helped to keep the coast quiet until about mid-century, when he, too, became a pirate king of sorts—essentially, an independent actor in command of much of southeastern China.
- Zhilong was also known as Nicholas Gaspard after converting to Catholicism in Macao. He had begun as a translator working for the Dutch East India Company, and he then became their privateer.
- In time, he became the leader of most of the Chinese pirates, using his well-traveled and multicultural know-how to build a fleet that the imperial navy knew they would be better off allying with than trying to resist. No one could sail in his area without a pass, for which they had to pay.
- In 1646, Zheng Zhilong switched sides to back the Manchus of the Qing dynasty against the Ming. His son, Zheng Chenggong—better known now as Koxinga—did not, eventually leading to the father's execution.
- Koxinga, too, achieved pirate king status. He still had considerable resources to put to use in maintaining his family's power. His Ming loyalty seems to have been important to him, and it was reinforced by the death of his Japanese mother as a result of Qing incursions.

- The Qing, who succeeded the Ming, had passed a law forbidding people from living within 30 miles of the coast as a countermeasure against the anti-Qing movement. This prompted many on the coasts to throw themselves in with Koxinga, who assisted many Han Chinese in relocating to Taiwan.
- In 1661, Koxinga ousted the Dutch from Taiwan (or Formosa, as the Europeans called it). He established himself as the head of a dynastic ruling house there.

THE LAFITTES

- The 19th century witnessed some homegrown American pirates, such as the oyster pirates of the Chesapeake Bay, and there was a healthy tradition of American river piracy. Two relevant names here are Jean Lafitte and his brother, Pierre. The Lafittes had a number of independent colonies and their own fleet of corsairs.
- Jean and Pierre claimed to be French born, although their origin stories had a habit of shifting. Some biographers think it's more likely they were born in Haiti and moved to New Orleans in the 1780s, or perhaps later; quite a few white people fled the Haitian Revolution of 1791 and resettled along the Mississippi River.
- In any case, by the early 19th century, the brothers were privateering out of New Orleans. Jean in particular had a reputation for a superlative knowledge of the inlets and local waterways.
- Following the Louisiana Purchase, the fledgling United States government placed a heavy embargo against foreign imports, which by then included the merchant vessels plying their trade to and from the Caribbean. The brothers smelled an opportunity: With the elder Pierre maintaining the face of a respectable blacksmith in New Orleans, Jean headed to Baratavia Bay in the Gulf of Mexico and set up a bustling nexus for outfitting and fencing on behalf of privateers, pirates, and smugglers.

- Soon they had their own small pirate fleet. They traded in stolen goods and enslaved Africans kidnapped from Spanish ships. The Lafitte brothers were not even plausibly privateers, but their depredations benefitted the economy of New Orleans, and so the local government held its nose.
- Eventually Pierre was arrested because local enslaving merchants were annoyed by the smuggler's ability to undercut their prices. Then the War of 1812 broke out, and Jean, who was still free and running the family business, was eyed with interest by both the American and British navies.
- The British made overtures, but Jean calculated that he needed to avoid being quashed by the American forces eager to prevent such an alliance. The pirate tried pleading patriotism, calling himself, in a very un-pirate-like metaphor, “a stray sheep, wishing to return to the sheepfold.”
- In late 1814, Lafitte was able to secure pardons from James Madison for his men in exchange for enabling New Orleans's defenses in the Battle of New Orleans. Andrew Jackson, whose bloody career was made by the victory in that unfortunate postwar battle, had arrived to find New Orleans without much in the way of official defenses; Lafitte's encouragement in getting his pirates to participate was of essential benefit to the American forces.

THE LAFITTES' LATER ACTIVITIES AND LEGACY

- Directly afterward, these pirates began ostensibly working on the side of Spain in the Mexican War for Independence, although in reality they worked with both sides for their own benefit. Jean essentially established a smuggler's colony on Galveston Island.
- They flew the Mexican flag, but all residents swore their allegiance only to Lafitte, who began drafting letters of marque for his ships. The ships went cruising against the enemies of this theoretical tiny nation, called Campeche. The enemies—were, according to Lafitte, everyone.
- They began targeting enslaving vessels and smuggling the captive enslaved into Louisiana ports. Eventually the American navy had enough and insisted he decamp from Galveston in 1821.

- Lafitte headed for Cuba and established a base. From there, he eventually persuaded the Latin American independence leader Simón Bolívar to issue him a real letter of marque to cruise against their mutual enemy, the Spanish (Lafitte having, in the meantime, been operating openly as a pirate).
- He was killed in battle around 1823. Pierre, meanwhile, had died in the Yucatán Peninsula in 1821. The cause of death is unclear: perhaps it was wounds he'd received while being hunted as a pirate, or a fever he'd contracted, or possibly both.
- Rumors persisted for years that Jean, at least, had escaped his doom. In one highly unsupported version, he rescued and teamed up with Napoleon Bonaparte. In another, he occasionally popped up in alleys and shadows of New Orleans to rob the unsuspecting.
- The Lafitte legacy was significant in terms of stories. Though denounced, correctly enough, as monstrous pirates during the period of their depredations, the brothers Lafitte quickly made the jump into American legend.
- Still, the Lafittes were piratical enslavers. They were men who made money from the misery of others, and they left little of substance behind them.

READING

Davis, *The Pirates Laffite*.

Subramanian, *The Sovereign and the Pirate*.

SHE-PIRATES

At sea, there is little evidence of women acting as pirates. (That is not to say there is absolutely no evidence.) However, there are plenty of stories. This lesson spends some time with the legends of women pirates as well as with some of the remarkable exceptions that nevertheless prove the rule.

FEMALE VIKINGS

- While historians continue to disagree on the matter, it seems possible that there were some female Viking rovers who bore arms bravely and effectively, though probably there were not very many. Real or not, the idea of the shield maiden or female warrior was culturally important in Scandinavian folklore and mythology.
- There was also fascination with the idea of Valkyries, warrior maidens who served Odin, the god of war. This poetic and cultural tradition of the warrior-woman trope makes it very difficult to get a sense of what the numbers of actual shield-maidens might have been; few of the shield maidens mentioned in the extant records can safely be taken as representing a historical person.
- Lagertha, a female warrior beloved by fans of the TV series *Vikings* thanks to her portrayal by Kathryn Winnick, appears in the 13th-century *Gesta Danorum* of Saxo Grammaticus as a wife of Ragnar Lothbrok. Lothbrok was also probably more a blend of several figures than an actual person per se—the first parts of Saxo’s book are more concerned with legends than history.

- Lagertha is described as a peerless warrior. It is somewhat unlikely that she was real, but the glorious piratical aspiration she represents must have been compelling to Saxo's moment. And furthermore, Vikings—who were often colonizers—did travel sometimes with women.
- As an aside, they also traveled because of women, who wove the sails. Most of the women traveling with Viking men would not have been raiders, but surely some of those women could also ply an oar and swing an axe when they needed to.

THE GOLDEN AGE

- In the Golden Age, there were not only women passengers but women sailors as well. There were not very many, but there were probably more than we know about, since at least some of them would have, for a variety of reasons, tried to pass as men.
- Of that set, we have documentation regarding only the handful who were caught and written about. A woman who could pass successfully for a sailor would have been brought up to some sort of physical labor and would probably not have a well-off family support system.
- One of the best-known female cross-dressers from the Golden Age was a marine, not a pirate. Hannah Snell, also known as James Gray, enlisted in the British marines at age 24 after her husband ran off, using her



HANNAH SNELL AS JAMES GRAY

brother-in-law's name and suit. She served, honorably and with some battle wounds, for three years before taking her discharge and resuming a woman's identity.

- To raise money, she sold her story to a bookseller under the title *The Female Soldier*, which was a mini-sensation in 1750. She also performed on stage as a female marine.
- Snell's example tells us two things: Some women could handle the vicissitudes of life at sea and even the vicissitudes of life among sailors, and when they stopped doing so, they could become objects of much public fascination.
- Women did serve, in a semi-recognized capacity, aboard naval ships, doing menial or nursing work or looking after the ships' boys. Such service was sometimes provided by the wives of the lower-deck officers, such as the gunner or the purser, who were occasionally allowed to sail with their husbands.
- However, such cases, even if off the books, were different from those of women who surreptitiously became male-presenting sailors. Another such seagoing woman was the British Mary Lacy, who, disguised as a man named William Chandler, actually passed the shipwrights' exam. Lacy, too, eventually retired and married, publishing a memoir titled *The Female Shipwright*.

TWO PSEUDO-PIRATES

- In all of the Golden Age, only about four female pirates have been confirmed to exist. Three of them were called Mary, and two of them are a bit hard to accept as pirates per se.
- One of those was Mary Critchett, sometimes called Mary Crickett. In 1729, as a transported convict, she helped to steal a little sloop and was accused in court of sitting on a hatch to prevent a man her fellow escapees had imprisoned from getting out of the hold. These so-called pirates released their prisoners and were promptly captured, tried, and executed.
- Martha Farley (also called Mary Harley) was another unfortunate convict. She had been transported to the Ocracoke inlet with her husband, Thomas Farley.

- In 1727, she and Thomas fell in with a very small gang of sea raiders, led by one John Vidal, who used a canoe to raid other small ships. When Vidal was captured by some would-be victims, Martha and the two other male brigands were also seized.
- Thomas fled, abandoning his wife and their two children; Martha testified that she had no idea he'd been pirating. Either the court believed her, or they were mortified by her friendless state; she was pardoned.
- Neither Critchett nor Farley seem to have done actively piratical things: one of them sat on a door; the other may really have been in the wrong place at the wrong time. Anne Bonny and Mary Read, though, seem to have committed fully to the life of the pirate.
- Interestingly, they did so, like Critchett and Farley, without concealing their sex. However, that is not how *General History of the Pyrates* author Charles Johnson, or anyone who has come after him, likes to tell the tale.

SOURCES ON BONNY AND READ

- We have two main sources on Anne Bonny and Mary Read. One is the *General History*, in which they appear in the first edition, published in 1724. By the second print run in the same year, they have billing on the title page.
- The other is an earlier pamphlet account of their trial, *The Tryals of Captain John Rackam, and Other Pirates*, published in 1721. This pamphlet also included the trial of Captain Charles Vane. Bonny and Read are also alluded to in the *Boston Gazette* in 1720 in a proclamation from Woodes Rogers, then the anti-pirate governor of the Bahamas.
- Therefore, we are certain women with those names really lived and that they sailed as pirates. As the only two female pirates of significance from the Golden Age Caribbean group, Bonny and Read cast a long cultural shadow. For instance, they appear in the cable drama *Black Sails* and in the *Assassin's Creed* video game franchise.
- Their lives have been novelized and dramatized repeatedly. However, it was the depiction in the *General History* that first made them famous.

RACKAM'S BRIEF TALE

- In the early 18th century, the Bahamas essentially had no colonial government; it was handed to Woodes Rogers in 1717, and Charles Vane promptly declined amnesty and sailed off. His quartermaster was John Rackam.
- One day in November 1718, a ship that appeared to be easy prey was spotted by Vane's crew, but Vane declined to give chase. The ship turned out to be a well-armed French naval ship, and Vane's crew, thinking he showed timidity, voted him out as captain and elected Rackam in his stead.
- Rackam made his bases in Cuba and Jamaica, probably to elude Rogers. He captured several small ships near the coasts of the Bahamas and Jamaica, but in late fall 1720, he and his crew of 10 were themselves captured by a Captain Barnet in the employ of the Jamaican government.
- The *General History* depicts Rackam as a small-timer. His story lasts only a few pages, and it's clear that he's interesting not because of his exploits but because of his crew.
- Johnson relates that after capture, two members of this pirate crew were spared execution because they revealed themselves to be pregnant. To the London audience of 1724, this was probably quite the plot twist.
- From there we go to the women's tales. When Johnson describes the lives of Read and Bonny, he begins with their childhoods. To a far greater extent than with any of his other subjects, he wants to know why they became pirates.
- The answer he puts forth is that both were raised as boys. It's extremely improbable Johnson would have had any way of knowing this. And the girl-raised-as-a-boy tale, while it could have happened in real life, was also a common trope in warrior woman and female soldier ballads. This is almost certainly fiction, but it has captured imaginations for 300 years.

THE STORIES OF READ AND BONNY

- Mary Read's story comes first, and it is largely about economic insecurity, especially for women. Mary is cross-dressed by her mother to look like her mother's first child—a boy who died in infancy.
- The father of that boy is married to Mary's mother, but he has disappeared. Mary's mother needs her mother-in-law to believe that Mary is that boy so the mother-in-law will give her money, even though Mary's mother actually had Mary with another man.
- Once the mother-in-law also dies, young Mary takes a job to bring money into the household, but as a footboy rather than a serving girl. It was probably both safer and better pay to do so.
- As she grows older, it becomes clear that Mary is cross-dressing both for money and for inclination: "growing bold and strong, and having also a roving Mind, she enter'd herself on board a Man of War. She later joins the army, where "she got the Esteem of all her Officers" until she falls in love with a comrade.
- She and the comrade marry and are happy for a time, but he dies, and their business fails. She rejoins the infantry and eventually turns pirate.
- Her sex is found out by Anne Bonny, an Irishwoman "who was not altogether so reserved in Point of Chastity" as serial monogamist Mary. The next part is hard to believe, but it makes a great story: Anne falls in lust with Mary and begins dropping hints.
- When Rackam, Bonny's lover, becomes jealous, he, too, is let into the secret, but no one else on the ship has any idea. At her trial, the court was sympathetic to Mary and stayed her execution. Johnson writes that "it is possible she would have found Favour," but she contracts gaol fever and dies in prison. This is in fact true; she was buried in Jamaica in 1721.
- As for the backstory of Bonny, who was "of a fierce and courageous temper," she first elopes with a sailor. Then she abandons him for the handsome pirate Rackam, with whom she elopes to sea in men's clothing.

- When their pirate ship is captured, all the men supposedly flee, and Bonny and Read alone try to hold the deck. When she finds Rackam is to be hanged, Bonny's farewell speech to him—which people love to quote even though it's almost certainly fictitious—is “that she was sorry to see him there, but if he had fought like a Man, he need not have been hang'd like a Dog.”
- Bonny, like Mary, has her execution stayed. It is unclear what eventually became of her, but it's entirely possible that she was eventually released and went on to live a quieter life.
- The trial records of Bonny and Read contradict much of what Johnson relates, leaving the truth uncertain. For example, two Frenchmen, John Besneck and Peter Cornelian, testified via an interpreter that the women wore dresses except when a vessel gave chase or attacked, in which case they wore men's clothing.

READING

Appleby, *Women and English Piracy*.

Stanley, *Bold in Her Breeches*.

WOMEN AS PIRATE COMMANDERS

Nearly all pirate captains and admirals were also men. Sometimes, however, they had to answer to women on land. Certain women actually commanded pirates, making them pirate queens in the sense that we can call men who held sway over pirate fleets pirate kings.

FINANCIAL ANGLES

- One way women came to command pirates was through financial arrangements. Privateers almost always had powerful economic backers and heads of state to keep happy; pirates sometimes did as well. And in a very small handful of cases, the person in charge was a woman.
- One example was Queen Elizabeth I of England, who disdained petty piracies but ennobled the boldest pirates. Elizabeth's reputation as a queen of pirates is so well established that the historian Susan Ronald titled her book on Elizabeth *The Pirate Queen*.
- But there were other ways for a woman to call the shots. Sometimes this came about through inheritance. In the 17th and early 18th centuries, it was fairly common for European women of the middling and trading classes to participate in the family business, even taking over entirely if their husbands were killed or away at war or on business travel. If the family business was privateering, sometimes the women would get involved.

GATHENHIELM THE PRIVATEER

- The businesswoman Ingela Olofsdotter Gathenhielm came to be a privateer in the service of Charles XII of Sweden in the early 18th century. Ingela came from a privateering family in Onsala, and her husband had the same background.
- The background here was the Great Northern War, which raged for the first two decades of the 1700s. In it, an anti-Swedish alliance headed by tsarist Russia and including Denmark-Norway and Saxony-Poland would eventually break the dominance of Sweden throughout the Baltic region.
- One result of the war was the end of absolutist monarchy in Sweden, the growth there of parliamentary power, and the burgeoning of civil rights. But in 1710, when Ingela's soon-to-be husband Lars obtained a privateering license, there were still many years of fighting yet to come.
- Lars converted his shipping business in part to a privateering fleet, and his ships were not overly choosy about their targets. He became a pirate.

VIKING LEGENDS

There are several legends about Viking noblewomen, seafaring shield-maidens. For example, the Danish historian and storyteller Saxo Grammaticus tells the tale of the 6th-century Norwegian shield-maiden Rusla, who commanded a fleet of her own longships and raided Danish and Icelandic ships. How far we can trust Saxo is unknown, but there is some evidence that Viking women ventured on raids.



- When Lars died young in 1718 (reportedly of tuberculosis rather than a sea battle), all of the business ventures—including the piracy—passed to Ingela, who was primed to take over. She made her fortune at it and then retired, investing in other businesses such as ropemaking.
- While colorful stories are told about Ingela, it's doubtful she was actually captaining ships and leading boarding parties. She did, however, run the crucial business side of the practice that enabled the captains and mariners who worked for her to do so.

ÆTHELFÆD

- Alfred the Great, king of Wessex and later the self-proclaimed king of the English, had a daughter, Æthelflæd, who was both a peace-weaver and later a shield-maiden. When her husband died in 911, she ruled as lady of the Mercians, a sole female regent.
- She pursued to considerable success the conquest of the Danelaw. This was the part of Anglo-Saxon England that had been colonized by Danish armies in the late 9th century.
- She erected a system of forts to act as bases along riverways. Unusually for a queen, she may have led her armies into the field as many as three times. At the very least, she directed them independently.

GRÁINNE NÍ MHÁILLE

- Gráinne Ní Mháille is an example of a so-called pirate queen who would possibly be better understood as a powerful noblewoman whose position in society required military action. (This is perhaps true for Æthelflæd as well.) A chieftain of the Galway region of Ireland, Gráinne resisted—successfully and legitimately—the incursions of English power into Ireland while also consolidating her own.
- She commanded fast coastal raiding ships and the men to manage them, and she could offer them in the service of others to build alliances. On the other hand, she was imprisoned in Limerick and then Dublin Castle for a couple of years on suspicion of inciting Irish rebellion.

- She was very unusual and must have been brave and charismatic. But her political power did not compare to Elizabeth's. Perhaps she was not a pirate queen in the same sense, but she was in charge of an untold number of piratical raids.

THE KILLIGREW FAMILY

- The powerful Cornish Killigrew family were masters of privateers. Some of those Killigrews were women, and like other families of the era, the Killigrews depended on the labor and participation of their women to keep the family business running.
- They did not sail the ships, but they were responsible for obtaining them; financing, planning, victualing, and managing the profits of the privateering and piratical ventures; and protecting the mariners, occasionally through appropriate bribes of admiralty officials. Mary Wolverston, wife of Sir John Killigrew, and Elizabeth Killigrew, John's mother, were both apparently heavily involved in the family business operations.

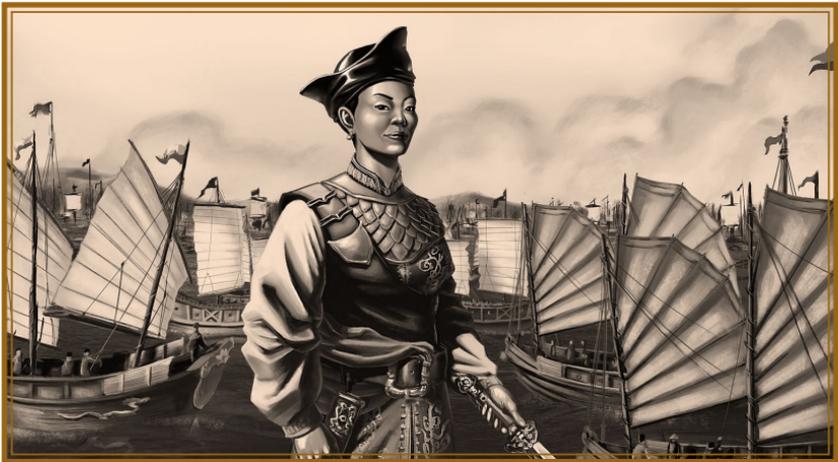
SAYYIDA AL-HURRA

- Sayyida al-Hurra, queen of Tétouan in the 16th century, was a commander of corsairs and was allied to the famous Barbarossa brothers. Sayyida al-Hurra is a title that may be translated as something like “the Independent Lady.”
- It indicated that she was queen who held sovereign power alone, not sharing it with a consort. She is not to be confused with Queen Arwa al-Sulayhi, a long-reigning queen of Yemen in the 12th century who bore the same title.
- Most of the sources we have on al-Hurra are Spanish and Portuguese, and they depict her as firmly in control of her government and the pirates of her region. For instance, it was with her that Iberian diplomats negotiated when they wanted their countrypeople released from Barbary captivity or to address the attacks on their shipping.

- Al-Hurra did not raid herself; she was the power behind the galleys but not a swashbuckler waving a scimitar about with the boarding party. Calling her a pirate is misleading.
- On the other hand, her authority with the major corsairing powers must have helped her case for building and maintaining power. If someone wanted a citizen released, al-Hurra was whom they had to go through.

CHENG I SAO

- Cheng I Sao, also known as Ching Shih, was a 19th-century Chinese pirate admiral who took on the British, the Portuguese, and the Qing alike. Her pirate fleet consisted of some 400 ships, and her pirates numbered in the tens of thousands.
- Eventually she established such a base of power that she was able to negotiate a posh settlement for herself and her fleet, garnering almost all of them not only peace and protection but also the right to keep most of their ill-gotten gains. Cheng I Sao reputedly settled down as the doyenne of an infamous gambling house in Macau.



CHENG I SAO

- A point of comparison to consider is this: For all the cultural power of the pirates of the Caribbean and the havoc they caused, piracy there never involved, even at its height, more than 2,000 or 3,000 men. The highpoint of Chinese piracy involved six or seven fleets and more than 50,000 mariners.
- They operated junk-rigged ships, whose sails were expanded in front of the mast by battens—rigid poles—that ran through the cloth. Junk culture was unique to the East; large floating communities made of junk boats, many of them functioning essentially as houseboats, carried entire families who rarely set foot ashore.
- Women were present as laboring members of these communities, unlike in Mediterranean or Caribbean ships. In a few cases, they may have assumed command ranks. This did not make a woman pirate admiral a common sight, however.
- When she was a Cantonese sex worker known as Shih Yang, Cheng I Sao met and in 1801 married the great pirate Cheng I (or Zheng Yi). Their union occurred against the backdrop of a rebellion in Vietnam that caused a large pirating and privateering operation to become unstable, leading to instability in China's Pearl River Delta as well.
- When things in the delta had settled, Cheng I and Cheng I Sao had consolidated power as chiefs among a new confederation of pirates; they controlled the important Red Flag Fleet. When Cheng I died in 1807, Cheng I Sao took over the family business very ably, taking the unusual step in this case of marrying her adoptive stepson.
- Chang Pao, a handsome and clever young man, had been captured and then adopted by her late husband. Using their relationship to legitimize her power, and still in her early 30s, she built up the power of the fleet and also increased its regulation as a protection-money racket.
- Cheng I Sao and Chang Pao instituted and enforced a law code with some striking similarities to the Caribbean articles of piracy. How to register and share out booty, the penalties for misbehavior, and how to treat captive women are clearly addressed. Women captives were either married to the pirates, sometimes after having been sold at auction, or ransomed and returned to shore.

- In any case, by 1809 and 1810, the pirate confederacy was threatening enough that after a few defeats failed to cow them, the Portuguese and Cantonese governments opted to negotiate. Cheng I Sao seems to have been the lead negotiator, securing highly favorable terms.
- Unfortunately, in the absence of archival information, many authors captivated by her legend choose to invent, adding in details about her looks, her voice, and her personality. Most imagine her as seductive; a notable exception is Jorge Luis Borges, who depicted her as a “slinking woman, with sleepy eyes and a smile full of decayed teeth.”
- Borges envisioned her as merely a sober commander of men, rather than the preternaturally gifted marine administrator she seems to have been. Whatever the case, pirate queen though she was, she seems not to have had any goal of creating a pirate dynasty. Instead, she negotiated a good deal for her people, took her profits, and ran. In this she was like many pirates: The eventual goal was to make a fortune and get safely out.

READING

Lebbady, “Women in Northern Morocco.”

Murray, “Cheng I Sao in Fact and Fiction.”

PIRATES IN LITERATURE AND THE THEATER

While there have been plays, poems, and ballads featuring pirates for a very long time, contemporary American and British culture is culturally still very much influenced by the voices that were dominant in the 19th century. In other words, what we think is a pirate is what 19th-century fiction writers imagined about 19th-century pirates. We've already considered several manifestations of pirates in fiction of various kinds in previous lessons, but in this one, we'll take a closer look at how our image of pirates was shaped especially by 19th-century literature and theater.

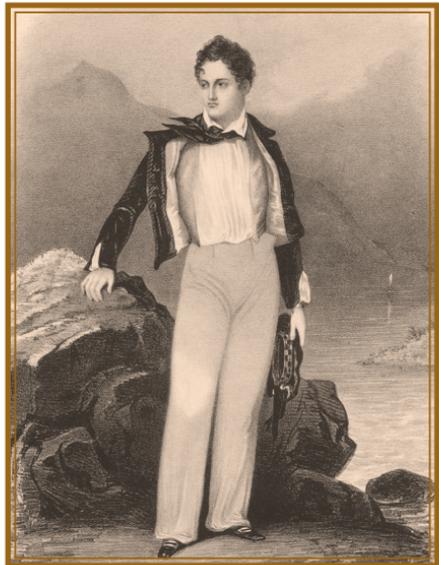
THE IMAGE OF PIRATES CHANGES

- The 19th century witnessed the rehabilitation of the popular culture pirate into a sentimental hero. It was also primarily in the 19th century that pirates were repackaged from fare for adults—such as trial proceedings, last words and confessions, histories, and serious dramas—into children's fare.
- The farther away pirates drifted from being actual threats to European shipping, the more they became fair game for fantasy. Notably, while the first half of the 19th century witnessed the apex of abolitionist sentiment and debate in English literature, the pirate fictions popularized in this period show no remarkable engagement with the topic.

- Early in the 19th century, as the war with France created a market for privateers and smugglers, pirates became objects of celebration on the British stage. John Cartwright Cross's melodrama *Blackbeard, Or the Captive Princess*, first performed in 1798 and perennially popular for at least 50 years afterward, was what we might today call a crossover hit.
- This play, a song-and-dance extravaganza, was performed initially at the Royal Circus Theatre in Lambeth, where its audience would likely have included many sailors and dockworkers, but it went on to find audiences in many other theaters. It must in some places have been a show for families, for toy theaters were available for purchase. These were booklets that contained the basic story of the play as well as pages of paper dolls that could be carefully cut out and decorated for home play theatricals.

LORD BYRON'S TREATMENT OF PIRATES

- In most plays like *Blackbeard*, the pirate is a fearsome and compelling character, yet not really the hero. There were productions taking the same kind of approach about Francis Drake, William Kidd, and Jean-David Nau, to name a few. The vogue for the pirate as steamy tragic hero appeared at about the same time, but it originated off-stage and then was quickly transplanted on stage.
- The true predecessors for the kinds of figures created by Errol Flynn and later Johnny Depp come from the work of authors like James Fenimore Cooper, Walter Scott, and George Gordon Byron (known as Lord Byron).



LORD BYRON

- Two of Byron's big hits in the early 19th century, *The Bride of Abydos* in 1813 and *The Corsair* in 1814, were tales in verse featuring piratical tragic heroes from the Mediterranean Sea. These were magnetic leaders of men who are undone by being unlucky in love.
- Shortly after the publication of these poems, Byron's marriage suffered a public dissolution, when his wife, Anne Isabella Milbanke, decided he was unbearable and possibly insane; rumors of cruelty and adultery flew. Byron had to leave England forever.
- While Byron was wandering through Europe, back in England, his poems were being adapted again and again for the melodramatic stage, many of them to major success. *The Bride of Abydos*, whose hero, Selim, becomes a pirate because he believes he has fallen in love with his own sister, garnered attention. *The Corsair* had at least half a dozen stage spectaculars based on its story.

WALTER SCOTT'S TREATMENT OF PIRATES

- The poet Walter Scott eventually turned to writing historical fiction. His work *Waverley*, a fiction of the Jacobite rebellion, did well. Unlike Byron, Scott published anonymously: His pen name was "the author of *Waverley*," though his identity was something of an open secret.
- Scott's work was very rapidly and repeatedly put on stage, nowhere more rapidly than when Scott wrote about piracy himself. The 1821 publication of *The Pirate*, another work by the author of *Waverley*, started a serious race to be the first to get it on stage.
- The novel was published in Edinburgh on the 21st or 22nd of December and in London a few days later. Within two weeks, there was a live stage version, and within three weeks, there were three competing ones.
- The first version to hit the stage, on January 7, 1822, was by Thomas John Dibdin, who titled his composition *The Pirate; or, The Wild Woman of Zetland*. Reviewers were not unimpressed, lauding the costumes and stage effects, which involved an onstage sea battle.

- Between Scott and Byron, the British audience was exposed to pirates through all available means at once: poems, plays, songs, novels, reviews, and even some moralizing pushback—always good for sales. Both Byron and Scott based their characters on sources that had plausible roots, but both romanticized them heavily and successfully. The message they and their adaptors sent came across very clearly: Pirates are bad, but pirate captains are brooding and attractive.

JAMES FENIMORE COOPER'S TREATMENT OF PIRATES

- The 19th century also saw the beginnings of anti-pirate collaborations between the American and British navies, and in more or less the same time period, some interesting transatlantic pirate fiction sales. Byron and Scott sold well in the US, for example, which inspired the American James Fenimore Cooper, of *The Last of the Mohicans* fame, to try to do one better.
- Cooper had a background as a midshipman, and he was irritated by what he saw as Scott's fanciful depictions of maritime scenes. Cooper therefore wrote *The Pilot: A Tale of the Sea*, an 1823 tale of heroism featuring John Paul Jones, who was a Scotsman and a key naval commander for the Americans during their revolt against the British.
- He was hence a military hero to the Americans, while the British denounced him as a turncoat and a pirate. There were three adaptations of *The Pilot* for the London stage, although they were not put together so quickly as Scott's *Pirate* adaptations.
- The British adaptations tweaked their source material, emphasizing the righteousness of the British characters and depicting Jones as tragically flawed—one of them was retitled *The Pirate's Doom*, lest the audience be confused about how they were to understand him. Some of these performances were then readapted for the New York stage.
- In 1827, Cooper followed up with *The Red Rover*, another pirate novel. This work was notable for its tragic free Black character, Scipio Africanus; a cross-dressed female cabin boy called Roderick; and a noble, trickster pirate figure in the Red Rover, who passes as a gentleman named Captain Heidegger.

FANNY CAMPBELL, FEMALE PIRATE CAPTAIN

Besides Roderick, the Anne Bonny-like figure in *The Red Rover*, the United States also offered a rare example of a full female swashbuckler, a fictional pirate cast in the Mary Read model. In 1844, author Maturin Murray Ballou published the novella *Fanny Campbell, Female Pirate Captain: A Tale of the Revolution*, which was inexpensive, fully illustrated, and extremely popular.



ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON'S TREATMENT OF PIRATES

- The aforementioned works set up was a major cultural shift in which pirates be the good guys (or gals), and even where they were not, they were definitely being reframed as darkly conflicted and tragically noble, forced to assume an air of false bravado to survive among the swashbucklers. Pirates, in other words, were increasingly understood as performers.
- And then came the Scotsman Robert Louis Stevenson. In 1889's *The Master of Ballantrae* and especially in the 1882 *Treasure Island*, which children still hear about long before they're even old enough to read, Stevenson fixed in the minds of millions a particular set of pirate clichés. In *The Master of Ballantrae*, we encounter a pirate who calls himself Teach and acts a great deal like Blackbeard despite the fact that the historical Blackbeard died decades prior to the mid-century setting of the novel.
- Stevenson's pirate fictions are full of treasures filched from other texts. Those include the *General History* and its many pirated editions as well as Washington Irving's stories from *The Money Diggers*, which had a lively presence as transatlantic fiction and upon the melodramatic stage. His pirates are vaguely Caribbean, vaguely 18th century, and vaguely familiar.

- *Treasure Island* was penned in the late 19th century, but it mostly stars pirates from the Golden Age, except that they anachronistically sport tattoos and earrings, neither of which was fashionable until the end of the 18th century. Stevenson doesn't date the novel precisely, but it appears, like *Balkantræe*, to be about mid-century.
- The character Squire Trelawney's summary of Captain Flint's career in the novel is a clear example of how 19th-century authors like Stevenson turned Golden Age piracy into national legend—almost something to be proud of. Trelawney says, “The Spaniards were so prodigiously afraid of him that, I tell you, sir, I was sometimes proud he was an Englishman.”
- But Flint is a vague reference to a deceased legend. He is not history, but something else.

CONCLUSION

- We can say something similar about J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*, first published in 1904, in which Barrie described the debonaire Captain Hook as “the only man whom Barbecue feared.” (Barbecue was a nickname for Long John Silver.) Hook smokes two cigars at once and dresses vaguely like Charles II, and he has hair reminiscent of Blackbeard. He is said to have sailed with Morgan and Flint. In short, he is laden with historical references, but he exists only in Neverland.
- The references from earlier in this lesson—such as *The Corsair*, *The Pirate*, and *The Pilot*—were all serious works intended for adults. But *Treasure Island* and *Peter Pan* were works initially marketed for children; their legacy is stuffed with playacting.
- *Peter Pan* began as a stage play in 1904. *Treasure Island*, while it started out as a serial novel, has been adapted for the screen dozens of times. It is featured in comic books, video games, and unauthorized sequels. Across two centuries, pirates had changed from a global economic threat to endlessly trendy children's fare.
- Meanwhile, Rafael Sabatini's *Captain Blood*, John Carlova's *Mistress of the Seas*, Tim Powers's *On Stranger Tides*, and many other 20th-century creations have added to the archive of fictional pirate entertainments for

adults. Importantly, though, the modern era takes its cue from the 19th century in continuing to insist that pirates are always from the Golden Age and that piracy is primarily of the Caribbean.

- Because there is a historical basis for such pirates, pirate fictions tend to be imbued with a certain degree of historical weight, even as their inspirations drift further and further away from the record.

READING

Burwick and Powell, *British Pirates in Print and Performance*.

Rennie, *Treasure Neverland*.

PROSECUTING PIRATES

Regarding the legal system, pirates had the sense that the deck was stacked against them. Additionally, pirates were acutely aware both of the shape of a trial and the theatrics that could attach to piratical justice. Pamphlets and news reports of trial proceedings were both common and popular by about the middle of the 17th century, and the 18th-century pirate trial drew upon so many well-known tropes that it was almost a cliché in its own right.

A CURIOUS SYSTEM

- The British judicial system during the high age of Atlantic piracies was greatly codified in its way, but it would not strike a modern observer as fair or just *per se*—nor did it strike all contemporary ones as such. For example, the judge was not required to be neutral and could strongly support the prosecution; he could also examine witnesses directly and could give extremely partial instructions to the jury.
- The most common evidence in piracy trials was the testimony of a fellow pirate who had made a bargain to save his own neck. However, the reliability of such self-interested evidence was rarely questioned.
- It is true that the accused could speak in their own defense and even petition the court to call witnesses on their behalf, but there were often no defense attorneys to tell them they were allowed to do such things. There was no automatic right to counsel at all in Britain until 1836. The accused also could not give sworn evidence.

- Trials were usually very quick compared to modern standards, often a matter of mere hours or less, with execution, if called for, following soon thereafter. The executions themselves were public displays—sometimes grim but often brutally festive.
- Hanging via the short-drop method, which usually does not break the neck of the condemned, could amount to a slow and painful strangulation. As was infamously the case with Captain William Kidd, it could even be botched and need to be repeated.
- As Gregory Durston has shown, the admiralty court, which dealt with matters of crime on the high seas, had some quirks of its own. These included a symbolic silver oar that would lie before the judges' bench and a velvet cloth embroidered with anchors. Non-English defendants could demand that their jury include a number of their own countrymen, which was a particularly relevant wrinkle for piracy cases, although not all accused foreign pirates requested a mixed jury.
- All of this applies to trials held in London. Trials in the colonies tended to be more ad hoc, using borrowed buildings, informal jails, and hastily erected scaffolds. Pirates were traditionally hanged on the coast, between the flood marks of high and low tide.

PUBLIC SHOWS

- The proceedings of pirate trials were made public, in part because they were meant to act as deterrents. Large numbers of defendants were often tried at once, which created more interest and more of a spectacle.
- Stede Bonnet, in an example of the higher end of things, was taken with 35 of his crew, and they were tried in 11 little groups over the course of several days; only four were acquitted. A fifth saved himself by peaching on the others.
- Bart Roberts famously died in his final battle off the coast of Africa, but he left behind 169 prisoners for the courts to deal with. The proceedings of that trial were so complicated they came with an index.

LEARNING FROM THE INCOMPETENT

A basic irony to our attempts to learn the real history of pirates is that the best information we have is largely about the least competent ones. This is because the best information on at least the European pirates comes from trial records. In turn, it is easiest to learn about the bad pirates—that is, the ones who got caught.

CLAIMS OF COERCION

Men taken as pirates tended to claim they had been forced and that being captured by another ship was to them not justice but the hopeful path to deliverance. Not infrequently they were telling the truth about this, and not infrequently they weren't, so the courts normally took the claims seriously enough to make at least a perfunctory inquiry into them.

DIFFICULT PROSECUTIONS

- Trials of pirates required a common law jury of their peers, according to the Offenses at Sea Act levied by Parliament under Henry VIII in 1536. This was less an attempt to make sure pirates had a fair day in court than to address the problem that admiralty courts were finding it almost impossible to convict anyone of piracy without a full and florid confession.
- With juries, the government reasoned, perhaps the prosecution would stand a fighting chance. Juries could be pressured by judges in a variety of ways to arrive at the desired verdict.

- Still, in both Elizabethan England and colonial North America, it could be hard to get an indictment against an accused pirate if he were properly greasing the wheels of community justice. It could also be difficult if the community were otherwise set against the prosecutors.
- The history of Henry Every is an excellent illustration in how trial by jury can go wrong. The trial of six of Every's pirates, the only ones of his considerable gang ever convicted, first ended in a hung jury, embarrassing the English government.
- In the pirate-friendly colonies, they had happened to be snapped up by an Irish sheriff while trying to flee to Mayo county. The government was determined to make an example of the handful of men they had. This was both to reassure Aurengzeb, the Mughal emperor whose vessel Every's men had attacked, and to prevent the East India Company from going rogue in its capitalistic distress.
- One man among them, Joseph Dawson, pleaded guilty. The rest said they were not guilty, and to trial they went. The concerns and loyalties of the judges and attorney general were made clear from the start.
- Sir Robert Newton, the prosecutor, warned the jurymen in as many words that if Every were not convicted, the East India Company might lose all its Indian trade entirely. The jury responded by acquitting everyone on all charges.
- It turned out they were far less the patriotic fans of that monopolistic behemoth than Newton had been banking on. Their defiance, as a subsequent government pamphlet explained, was "contrary to the expectation of the Court."
- The government was mortified. Since the pirates had been acquitted of attacking Aurengzeb's ship, the *Ganj-i-sawai* (which they most certainly had done), they were hastily tried a second time, now for the original theft of their flagship, the *Fancy*. It next turned out, much to the justices' annoyance, that some of the original jurors who disliked the East India Company had been seated among the new jury. They were removed.

- The judge, Sir Charles Hedges, harangued the new jury that if they screwed up like the last set had, “barbarous nations will reproach us as being ... a nest of pirates.” This was not untrue.
- This time, the jury convicted. They must have set aside the awkwardness created when evidence on which the men had just been acquitted was reintroduced as proof of their original piratical intent. The men were dutifully hanged, except for Dawson, who had calculated better on the government’s attitude than his fellows had: He was pardoned for owning his mistakes, as were two other pirates, John Dan and Philip Middleton, who had turned on the rest as witnesses.

LATER REFORMS

- Every’s actions had reached far beyond the two trials of the unfortunate half dozen, however. New law was made to deal with the embarrassments he’d set off and the outrage of both Aurengzeb and the British Board of Trade.
- The Navigation Act of 1696 was created in large part to deal with Every’s muddle. The act helpfully provided for the creation of colonial courts presided over by the vice-admiralty, but it forgot to patch up a requirement dating back to Henry VIII that pirates had to be tried under English common law in London. The colonial courts could only arrest them and then send them to England for trial.
- The one exception was in Jamaica, where the assembly passed a 1681 act providing for local jury trials for pirates. Even then, the juries could be unruly, even willing to nullify, and pirates could also simply flee to the Bahamas to avoid them entirely.
- This mess was somewhat remedied by a 1700 anti-piracy act. This act allowed for pirates to be tried by special session almost anywhere in the world, and without benefit of a jury or benefit of clergy (which allowed someone found guilty to seek a reduced sentence by passing a nominative test).
- The 1700 act was quickly followed by a failed attempt to pass a 1701 bill that would have abolished a great deal of colonial self-government in favor of direct Parliamentary control. It included a clause that colonies who thumbed their noses at the anti-piracy act could lose their charter.

- These reforms were aimed at increasing efficiency of pirate hunting—not at increasing transparency or justice, as Captain Kidd’s 1701 trial demonstrates. Even if it arrived at the correct conclusion (that Kidd was guilty of piracy and murder), for political reasons Kidd was subject to an especially prejudiced and inequitable trial—even more so than most accused pirates.
- Kidd’s trial was fairly brutal. Most pirate trials were comparatively more orderly and sedate, or at least that’s how they were represented afterward.

ENEMIES OF THE HUMAN RACE

- Much attention tended to be given to the intent of the accused at a pirate trial, particularly in the last phase of the Golden Age, because pirates were held to be a special class of criminal. They were considered *hostis humani generis*—a term coined for pirates in ancient Roman times that meant “enemies of the human race.”
- Cotton Mather ministered to condemned pirates and had a niche sermon industry writing about it. He opined in *The Religious Marriner* that piracy is so offensive to heaven that merely to have a former pirate on one’s ship may call down the wrath of heaven and the loss of life for everyone aboard. That was one extreme view.
- Mather’s view was convenient to the legal purposes of 16th–18th-century Europeans. They were busily expanding global trading networks and wanted to do so unencumbered by opportunists other than themselves.
- The trick of declaring pirates the enemy of all nations meant that a country like England could feel justified in trying and condemning the pirates of other nations. As one Boston prosecutor of pirates urged, a pirate was legally “a wild & savage Beast, which every Man may lawfully destroy.”
- Robbery at sea was sometimes charged as piracy even if it involved only the subterfuge of a single actor. Sailors who attacked their officers were sometimes called pirates, even when piracy seemed to have no part of their motivation. The connection between mutiny and piracy resonated so powerfully that mutineers and would-be mutineers could be tried as pirates, although many mutineers had no piratical plans at all.

MODERN DIFFICULTIES

- Even today, after hundreds of years of jurisprudence, there is no definitive sense in the law of how to identify a pirate and what to do with a captured pirate. One somewhat recent example illustrates this clearly: In the early 2000s, the international seafaring community stepped up its enforcement efforts against Somalian pirates. They captured quite a few, but that turned out to be the easy part.
- The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea affirms, just as international law did in the 17th century, that pirates are subject to the justice of anyone who captures them. The problem arises in trying to put this into practice. Many countries simply don't have specific mechanisms on the books for dealing with pirates anymore and seem to lack the desire to create any.
- Kenya and Seychelles took the pirates for prosecution at first, but they became overwhelmed and irritated by the lack of support they received from other nations for funding the actual trials. Most captured pirates were simply released, to return to the trade—the same problem of the 17th-century Caribbean all over again.
- In another undesirable alternative, rather than try to prosecute and imprison a group of 10 Somali pirates in 2010, the Russian navy placed them in an inflatable raft 300 miles from shore with no supplies or navigational equipment. They are presumed to have died at sea.
- The problem of Somali piracy was brought home to the US public when four Somali pirates hijacked the *Maersk Alabama*, a cargo ship traveling in the Indian Ocean off the coast of Somalia. After a hostage standoff, US Navy snipers ultimately killed three of the pirates, but one, Abduwali Muse, was captured alive.
- He was ultimately tried in the Southern District of New York because the FBI office there had experience prosecuting crimes that had happened in Africa. Muse, though, was never convicted of piracy.

- Prosecutors agreed to drop that charge if Muse pled guilty to hijacking and kidnapping. No one wanted to try to prosecute for piracy per se. The question of how to deal with pirates at trial has not become smoother or more obvious with the passage of time.

READING

Baer, *Pirates of the British Isles*.

Burgess, "Trial and Error."

Greene, "*Hostis Humani Generis*."

CAN PIRACY BE STAMPED OUT?

This lesson discusses resisting and suppressing piracy, and it considers some of the factors that make this a difficult undertaking. Many tactics have been attempted over the centuries, but dealing with piracy on a wide scale is tricky. Setting up an individual ship, convoy, or even settlement so as to make it reasonably safe from pirate attack is expensive but fairly straightforward to do; actually eradicating piracy as a phenomenon is not.

A LOCAL PROBLEM

- Pirates are not actually perpetually roaming the seven seas; they are always somehow attached to local communities. Piracy is a local happening but a global evil, which often makes the challenge of pirate repression local as well: Stamp out one base, and the pirates may simply migrate elsewhere. Sink one ship, and another may be stolen.
- Eradicating entire coastal pirate-friendly settlements, attempted in both the Americas and Asia, is expensive and upsetting to one's citizens. Worse, it tends to be a temporary fix at best because it doesn't eliminate the motivations to turn pirate.
- While piracy has never been entirely stamped out, it has been reduced, sometimes drastically, in specific contexts, including the Atlantic after 1726, the Mediterranean after 1830, and the China Seas after 1956. However, even this more particularized type of control is notoriously difficult to pull off.

- For example, it's surprisingly difficult to get everyone necessary for the job to agree that piracy should be repressed and band together, rather than hoping that piracy can be used as an enemy-of-my-enemy tool of foreign relations. Once a group of locals, merchants, or even governments decides piracy needs attention, there are two basic approaches that can be attempted, separately or in tandem.
- One is changing the socioeconomic conditions that make piracy appealing via amnesty, employment, or bribery. The other is using military powers to battle and intimidate pirates.

THE VIOLENT SOLUTION'S REQUIREMENTS

- To pursue the violent solution, centuries of experience suggest that the requirements are a captain who is capable and will follow orders and a crew that's healthy, well-trained, and ideally loyal. Also necessary is the right kind of ship: a maneuverable, heavy, well-armed ship of the line for deep-sea hunting or something smaller and faster for hunting along the coast.
- This might even require a group of ships—even a fleet. Fresh supplies on demand are in need, too, as is good intelligence about where to find the pirates. The support of local communities is greatly helpful as well.
- Frequently, pirate hunters do not have all of these elements, however. Often, they are missing most of them. Pirates have often enjoyed the protection of local communities and even officials, and they can be quite hard to catch regardless.

THE EXAMPLE OF RACKAM

- Captain Rackam, who sailed with the fascinating she-pirates Mary Read and Anne Bonny, is a decent illustration of the difficulty inherent in hunting down even a mediocre pirate. At his trial, Rackam and his men were accused of having, in 1719, “Solemnly and Wickedly” consulted and agreed to “Piratically, Feloniously, and in an Hostile manner Attack, Engage and Take” seven fishing boats, plus assault the fishermen. Further, the claim went, they “did steal, take, and carry away, the Fish, and fishing Tackle.”

- Rackam also snapped up two small merchant ships, a schooner, and a sloop, though he simply didn't have the crew to carry much of a prize fleet with him. In the end, Rackam couldn't claim much in the way of treasure or conquest, but he had an impressive number of escapes and near misses, in part because he knew the waters and cays around Cuba quite well.
- Rackam had been Charles Vane's quartermaster, but he overthrew his captain. In one version of what came next, his crew captured a wealthy merchant ship, the *Kingston*, near Port Royal.
- Spanish hunters were sent after him and found him anchored on what the English called the Isle of Pines, the Cuban Isla de Los Pinos. Because the pirates were on shore, they were able to flee into the woods, but their ship was recovered and returned to Jamaica.
- The story goes that they managed to steal an English sloop and evade Spanish capture by sticking to the shallow Cuban waters where the heavy Spanish Guarda del Costa could not pursue them, eventually making their way back to Nassau. Whatever really happened, Rackam agreed to Woodes Rogers's amnesty for pirates in the Bahamas after this, and he fell in with Anne Bonny during his brief retirement from piracy.
- By August 1720, Rackam and his crew of 10 men and two women were pirating in his old stomping grounds between Nassau and Jamaica, harassing fishermen. They were using a fast ship called the *William* that they had stolen from, ironically, a privateer.
- By September, Woodes Rogers had proclaimed them pirates, and pirate hunters apparently learned they were repairing and resupplying in a quiet bay of the Bahamas. Rackam again eluded the hunters for a time, until November, when a Captain Jonathan Barnet, a merchant and licensed pirate hunter, sailing the small but heavily armed *Tyger*, caught up to Rackam near Negril Point.

BLURRY LINES AND FIGHTING AT SEA

- Barnet had been tipped off by another merchant-hunter, Captain Bonnevie. Note the difficulty of separating categories here: pirate, privateer, merchant, and policing vessel were simply not discrete categories

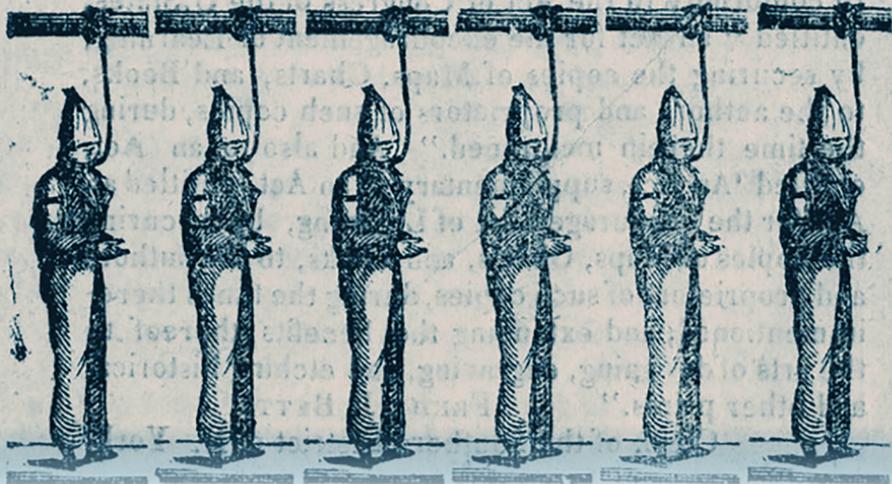
of operations in the Caribbean. Pirate hunters, rather like privateers, were known to become a bit too enthusiastic in detecting piracy, especially onboard Spanish-seeming vessels.

- In fact, at trial, Rackam's crew tried to claim to be privateers, asserting "that their design was against the Spaniards," although this did not much impress the jury. Nonetheless, Barnet was after Rackam in earnest.
- The *William* was laden with goods taken a few days earlier from a merchant: mostly tobacco and spices, but new sails and sailing gear as well. Barnet's ship was larger than the *William* and was not so swift a sailor; it gained slowly, and night fell before Barnet could come up with Rackam.
- This would normally have meant dousing the lights and escaping into a dark night. However, something went wrong, possibly because the *William's* crew became drunk.
- By 10:00 pm, Barnet was alongside the *William*, demanding that they surrender. The pirates declined, and one of them fired off the swivel gun. A quick broadside and volley later, though, Rackam's crew called for quarter.
- That was the end of the careers of John Rackam and crew. That the pirates were finally captured appears to have been more of an unforced error on their part than any particular coordination or deliberate action on the part of the government besides a weak proclamation. Furthermore, this was in 1720, meaning that pirate hunting was hardly a new pursuit.

PROBLEMS WITH PIRATE HUNTING

- When it comes to the Golden Age, the most commonly sketched arc is that it declines rapidly in the 1720s and is essentially done with by 1726. It does seem that piracy was becoming less appealing in general, and more desperate overall, by the 1720s.

- One view is that this slow choking off of piracy's resources happened because of a deliberate, multipronged suppression campaign undertaken by the British home government. Peter Earle makes this argument, but he also argues for problems with pirate hunting that were particular to the Golden Age and based particularly on avoidable mistakes made by anti-pirate forces.
- The admiralty liked to keep an eye on its bottom line, which could produce substandard working conditions. Examples included undermanned ships being poorly supplied. Scurvy and diseases like malaria and yellow fever ran rampant. Given those conditions, avoiding fights with pirates was a natural result.
- Earle claims that in the 1720s, self-inflicted problems like that were largely reversed. Supplies were more plentiful, morale improved, and captains made more effort to actually find some pirates.
- However, in contrast to Earle's premise that piracy declined because of coordinated decisions made in London to take action against pirates, David Wilson posits that piracy declined gradually because of a number of uncoordinated efforts. This falls more in line with the idea that a community-embedded problem like piracy can only be solved locally.
- Wilson emphasizes the importance of merchant lobbyists such as the British East India Company but also tobacco merchants from the Chesapeake and even Newfoundland fishermen bringing pressure to bear on the king, Parliament, and Board of Trade. The point was less to eradicate piracy than to stop particular pirates or clean out particular routes, protecting Virginia slave traders or Jamaican sugar planters, for example.
- Furthermore, some of the most important steps taken against piracy were, Wilson contends, more the result of work by independent individuals or groups than top-down government imperative. The capture of Stede Bonnet and Blackbeard, for instance, happened because of questionably legal private actions taken by colonial governors without the direct support of London or the admiralty. This was not a war on the pirates; it was a series of independent skirmishes against specific pirates.



HARSHER PUNISHMENTS

- Eventually, punishments for piracy became markedly harsher. Earlier, a prominent approach was hanging the worst malefactors plus a few extra for good measure and telling the rest to behave. This had been more common in the 17th century.
- By the 1720s, pirate trials, now often conducted without the benefit of a jury, were a great deal more aggressive. Historian Marcus Rediker estimated between 400 and 600 accused pirates were hanged in the final decade of the Golden Age, setting aside those who died in battle or of illness.
- During this period, the overall number of pirates operating in and around the Caribbean dropped from about 2,000 to about 200. This suggests around a quarter of the reduction was directly due to the hangman.

SEMI-PEACEFUL AND DIPLOMATIC SOLUTIONS

- However, another historian, Guy Chet, has argued that except for a few high-profile cases, British anti-piracy forces remained largely unenthusiastic even in the late period, and that deep sea piracy, at least, continued to be accepted as part of the price of doing business in international trading. Further, the argument that piracy declined across

the 18th century depends in part upon accepting the notion that the line between pirate and privateer was consistently demarcated, and that's a difficult proposition to swallow, on the whole.

- For Chet, the effective move for driving down piracy was increasing free trade policies. The lower prices and more open commerce that became possible in the capitalistic post-Napoleonic era drove down the profitability of the kind of international black-market activity that made piracy lucrative. Most pirate booty was not treasure or money but goods and prisoners that the pirates needed to sell.
- There are other semi-peaceful solutions to piracy. Pardons can work but also can be subject to major recidivism. For many of those who didn't have many of ill-gotten gains, amnesty looked preferable to death by hanging, but it was a deal-breaker for some of the more successful rovers, Vane being the obvious case in point.
- Other pirates returned to the account once they'd drunk through their pocket money, or had difficulty finding employment, or, in Rackam's case, became involved in messy relationship drama.
- It certainly helps reduce the pirate population if, in addition to rehabilitating their pirates, the state stops creating them in the first place. Peter Lehr has posited that while the era of free trade has mattered enormously, the single most important action in eradicating piracy is to stop using privateers.
- Privateering was outlawed by a group of 55 nations in 1856 in what was called the Paris Declaration Respecting Maritime Law—although some major powers, including the US and China, refused to sign on. Most have largely abided by the agreement even so.
- Another solution to dealing with the violence of piracy, if not the fact itself, is to use diplomacy to cut out the middle steps. This was a fairly successful tactic for coping with Barbary predation.

- Most of the European nations interested in Mediterranean trade negotiated treaties, or tried to, with the major powers like Algiers, Tunis, and Morocco, whereby the governments simply bought protection for their shipping by paying an agreed upon sum. However, as with acts of amnesty, diplomatic solutions to piracy could be unreliable.

READING

Chet, “The Persistence of Piracy in the British Atlantic.”

Little, *Pirate Hunting*.

Wilson, *Suppressing Piracy in the Early Eighteenth-Century*.

PIRATES IN MODERN TIMES

Globalized as it may now be, piracy remains fundamentally a local issue that is little remarked upon until it begins to disrupt international trade and imperial ambitions. The major difficulty in eliminating piracy is that its causes are often international, but pirate cultures are local and not easily amenable to international solutions.

FISH PIRACY

- A surprising amount of modern piracy involves fish. Deep-sea fish piracy can take many forms, from poaching fish without a permit to using illegal, environmentally damaging gear, to stealing the haul from other vessels' nets, to actually attacking other fishing boats directly.
- Delicious Patagonian and Antarctic toothfish, which is sold in US restaurants as Chilean sea bass, is an especially appealing prize for illicit fishing. But while pirate fishing can mean big money, the crews are often forced men, or at least severely underpaid, and unable to leave or complain.
- Fish thieves, whose takes may represent up to a fifth of the world's fish markets, are a widespread, international problem with no very clear solution. Their predations are underreported, hard to discourage, and harder to prosecute.

- Indonesia is one place that has suffered badly from illegal fishing, which has driven some of its own young men toward piracy. Its government has been more than firm in its stance against fish pirates, so much so that watching the navy scuttle and blow up pirate fishing boats is now something of a minor cultural industry.
- Its 2016 demolition of the ship *F/V Viking*, which was hunted by 13 nations, was widely publicized, televised, and tweeted about. But Indonesia's stance is an exception.

CONFINED BUT POWERFUL

- Piracy is more confined, relatively speaking, than it was in the 17th and 18th centuries. But it is still with us. It is still largely driven, as Peter Lehr puts it, by “greed and grievance,” in varying measures.
- Thanks to Tom Hanks as Captain Phillips in the film of the same name, most people in the West have heard of the *Maersk Alabama* and the resurgence of piracy off the coast of Somalia. (As of this course's taping, that resurgence is fairly well contained.) But piracy exists elsewhere.
- The Straits of Malacca were once a key piratical stomping ground because of their ideal geography for raiding trading ships moving between the East and West. The geography there is unchanged, and a huge amount of world shipping still depends on traversing the Straits of Malacca and Singapore.
- Therefore, the pirates are still there as well, not to mention in the other traditional pirating areas of the South China Sea, the Sulu Sea, and the Gulf of Thailand. Modern piracy takes all the forms that older piracies did, including simply stealing anything not nailed down, hostage taking and ransom operations, and protection rackets.
- Pirates still exist as independent operators, but increasingly, much piracy is well organized and tied to larger criminal syndicates. Some scholars raise parallels to Maghreb corsairing economies, except that captives are taken now almost exclusively for ransom rather than labor.

A TOUGH TRACKING SITUATION

- One might think that with cell phones, satellite imagery, and our constant state of digital surveillance on land that it would be difficult now for pirates to exist. It is not.
- The ocean is still very large and very unorganized. Stolen ships with expired or false registrations are perfectly real; some of them are merely poor and desperate, and some of them are dangerous and well armed. False flags are still widely employed by pirates and poachers to throw off pursuit. And the confusion over provenance has only become more common and more complex.
- Even legal ships are often owned by one multinational corporation, chartered by another one, actually operated by a third, captained and crewed by mariners from all over the world, and registered with some convenient nation attached to none of the above. Figuring out who is responsible for any particular vessel is a daunting task in and of itself.
- Actual ghost ships are quite real, too—ships floating the seas with no living crew aboard. These can be quite large: There are huge radar blind spots, and if a ship turns off its transponder and is not in any satellite's visual range, it can be effectively lost. For instance, the 2,400-ton *MV Alta* was abandoned by its crew in 2017 and just drifted around for 17 months before washing up near Cork in February 2020.

A PROBLEM OF RESOURCES

- While the ocean is vast, its natural resources are finite enough to create strife and competition. And the Straits of Malacca is not the only pirate-friendly choke point of the modern ocean world; the Gulf of Aden, between the Arabian Sea and Red Sea, also remains a useful spot for pirates.
- Wrecking, smuggling, and piracy are old traditions for some spots along the Horn of Africa. When disputes over local fishing rights there combined with governmental turmoil and desperate economic conditions in the 1990s, those traditions saw a revival.

- The seas near Somalia are rich fisheries. Since 1982, the UN has declared that nations have exclusive fishing rights in the waters 200 miles and closer to their shores. Yet near Somalia, international fishing companies moved in during the late 20th century, overfishing, disturbing local ecosystems, and making subsistence fishing very difficult for Somali fishermen.
- Somali pirates at first were mostly desperate fishermen, trying to get some portion of what they felt was rightful compensation from the foreign ships devastating what was left of the local economy. As tends to happen, though, pirating soon became its own business.

SOMALIAN PIRACY AND HOSTAGES

Hostages are imperative to Somali piracy in part because very often the pirates are detected before they can get to port after a raid. But as long as the pirates have live hostages, boarding is unlikely, and the insurance companies involved will be willing to negotiate. The military can blockade the pirates, and drones can track them, but armed intervention is risky and rarely undertaken. The entire process can take anywhere from weeks to years, and the average is five to seven months.

X



MODERN PIRATE TECHNIQUES

- Modern pirates often hide in plain sight, using stolen, formerly legitimate ships to blend in among still-legitimate cargo and fishing vessels. In the early 2000s, Somalian pirates began using a so-called mothership technique, wherein a larger ship would act as a home base, sometimes hundreds of miles from shore, for a host of small, light, very fast boats with fiberglass hulls.
- Jatin Dua describes his book on Indian Ocean piracy as “a book ... about how small boats hijack big ships.” The actual raids could be conducted by a few men on small vessels, very easy to overlook until the boarders were already doing their work.
- Large ships need to maintain a speed of more than 18 knots per hour to avoid pirate approaches. Most get nowhere near that rate and rely on other precautions from lookouts to security forces for protection instead.

DEALING WITH PIRATES

- One major means of dealing with Somalian piracy has been a transit system that functions as a modified version of the convoy. Encouraged by insurance companies, the UN created a heavily patrolled, designated transit corridor where merchant ships can traverse the Gulf of Aden in safety, although once they exit the corridor, they are again vulnerable. Additionally, the problem remains of what to do with pirates who are captured.
- On the subject of how to deal with piracy, James Wadsworth posits this:

The fishing industries in Somalia and Nigeria could be revived by retracting foreign fishing permits and giving them to Somalis, cleaning up oil spills along the Nigerian coast and rebuilding fishing infrastructure like port facilities and processing plants.

- Wadsworth's proposition may be overstating the ease of such interventions. However, he is correct that the one thing that has not been truly tried is actually addressing the complaints of Somali fishermen, who honestly do not have a lot of other career options to choose from, or in finding other economic options for the militiamen who have joined them.

PETROLEUM PIRACY

- Some piracy focuses on petroleum cargos. Oil-interested piracy in West Africa, especially the Gulf of Guinea and particularly off the coast of Nigeria, Ghana, Togo, and Benin, is less well known to Westerners than Somalian piracy, but it's also more violent and entrenched.
- Nigerian pirates are more prone to violence and harder to deter with the prospect of armed resistance than Somalian ones. They are far more willing, on average, than Somalian pirates to risk weapons fire and military reinforcements.
- Multinational oil companies have been an ecological and socioeconomic disaster for the non-elite coastal populations of Nigeria. Pirates and smugglers, based in swamps, have responded by siphoning oil, attacking tankers, and taking hostages. Attacks against Nigerian vessels are also not unheard of.
- As with Somalian piracy, coastal communities are often willing to protect local pirates because they benefit from their smuggling. Harbor masters who are overseen by weak or inefficient governments can be bribed, just as they could in yesteryear.

INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS

- Another potential source of small-scale piracy comes from stateless Indigenous peoples who have historically been attached to life at sea on ships or in other littoral habitations. The Orang Laut of Southeast Asia, a nomadic seafaring group, were for a long time one of the most formidable maritime groups around the Straits of Malacca.

- They were gatherer-traders who later served the Malacca royal family and other local rulers by controlling shipping and repelling rival predatory groups, including pirates and European powers. They were also on occasion very fearsome pirates in their own right, at least according to the definition of European governments.
- Many of the Orang Laut intermarried with other ethnic populations in the 19th and 20th centuries. However, the remaining members of the group are essentially stateless, unprotected by the larger land-based communities around them and denied access to healthcare and public infrastructures.
- The Moken people of Thailand and Myanmar are in a similar predicament, as are other groups such as the Sama-Bajau. The Orang Laut no longer practice piracy on any appreciable scale, but other disenfranchised fishing groups do. Lacking other means of accessing resources, their livelihoods endangered by pollution and overfishing, they can be hired to act as pirates on behalf of militias or do so on their own.

PIRACY AND TERRORISM

- Many scholars warn of a growing link between piracy and modern terrorism, the former being ideologically and potentially economically useful to the latter. Jihadists such as ISIS or al-Shabaab sometimes glorify piracy conducted by primarily Islamic populations as a legitimate defense against Western powers.
- Even so, to conflate piracy with more widespread terroristic groups is a mistake. Piracy does not originate as terrorism, although pirates may use terroristic tactics.
- However, if the causes of piracy are left to fester, it is certainly possible for larger criminal or terroristic syndicates to move in and take control of pirate ventures. In fact, the legal term *hostis humani generis*, which for centuries applied primarily to cases of piracy, is more and more being invoked in the legal discourse around terrorism.
- The idea is that terrorists, like pirates, commit crime against all humanity. It's then justifiable to punish them accordingly.

PIRACY ACROSS THE GLOBE

- It is also now claimed that piracy has become a globalized phenomenon. Pirates can now be backed by and share profits with financiers from all around the world, hiding behind the ease of electronic currency transfer. While Peter Lehr has argued that the days of the nobleman pirate are long over, it's less clear that modern piracy is not sometimes tangled up with some corporate aristocracies and even terrorist organizations of its own.
- Small-scale piracy persists too, though, and even in the supposedly pirate-free Mediterranean and Caribbean. Wealthy people traveling in private yachts are understandably vulnerable to robbery, particularly when moored at anchor.
- Pirates working on the Amazon River delta have garnered a few headlines in recent years for increasing rates of predation on river vessels. Using small, fast speedboats, such pirates use surprise and, as needed, terror to overwhelm travelers, then grab whatever they can, often including as much fuel as they can siphon. Then, they disappear quickly into the huge waterway of the Amazon, whose geography they tend to know better than law enforcement.
- Tourists and adventurers can be targets, but most often local riverboat passengers and fishers are the ones attacked, as are cargo boats and even drug traffickers. Remote riverbank communities are often underserved by the infrastructures that would discourage organized piracy.

READING

Dua, *Captured at Sea*.

Wadsworth, ed., *Global Piracy*.

PIRATES IN POP CULTURE AND BEYOND

Pirates refuse to be consigned to the realm of finished history. Not only does real piracy persist, but piracy as fiction and even as metaphor remains a powerful and omnipresent cultural force.

A COMPLICATED EMBRACE

- The lion's share of modern piracy tales and images, like those of the 19th and 20th centuries considered in this course, still assume that the Golden Age stereotypes are synonymous with piracy. At the same time, Western culture has largely embraced the post-19th-century idea of pirates as romantic, freedom-loving antiheroes, as opposed to the 18th century's understanding that they were lower-status villains of all nations or the early modern tendency to see higher ranking pirates as patriots.
- A good, recent example of this tendency is the Starz cable drama *Black Sails*. The opening of *Black Sails* begins with a title card that invokes the old *hostis humanis generis* discourse, describing pirates as at war with humankind.
- Calling pirates the enemy of humankind is done more often to set a disciplinary tone or call up a swashbuckling mood than it is to give an audience vital legal information. The vocabulary around piracy remains tricky.

- On the one hand, piracy is treated as a very special and particular crime, one that abjures national belonging and positions the perpetrators against all the world outside their floating community. On the other hand, the accusation of piracy is sometimes made very loosely, and it often just refers to some sort of theft, especially if the theft is positioned as galling or shocking, or even just not easily fitting other categories.

ECHOES AND COPYRIGHTS

- From the continually renewed performances around *Peter Pan* and *Treasure Island*, to *Pirates of the Caribbean* films, to the Dread Pirate Roberts in *The Princess Bride*, to the *Assassin's Creed* and *Uncharted* video game franchises, the figures made famous by *A General History of the Pyrates* are still with us. Most of the foundational texts for piracy are now in the public domain, which means adapting them for any old wild use is much more straightforward than with many other popular characters.
- *Peter Pan's* situation is more complicated than many other pirate sources. Still, the fact that most key pirate texts are not bound by copyright makes it all the more interesting that terms like *piracy* and *pirate* are used as a way referring to and villainizing copyright violators.
- One of the most vital copyright cases of recent memory involves the historical Blackbeard the pirate, or more specifically, the wreck of his onetime flagship, the *Queen Anne's Revenge*. Its sunken remains were verified to be off the coast of North Carolina in 1996.
- A documentary filmmaker named Frederick Allen was hired to film some of the salvage work being done on the wreck. He copyrighted his work, and the state of North Carolina nonetheless posted some of it to their website without permission.
- Allen sued. The state's legislature then took the rather buccaneering step of passing a law that declared all records of North Carolina's historic shipwrecks to be in the public domain, regardless of copyright status.
- In March 2020, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled unanimously in the case of *Allen v. Cooper* against Allen, holding that individuals cannot sue states for violations of federal copyright statutes.

Justice Stephen Breyer, joined by Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, concurred in the judgment but critiqued its reasoning, taking exception to the idea that Congress would be unable to require that “when proven to have pirated intellectual property, States must pay for what they have plundered.” Justice Breyer’s inability to resist a little marine-themed wordplay in his opinion is a common tendency of copyright rulings.

COPYRIGHT VIOLATORS AS PIRATES

- Calling copyright violators pirates is a modern habit with old roots. In England in 1557, the Stationers’ Company of London was given a monopoly on printing; they were also in charge of policing their monopoly.
- Rogue printers set up anyway, for ideology, profits, or both. Just as people will pay for the goods that real pirates bring to the black market, they will also pay for cheaper pirated texts (and other forms of media).
- These illicit printers were termed *pirates* by the guild to emphasize that they were stealing real property and were violating the law of humans and kings when they did so. But in 1695, a law called the Licensing Act, which had required all materials to be registered with the Stationers, was intentionally allowed to lapse.
- Suddenly, anyone with capital and access could set up a printing press, and print piracy exploded. Daniel Defoe, who wrote extensively on pirates, found himself the victim of unscrupulous printers.
- The Stationers, with an assist from philosophers like John Locke and angry Lockean like Defoe, came up with a new argument to try to deal with their problem: A text was property that, due to the labor involved in its creation, could only belong to an author unless the author signed it away.
- The first copyright law was passed in 1710. It didn’t solve piracy, but it did create a whole litany of interesting new reasons for people to sue each other. Just as in *Allen v. Cooper*, the lawsuits over copyright clearly adapt the language of maritime legal wrangling.

CAPTAIN BLOOD

- Performance, both live and filmed, has been one of the most powerful forces keeping old-fashioned piracy culturally current. The best-selling novelist Rafael Sabatini is a good case in point.
- Sabatini's *Captain Blood* was filmed twice, most memorably in 1935, when it solidified the fame of newcomers Errol Flynn and Olivia de Havilland. The casting was inspired. Flynn's grog-loving buccaneering temperament is well documented, and De Havilland had a swashbuckling spirit of her own, and she would later be in large part responsible for breaking the seven-year studio contract system in Hollywood.
- In blockbuster films like *Captain Blood*, American audiences could pretend that they, too, were a nation of pirates—but only the sanitized, freedom-loving, ultimately patriotic type that never actually existed in any pure form. Peter Blood is a highly cleaned-up version of Henry Morgan.
- Blood is very good at being a pirate, but it doesn't make him happy. Once the tyrannical King James II is deposed in favor of William and Mary, Blood eagerly leads his men back to the right side of law and order—particularly striking, as he has kept insisting all along that he is not English but Irish.
- He settles down and, for good measure, gets married to the spitfire Caribbean heiress Arabella. A similar ending graces the other Sabatini-inspired pirate film belonging to Warner Brothers, 1924's *The Sea Hawk*.
- The Warner Brothers' outlook on the causes and ends of piracy presented in these films is suspiciously tidy and oversimplified. Racism and slavery, in the peculiar manner of American adventure films, are carefully displaced.

LEAVING SOCIETY

- Later, around the 1950s, the cinematic reabsorption of the pirate into a whitewashed society becomes less common. The historian Neil Rennie suggests that the later film pirates are really fighting for the freedom *not* to come home—to sail off into piracy forever.

- Supporting examples are not hard to find. Sometimes pirates sail off for new adventures with their treasure, as in *Cutthroat Island* and *The Crimson Pirate*.
- There are other ways of ushering the pirate offscreen. For instance, *The Princess Bride* reveals that there is no Dread Pirate Roberts: He has been retired 15 years and is living like a king in Patagonia. The end of *Blackbeard's Ghost* is the release of the pirate ghost from limbo so that he can join his spectral crew in pirate heaven.
- Often, the pirate ends up assisting the matrimonial prospects of a non-pirate couple and then sailing away to unknown waters in the wake of their happiness: This is the case somewhat inadvertently in *Against All Flags*, in *Nate and Hayes*, and in at least some of the *Pirates of the Caribbean* series. To generalize, in their current incarnation, pop culture pirates are anti-domestic, representing freedom from responsibilities and the strictures of social expectations more than freedom to pillage and plunder.

THE INFLUENCE OF MODERN PIRATE NARRATIVES

- At the same time, it's not quite correct to shrug and pass off modern pirate narratives as harmless fantasy. Researchers including Jody Greene and Erin Mackie have shown that the way we talk about and depict pirates has real-world effects on real-world populations.
- Greene, for example, relates the legalistic discourse around piracy to the way it has been adapted to help conceptualize modern global terrorism. Mackie, meanwhile, charts a complicated nexus of influence from maroon culture and Golden Age piracy to reggae and rude boy culture in Jamaica and its diaspora.
- A common link for such analysis is that piracy is frequently understood to be about resistance, and particularly about resistance to imperial powers—never losing sight of the many ways that nascent empires rely upon piracy and piracy-adjacent practices. Resistance is rarely a pure thing.
- The problem is that the piratical ethos of freedom tends to mean freedom only for the self. It can indeed be incompatible with the liberty of others.

- The Golden Age maritime community, even the non-piratical parts, was a space of cultural, linguistic, and ethnic mixing. Cross-cultural contact was continually running up against the small spaces and harsh conditions of shipboard life.
- Meanwhile, extensive contact between Europeans and maroon communities was also a real fact of life. Maroon communities, which were independent, autonomous nations within imperial Caribbean settlements, were recognized by colonial governments in an adversarial kind of way; they were neither defeated nor assimilated.
- Maroon communities still exist today in the Caribbean and throughout the Americas. Many retain semi-autonomous existence, although neighbors and tourists are often allowed in their villages and, importantly, at their cultural festivals. In the maroon influence, there may be shades, too, of pirate legends, or at least awareness.
- In an example that pulls several threads together, the artists Home T, Cocoa Tea, and Shabba Ranks have a hit 1990 track called “Pirates Anthem.” It’s about illegal broadcasters of dancehall music.
- It was the on-the-nose first song to be broadcast on the UK’s radio Kiss FM after they had obtained a license. Appropriately, prior to their “Pirates Anthem” moment, the station had been operating for half a decade as a pirate radio station—that is, without a broadcasting license. Kiss FM initially specialized in dancehall and ragga music, the first licensed UK station to do so.

PARALLELS AND CAUTIONS

- Mackie argues there are historical parallels between pirate self-governance and maroon self-governance, which are strengthened by the fact that the two groups sometimes collaborated against common enemies. Both were making a conscious choice not to participate in either the plantation system, its labor-stealing governments, or the military forces backing those institutions.
- Maroon communities were formed by captives who fled enslavement, and many pirates got their start by mutinying against enslaving officers. However, these resonances should not be overstated.

- While some pirates were former indentured or enslaved captives who had escaped their bondage, pirates frequently engaged willingly in the very slave trade that both fed and necessitated maroon communities and against which maroon communities had to range themselves. Established maroon communities, too, sometimes effectively perpetuated enslavement.
- In some cases, they contracted with colonial forces to suppress revolts by the bondsperson or discontented laborers living among them. Self-assertion always seems to come up against its limits when communities cannot avoid contact within the hierarchy of the Atlantic world.

THE PIRATE LABEL

- Perhaps the most striking sign of how far pirates have come from a former counterculture existence is that there are now many active groups using the pirate label in an attempt to enter mainstream legitimate politics. The first pirate party originated in Sweden in 2005.
- It is now one of a number of loosely affiliated political groups interested in net neutrality, copyright reform, open source, and open access, among other values. While they have not managed to make major representational inroads, pirate parties have had a few notable victories here and there.
- Modern pirate parties are fairly far removed from any real history of piracy. Their chosen label is far more about a desire for sharing than for theft.

CONCLUSION

- Pirates now are logos, children's toys, and Halloween costumes. Pirates are a pastime now. They represent escape. But that is not enough.
- In a moment that many people have returned to in studying colonial aftereffects, Joseph Roach remarked that, "The unspeakable cannot be rendered forever inexpressible: the most persistent mode of forgetting is memory imperfectly deferred." There is a certain danger in the popularity of pirates, particularly in the toothless (and one-eyed) incarnations of their traditions in 20th- and 21st-century popular culture.

- Our modern pirate traditions involve a deliberate amnesia toward their violence, done to merchants, to coastal dwellers, and to Black and Indigenous people at apocalyptic levels. Yet there is always resistance to the amnesia, and it's a resistance we can cultivate.
- The children who grow up playing pirate for Halloween sometimes decide to look more closely into the real histories behind them, and some audiences can celebrate the music and the grog but still deplore the destruction and the suffering caused by pirates. The memories of the ocean and pirates' implacable violence and murder will not be erased by visions of Long John Silver and squawking parrots.

READING

Johns, *Piracy*.

Mackie, *Rakes, Highwaymen, and Pirates*.

Roach, *It*.

QUIZ QUESTIONS

- 1** The Golden Age pirates of the Caribbean are historically significant because:
- a** They are the basis for a great deal of the pirate “knowledge” in Western culture and literature.
 - b** Their ships were radical hotbeds of democracy and spread freedom to distant shores.
 - c** They were important to the struggle to break Italian imperial trade monopolies in the West Indies.
 - d** They seldom ventured far beyond their home ports, giving rise to a series of unique coastal idioms.
- 2** Reasons one might become a pirate include:
- a** Greed
 - b** Love of adventure
 - c** Hatred of the Spanish
 - d** Unemployment or rebellion against maritime labor practices
 - e** All of the above
- 3** All of the following are considered characteristic of Golden Age pirate culture—what is sometimes called the Jamaica Discipline—except:
- a** Many crewmembers wore eyepatches in order to be able to adjust their vision quickly when moving between decks.
 - b** Prizes were shared more or less equitably among pirates, except for Black or enslaved crew members, and included some forms of incentive and hazard pay.

- c** Captains were elected and could be deposed.
- d** Actions such as theft, desertion, dereliction of duty, gambling, dueling, and assault could be punished if they were verboten in a ship's articles.

4 The Red Sea figures Thomas Tew and Henry Every have all of the following in common except:

- a** They raided fabulously wealthy ships that belonged to the Mughal emperor Aurengzeb.
- b** They angered both the Mughal Indians and the East India Company extremely.
- c** They were eventually hanged for their crimes as a warning to others.
- d** They became famous, and stories of their deeds circulated and may have inspired other piracies.

5 Which of the following is not a text known to be written by an actual pirate or privateer?

- a** *The Buccaneers of America*
- b** *A Cruising Voyage Round the World*
- c** *A General History of the Pyrates*
- d** *A New Voyage and Description of the Isthmus of America*
- e** *A New Voyage Round the World*
- f** *Ram-Alley, or, Merrie-Trickes*
- g** *The South Sea Waggoner*

- 6** Which of the following is a pirate myth with a strong basis in historical fact?
- a** Walking the plank was one of many techniques pirates used to terrify their victims from the 17th century onward.
 - b** Blackbeard's infamy began a trend whereby many pirates grew long, intimidating beards and other facial hair.
 - c** The black flag with a death's head or thematically similar emblem was flown and sometimes called the Jolly Roger after 1700 or so.
 - d** To differentiate themselves from landlubbers, pirates spoke a peculiar jargon of their own aboard ships, including frequent use of the words *matey* and *arr*.

- 7** Which of the following have not been verified as women who were active pirates?
- a** Anne Bonny
 - b** Mary Read
 - c** Cheng I Sao/Shih Yang
 - d** Lagertha

- 8** Which of the following pirates did not see themselves, or at least claim to see themselves, as privateers?
- a** Stede Bonnet
 - b** Anne Bonny
 - c** William Kidd
 - d** Henry Morgan
 - e** Jack Ward

- 9** Who (supposedly) called for “A merry life and a short one”?
- a** Henry Every
 - b** Edward Thatch or Teach (also known as Blackbeard)
 - c** Benjamin Hornigold
 - d** Bartholomew Roberts
- 10** Which of the following is not a common barrier to stamping out piracy?
- a** Fitting out (or assigning existing) ships to hunt, fight, or blockade pirates is often prohibitively expensive.
 - b** Pirate loyalty is legendarily strong, making it difficult to infiltrate or break up crews or alliances.
 - c** Pirates can often find protection from local coastal settlements.
 - d** Capturing pirates is often not a major priority for resource-strapped governments, particularly since trying pirates can be fraught and thankless.
- 11** The practice of terming a theft of intellectual property *piracy* is
- a** A common usage that dates back to the 17th century, even before copyright law existed as such.
 - b** A fairly modern innovation, coming into practice with the 19th century’s age of mass production.
 - c** Only correct when referring to printed materials and not digital or musical reproductions.
 - d** The result of a famous lawsuit in 1706 brought by Daniel Defoe.

12 Modern piracy might focus on any the following types of theft except for:

- a** Fish
- b** Hostages
- c** Ice
- d** Money and valuables
- e** Oil and other fossil fuels

13 The author of *A General History of the Pyrates* is best referred to as:

- a** Daniel Defoe
- b** Charles Johnson
- c** Nathaniel Mist
- d** Howard Pyle

14 *Hostis humani generis* is

- a** A Latin phrase meaning “the generous host.”
- b** The bacterium that causes yellow fever, the scourge of many hapless sailors.
- c** A prayer pirates sometimes uttered as their way of saying grace.
- d** A legal term with a fraught history, meaning “the common enemy of humankind,” that is applied to pirates and, increasingly, terrorists.

15 True or False? Most pirates were skilled navigators.

16 True or False? One pathway into the pirate world for women was to assist in (or inherit) a privateering or mercantile business.

- 17 True or False?** The size of the 19th-century pirate fleets in the China Sea was exponentially greater than the size of the 18th-century pirate menace in the Caribbean.
- 18 True or False?** Throughout most of their history, more pirates escaped being brought to justice or were acquitted at trial than were hanged or otherwise punished.
- 19 True or False?** One thing pirates tend to have in common is that they love freedom and resist bondage for themselves or others.

QUIZ ANSWERS

1 a; **2** e; **3** a; **4** c; **5** c; **6** c; **7** d; **8** b; **9** d; **10** b; **11** a; **12** c; **13** b; **14** d;
15 False; **16** True; **17** True; **18** True; **19** False

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- . *The Successful Pyrate: A Play as it is Acted at the Theatre-Royal in Drury-Lane by Her Majesty’s Servants*. 3rd ed. London: Bernard Lintott, 1713. Different Charles Johnson from the one above. This is a musical play about Captain Every, here styled Arvirargus after the legendary British king.
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- Mernissi, Fatima. *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*. Translated by Mary Jo Lakeland. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997. Remains one of the very best sources on Sayyida al-Hurra.
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