PIRACY'S INFLUENCE IN THE ATLANTIC WORLD

By

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by

Jason Acosta
This paper is dedicated to my parents, Susan and Harvey, for always supporting my dreams and giving me the means to obtain them.
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Ranging from causes for Atlantic expansion to whether or not the Atlantic world even exists, Atlantic history covers a wide swath of territory. No specific/recent study however, is currently available on the role of pirates in the Atlantic world. Piracies’ influence on the political structures of the Atlantic community in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is surprisingly overlooked in today’s historiographic studies. Moreover, the direct impact of pirates on the economic system of the trans-oceanic world during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is even more underdeveloped. For far too long the role of pirates in Atlantic history has been ignored and it is time to place this band of “Brethrens of the Sea” in the position of importance they so richly deserve.

The following paper will therefore seek to employ various resources to instill in the reader the importance of pirates in the economic and political systems of the Atlantic world during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. By the process of inclusion this paper will also place into context the role of the Atlantic colonizers (indentured servants, African slaves, and immigrants) in helping to swell pirate ranks. This thesis will also
identify an important similarity between the oppression felt by pirates and American colonizers and how this oppression led to the founding of a democratic government. Overall, it is the author’s intention to explain the contributions of pirates to the Atlantic world as well as to make clear how the Atlantic world influenced the growth and expansion of piracy.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The study of the Atlantic has recently become a major field of history. Ranging from discussions of causes for Atlantic expansion to debates over whether or not the Atlantic world even exists, Atlantic history covers a wide swath of history. Surprisingly, however, no major study has done justice to the contribution of pirates to the Atlantic world. Specifically, although historians like Marcus Rediker, Clinton V. Black, and Janice E. Thomson have studied the biographies and political nature of pirates, very few works focus on how pirates helped build European empires. Likewise, the direct impact of pirates on the political and economic systems of the trans-oceanic world during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is underappreciated. While historians, notably Rediker and Linebaugh, have considered some aspects of pirates' contributions to the Atlantic World's economy, few have explained the contributions of the "Brethren of the Sea" to the rise of capitalism.

This paper argues that pirates played a significant role in the economic and political systems of the Atlantic world during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In an attempt to explain these two themes this paper will examine the role of the Atlantic colonizers (indentured servants, African slaves, and immigrants) in helping to swell pirate ranks, but the main goal of this paper will be to explain the contributions of pirates to the Atlantic world.

The scourges of the seas, pirates sailed the world’s waterways exploring, mapping, plundering, and raping their way across the globe and weaving their way into the stuff of legends, but rarely the front page of history. Pirates were responsible for turning the tide of wars and crippling economies of rival nations; the various town sackings by pirates were directly responsible for proving to the rest of the world that Spain’s South American Empire was falling apart. Pirates also helped cripple navies. As Captain Charles Johnson, author of the definitive work on piracy, *A General History of the Pyrates*, noted:

between 1716 and 1726 pirates captured more vessels and did greater damage to trade than had been done by the combined naval and privateering campaigns that Spain and France undertook during the War of Spanish Succession.2 Historical records, often written by victims of pirate attacks, have recorded numerous pirate activities. These victims’ accounts have documented pirates as “abominable brutes [and] monsters in human form.”3 In the past, that focus has led to a stigma: pirate acts reduced pirates to little more than footnote in most academic history books. The bulk of literature available on piracy focuses solely on the narrative tales and adventures of these swashbuckling men and women. Authors such as Patricia Seed, Lynne Withey, and Elizabeth Mancke brush upon the topic, but spend little time on piracy's historical ramifications.4 But though pirates led a hard life and committed many unspeakable acts of violence, the tortures and pains they inflicted were no crueler than the treatment of Native Americans by Europeans. And more recent research has begun to

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2 Rediker, *Villains of All Nations*, 33.

3 Black, *Pirates of the West Indies*, 1.

shed light on a new vision of piracy, which shows “their numbers, near 5,000, were extraordinary, and their plunderings were exceptional in both volume and value.”\textsuperscript{5} Authors such as Marcus Rediker and David Cordingly have begun to challenge the dominant views on piracy and are helping to take the pirate from the footnote to the title page.\textsuperscript{6} As Rediker suggests, "Beneath the rhetoric of demonization lay an actual history of national challenge and consequence," a challenge that new historians are just now beginning to identify.\textsuperscript{7}

Following their lead, this paper argues that pirates were an integral part in expanding European empires into the Atlantic and Caribbean. It will, however, modify their thesis slightly, arguing that piracy played a role in advancing the capitalists as part of the Atlantic World. In order to achieve the paper’s main objectives it will be broken up into the following main parts: 1) Atlantic and pirate historiographies, 2) the political role of pirates for European powers, 3) the impact of Atlantic immigration on piracy, 4) the political ties between pirates and American Independence, 5) the economic impact of pirates, 6) the law of piracy, and 7) the conclusion. In this thesis I rely on primary materials that include original travel narratives, court hearings, letters of marque, sermons delivered at pirate hangings, and first-hand accounts by pirate captives to argue that piracy was more influential on the expansion of European powers than the travel narratives and current ship social structure studies contend. Many of the secondary source materials used contain reproductions of primary sources unavailable in original form and


\textsuperscript{6} Rediker. \textit{Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea}. Black. \textit{Pirates of the West Indies}.

\textsuperscript{7} Rediker. \textit{Villains of All Nations}, 6.
also show how pirate literature has been pigeonholed. My examination of historiography of both piracy and the Atlantic world will provide background and suggest links between the two fields that need further exploration. The main body will develop the link between Atlantic and pirate historiographies and offer a new interpretation on primary and secondary sources demonstrating the importance of pirates to the Atlantic world.

**What is a Pirate?**

Numerous terms have become synonymous with the word *pirate*. The words *buccaneer*, *pirate*, and *privateer*, to name a few, have all become interchangeable terms to describe individuals known as pirates. Before one can discuss how empires made use of these nautical men and their exploits it is essential that the terms for these seafaring peoples be defined. This explanation will help clarify the need to see the three terms as a singular group of people.

*Privateers* are defined as any persons or ships that contract out their services to one government with the purpose of attacking all enemy ships during a time of war. “Their hostilities were directed solely against the declared enemies of the sovereign whose commission they held or, subject to the control of a prize court, neutral vessels carrying troops or cargo in aid of such enemies.”

8 The contract established for privateers became known as a *Letter of Marque*, a written agreement that a share of any plunder taken by the ships’ crew during wartime would go to the government that issued the contract. The act of issuing a *Letter of Marque* usually entitled the government that granted it to a share of one-fifth of the value of ship and cargo taken. In most cases the

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captain of the ship, who was appointed by the backers of the privateering voyage, chose
the target attacked.

The term *pirate* has been used throughout history to mean many things, but its
most historically accurate definition is “a person at war with all the world and engaged in
criminal depredations at sea against any vessel which could be victimized.”

Furthermore, “by the universal law of nations, robbery or forcible depredation upon the
high seas, *animo furandi* is piracy.”

Though pirates had no official economic backers
for their voyages, many times the crown and its colonies secretly supported these
freebooters, by offering locations to sell their wares at a reasonable price. These men of
the sea would then spend the money gained by those sales, in the colonies, which further
helped support a fledgling economy.

Lastly, the term *buccaneer* depicts a French backwoodsman of Hispaniola and
was derived from the word *boucan*, which described the way in which these voluntarily
marooners smoked their meat. Originally buccaneers were hunters in the woods and
valleys of Hispaniola. Buccaneers were usually fugitives from Spanish plantations, such
as Alexander Exquemelin (who will be addressed later), who would raid Spanish
dwellings on Hispaniola to steal the cattle and pigs. They would then dry the meat out
and sell it to vessels that docked near their camp for provisions. Most of the early
buccaneers were fugitives from Spanish penal colonies and plantation runaways. To
retaliate for harsh treatment many received while under Spanish rule during the mid-

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9 Donald A. Petrie, *The Prize Game: Lawful Looting on the High Seas in the Days of Fighting Sail*. (New

seventeenth century most buccaneers began attacking merchant Spanish ships using dugout canoes.

Definitions aside, it is important to keep in mind that ultimately the true label of who was and was not a pirate lay in the view of the vessel being attacked. For example if a British sloop carrying a *Letter of Marque* attacked a Spanish galleon the Spanish vessel would interpret the assault as piracy, while the British crew would see themselves as privateers. And if the *Letter of Marque* was the sole identifier of what makes one man a pirate and another a privateer, it bears noting that in some cases, Henry Morgan being on example, that was a very blurry line. Morgan was recognized as a pirate by his countrymen, even though he carried a letter of marque from his country. Further confusion of terms is indicated by the fact that not all men who were privateers limited their attacks to vessels of an enemy nation. Captain William Kidd and Sir Francis Drake are just two examples of this problem: the former attacked vessels from his own country, the latter attacked vessels of a nation that was not officially at war with his own country.

Finally, though a privateer vessel may have had official sanction for its attacks, the fact remains that the very act of attacking another vessel and robbing it of its goods was considered piracy by all nations of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. While hairs can be split over the legality of privateering as apposed to piracy, the reality of the situation is that a nation using its merchant vessels to plunder the merchant vessels of another nation's navy was still engaged in an act of piracy. Even if the nation doing the attacking saw the crown-legalized act of theft of property as privateering the person, or persons robbed would identify their attackers as pirates in accordance with the definition of piracy. In short, most European nations identified sailors as privateers when the
sailors were useful in attacking enemy vessels, and saw those same sailors as pirates, when the sailors' acts of piracy were a political black eye. For these reasons, this paper dispenses with the distinction between pirates and privateers that dominates the literature, and treats the terms as synonyms.

What is Atlantic History?

In order to achieve the above-stated goals this essay will use David Armitage’s article, “Greater Britain: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis?” to study the empire by viewing its interactions with other nations. More precisely, the paper will describe how Britain and France used pirates to interact with Spain and its American Empire. By focusing on the importance of pirates and privateering ventures this work will add credibility to the study of piracy and concretely solidify their importance to the Atlantic histories.

Over the last few decades Atlantic historians such as David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick argued for an encompassing study of European trans-oceanic expansion they call Atlantic history. Both Armitage and Braddick have suggested that the massive migration of Europeans across the Atlantic Ocean created a “network of kinship and exchange [that] bound together expanding communities of settlement and trade.”11 These "expanding communities" explored a new geographical location and populated a vast expanse of territory that required new political, social, and economic systems. “Settlers, traders, and migrants encountered foreign and exotic societies and were forced to come to

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terms with challenging physical and social environments” that helped influence the structures of both the metropole and its peripheries.\(^\text{12}\)

Historians such as Nicholas Canny and Bernard Bailyn also have offered interpretations of the Atlantic world. For Canny the explosion of migration and trade initiated in the sixteenth century created a boom of naval and mercantile expansion that helped bring about the Atlantic world. As European powers stretched out across the Atlantic, metropoles required more sailors and ships to extend the lines of communication out toward port cities and colonies, a niche sometimes filled by privateers. This chain of ports and harbors succeeded in establishing a fluid line of communication between the metropole and the periphery. Canny explains these “improved communications had the most enduring impact on how business was conducted in the Atlantic as merchants could proceed more confidently about moving surpluses to scarcities.”\(^\text{13}\) Canny also touches on the importance of social orders of the sixteenth century, explaining how this cohesive unit of interaction brought together the colonizers of white settlers and black slaves to form a society using European technology that depended on African labor. Many of these same colonizers would seek to escape the colony through piracy.

The Atlanticist Bernard Bailyn would have suggested to Canny that commerce and communication alone were not the only focuses of Atlantic study, but that “it was the

\(^{12}\) Armitage, British Atlantic World, 1.

movement of people as well.” 14 Bailyn argued that the creation of numerous small entities (colonies) throughout the Atlantic world allowed for the creation of that world. One might add that many of these entities were founded as pirate havens and only became respectable colonies after the pirate threat was removed. 15 Bailyn succeeds in explaining how European colonizers linked the four continents of the Atlantic basin into a cohesive unit of forced interaction, many times with a pirate medium. But by having placed more importance on the people of the Atlantic domain than on the commerce and communication they supported, Bailyn understates the reasons for this large relocation of people. Those political, economic, and social interactions of expansion among the four continental hemispheres and how they have been linked to piracy will be the topic of focus for the remainder of this paper.

David Armitage offers a way to consider this linking of pirate to empire. For Armitage trans-Atlantic history "joins states, nations, and regions within an oceanic system." 16 Marcus Rediker also described how this joining of people in the Atlantic world created a trans-Atlantic population. 17 As I suggest below, pirates helped build and form nations in the Americas; by attacking rival nations, privateers forced European powers to sit down at the bargaining table and come to a truce to end crippling mercantile attacks. These are some of the agents of Armitage's changes. (The argument can also be

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15 Both the colonies of Port Royal and Tortuga in the Caribbean began as pirate havens and pirate ports of call. They would become respectable when piracy was no longer a desired way to benefit the empire. See Port Royal Jamaica, by Michael Pawson and David Buisseret for further information.


17 Both Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea and The Many-Headed Hydra offer Rediker's in-depth view of the cultures and peoples of the Atlantic World.
made that these same pirates created a joining of nations aboard their own ships by allowing men and women of all nations to join with them and have a fair share in the plunder.

But how exactly did pirates influence the Atlantic World? Two historians, Marcus Rediker and David Cordingly, have begun to provide answers. Cordingly approaches pirates from the notion of vanguards of empire, yet never specifically make that connection of piratical importance. Though Cordingly aims "to examine the popular image of pirates today, to find out where this image came from, and to compare it with the real world of pirates," the author never openly ties piracy to empire building.18 Rediker and Cordingly have instead been forced to use much of their work to tear down the old myths of piracy instead of focusing on any true impact pirates had on history.

Both Rediker and Cordingly have written books to help break down the myth of the stereotypical brutal, uncivilized pirate identity. However, neither author deals with the economic impact pirates had on Atlantic history. The two authors have instead focused on breaking down the myths propagated by Hollywood portraying pirates as bloodthirsty, one-eyed, peg-legged men who bury treasure and who force people to walk the plank. Both authors have begun to build up the picture of pirates as participants in a democratic society taking revenge on a mercantile society that wronged them. Having used first hand pirate accounts, Rediker and Cordingly have made in-depth studies of the social and political worlds of pirates, but have not touched on the impact pirates have had on Atlantic culture. While Rediker's work explains the growth of pirate culture, he never

makes the connection to Atlantic history. Though the author identifies the cornucopia of different peoples on board a pirate ship, he never ties his work directly to pirate impact on Atlantic history. While the author claims to "explore the social and cultural history," of pirates he instead focuses on pirates against the maritime status quo.\(^\text{19}\) Therefore, some of Rediker's work will be shown in a positive light, while some of his claims will be argued against.

This paper suggests that Rediker's work on democracy on board a pirate ship truly did exist; yet, the author's perfectly utopian idea of democracy shall be examined under a closer scrutiny. Since examples exist that go against Rediker's claim of a group of men who constantly banded together to fight the oppression of the mercantile captain, it is hard to completely agree with his claims. Just a few of these examples will be identified in the remaining sections of this paper.

Views on capitalism will be the most important distinction that will be made between Rediker's work and this paper's findings. Rediker identifies that capitalism was the very thing that pirates were rebelling against, but below I suggest that pirate ships were part of capitalism in several ways. Pirates had close affiliations with the capitalist goals of protecting and creating empires.\(^\text{20}\) In addition, the very goal of piracy itself was making money, a truly capitalistic tendency. And, finally, when pirates began

\(^\text{19}\) Rediker, Villains of All Nations, 16.

\(^\text{20}\) For this paper the definition of capitalism will be taken from Jeremy Adelman's text, Republic of Capital: Buenos Aires and the Legal Transformation of the Atlantic World. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999). Adelman suggests that capitalism emerges after two phases: 1) the political economy of mercantilism must be destroyed, putting an end to the guild merchants and 2) an emerging successor phase of open competition and reintegration must occur tearing down the old pattern of political trade and property rights. Adelman, Republic of Capital, 224.
interrupting the moneymaking goals of the nation, did European empires step in to crush piracy, another form of capitalist competition.
CHAPTER 2
THE POLITICAL ROLE OF PIRATES AND PRIVATEERS

For most of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries political relations of Europe resembled a powder keg primed and ready for firing. These political strains on the continent stemmed from the religious differences found throughout Europe. As political and religious tensions mounted, the political instability of continental Europe slowly spread out into the Atlantic. When the papacy decreed control of the New World to Spain and Portugal, other European powers were forced to wrestle away power from the Iberian nations. Spain’s unwavering devotion to Catholicism mixed with England’s split from the church in favor of Protestantism created a political atmosphere rife with conspiracies against competing theologies. France’s secular split in the late sixteenth century was also founded in religious differences between Protestant Huguenots and Catholic nobles and led to political inconsistencies that were common throughout Europe.21

These sectarian splits led to the carving up of the New World and the Atlantic Ocean. “As a result of the regularization of diplomatic relations in the Atlantic basin French and Spanish diplomats developed the concept of lines of amity,” which served to separate geographic areas of control.22 Political and territorial conflicts that erupted in the time of early colonization centered around the use of trade lanes in the Atlantic and


22 Armitage, British Atlantic World, 175.
the access to natural resources. In 1551 hostilities between Henry II of France and Phillip II of Spain were resumed and the Caribbean, prevalent with pirate activity, became a significant theater of international warfare for the first time. As the sixteenth century wore on, the political and religious differences in Europe became more pronounced, dragging England into the war on the side of Spain. As Britain began expanding into Spain’s American empire, conflicts between the two nations arose in the Atlantic.

   New territories meant new borders. Sailors felt that an imaginary line existed between the borders of continental Europe and the New World where European treaties could not reach. As a result many sailors treated the Atlantic Ocean as a constant war zone. For many sailors these lines of amity could not extend further than a country's land borders and therefore made all legal claims null and void. For pirates, "The Pope at Rome might draw lines on the map of the world and decree where Spain should rule supreme and where Portugal, but the heretic swashbucklers cared very little about that." Furthermore, while Anglo-French feelings flared in Europe they would be “tempered by a longstanding tradition of maritime war and plunder which favored privateering at the expense of colonization.”

   Elizabeth Mancke discusses the political situation of Europe in her essay, “Empire and State.” She suggests that Atlantic empires created a state formation system that “began to control or suppress privatized violence, to define the boundaries of overseas

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claims, and to coordinate institutions within and between overseas dependencies.”25 As she puts it, “empire building and state formation seem to be parallel more than interdependent phenomena, related coincidentally rather than consequentially.”26 Mancke argued that the expansion of European empires into the Atlantic world forced Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, France, and Britain to more regularly interact politically and economically with one another. Many times this interaction took the form of privateering.

With new territories having been colonized the individual nations required open lines of communication with one another, which the author suggests forced the establishment of a state political and diplomatic system. Further, Mancke argues that the divide of the Atlantic created a system of colonies that required self-sustaining systems of survival and the ability to communicate with foreign powers to maintain the colony’s health. This led to a system in which colony-states were able to sustain their own political systems with little help from the metropole. Unfortunately for European metropoles these contacts were not always legal foreign powers. As war on the continent pulled resources away from colonies many early American settlements found the necessary supplies by trading with pirates. Caribbean island colonies also called on pirates for maritime protection and general information gatherers. Mancke suggests a system of outside help was enacted because “the Atlantic still served as a cultural divide between Europe and the extra-European world,” which required the Atlantic system to


26 Mancke, "Empire and State," 177.
evolve a new government in the form of power of state.\textsuperscript{27} Frayed tempers between imperial powers during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries led to the commissioning of privateers, by European nations, who were set loose on the open waters of the Atlantic giving Britain and other European powers a forced opening into the Atlantic world.

The French and English enacted these newly formed state powers shortly after 1638 when a large Spanish force invaded Tortuga and crushed much of the buccaneering infrastructure in that year. The surviving buccaneers, some three hundred in number, began recruiting sailors from all nationalities. Shortly thereafter these buccaneers began openly assaulting all Spanish trade and empire-building support. Both French and English colonies secretly and openly supported these buccaneering raids. Monsieur de Poincy, the French governor of St. Christopher, even managed to place a garrison of French troops on Tortuga as protection for the mainly French pirates. This action would allow the French to expand the empire ahead of the British. Aid to Tortuga also strengthened the French economy since a well-defended port city made for an excellent spot to sell plunder, an issue dealt with in the next section. While British colonies wanted to help out as well, the political problems between King Charles and Parliament in England allowed little aid to the colonies to help support buccaneers.\textsuperscript{28}

Nationality aside, European countries interacted with pirates through their colonies. In times of peace British and French colonies sought out letters of marque from countries that were at war with Spain, usually Portugal, to make their piratical acts legal.

\textsuperscript{27} Mancke, "Empire and State," 195.

\textsuperscript{28} Charles raised money through taxes and customs duties after Parliament refused to grant finances for war with Spain, France, and a later campaign to regain the Rhine. Charles' further discounting of a Petition of Right in 1628 (passed by the people and Parliament to control his excess spending) and is disregard for Parliament in general eventually led to Civil War in 1642. Mike Ashley. British Kings & Queens. (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, Inc, 1998).
When at war buccaneers became "without trouble of expense, a well-trained military force, always at hand, and willing to be employed upon emergency, who required no pay nor other recompense for their services and constant readiness than their share of plunder, and that their piracies upon the Spaniards should pass unnoticed."\(^2^9\) For colonies in the New World that were not Spanish, pirates acted as the lifeline to knowledge, protection, and survival. In exchange European colonies acted as safe havens and open markets for pirate wares. Politically, therefore, piracy acted as the agent for empires to extend their influence into the Atlantic.

In reality most of the European naval fleets of Britain, France, and the Netherlands were made up entirely of privateers when Atlantic expansion began. As mentioned before, “privateers are defined as ‘vessels belonging to private owners, and sailing under a commission of war empowering the person to who it is granted to carry on all forms of hostility which are permissible at sea by the usages of war.’”\(^3^0\) In short, privateering was legalized piracy for the state and helped less nautically powered European nations sail into the Atlantic world. As the partial table below shows, English naval forces in the early part of the seventeenth century were almost entirely dependent on private vessels to defend their imperial interests.

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Royal ships</th>
<th>Private vessels</th>
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<tr>
<td>1625</td>
<td>Cadiz</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1627</td>
<td>Île de Rhé</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1635</td>
<td>Ship Money</td>
<td>19</td>
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While the chart above shows a decline over time in the use of private vessels in defending the whole of the empire, the opposite could be stated for their use in the Atlantic. When British forces seized Jamaica from Spain in 1655, “the governor freely issued letters of marque to ‘Frenchmen’ from Tortuga, Dutch adventurers, and then, increasingly, to English rovers.” The protection of Britain’s Caribbean strongholds was entrusted almost entirely to ships of a piratical nature and many of the ports and colonies that were created, at least for the British, doubled as pirate harbors. In the late sixteenth century, with Queen Elizabeth’s expectation of war with Spain, the British government looked to her pirate crews for experienced seamen who would defend their country.


32 Thomson, Mercenaries, Pirates, 47.
Instead of having this natural resource of seamen hanged or left to rot in prison, Elizabeth had large numbers of able-bodied seamen released from prison to man England’s vessels of war. It seems that the British Government did not care about the abuse of privateering commission and usually depended on her shady seamen to protect her imperial interests overseas.

The English government in Jamaica was pleased to have a pirate presence since: the absence of British naval units based on the island [made it] comforting to have these searovers around since by their ceaseless, savage attacks on the neighbouring Spanish territories they kept the enemy occupied defending their own coasts, weakened Spain’s control in the Caribbean and contributed in no small measure to the protection of the English as well as the French and Dutch colonies.33

The role of pirate and buccaneer as protector served not only in British colonies, but in England as well, where “the best recruits available [to strengthen the British navy] were the crews of pirate ships, who were good seamen with battle experience.”34 Fearing war with Spain, this large supply of proven naval might was capable of quickly filling the role of navy for the dilapidated fleet of Elizabeth I. In 1588, when a large Spanish armada was seen sailing up the coast of the English Channel, it was a pirate who surrendered to the British navy in order to warn of the arrival of the Spanish fleet. “The Armada was [then] defeated by a combined fleet that included privateers and pirates as well as the Royal Navy.”35

The connection between piracy and empire, while not completely new, has never been tied directly to the expansion of Atlantic imperialism, although Eliga Gould

33 Black, Pirates of the West Indies, 9.


35 Pringle, Jolly Roger, 32.
associates pirates and Atlantic history. In his article, "Revolution and Counter-Revolution," Gould argues that the creation of the true Atlantic world occurred after the American Revolution. As European nations expanded their colonial and imperialistic needs, the empires helped lay the groundwork that forced self-government in the colonies. Gould also identifies an historical trend to tie together the Atlantic world by uniting "the integrative tendencies of Atlantic history, with geographically dispersed British community being bound ever more closely by a common heritage of law, religion, language, education, constitutional government, and economic opportunity."36 This would explain why men who turned to piracy still practiced the tendencies of joining with other pirates. Coming together with others of their own kind created a floating society where they could be seen as equals instead of lower class shipmen.

Much as Rediker suggests pirates threw off the imperial yoke to protest harsh working conditions, Gould explains how American colonies created self-government by throwing off European rule and expanding the Atlantic world. By charting the expansion of European powers the author shows how early American colonies were simply an extension of European rule, just like pirates were an extension of the navy. For Gould, the American and Caribbean settlements offered European rule, just further away from the metropole. When the link with European powers was severed, the creation of a truly unique system of Atlantic history erupted onto the scene.

Gould’s argument is highly convincing. By offering the background information on European countries that created American settlements, Gould shows how these colonies were mere extensions of imperial power. When revolution occurred in the

Americas and Caribbean Islands the links between old world and new world were severed, creating a chasm between Europe and America. The creation of this gap allowed for the Atlantic world to offer a more rich history by including a mixture of cultures and political systems all vying for economic wealth. Much the same could be said of privateers who turned to piracy and joined with members of all nations to go on the account. The rich mix in culture created an identity of people who would need to be dealt with politically, economically, and socially. Through the lines of communication an Atlantic culture emerged bringing with it the signs of life necessary to open the door to Atlantic history.

Though early exploration was an important outcome of piracy England and France maintained a second hope for their newly discovered weapon of piracy. During much of the sixteenth century Spain worked to establish a dominance of the seas in both trading and military force. The newly expanding empires of England and France hoped to challenge that dominance by weakening the power of the Spanish war machine with numerous privateering and pirate attacks that might spread thin Spain’s large naval force.

“Piracy was good for showing the Spanish what the English were capable of without taxes and royal expenditures [being levied in British colonies].”

England not only found a military use for her new fleet, but also found political allies in the form of escaped slaves and disgruntled natives in the Caribbean. In 1571, when Sir Francis Drake began scouting the Spanish treasure port of Nombre de Dios for attack, Drake entered the port under the guise of a Spanish merchant. While in the dilapidated town, Drake made contact with some of the escaped slaves called Cimarrons

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who lived in the jungles that surrounded the town. The establishment of political lines of
communication with the Cimarrons allowed Drake first-hand knowledge of the
surrounding area and its inhabitants during his return trip. Such knowledge was
invaluable to an expanding empire and gave England useful information of just how large
the Spanish empire was growing. Furthermore, when Drake returned he planned to take
full advantage of the Cimaroons’ hatred of the Spanish by using them to strengthen his
fighting force and to give him first-hand knowledge of the terrain. As the Spanish
Archive records:

This league between the English and the Negroes is very detrimental to
[Spanish settlements in the Americas], because, being so thoroughly
acquainted with the region and so expert in the bush, the Negroes will show
them methods and means to accomplish any evil design they may wish to
carry out.38

Though there was no officially recognized treaty between the two groups, Drake’s ability
to sway Cimaroon opinion opened the door for future British/local cooperation against
Spanish efforts.

In July 1572, Drake made his return to Nombre de Dios as a privateer, landing his
group of seventy-three men just east of the town and began his assault around 3:00 AM.
With blaring trumpets and beating drums Drake’s force of privateers, buccaneers, and
Cimaroons entered the town to a panic of people who believed they were being invaded
by a large force. Attempting to raise some form of order, the Spanish troops lined up to
repel the invaders, and fired into the oncoming group, killing the drummer and wounding
Drake. The return fire by the Spanish was unexpected and lowered the moral of Drake’s

38 Kenneth R. Andrews, Trade, Plunder and Settlement: Maritime Enterprise and the Genesis of the British
men. To make matters worse, Spain had sent new orders to its American colonies, stating "that for greater security treasure was now to be sent from Panama only when the vessels forming the plate fleet had anchored at Nombre de Dios." According to biographer Harry Kelsey, "the small amount of booty that the pirates managed to take was not of sufficient value for the citizens to make a claim." Though no major plunder was found, "their exploit had shown how easily a Spanish stronghold could be surprised and, but for the tropical storm [which blew up] and the chance wounding of their leader, the English would have made a significant haul."

For the next few months Drake's random attacks, while waiting for the next caravan, forced Spain to take a more “active rather than passive defense throughout the Americas, a very costly trend that would continue in the following decades.” In the end the captured caravan added up to a total sum of £30,000. Unfortunately for Drake, because England and Spain were no longer at war, both British and Spanish governments viewed his attacks as acts of piracy. He would spend the next two years of his life waiting to go back to raid the Americas while his name began circulating through the royal court. Britain's response to Drakes' role in the attack perfectly displays how European powers would support piracy one moment (funding the attack) and remove that support when politics required it, or at least on the open stage. When Drake returned from his voyage "Drake was advised that the queen had been greatly embarrassed by his actions and that


41 Williams, Sea Dogs, 91.

42 Lane, Pillaging the Empire, 57.
the Spanish ambassador was asking for restitutions. In reality this show of anger was done for the benefit of the Spanish ambassador to England, Bernardino de Mendoza. Demanding retribution, Spain would have considered British endorsement of Drake's raid an open act of war. In reality "A short time later Drake received private messages from the queen, telling him that he had nothing to worry about." Drake's case further supports the view that privateers were essential to building Britain's empire and explores how publicly the act of piracy would be shunned, yet privately the monarchy and royal court would bath in the lavishes of Spanish plunder.

In 1586 Drake was again commissioned as a privateer and began attacking Spanish shipping through the Azores. The damage he created in this raid led one foreigner to report Drake "has done so much damage on these coasts of Spain alone, that although the King were to obtain a most signal victory against him, he would not recover one half the loss he has suffered." The voyage placed £40,000 of prize money in Queen Elizabeth’s coffers and Drake’s attacks also helped assure that “no [Spanish] Armada could sail for England that year." His further attacks on San Domingo and Cartagena showed how vulnerable the strongholds of the Spanish Main were to privateer attacks. Philip II of Spain now needed to know "whether Drake's raid was a signal of English intentions to open a general war against Spain," or one man's personal quest. Early reports returned to Philip informed the King "other private citizens were thought to be

43 Kelsey, Sir Francis Drake, 211.
44 Ibid.
45 Williams, Sea Dogs, 173.
46 Ibid.
47 Kelsey, Sir Francis Drake, 208.
planning similar raids.”

As time passed Philip would come to realize that Drake's attacks were just the beginning of another coming war with England.

In 1591, after the battle off Flores and the sinking of the pride of the Spanish fleet, the Revenge, England felt that Spain could “be brought to her knees to sue for peace by relentless pressure from the sea dogs, whether commanding squadrons of the Queen’s ships or fighting as lone privateers.” Numerous privateering ventures were also undertaken in the Caribbean with the hopes that fast-moving privateering sloops may be able to locate and engage some of the slower-moving Spanish warships, reducing the size of the massive Spanish navy. While privateering voyages failed militarily to cripple the Spanish armada, the continuous attacks by pirate vessels managed to take a great toll on the Spanish treasury, with millions being lost to their raiding attacks.

Also, reports began circulating throughout the Spanish American colonies that the massive forts that had been set up to protect the colonies had fallen into disarray and that many settlements were failing without the much-needed help from the Spanish homeland. Even the Spanish colonizers recognized the English threat when the Municipal Council of Panama wrote to the crown in February 1573 stating:

We holde it certain that the principal design of these English is to explore and study this land, and what strength there is in it, in order to come from England with more people to plunder and occupy it

Pirates had effectively crippled the lines of communication and trade. “For the Spanish seaborne empire, in sum, the second half of the seventeenth century was a period of

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48 Kelsey, Sir Francis Drake, 208.

49 Williams, Sea Dogs, 205.

50 Andrews, Trade, Plunder, 132.
crippling military, financial, and political blows in the Indies,” one of the scourges being buccaneering and piracy. 51 Further privateering voyages continued to show that Spain was weakening as a world power while at the same time England and France were becoming stronger off of the Spanish plunder and colonial gains.

In 1603 Elizabeth died, and the change in rulers also began a change in attitude toward privateers. King James I viewed privateers as outright pirates (much as this paper has) and his policy to move toward peacetime decommissioned the large numbers of the privateer navy. As Captain John Smith wrote in a discourse to the King:

After the death of our most gracious Queen Elizabeth of blessed memory, our Royall King James who from his infancie had reigned in peace with all Nations, had no imployment for those men of warre, so that those that were rich rested with that they had; those that were poore and had nothing but from hand to mouth, turned Pirats… 52

The ironic result of James’ policy was to create that population of pirates. Decommissioning led to the release of large numbers of trained sailors into ports and towns that offered no prospects for future employment. These fifty thousand seamen now entered the world of unemployment and turned from the legalized business of privateering to the illegal act of piracy.

As warships returned home and the port cities of Britain began to swell with the ranks of fired seamen, governors and mayors of these port cities began reporting lawlessness. Soon the Privy Council was inundated with letters from all major ports of

51 Lane, *Pillaging the Empire*, 129.

seamen stealing away boats in the night and taking to piracy.\textsuperscript{53} As the mayor of Plymouth wrote in June 1603:

\begin{quote}
… since our late Queen’s death, there do daily resort heither such a great number of sailors, mariners and other masterless men, that heretofore have been at sea in men of war, and being now restrained from that course do still remain here and pester our town which is already overcharge with many poor people. And some of them do daily commit such intolerable outrages as they steal and take away boats in the night out of the harbour and rob both English and French …\textsuperscript{54}
\end{quote}

While a few of the sailors managed to sign on with merchant vessels of the East India Company, or with northern fisheries, a majority were left with the decision to starve or turn pirate.\textsuperscript{55}

James’ new policy toward privateering created a flood of pirates that would begin to strike out at the very government that had previously employed them. No longer focusing solely on England’s enemies, pirates saw all ships as equal prey and attacked openly without warning. These attacks harmed England directly and indirectly, since these illegal attacks by British sailors were seen as privateering ventures by victimized European countries. Such attacks helped further drive European powers apart and led to further hostilities.

When Charles I claimed the British throne in 1626 many of the hostilities with Spain ended. The acts of piracy being committed were agreed by all European powers to be a threat sponsored by none. Yet as tempers in Europe subsided, conflicts within Britain escalated as Charles attempted to bring together Protestant-Catholic beliefs. This

\textsuperscript{53} Senior, \textit{A Nation of Pirates}.

\textsuperscript{54} Senior, \textit{Nation of Pirates}, 10.

\textsuperscript{55} This need to choose an illegal career path is explored in more detail in Marcus Rediker's texts, \textit{Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea}, and \textit{The Many-Headed Hydra}, which he wrote with Peter Linebaugh.
disastrous endeavor led to civil war in England and the execution of Charles I. Though no direct link is known, it is possible that the piracies committed during his reign could have further stressed political tensions Charles was facing. His son, Charles II, took the throne in time to deal with the growing Dutch naval superiority that had been building during England’s civil war. Escalated naval hostilities with the Dutch necessitated an increase in the British navy, which called back into recognized service its old privateers.

Spain, which had sided with the Dutch in this latest round of conflicts, became the target of these pirate attacks. The need for naval supremacy is the fundamental argument of Jonathan Israel’s essay, “The Emerging Empire: The Continental Perspective, 1650-1713.” In his work, Israel briefly summarizes the political tensions that existed among the major European powers of the seventeenth century. By touching on Britain, France, Spain, and the Netherlands, Israel offers a broad description of how the political situations between these countries led to military conflict and eventual territorial expansion by way of the open seas. The constant creation of treaties and alliances shows just how fragile political situations were in Europe in the seventeenth century. Though he does not mention the influence of piracy directly, his the underlying argument for the major role of naval superiority can be discerned throughout Israel’s discussion.

Israel explains how the constant tensions in Dutch-Spanish relations and French-Spanish relations helped allow the creation of a strong British presence in the world’s oceans. He still fails to identify the bulk of that presence being in the form of privately owned vessels that were sailing the Caribbean waters searching for Spanish ships to plunder. The author does state that “the expansion of England’s overseas Empire could have been reversed had French policy been different,” touching on the self-preservation
and isolationist attitudes of most European powers.\textsuperscript{56} When the European civil wars were over, however, Britain had used her privateering fleet to establish herself as an imperial power. She would then use her new naval superiority (minus the privateering influence that would later be eliminated in treaties with Spain) and mercantile advancements to expand across the Atlantic and create a World Empire.

In 1670 Spain demanded retaliation for English-backed piratical attacks and began commissioning her own corsairs. A Portuguese corsair named Captain Rivero accepted the commission and began raiding the Cayman Islands and later attacked a Jamaican privateer ship off the coast of Cuba. Rivero then landed his small thirty-man army at Montego Bay in Jamaica and destroyed numerous houses in the settlement. The small retaliation was nothing compared with the insult that the President of Panama, Don Juan Perez de Guzman, was soon to receive from Henry Morgan.

In 1662 Morgan, whose exploits are highly detailed by Alexander Exquemelin in his book, “The Buccaneers of America,” received a commission from the English monarchy to begin his privateering career. After two years of preparation, in 1664, Morgan and his crew of buccaneers set sail for Central America and his place of immortality. During his two-year voyage Morgan and his crew plundered three Spanish cities, but instead of returning to England with his crew Morgan decided to retire to Jamaica. “When Morgan saw that his men had squandered [their] booty and were just as badly off as before, he thought of a new enterprise, knowing he would have little trouble

in persuading them to a fresh attack on the Spanish coast.” On August 1, 1670 Morgan, during the Third Anglo-Dutch War, was granted a commission to resume his privateering adventures. He traveled to Isla Vaca where he met up with the buccaneers and on December 12, 1670 a council of war decided on Panama as the target of attack. Panama was known as the main treasure port of the Spanish fleet and was expected to contain a large fortune. The loss of this fortune to the English would not only cripple the naval expansion efforts of Spain, but also serve to increase England's maritime fleet. Don Juan had planned for the expected attack well and had begun fortifying Panama’s defenses and loading ships with the treasure before Morgan and his men arrived.

On January 28, 1671 Morgan and his crew arrived and began their assault on Panama. Morgan marched toward the fort and halted his men. He viewed a frontal assault as costly and unwise, so Morgan decided to march his men toward a hill that overlooked the city. The Spanish infantry and cavalry incorrectly viewed the shift as a retreat and charged the pirate force. The miscalculation proved costly for the Spanish army as over one hundred infantry and cavalry were cut down by merciless and accurate fire from the more efficient pirate army. The disorganized Spanish army was forced to retreat back into the safety of their fort. Such open conflict show just how significant a pirate fighting force could be to the expansion of European powers.

Don Juan then ordered an unusual charge of oxen, which were stampeded out of the gates toward the pirate lines. The pirates merely shooed away the advancing oxen and sent them back toward the town followed by the whole of the buccaneer army. When the morning after the buccaneer attack came "At least 600 Spaniards lay dead on the

plain…the smallness of their own casualties (fifteen) raised the buccaneers spirits enormously. "58 Don Juan had the last laugh, though. The expected treasure had already been loaded on ships and had set sail for Ecuador. It is here that one of the most glaring inconsistencies of the story takes place. According to Spanish sources Don Juan also ordered the captain of artillery to fill the houses and stores with gunpowder, as his army retreated the order was given to light the fuses. According to Exquemelin, “Morgan secretly had houses in various parts set afire, but started a rumour that the Spaniards themselves had done this.”59

This inconsistency serves to illustrate the problem with using primary source material on piracy, because first-hand accounts are biased. In any case, the whole of Panama was engulfed in flames and reduced to ashes so as the attacking pirates pressed on they were met with nothing but the glowing embers of the destroyed town. The jewel of the Spanish-South American crown lay in ruins across the ground. Of the event Morgan wrote, “Thus was consumed the famous and antyent city of Panama, the greatest mart for silver and gold in the whole world, for it receives all the goods into it that come from Old Spaine in the King’s great fleet and likewise delivers to the fleet all the silver and gold that comes from the mines of Peru and Potazi."60 Whether by pirate atrocity or Spanish pride, the once proud and important city of Panama was destroyed by Morgan's assault.

58 Exquemelin, Buccaneers of America, 196.
59 Ibid. at 197.
Afterwards the pirates rounded up all of the prisoners they could find and tortured them into revealing the whereabouts of the treasure. Morgan and his crew then sailed to the outlying islands and proceeded with the torturing and dividing up the booty, "or as much at least as Morgan vouchsafed them." Exquemelin reports:

When it was dealt out individually, each man found his share came to no more than 200 pieces of eight. The wrought silver was reckoned at only ten pieces of eight the pound; the price offered in exchange for various jewels was dirt cheap, and many jewels were missing--for which Morgan was publicly accused by the buccaneers.

In contrast to Marcus Rediker's view of a utopian empire this piratical venture left many disappointed in the outcome. Though Rediker suggests "distribution of plunder was regulated explicitly by the ship's articles, which allocated booty according to a crewman's skills and duties," it would seem that not every pirate captain held firm to the ship's charter. The undertaking was viewed as a total failure and led to many of the buccaneers believing that Morgan had cheated them out of their real share of the profits. Though it was expected that all would receive a fair share, many historians, Exquemelin included, have recorded Morgan's acts as cheating his crew. While Rediker would suggest that pirates agreed and abided by the terms and conditions of a signed pirate charter, Morgan's case demonstrated that pirates looked out for themselves and those closest to them first.

The political winds of change had blown during the event as well and the news that Spain and England had signed a peace treaty meant that the whole excursion would

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62 Ibid.
63 Rediker, *Villains of All Nations*, 70.
be viewed as an act of piracy by both countries. Support for the debauchery was repealed from the English monarchy when the Spanish Queen demanded retribution and the crown attempted to distance itself from the whole situation by stating that the governor of Jamaica was solely responsible and he did not have the authority to confer a commission for privateering. As Morgan returned to England to answer for his piracy "the new governor promptly sent ships to all the Spanish ports with assurances of good fellowship and promises that no more buccaneers should sail out from Jamaica."\(^{64}\) Once again the monarchy that had supported the use of piracy when it was a useful tool abandoned her support of the trade when it became a political black eye. The buccaneer trade was not lost and even after the hanging of some of the seamen the buccaneers simply looked for new ports that would open for their wares. As Exquemelin reported, "If one port is forbidden them, then they sail to another, for (the Caribbean) is full of fair harbours, where the buccaneers can find all they need to maintain their ships, and food in abundance."\(^{65}\)

Many of the returning buccaneers were persecuted and chose to turn to full blown piracy instead of facing the consequences of the blunder and political betrayal. The sack of Panama did create a major and essential change in Spanish recognition of British power. The Treaty of Madrid, signed July 1670, forced Spain to recognize English holdings in the Caribbean and in return both nations agreed to prohibit piracy against the other. This landmark showed that piracy was having enough of an effect on Spanish colonies in America to change Spanish foreign policy. Spain decided that recognition of

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\(^{64}\) Exquemelin, *Buccaneers of America*, 225.

\(^{65}\) Ibid. at 226.
British colonies was more easily accepted than dealing with the pirate and privateer attacks.

As the seventeenth century drew to a close however, England once again found itself at war, this time with France. The War of the League of Augsburg, which lasted from 1688 to 1697 and was known as King William’s War in England, was one of the last wars in which France used buccaneers. Throughout the course of the war the French governor of Saint Dominigue, Jean Du Casse, issued numerous Letters of Marque to organize buccaneer and privateer raiding parties. As the war ended France became desperate to strike out at its more powerful enemies. The target that the French strategists chose was the Spanish city of Cartagena, one of the cities that Sir Francis Drake had attacked on his voyages, yet had been spared buccaneer attacks over the last few years due to its highly formidable defenses.66

In March 1688 the details of the attack were completed, including a full government-sponsor with business investors.67 Baron Jean de Pointis was chosen to lead the attack which consisted of ten French warships, seven buccaneer vessels, and governor Du Casse’s own personal colony squadron. All together the expeditions contained thirty vessels and 6,500 men, including French soldiers and artillery. Due to personality conflicts de Pointis quickly fell out with the buccaneering crew, who were only persuaded to stay after Du Casse intervened and helped draw up contracts on how all plunder would be divided. The entire expedition arrived off the coast of Cartagena on

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April 13, 1689. Defenses of the city were surveyed and a plan of attack was drawn up. When the privateering party finally arrived they discovered that, the garrison was well under strength, and many of the fortifications were too poorly designed to support each other. The French fleet sailed in and bombarded the main forts that guarded the island’s entrance and then began shelling the inner city. A small land party was landed to attempt a capture of the city, but was repelled. After two weeks of further shelling, on May 6, 1689, Cartagena realized the futility of resisting the siege and surrendered.

French buccaneer forces entered Cartagena and established an agreement with the governing body that the army would sack only half of the town. Such agreements had happened for years in the Caribbean, where pirates were sometimes paid to not sack, or pester towns. In this instance however, the buccaneers were unaccustomed to such dealings and felt as though they were being taken advantage of. On May 29 de Pointis and his ships decided to leave and handed over the buccaneer’s share of the booty, which was only a portion of the expected haul. The buccaneers determined that the share was insufficient and decided to return to Cartagena after the French left to complete the sacking. As one buccaneer put it "It is useless to trouble ourselves any farther about such a villain as De Pointis; let him go with what he has got; he has left us our share at Carthagena, and thither we must return to seek it." Again this example challenges Rediker's idealized version of a pirate utopia where everything was shared equally. In

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68 Different accounts of this story from different sources have given conflicting dates, the dates used therefore, are estimates from the three sources used.

69 Konstam, History of Pirates, 91.

70 A detailed account of the siege can be read about in Burney's, History of the Buccaneers of America, 355-382.

71 Burney, History of the Buccaneers of America, 370.
this case the pirates felt they were cheated of their fare share of the loot and returned erroneously to Cartagena.

As the French fleet sailed for home an English fleet that had been patrolling the waters attacked them. Luckily, due to a gale force storm, the French fleet was able to escape with their plunder. The English fleet however, turned toward Cartagena and the buccaneers who were partaking in the second looting of the city. The pirates were surprised by the attack and lost most of their plunder from both attacks and numerous vessels to the English. On their successful return home, the French King, Louis XIV, happily welcomed Baron de Pointis and the plunder. As a token of generosity Louis XIV sent a cash award to the buccaneers who had survived the English attack. The entire operation would prove to be one of the last Caribbean raids by buccaneers who did not feel highly rewarded for their services. Those that returned took a page from their British brethren and either turned to the legal occupation of privateering to outright piracy.

In August 1692 James II, the deposed king of England, sent out a letter of marque to his privateers. In his commission he requested all sailors loyal to him "To Ravage, Plunder, Burn, Sink, and Destroy all the Ships and Goods of the People of England.

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72 James II was the son of Charles I and spent much of his childhood in France and Spain. At the end of the British Civil War the monarchy was restored to power and Charles II, James' brother, took the throne. James converted to Catholicism and married a Catholic wife. When rumors spread of James' conversion the Government tried to pass an Exclusion Bill to remove James from the line of succession. In 1685 James became King of Scotland terrifying those in Scotland and England who were anti-Catholic. Plans were put in place to oust James from the throne, but he was able to secure his seat on the throne of England first. Determined to restore Catholicism in England and Scotland James introduced a Declaration of Indulgence in April 1687 restoring rights to Catholics. William of Orange was then supported by Parliament to overthrow James and become ruler of England. Eventually James would concede and flee to France. It is here that James would authorize the letters of marque against his own countrymen in an attempt to reclaim his throne. Mike Ashley, British Kings & Queens, (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, Inc, 1998).
Scotland, and Ireland."\(^{73}\) One more time the former British monarch would call upon privateers to try and secure the throne of England and protect the Empire. English response was to say:

Instead of bravely grappling at his Royal Rival in the Imperial Seat, he vilely (as)sumes little less than a common Pyrate, Authorizes the Depredations of the English Merchants even by the very hands of Englishmen…and when he can Scourge Kingdoms no longer, he prepares his lesser Rods for a more humble Tyrannick Lash, or else that forgetting that he ever was a Monarch, and therefore blushing at nothing though never so Unprincely, he contents himself with being under Secretary to the French King.\(^{74}\)

In a stroke of irony one of the very nations that had built its empire on the backs of privateers and piratical acts now shunned a former monarch who was relying on the same practices. It would appear yet again that privateering was a suitable venture when it gained power and money for one's own country, but was an evil and shunned act when it was done against one's own country.

By the mid eighteenth century the political ties between European nations changed so rapidly that letters of marque and reprisal were commissioned on a regular basis. In October of 1756 the British crown had decreed that:

We do strictly forbid all Commanders of Such Ships and Vessels as may have Letters of Marque or Commissions for Private Men of War to molest the Persons, or interrupt the Navigation of the Subjects of the Crown of Spain, or to seize or detain any Ships or Vessels belonging to them, on any Pretence whatever, unless on Account of Contraband Goods and Merchandize on board the same.\(^{75}\)

\(^{73}\) James II, *Commission to his Privateers with Remarks thereupon*. August 8, 1692.

\(^{74}\) Ibid.

\(^{75}\) *An Additional Instruction for the Commanders of all such Ships and Vessels as may have Letters of Marque of Commissions for Private Men of War against the French King, his Vassals and Subjects, or other inhabiting within any of his Countires, Territories, or Dominions*. October 5, 1756.
Here again the kingdoms of France and England were at war and England desired to keep Spain as an ally by demanding privateering attacks cease against Spanish vessels.

As the political turmoil in Europe ebbed and flowed, so too did the usefulness of privateers and pirates. Empires constantly found a use for privateers during wartime and quickly found reasons for their disbanding under peacetime conditions. Yet, men like Morgan and Drake served to show the world how weak Spain’s American empire had become. The very nature of piracy, as Rediker suggests, was a political statement in and of itself and provided to establish the role pirates had in setting up political systems and lines of communication with American colonies. For Rediker, "Pirates constructed [their] world in defiant contradistinction to the ways of the world they left behind, in particular to is salient figures of power, the merchant captain and the royal official, and to the system of authority those figures represented and enforced." The people who made up this system of rebellion against authority will be the focus of the next section.

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CHAPTER 3
MIGRATION AND THE PIRATE POPULATION

The discovery of America led not only to struggles between the European powers, but also to new settlements, and a flood of immigration of both a voluntary and involuntary nature. As one scholar notes, “All overseas ventures required personnel, especially young, able-bodied laborers, and the rising population that dislodged so many young men from their home parishes and launched them on the road to port towns was not coincidental, but causal, in the success of English overseas ventures.”\textsuperscript{77} Between the seventeenth and eighteenth century hundreds of thousands of Europeans, mostly young men, relocated themselves across the Atlantic. In addition, millions of Africans were transported in response to the growing need for labor. For many of the dispossessed Europeans and Africans New World colonization was a death sentence and instilled hatred in them toward the masters of their fates. Therefore, “Once landed in the colonies and having tasted the hardships of forced labor, a roving disposition was soon awakened and runaway servants were almost as common as blackbirds.”\textsuperscript{78}

Much of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were “a time of opportunity for embittered Dutch sailors, for abandoned French colonists, for abused English, Scots, and Irish indentures, even for indebted sea captains and naval officers who had little other

\textsuperscript{77} Alison Games. “Migration,” \textit{British Atlantic World, 1500-1800}, 36.

excuse to turn to crime to solve their problems.”79 For thousands of refugees and escapees, piracy offered an outlet for the pent up hatred they felt toward their former masters and the promise of greater economic and political freedom. Piracy’s democratic society of all hands with a vote and its lure of economic gains presented the perfect opportunity for ‘undesirables’ of society to collaborate in a profitable business.

“In the colonies the numbers [of pirates] were swollen by escaped bondsmen and transported criminals,” who sought to escape what respectable society decreed to be an honest living.80 As the atrocities of European masters grew Europe’s ‘honest living’ created a sense of rebellion in many ‘undesirables’ during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

When the Dutch pirate [Exquemelin] came to the Caribbean in the 1660s as an indentured servant himself, he met in his own experience and in the tales of other pirates with similar backgrounds many examples of contracts being extended, broken or abused by the wealthy, who sought to maximize the labor they received from their indentured workers. These tactics were often resisted by the workers not just by running away and joining pirate gangs but by work stoppages, revolts, petitions, and labor action.81

In numerous abuse cases an escape to piracy offered the most enticing choice for reparation. A slave or indentured servant could work his entire life and never the profits that could have been gained by one successful pirate venture. Though some pirate vessels used escaped and captured slaves to perform menial tasks and sustained the guise of slavery, most treated their escaped crewmen as equals and helped foster the spirit of

79 Lane, Pillaging the Empire, 96.

80 Pringle, Jolly Roger, 101.

anti-establishment rebellion that men like Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh suggested was the main act of piracy. 82

These migrating men did not just turn to piracy on a whim. As both Rediker and Linebaugh agree, migrant sailors suffered a long harsh road of abuse before piracy became the career of choice. Sailors “routinely experienced devastating disease, disabling accidents, shipwreck, and premature death.” 83 While these alone are not reasons to turn to piracy, the acts of an abusive captain could easily turn the tide. Being starved, diseased, overworked, beaten, abused, and underpaid, it is no wonder that many sailors seized the opportunity to jump ship and search for a new way of life. Piracy offered the same life of maritime danger and disease, but it also offered the potential for fortune. Piracy also offered better food, shorter work shifts, and power of the crew in decision making all ideals that would have been very appealing to a migrant sailor.

Seamen grumbled about their poor treatment on merchant ships and in the navy. Rediker goes as far as to say that sailors' protests took the form of work stoppage (much like plantation workers), yet such protests meant the Royal Navy turned to impressment to fill its nautical needs. 84 Those who were impressed into service were even more embittered since impressment put them in unwanted places. “Royal surgeon John Atkins, noting that merchant seamen were frequently pressed, underlined precisely what these sailors had to fear when he recorded that the Weymouth, who brought out of England a

82 Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker allude to the pirate's rebellion against authority in their text, The Many-Headed Hydra, and Marcus Rediker discusses this issue in great detail in his texts, Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea and Villains of all Nations.


84 Rediker, Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea, 97-99.
Compliment [sic] of 240 Men, had at the end of the Voyage 280 dead upon her Books.⁸⁵ These abysmal numbers show just how dangerous seamanship was. Volunteering for such a duty was bad enough, but being forced into service was more than enough reason for men to jump ship at the first pirate raid and agree to fight the oppression.

Beyond impressment, many sailors were angered by the captain's discipline, the lack of trial by jury they received when punished on board ship, and the way courts protected captains who were guilty of murder and other charges. Merchant captains were responsible for doling out justice however they saw fit at the time. It was not unusual for men to be accused of not working or other transgressions aboard ship and then being mercilessly beaten to death by an enraged captain. Furthermore, when a return to shore was affected the captain guilty of the transgressions was put to a court-martial hearing usually attended by members guilty of the same wrongdoings. Many of these nautical trials of guilty captains were simply constructed for the public necessity of clearing the captain’s name in public record. One case of support can be found in the trial of William Floyd who was indicted for the murder of five of his crew, “One was beaten to death by Floyd with his hands, fists, and feet, one was forced overboard and drowned, the third was flogged to death, the fourth flogged and drowned, and the fifth killed by an instrument of iron called the tormentors.”⁸⁶ This supports Rediker's argument that merchant sailor uprisings were intended to overthrow the bourgeois captains of oppression. For Rediker, the harsh treatment sailors received led to work-stoppages

⁸⁵ Rediker, Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea, 259.

⁸⁶ Black, Pirates of the West Indies, 14.
which "were highly visible and carried expansive social meanings, affording examples, perhaps encouragements, to others, and occasionally precipitation collective actions."\textsuperscript{87}

Rediker also suggests another reason why merchant seamen became pirates, when he notes "the social contours of piracy, although fully congruent with the labor process at sea, were often formed in violent antipathy to that world of work from which many seamen gladly escaped."\textsuperscript{88} Men did not simply wake up one day and suddenly realize they were being mistreated, rather this was a cycle, Rediker suggests, that had been in place for some time and most of the voiced disagreements were simply turned away without any trial whatsoever. Being given no rights on board ship, being starved, and being subject to the mindless tortures of a merchant captain who sought profit over human life, it is no wonder that men went on the account to escape their fate of death.\textsuperscript{89} Since the punishment for piracy was hanging anyway, many shipmen felt there was little reason not to try piracy, which offered the possibility of a huge pay off. As Captain Bartholomew Roberts put it, "In an honest service there is thin commons, low wages, and hard labour; in (piracy), plenty and satiety, pleasure and ease, liberty and power; and who would not balance creditor on this side, when all the hazard that is run for it, at worst, is only a sour look or two at choking."\textsuperscript{90} Though the merchant and naval seaman would leave behind the rank and file of the bourgeois world, Rediker suggests they looked to the past to create the future of pirate code. This code would be necessary to turn the rag tag group of discarded sailors into the fighting force of pirates they would become.

\textsuperscript{87} Rediker, Devil and the Deep Blue Sea, 98.

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., at 108.

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., at 106.

\textsuperscript{90} Black, Pirates of the West Indies, 62.
As these merchant sailors began crossing the Atlantic they brought with them immigrants and New World settlers who were looking for a chance to make it rich. Some of these new immigrants were classified as undesirable since they had little money and no means to fend for themselves in the Americas. Immigrants such as indentured servants, debtors, and even slaves became an ever-increasing population of the Atlantic and New Worlds. Rediker explains that "some pirates had been 'Baymen,' or logwood cutters...mariners, renegades, and castaways." When honest merchant sailors turned to piracy they soon found the growing population of Atlantic immigrants and settlers more than willing to help swell their ranks.

Before turning to piracy Jack Tar lived by the rules of the merchant captain, or the Royal Navy. In either instance the word of the commanding official on board the ship was the first and last say on any matters public, or private dealing with ship discipline. This totalitarian system led to numerous abuses of power, a few of which, such as poor ship conditions and brutal treatment by merchant captains, have been previously described. Therefore, “the determined reorganization of space and privilege aboard the ship was crucial to the remaking of maritime social relations.” So, “Pirates drew upon an ancient custom, largely lapsed by the early modern era, in which the master consulted his entire crew in making crucial decision.” If any important decisions that affected the entire crew were to be made than every man would be allowed to have a say. From what

91 Rediker, Villains, 45.
92 Ibid., at 262.
93 Ibid., at 263.
vessel to attack, to who would be the captain, all important decisions were made at the
discretion of the council, or pirate crew.

Such an idea of every man having a say would not only have been appealing to
impressed and merchant sailors, but also to immigrants, runaway slaves, and indentured
servants. Both Kenneth Kinkor and Marcus Rediker have suggested that these groups of
undesirables would have taken advantage of being seen as equals in the eyes of their
fellow pirates. As Kinkor points out, "it would seem that the deck of a pirates ship was
the most empowering place for blacks within the eighteenth-century white man's
world."94 As new peoples poured out into the Atlantic the opportunity to throw off a
plantation owner's yoke of oppression by turning pirates must have been very desirable.
To find freedom on a pirate ship one had only to volunteer for duty onboard. For blacks
especially, "visions of invincibility, with dreams of easy money and the idleness such
freedom promises, and with the promise of a life unfettered by the racial and social
ideology of the plantation system," were more than enough reason to turn pirate.95

British Admiral Edward Vernon suggested that "the thirst, hunger, wounds from
lashings, and premature death that these helped to engender were central to deep--sea
faring in this period, and even more central to the decision to go 'upon the account.'"96
For men turning pirate merchant rules were seen as harsh and unfair. Life aboard a pirate
ship may result in a shortened life span, but it would be one where a man could gain his
fortune if the tides were right. For indentured servants and slaves, instead of waiting for

University Press, 2001), 201.

95 Ibid., at 200.

96 Rediker, Villains, 57.
a slow death at the hands of a plantation owner a pirate ship could offer a chance at freedom. As Rediker points out, "Enslaved Africans, sought to escape slavery; fishermen sought to escape peonage; transported felons sought to escape long terms of servitude; and sailors sought to escape impressment or deadly conditions aboard ship." In any case, piracy presented men from all walks of life the ability to be free and escape the harsh realities of the New World. Even more important, “Pirates constructed [their New] world in defiant contradistinction to the ways of the world they left behind, in particular to its salient figures of power, the merchant captain and the royal official, and to the system of authority those figures represented and enforced.”

No where was this more apparent then when a prize was claimed.

When a ship was taken one of the first actions the pirate crew initiated was inquiring as to the treatment of the merchant crew by the captain. “Upon seizing a merchantman, pirates often administered the Distribution of Justice enquiring into the Manner of the Commander’s Behaviour to their Men, and those [captains], against whom Complaint was made were whipp’d and pickled.” In other cases, such as the case of William Snelgrave, an honest captain was given the opportunity to return back to his duties richly rewarded and unharmed. As Rediker points out:

Snelgrave's character proves so respectable that the pirates [who captured him] proposed to give him a captured ship with full cargo and to sell the goods for him. Then they would capture a Portugueses slaver, sell the slaves, and give the proceeds to Snelgrave so that he could 'return with a large sum of Money to London, and bid the Merchants defiance.'

97 Rediker, Villains, 58.
98 Rediker, Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea, 267.
99 Ibid., at 270.
100 Rediker, Villains, 88.
The pirate council would have been very strict on the rules of punishment and would have seen fit to punish any man who did not abide by the rules of the group. The poor sailors far from home now had a new identity where he could be master of his own fate, or at least have a say in the ship's destiny.

Disillusioned indentured servants were another group of undesirables who turned to piracy to escape the toils of contract-plantation life. Famous icons in pirate history such as Francois L’Olonnais and Henry Morgan, both discussed by Alexander Exquemelin (also and indentured servant), in his study of piracy, began their Caribbean careers as indentured servants. During the seventeenth century some one hundred and eighty thousand Irish and British indentured servants were transplanted to the Caribbean with the understanding they would work off their debt for Atlantic passage. The backbreaking system of labor these individuals became accustomed to quickly disheartened large numbers of servants. In 1718, Nicholas Lawes, Governor of Jamaica, complained to the Council of Trade and Plantations that:

[Indentured servants] have been so far, from altering their evil courses and way of living and becoming an advantage to us, that the greatest part of them are gone and have induced others to go with them a pyrating, and have inveigled and encouraged severall Negroes to desert from their masters and go to the Spaniards in Cuba, the few that remains proves a wicked lazy and indolent peoples, so that I could heartily wish this country might be troubles with no more [of] them.

As Lawes' complaint expresses, indentured servants gladly looked for an opportunity to remove themselves from the trap of endless debt and harsh working conditions that servitude had placed them in. For some the call to piracy rang all too clearly and physical

101 Exquemelin, The Buccaneers of America.
102 Rediker, Villains, 46.
risk as well as “Moral deterrents are rarely a match for the incentive of hunger.”\textsuperscript{103} Since the alternative to possibly making a fortune at piracy led down the path of a slow death on the plantation, or a quick death at the end of a rope, for many an indentured servant piracy was the path to financial freedom.

One of the most recognizable groups of ‘undesirables’ who turned to piracy to strike back at their oppressors were African slaves. “It is not surprising that some blacks enthusiastically embraced ‘visions of invincibility, with dreams of easy money and the idleness such freedom promised, and with the promise of a life unfettered by the racial and social ideology of the plantation system,’” which piracy offered.\textsuperscript{104} The finding that was surprising was the handling of African slavery by Bermudian merchants. Not fearing large numbers of runaways (due mainly to the extra economic gain slaves could make transporting their own cargo) many Bermudian merchants purchased slaves who were taught the trade of seamanship. For many merchant captains the advantage of slaves was two fold: (1) slaves did not have to be paid regular wages and (2) if a ship with an all black crew was found suspicious of smuggling “the testimony of their black sailors would be inadmissible in most colonial courts.”\textsuperscript{105} Many pirate crews welcomed runaway slaves on board ship because of their reputation as hard workers and trained seamen. The sheer image of terror that could have been associated with the dark color of their skin could also have been a major reason for the desire to have Africans among the

\textsuperscript{103} Pringle, Jolly Roger, 104.

\textsuperscript{104} Kinkor. “Black Men under the Black Flag,” 200.

crew. Added to these factors was the presumably ferocious desire to resist reapprehension after having faced bondage and “Whether slave or free, black able-bodied seamen were especially valuable pirate recruits.” As Rediker points out, pirates were not interested in the color of one's skin, but instead "were more concerned with who would make a committed pirate, and of course escaped slaves fitted the bill." 

Numerous rundown British or Spanish vessels became easy prey to a swarming mass of pirates led by African boarding parties (Diego de los Reyes, Laurens de Graff, and Nicholas de Concepcion to name a few) who constituted “perhaps twenty-five to thirty percent” of all pirate crews between 1715 and 1726. Unlike on the plantation, where masters clearly and forcefully dominated slaves, pirate ships viewed all members of the crew as equal, entitled to a full share of the bounty taken, as long as the crewmember kept up his share of the work. In one legendary instance when a pirate ship captured a slave ship the pirate Captain Misson stated:

that the Trading for those of our own Species, cou’d never be agreeable to the Eyes of divine Justice: That no Man had Power of the Liberty of another; and while those who profess’d a more enlightened Knowledge of the Deity, sold Men like Beasts’ they prov’d that their Religion was no more than Grimace, and that they differ’d from the Barbarians in Name only since their Practice was in nothing more human:…That however, these Men were distinguish’d from the Europeans by their Colour, Customs, or religious Rites, they were the Work of the same omnipotent Being, and endued with equal Reason: Wherefore, he desired they might be … divided into Messes among them, to the End they might the sooner learn their Language, be sensible of the Obligation they had to them, and more capable and zealous to defend that Liberty they owed to their Justice and Humanity.


107 Rediker, Villains, 55.


Though Daniel Defoe’s description may be a bit fanciful it is known that “blacks were frequently recorded as active combatants,” and added to this is the fact that “no known pirate crew prohibited blacks from carrying firearms [which] is perhaps the most telling evidence that differences in status between whites and blacks were relatively minor.”

European plantation owners feared and dreaded that slaves and servants could runaway and join pirate ships. Such “fears that slaves might ally with pirates are evidenced by at least one governor’s complaints that 'the negroe men…are grown soe very impudent and insulting of late that we have reason to suspect their rising, soe that we can have no dependence on their assistance but to the contrary on occasion should fear their joining with the pirates.'” In other instances the use of oppression became the preferred means of dealing with impudence and many slaves disappeared into the jungles to create their own towns and villages, or informed pirates of their master’s whereabouts and fortunes in an attempt to speed up their freedom from slavery. These runaway slaves fled into the mountainous and marshy areas of the Americas and "established fiercely independent free societies which resisted apprehension and occasionally went on the offensive against European encroachment." During his sack of Panama, Sir Francis Drake enlisted the help of natives and escaped slaves to gain information on opposing military might, strategic locations, and locations of plunder for raiding parties. During Drakes’ Panama campaign “much time was spent exploring the rivers and tracks of the entire Panama Isthmus with the aid of Drake’s Cimaroon [escaped

110 Kinkor, "Black Men Under the Flag," 201.

111 Ibid., at 202.
slaves] allies, while others saw to the careening of the ships and putting the pinnaces in first-rate order.”

In other cases groups of African runaways in the Caribbean aided French and English pirates to strike at their former Spanish masters. Having a shared distrust for Spain, yet knowing “all too well the slaving past of the French and English…they realized that these potential enslavers—armed and angry as they were—could be used effectively against the Spaniards in the short term.” In most cases therefore, runaway communities were willing to aid European advances against the Spanish.

Another reason many servants and slaves turned to piracy was for a voice in their futures. On ship, it has been suggested, each man had a say and was accounted for in all pirate ship's charter, which had to be signed by every man on board. This symbolism of signing one’s name for agreement was held as a show of faith and mutual respect in order to create a common set of rules to govern such a hodgepodge of different cultures and nationalities. These laws, shown in a later section, shared much in common with the laws used to found the United States of America and "allocated authority, distributed plunder, and enforced discipline." For piracy the act of signing articles was based on an oath of honesty such as in the case of Bartholomew Roberts whose code of conduct can be found in Alexander Exquemelin’s *Buccaneers of America*. Roberts’ code was created to offer reparations to pirates injured in the line of duty, such as "a man who lost both legs would receive 1,500 pieces of eight over and above his ordinary share." His articles also set

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112 Williams, *Sea Dogs*, 93.

113 Lane, *Pillaging the Empire*, 41.


up a reward system for men "who behaved with extraordinary gallantry--such as being the first to tear down the flag on a fort and run up the English colours."\footnote{Exquemelin, \textit{Buccaneers of America}, 172.}

Henry Morgan's articles, on the other hand, were created after the captain was told that one of his officers had absconded with a large portion of the group’s booty Morgan “decided to draw up a set of binding articles, to be signed and sworn to by the whole company.”\footnote{Black, \textit{Pirates of the West Indies}, 64.} In any case, articles were created to bring back laws to what could have become a lawless society. Unanimous signings were considered an oath that the individual groups would cast their lots together for a common cause. “Theirs was truly a case of hanging together or being hanged separately.”\footnote{Rediker, \textit{Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea}, 276.} As already shown however, these charters may not always have been followed.

Though the ships had written laws they rarely had crew manifests. It is therefore hard to establish exact numbers of what racial and ethnic groups were on board pirate ships. It has been suggested by historians, such as Rediker and Kinkor, that up to twenty percent of the estimated two thousand active pirates during the Golden Age of Piracy (approximately 1690-1730) were African. Unfortunately, very little information has been cemented on the makeup of crews and present/future historiographical studies might shed light on the subject. What is known about most pirate ship crews is that “all contained clear anti-Spanish tendencies, but in a mercantilist world in which ships, cargoes, and seafarers were rigorously categorized by nationality, pirates discriminated as little in their recruitment policies as in their choice of targets.”\footnote{David J. Starkey, “Pirates and Markets,” \textit{Bandits at Sea: A Pirate Reader}, 112.}
Rarely were pirate crews concerned about race and more often than not pirate crews reveled in their amalgamation of ethnicities, sometimes depending on their sheer image of barbarity to capture a ship without firing a single shot. Ships that fought back could result in the loss of pirate lives or worse yet, a loss of valuable merchandise that could be sold off. As Rediker explains “the idea was to intimidate the crew of the ship under attack so that they would not defend their vessel.”

The most widely recognized form of this barbarity could be viewed in the pirates’ flag, which “was intended to terrify the pirates’ prey, [by] its triad of interlocking symbols—death, violence, limited time.” Whether it was the flag (suggested by Rediker) or the fear of what toll the crew might extract, pirates were highly aware that the fewer shots exchanged with a prize the better therefore, it was beneficial to strike fear into the hearts of the prey in order to escape interaction with the least loss of life possible. In fact "in the great majority of cases merchant ships surrendered without a fight when attacked by pirates."

Not only were blacks seen as equals on pirate ships, but the law treated many runaway slaves as white men if found guilty of piracy peculiar, since blacks could not testify in court. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries blacks were usually deemed as servants and could not be tried in white courts, instead they would be returned to servitude with their former masters, or sold at auction. Such appears to have been the fate of John Julian "one of the only two survivors of the wreck of The Whydah Galle," who "was sold to John Quincy of Braintree in lieu of trial."

However, the majority of

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120 Rediker, Villains of all Nations, 165.
121 Rediker, Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea, 279.
122 Cordingly, Under the Black Flag, 121.
blacks found guilty of being on board pirate vessels and committing acts of piracy were tried in white courts as freemen and sentenced to hang with the rest of the crew. Admiralty records show only a small minority of African captives were sold back into slavery, or returned to former masters. As the 1690s pressed on, and pirate attacks became more costly, pirates of all nationalities and ethnicities started receiving the same fate of hanging, to issue a warning to others. In 1718, at the trial of Blackbeard's crew, five captured blacks "were tried, found guilty, and executed."124

Plantations were not the only source of African recruits. The Atlantic culture of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries also created a large influx of naval traffic in the form of slave ships. As Rediker points out "Edward England and other pirate captains found the slavers to be excellent recruiting grounds."125 Being stocked with great quantities of supplies to feed their human cargo and also running extremely fast across the open oceans to preserve that cargo pirates began to make it a point of interest to seek out those slaving vessels. Since most pirates would have found it difficult in their day and age to find a buyer for the cargo on board a slave ship the bonded men on board were offered a chance to join up. More importantly, the new recruits would be able to help sail the newly captured slave vessel as part of the pirate fleet. Such drastic attacks on slave ships however, brought the wrath of governments, whose economy depended on slave labor, and would go a long way toward piracies eventual extermination.126

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125 Rediker, Villains of all Nations, 138.
Also, while many freed/runaway slaves and escaping servants viewed piracy as an escape from the horrors of colonial life some did not. In some instances runaway slaves did not look favorably upon piracy. One recorded instance states:

After long and damaging campaigns in the 1570s, for example, the Panama runaways agreed to peace terms that granted them freedom and municipal status in exchange for action against English privateers. The plan must have been successful, for Vazquez de Espinosa mentions villages of freemen, former rebel slaves, in Panama, now assisting in protecting the colony in the early seventeenth century.127 Fed up with the indiscriminate pirate attacks on their own secret colony of freemen such occurrences of colonial assistance were rare, but existed. The most common outcomes saw free societies offering help to pirate vessels in exchange for supplies, or an end to colonial military pressures. Other “undesirables/immigrants” who turned pirate in the mid-seventeenth century were the French backwoodsmen of Hispaniola, who came to be known as buccaneers. The word is derived from the word boucan, which describes the way in which they smoked their meat over an open pit. Usually escaping from Spanish invasion and capture of French territories these pirates would raid Spanish plantations in Hispaniola, stealing the cattle, and then they would dry the meat out and sell it to vessels that docked for provisions near their camp. Spanish attacks on buccaneers camps in 1717, "made the problem worse, for themselves and everyone else, since the men who were once employed, reported a royal official in Jamaica, 'turn'd pirates and infested all our seas.'"128 Most of the early buccaneers were fugitives from Spanish penal colonies and began their careers by attacking passing Spanish ships during the mid-seventeenth century.

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As time progressed, runaway slaves, deserting seamen, and many English and French raiders of the Spanish Main swelled the ranks of the buccaneers. Many of these men became pirates by volunteering. "Colonel Benjamin Bennett wrote to the Council of Trade and Plantations in 1718, setting forth his worries about freebooters in the West Indies: 'I fear they will soon multiply for so many are willing to joyn with them when taken."129 As of 1660 "these multinational and occasionally renegade Hispanic pirates were no small matter," and they began taking a severe economic toll on merchant shipping.130

As this suggests, pirate crews were generally made up of a vast mixture of these ‘undesirables.’ The crew of Sam Bellamy’s “The Whydah Galley, for example, included not only English, Irish, Scottish, Welsh, and British colonials but also Frenchmen, Dutchmen, Spaniards, Swedes, Native Americans, African-Americans, and Africans.”131 Since pirate ships were usually manned by individuals seeking their fortune and trying to escape harsh conditions, it is highly likely that most other pirate crews resembled Bellamy's. Pirate court proceedings, which have created a small record for historians, confirm that people of just about all nationalities answered the call to piracy.132 Though the question remains of what exact numbers of peoples from different nations became pirates, it is known that people from many nations did become pirates. Here, again, a

129 Rediker, Villains, 47.

130 Lane, Pillaging the Empire, 129.

131 Pennell, Bandits at Sea, 198.

132 The trial of Captain Thomas Green and his Crew (1705), The Trial of Major Stede Bonnet (1718), and An Account of the Pirates with divers of their speeches & Letters, Who were Executed at New Port on Rhode-Island, (1723), and numerous other trials not only offer the names of men tried for piracy, but in many cases, nationality and age. The recorded court proceedings themselves even delve into some of these men's personal lives, revealing social status and religious affiliations as well.
similarity in creation can be made between pirate vessels and the burgeoning colonies in America. The complicated grouping of people in both groups created a hodgepodge of cultures and ethnicities that would require a new form of government. Surprisingly, many of the piratical individuals shared the ideals of those who led the American Revolution, ideals which helped form an Atlantic World. The following section will therefore tie the political ideals of a pirate ship to the early government of America. It is intended that the following section will further support the idea of pirates as vanguards, but this time as vanguards of a new political system in the Atlantic World.
CHAPTER 4
POLITICAL TIES BETWEEN PIRACY AND AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE

As the previous sections have already shown, Marcus Rediker suggests that the law making body of government on board a pirate ship was a revolutionary response to the oppression they were surviving on a merchant ship. Though this paper has suggested some of his findings to be debatable, his work is more intriguing in its oversight. Though Rediker does identify a pirate democracy brought on by the oppression of a governing body (a democracy that was not a simple blissful utopia as he sometimes makes it out to be) he never connects this study with the oppression American colonists felt they were suffering in the colonies.

The connection between pirate codes and early American government is easy to suggest and outline, especially since many of the parties’ grievances were similar. In effect, these similarities establish “connections” between the two, as outlined by Louise Tilly in her article by that name. Tilly connects processes that led to the Industrial Revolution in different areas of the world, looking at the temporal connections between past and present in the case “on the interplay of textile industrialization and the familial social relations of workers in India, England, and France.”133 Here, a variation of Tilly's method will allow me to trace the similarities between the established pirate charters and the governments created in post-Revolutionary America, showing the parallels between the ideas of the two. As Marcus Rediker suggests, if piracy had more clearly voiced its

reasons for rebellion, historians might counted them amongst the first democracies. In the absence of a clear articulation of their grievances, we need to trace out their ideas to see how they participated in the tendencies toward democratization of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In the next few sections I will trace out those “connections” by revealing some of the similarities between piracy and democracy.

**Declaration of Independence**

Colonists outlined the major reasons they felt the need for independence from Britain’s monarchy in one succinct source, the Declaration of Independence. “The basic theory of the Declaration was that of the social compact, precedent and justification for government.”¹³⁴ The Declaration has been considered the statement to the world to explain why British tyranny required a legitimate separation from England. Benjamin Franklin stated that the British colonies of America differed “not only under different governors, but have different forms of government, different laws, different interests, and some of them different religious persuasions and different manners.”¹³⁵ The Declaration offers King George III’s neglecting to observe “certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness”¹³⁶ as the reasons for independence. On merchant vessels of the day, these same arguments could be made for men who turned to piracy. Sailors “routinely experienced devastating disease, disabling accidents, shipwreck, and premature death.”¹³⁷ Being starved, diseased, overworked, beaten,

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abused, and underpaid it is no wonder that many sailors seized the opportunity to jump ship and search for a new way of life, namely piracy which offered better food, shorter work shifts, and power of the crew in decision making.

Another reason men turned to piracy, impressment, had a parallel to the colonial cry against quartering soldiers against their will. Impressment goes one step further than impressment, by taking an unwilling proponent and placing him in an unwanted position in the form of a man of little monetary means being placed on a merchant ship. “Royal surgeon John Atkins, noting that merchant seamen were frequently pressed, underlined precisely what these sailors had to fear when he recorded that the Weymouth, who brought out of England a Compliment [sic] of 240 Men, had at the end of the Voyage 280 dead upon her Books.”

Another parallel suggested by the Declaration of Independence is an objection to legal charges that deprived citizens of trial by jury and which protected those guilty of murder and other charges “by a mock Trial, from punishment for any murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States.” These two major complaints were also sources of grievance on board a mercantile vessel as has already been shown by the brutality of merchant captains, such as William Floyd, who beat their crewmen to death. This shows that the same pressures that caused a Revolution to go down in history as glorious placed a merchant uprising in context of despicable piracy.

The Declaration of Independence furthers the argument of American separation from Britain by stating the King “has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our

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towns, and destroyed the Lives of our people.”\textsuperscript{140} This description of mistreatment sounds similar to the complaints of those who became pirates. As Captain Bartholomew Roberts put it “in an honest service there is thin commons, low wages, and hard labour; in (piracy), plenty and satiety, pleasure and ease, liberty and power; and who would not balance creditor on this side, when all the hazard that is run for it, at worst, is only a sour look or two at choking.”\textsuperscript{141} There is one major difference between the rebellion of tars who became pirates and the colonial act of separation. Pirates did not write down their list of transgressions before effecting a separation from the ships.

Problems Abound With Original Government

While this may seem minor, the Declaration states “a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.”\textsuperscript{142} For colonists this new form of government would come first in the form of the Articles of Confederation and state constitutions. Later, the Constitution of the United States would be adopted in an attempt to make up for the shortcomings and complications of the Articles of Confederation, which will be discussed in further sections of this paper. The main problem for why no such record exists for pirates was illiteracy. Since most jack tars could not read or write the possibility of a complete set of grievances being written is unlikely. However, the ship articles that have been uncovered from some pirate ships suggest that pirates at least attempted to voice their grievances by writing laws to eliminate the harsh rules they had weathered on merchant ships.

\textsuperscript{140} “Declaration of Independence,” in Federalist Papers, 531.

\textsuperscript{141} Black, Pirates of the West Indies, 62.

\textsuperscript{142} “Declaration of Independence,” in Federalist Papers, 528.
For America that pre-existing government came from England. For piracy the original code was based on the antithesis of the Royal Navy rules and maritime rules of antiquity. In both cases problems abounded and the need for a change was becoming ominously evident.

England created a form of government for the colonies that took direct control away from the individual colony burgesses and placed control in the hands of the English Parliament and King. Fearing a return to a government that could dissolve into monarchical tyranny led the Second Continental Congress to create a government that required the thirteen individual states to oversee the execution of laws. The colonists' early attempt at government, the Articles of Confederation, set up a Congress for the purposes of “determining war and peace, sending and receiving ambassadors, negotiating treaties, settling boundary disputes between states, regulating coinage, borrowing money, managing affairs with Indians, establishing and regulating a post office, regulating the army and navy, appointing courts for the trial of piracy and felonies on the high seas, and for dealing with cases concerning captured ships.”¹⁴³ This Congress however, could not levy taxes, or regulate commerce among the states; moreover Congress was unable to “prevent one state from discriminating against other states in the quest for foreign commerce.”¹⁴⁴

Mixed with the Articles of Confederation were the individual State Constitutions, which further complicated the American government system. Excluding Rhode Island and Connecticut each state had its own, separate constitution that bound the colonies into


a fragile alliance. Since the individual states reserved the right to levy taxes, except postage tax, the Articles of Confederation were left with the requirement to defend the United States “but the taxes to pay these requisitions had to be laid by the states.”\(^{145}\) Congress also “had no power to regulate domestic and foreign commerce, because it was felt that Parliament’s power to pass the Acts of Trade and Navigation had been abused.”\(^{146}\) No system of federal judiciary was created, leaving no system to handle domestic or federal disputes, a complaint colonists had voiced under English rule. And even more like life under England, the colonists' early attempt at government by the Articles “was given no means to enforce such powers as were granted; it rested on the good will of the states.”\(^{147}\) All of these rights were left to the individual states and allowed for a complicated system of legality with a Congress that had no power to enforce the established rules. This early attempt at self-government reintroduced many of the same problems that the Revolution was fought over.

For pirate government, before turning to piracy Jack Tar lived by the rules of the merchant captain, or the Royal Navy. In either instance the word of the commanding official on board the ship was the first and last say on any matters public, or private dealing with ship discipline. This autocratic system led to numerous abuses of power, a few of which, such as poor ship conditions and brutal treatment by merchant captains,


\(^{146}\) Ibid.

\(^{147}\) Ibid.
have been previously described. Therefore “the determined reorganization of space and privilege aboard the ship was crucial to the remaking of maritime social relations.”

In both cases, colonist and pirate, the original rules became troublesome and led to more problems than they solved. For piracy, merchant rules were harsh and unfair. “Pirates constructed [their] world in defiant contradistinction to the ways of the world they left behind, in particular to its salient figures of power, the merchant captain and the royal official, and to the system of authority those figures represented and enforced.”

For colonist, English rule was oppressive and while the Articles were a good start “changes in the conception of representation required and eventually demanded all sorts of adjustments that were scarcely predicted and often stoutly resistant even by those who held to ideas that made the adjustments necessary.” To put it more succinctly, the requirement of a unanimous vote by the thirteen colonies to amend any problems with the Articles led to the Articles of Confederation quickly becoming a hindrance to the constantly changing state of democratic progress. “Fearing concentrations of power, and arbitrary power of any kind, convinced that America’s experimental achievements in freedom were beset by forces that would destroy them,” colonists looked for a new system of legislature. This failing of government leads to yet another parallel between pirate and colonists. No matter the previous government’s shortcomings, both the

148 Rediker, Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea, 262.

149 Ibid., at 267.


American Constitution and the pirate charter still looked to their preceding government systems in order to create their future governing bodies.

**Looking to the Past for Present Laws**

In an ironic twist, both pirates and Americans looked back on their previous forms of government and the very laws they challenged to create their new systems of rule. For the colonists the system of government would be based not only on the defunct Articles of Confederation, but also on Greek and Roman law and English legal principles. Bernard Bailyn describes this struggle to find a new government, noting “under the pressure of events and the necessity to justify resistance to constituted authority, the colonists developed from their complex heritage of political thought the set of ideas, already in scattered ways familiar to them, that was most illuminating and most appropriate to their needs.”\(^{152}\) For the pirates, the process was similar. As much as they despised naval and merchant law, they still looked back on Royal Navy laws and ancient nautical rules to set forth a system of order on the ship. “Pirates drew upon an ancient custom, largely lapsed by the early modern era, in which the master consulted his entire crew in making crucial decision.”\(^{153}\) If any important decisions that affected the entire crew were to be made than every man would be allowed to have a say. From what vessel to attack, to who would be the captain, all important decisions were made at the discretion of the council, or pirate crew.

Both colonists and pirates desired a system of government that would ensure that the tyranny they had known under their previous (pre-revolution) governing bodies did


\(^{153}\) Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 263.
not return. Both groups felt as though they had been the targets of a cruel plan to treat them as lesser individuals in their respective societies. With the ability to transform their way of life, both groups looked for a system that would take the power of politics out of the hands of the wealthy few and place it into the hands of the majority. It is in this sense of democratic government that the American colonists and the pirate become all too similar in their search for independence from the known system of political order. From the rights of the individual to the system of checks and balances, these two groups had much more in common then most historians usually allow.

Pirates and colonists wanted democracy controlled by government. As one scholar put it: “The pirates allowed their captain unquestioned authority in chase and battle, but otherwise insisted that he be governed by a Majority.”\textsuperscript{154} While pirates may have complained about merchant captains' abuses, the pirate crew still recognized the need for order in instances of conflict when organization could be the difference between losing and capturing a prize.

So too, Americans wanted to cut ties with the tyranny they suffered under King George III. Being disheartened by the lack of representation the colonists felt they had as British colonies the Founding Fathers attempted to establish a government where those who would be affected by policy could be responsible for creating it. It could be said that “One reason that many smallholders and poor whites sought an independent government was that they expected it to be much more amenable to their influence.”\textsuperscript{155} Such ideas were the same in the realm of the pirate crewmen who, being tired of his impressed labor,

\textsuperscript{154} Linebaugh, \textit{Many-Headed Hydra}, 162.

\textsuperscript{155} Woody Holton, \textit{Forced Founders}. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1999), 191.
searched for a more open system of employment where he would have a say. The Constitution searched for a middle ground to marry “the concept of separation of powers, checks and balances, and federalism.”

For pirates, the very idea of democracy was the answer to assuring no captain could hold an abuse of power through force. This similarly of ideas led to the forming of a government for both groups that had less of a monarchical feel and more of a democratic mentality spread. “Most pirates, having suffered formerly from the ill-treatment of their officers, provided carefully against any such evil.” Jack Tar and the American colonies feared the consolidation of power in the hands of a few and searched for a system of government that would allow little abuse of power. In both groups a system of checks and balances were formed that would show numerous similarities in their design not least of which was the establishment of three levels of government. While the Constitution sets up the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, the pirate charter set forth division in captain, crew-committee, and quartermaster respectively. More surprisingly this pirate code predates the Constitution by fifty years (possibly more), being recorded as early as 1720 in Bartholomew Roberts charter.

Another similarity between colonists and pirates was the emphasis on the written laws approved by the government. As already stated, ship charters had to be signed by every man on board. For piracy the act of signing articles was based more on an oath of honesty such as in the already identified case of Bartholomew Roberts. No matter the case, unanimous signings were considered an oath that the individual groups would cast


157 Linebaugh, Many-Headed Hydra, 162.
their lots together for a common cause. This symbolism of signing one’s name for agreement was held as a show of faith and mutual respect in order to create a common set of rules to govern such a hodgepodge of different cultures and nationalities. In the case of the American government the Declaration of Independence and the Articles of Confederation were replaced by the rhetoric of the Constitution and by a convention elected by the people. Those men involved in the creation of these documents were required to sign their names to the documents. The same symbolism was invoked for pirates and Americans. The ideas that were no longer acknowledged had to be personally accepted in the new form of government by signature.

Laws and Government

Both colonials and pirates shared the fear of a return to despotic government and so both placed the limiting agents to keep this fear from becoming a reality. For the pirate “their articles and general organization…ensured their freedom from such tyranny and despotism, especially in the control of their chosen captain.”\textsuperscript{158} As the President of the United States is elected, so too was the captain of the pirate vessel. The articles made it very clear that the pirate captain’s main duty was to only be recognized in times of combat, much like Article II, Section 2 gives the President the position of Commander in Chief. Unlike the President, it was only in times of conflict that the pirate captain was officially in control of all those around him, his elected position being in jeopardy should he be gun-shy in the face of danger.

The Constitution, under Article VI, expects of its elected officials to take an oath to uphold the Constitution to effectively take office. The signing of the pirate articles

\textsuperscript{158} Black, Pirates of the West Indies, 14.
would have been considered taking the oath to protect the rights and privileges of all those on board. Harkening back to the previous example of Bartholomew Roberts, it was necessary to ensure that no one ran off with the plunder and a signed oath was considered by Roberts to be “for the better Conservation of their Society and doing Justice to one another; How indeed Roberts could think that an Oath would be obligatory, where Defiance had been given to the Laws of God and Man, I can’t tell, but he thought their greatest Security lay in this, that it was every one’s Interest to observe them, if they were minded to keep up so abominable a Combination.”

The articles of piracy also allowed for the payment of the elected officials as well as the members of the rest of the crew in much the same way the Constitution does under Article II, Section 2. Once the term of payment was agreed upon the said term would remain effective until the captain was replaced or, having reached a set amount of shared booty, the pirate crew dissolved to go its separate ways. While the amount the captain shared in could change from ship to ship, the agreed upon amount was constant once the articles were signed. The articles of Captain Bartholomew Roberts placed the rule as such “The Captain and Quarter-Master to receive two Shares of a Prize; the Master, Boatswain, and Gunner, one Share and a half, and other Officers on and a Quarter.”

The most important similarity between the democratic systems of pirates and colonists was the right of franchise, or as stated in Bartholomew Robert’s Articles “Every Man has a Vote in Affairs of Moment.”

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160 Ibid., at 212.

on the welfare of the crew were generally reserved to the council (the crew), the highest authority on the pirate ship.”162 While it would take some time for the American colonies to grant the right to vote to all citizens, in the 19th Amendment, pirate vessels were ahead of their time by allowing every member of the crew, regardless of their nationality, the right to vote in the assembly. So disgusted were the pirate crews with the thought of nationalities that most announced themselves to be only from the sea feeling “it signified nothing what part of the World a man liv’d in, so he Liv’d well.”163

This assembly of pirates could most be compared to the establishment of an elected Congress. Since the pirate vessel was a much smaller environment everyone was, by default, a member of the pirate Congress known as the council. In this way, as the American Congress, all walks of life were to be represented so that everyone had a say. Nowhere was this more true than on a pirate vessel where everyone had a say and share in the system. Pirate crews also reserved for themselves the rights to choose which vessels to attack and what punishments should be doled out to those crewmembers who did not follow the agreed upon charter in much the same way Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution entitles Congress to declare war and punish crimes. “The highest authority on a pirate ship was the council to which were generally reserved decisions affecting the welfare of the crew and such matters as where the best prizes might be taken and the settling of dissensions.”164

162 Rediker, Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea, 263.
163 Linebaugh, Many-Headed Hydra, 165.
164 Black, Pirates of the West Indies, 14,15.
Such similarities between American Congress and Pirate Council do not end there. It is also the responsibility of Congress, in Article I, Section 8, to provide for a military and navy, much in the same way that pirate Captain John Phillips expected every man to “keep his Arms clean, fit for an Engagement.”\textsuperscript{165} Congress’ ability to provide for an armed forces functions much in the same way the Council was expected to keep their arms clean and in good condition for battle. To make such matters even more important “Lookouts on pirate ships were encouraged to keep their eyes skinned, for the articles usually provided that the man who first spied a sail that proved a prize earned, in addition to his share of the loot, the best pair of pistols on board.”\textsuperscript{166} After the fray the crewman would have stood at the main mast and taken part in the general auction of guns in an attempt to add to his repertoire of firearms. Since in this case the Council acted as the army they were responsible on their on account to make sure they were ready for conflict, or suffer the wrath of the crew’s judgment, or worse, being ill-prepared to repel unwanted boarders.

Also, in Article I, Section 3 the Constitution gives the Senate the right to bring against the other members of government impeachment hearings. While no written law was mentioned in the direct articles of the pirate crew, it was taken for granted that in times of misfortune or unease, the crew would vote to replace the captain, or split the crew so each could go their separate directions. Whether that meant making a troublesome man the governor of his own island, marooning, or simply replacing a captain who was not having the desired economic effect for the good of the crew, the

\textsuperscript{165} Defoe, \textit{General History}, 343.

\textsuperscript{166} Black, \textit{Pirates of the West Indies}, 57.
right was constantly there. For instance John Rackam became captain of a pirate flotilla when the Company was divided and the previous captain, Vane, was “turned out for refusing to board and fight the French Man of War.” Should the need arise all it would take for a change in political direction would be a majority vote. In some instances, if the fleet and crews were large enough, a complete split was made and the two parties went their separate ways, attempting to avoid the bloodshed of their fellow pirates. Such was the case of pirate Captain Howell Davis whose crew ended their Company with Davis’ “short speech: -- Heark ye, you Cocklyn and la Bouche, I find by strengthening you, I have put a Rod into your Hands to whip my self, but I am still able to deal with you both; but since we met in Love, let us part in Love, for I find, that three of a Trade can never agree.”

Furthermore, as Article I, Section 9 of the Constitution states “No Money shall be drawn from the Treasury, but in Consequence of Appropriations made by Law” in much the same way that “the distribution of plunder was regulated explicitly by the ship’s articles.” On the whole, most pirate ships functioned on the principle “no prey, no pay,” which meant that if no prizes were taken, than no man would receive a share. The loot that was captured would have been gathered into a common pool to be divided out when the ship was brought to port, or the Company was agreed upon disbanding.

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167 Defoe, General History, 148.
168 Defoe, General History, 175.
169 Rediker, Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea, 264.
170 Black, Pirates of the West Indies, 7.
“Included in the articles also was the typical disability clause providing compensation for injury received in action.”\textsuperscript{171}

The judicial branch in the Constitution can be compared to the pirate ship quartermaster. The quartermaster “was elected to represent and protect the interests of the crew, and in the institution of the council, the gathering that involved every man on the ship and always constituted its highest authority.”\textsuperscript{172} The quartermaster position was held similar to that of a judge, as described in Article III, Section 1 on the Constitution, holding their Offices during good Behaviour. The quartermaster was responsible for taking care of the well being of those on board and to hold in check the authority of the captain, while making judgment on felonious matters deemed too small to require the input of the Council. “If they disobey his Command, are quarrelsome and mutinous with one another, misuse Prisoners, plunder beyond his Order, and in particular, if they be negligent of their Arms, which he musters at Discretion, he punishes at his own Arbitrement, with drubbing or whipping, which no one else dare do without incurring the Lash from all the Ship’s Company.”\textsuperscript{173} Like the captain, the quartermaster was elected to his position and guaranteed a portion of the booty taken as accorded by the agreed upon charter. In instances where there were discrepancies in the division of booty, or arguments between shipmates, it was the quartermaster who stepped in and doled out punishment, though the crew did have to agree upon the action taken. Once again similar situations called forth similar systems of government.

\textsuperscript{171} Black, Pirates of the West Indies, 15.

\textsuperscript{172} Linebaugh, Many-Headed Hydra, 163.

\textsuperscript{173} Defoe, General History, 213
Constitutional Rights and Pirate Privileges

Similarities between the American Government and the Pirate Articles do not end in the area of organization, they also extend into the amendments. Just as the first amendment allows for the freedom of religion and speech, pirate ships usually allowed such freedoms among themselves, being allowed to speak their mind and band together for the common good. While the Constitutional Amendment is based on freedom of religion, pirates usually based their community feeling on a code of brotherhood meaning “French, Dutch, Spanish, and Anglo-American pirates usually cooperated peaceably…consistently refus[ing] to attack one another,” because of nationality.\textsuperscript{174} In short, pirates “are generous to their comrades: if a man has nothing, the others will come to his help.”\textsuperscript{175} Coincidentally the Fifth and Sixth Articles, offering the right to jury trial and the right to a speedy trial respectively, are similar to the way in which any discretion on board was put to the vote of the crew as jury as soon as it was discovered. While some punishments for breaking of the rules, such as stealing and desertion, were already established many were left to the scrutiny of the crew’s judgment. Such open jury system rights were acknowledged regardless of the size of discretion and occurred long before the American system was a glimmer in the Founding Father’s eyes.

The right of Congress to admit new states as guaranteed in Section III, Article IV of the Constitution is equal to the right of pirates to allow new members into the crew. If a new state were to join the United States it would be required to be put to vote in Congress and accepted by the majority, it stood in the pirate articles that new members

\textsuperscript{174} Rediker, \textit{Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea}, 276.

\textsuperscript{175} Exquemelin, \textit{Buccaneers of America}, 82.
would need to be voted on as well. The Articles of Captain John Evans decreed that “if at any Time we should meet another Maroner that Man that shall sign his Articles without the Consent of our Company, shall suffer such Punishment as the Captain and Company shall think fit.”\textsuperscript{176} In short, no man was allowed into the confederation unless voted upon, quite similar to the requirements of the Constitution.

Even the subsequent enactment of the Thirteenth Amendment, which prohibited slavery and involuntary servitude, was anticipated on numerous pirate vessels. In an attempt to try and dissuade disciplinary problems that could be created by taking men against their wills many crews opted to take “no Body against their Wills.”\textsuperscript{177} While some specialists (i.e. carpenters, gunners, navigators) were forced into piracy “the overwhelming majority of those who became pirates volunteered to join the outlaw ships when their vessels were captured.”\textsuperscript{178}

\textsuperscript{176} Defoe, \textit{General History}, 342.

\textsuperscript{177} Rediker, \textit{Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea}, 266.

\textsuperscript{178} Linebaugh, \textit{Many-Headed Hydra}, 160.
CHAPTER 5
ECONOMICS, PIRATES, AND PRIVATEERS

In the sixteenth century the focus of the European powers still was firmly on economic gains, therefore, the majority of European powers that settled in the New World did so for economic growth. With the establishment of metropoles in the Americas the raw materials (gold, cotton, timber, etc.) that the European colonies accumulated required constant shipments back to the home country for processing. Plunder was what pirates wanted and for many European sailors the “design of making [their] own fortune” was reason enough to go a pirating.179 Cumbersome treasure fleets were prime targets for those desperate and greedy men seeking their fortunes. While one goal of this paper has been to show that pirates were important to expanding and defending the empire, their economic aims (i.e. violently extorting goods and money) cannot be ignored. On the whole piracy’s main purpose was to obtain money and financially enrich the lives of all those who participated in the deed, but their moneymaking purpose also benefited European Empires. As Atlanticist John Appleby suggests “The imperial monopolies claimed by the Iberian monarchies forced those who followed in their footsteps to adopt armed and aggressive methods, encouraging the growth of English and French piracy and privateering in Europe and across the Atlantics.”180 In light of Appleby's argument it is important to understand the economic

179 Defoe, General History, 51.

goals of the major players in the Atlantic at this time, namely Spain, England, and France.

The following section will therefore outline the economic reasons behind and impacts of piracy. By first identifying the growth of the Spanish economy as an imperialistic threat to France and England, the sailor's role of privateer will be explained. France, the first to identify the economical benefits Spain was acquiring in the Americas, made her intentions clear toward Spain by attacking her Atlantic-going treasure fleets. The section will then show how England used her privateers, instead, to settle her first outposts and colonies in the New World. As both France and England began to reap the benefits of Spain's plate fleet and commenced establishing colonies the strength of both Empires increased. This section will then trace the increase in imperial strength that would eventually lead to the expansion of piracy in the Atlantic waters. As identified in previous sections, here too will be identified individual sailors who rebelled against the harsh treatments they were receiving in the service of their monarchies. These men would turn privateering to outright piracy and help expand the empires that Marcus Rediker suggests they were rebelling against.

**Destroying the Spanish Empire**

In a time when many of the European superpowers were constantly expanding and at war these American resources supported the ever-increasing costs of maintaining the empire. Spain commissioned massive, slow moving treasure ships, the backbone of her economy, to transport home the immense amounts of gold and silver accumulated in South America. As Spain expanded the empire into the Americas the discovery of gold,

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181 James D. Tracy and Kenneth R. Andrews outline this need for trade and economic expansion in their texts *The Rise of Merchant Empires* and *Trade, Plunder and Settlement* respectively.
silver, and other raw materials made her a wealthy nation, and enabled her to fund wars with England and France. Carla Phillips’ essay “Trade in the Iberian empires, 1450-1750,” explores the realm of both Mediterranean and Atlantic trade from the Iberian point of view. The author suggests that with the creation of Atlantic Empires the focus of economic gain shifted from a Mediterranean center to an Atlantic one. Phillips identifies the cause for this switch as the large amounts of gold and silver being brought to Spain from the Indies. As she explains "it has been suggested that 164,000 kilograms of gold were exported from the Indies to Spain in the century and a half before 1660...[and] it undoubtedly contributed to the European price rise during the sixteenth century." 182 This inflation in price of European goods can also be attributed to the large amounts of silver the Spanish crown received through the "royal fifth." The royal fifth was a tax levied by the Spanish crown on all gold and silver shipments collected by her vessels from 1504 on. As Phillips identifies "The single most valuable source of royal income in the late sixteenth century was the royal fifth from Tierra Firme, which made up about 60 percent of the royal share between 1555 and 1660." 183

For much of Spain’s early period in the Americas she was able to keep these new bullion supplies a secret. However, in 1523 French corsair Jean Fleury discovered the immense wealth that Spanish treasure galleons were bringing back from the Americas. Sailing off the coast of Cape St. Vincent near the southern shores of Portugal Fleury witnessed three slowly moving Spanish caravels, under the command of Captain Quinones, returning to Spain after their long journey from Mexico. Fleury and his crew


183 Ibid., at 84.
managed to capture two of the ships and were astounded by the fortune they discovered aboard them. The ship’s combined wealth contained several tons of Cortes’ plunder, a treasure that included “three huge cases of gold ingots; 500 pounds weight of gold dust in bags; Aztec pearls weighing 680 pounds; and emeralds, topazes, golden masks set with gems, Aztec rings and helmets, and feathered cloaks.”

Fleury’s employer, the Viscount of Dieppe, quickly brought the news of the rich prizes to the attention of the King of France, Francis I. Alerted to the vast amounts of treasure that his enemy was now bringing from the New World Francis I issued commissions to all sea captains who were able to capture and plunder the Spanish galleons, giving rise to some of the earliest French privateers.

Since Spain already had sources for income (her American colonies) her need to turn to piracy was not as great as it was for other European nations, but she suffered from piracy the most. As war among these countries became more frequent the ability to trade safely in the Mediterranean and Atlantic became harder, pirates responded to the trade declines of the seventeenth century through increased attacks on Spanish holdings. As Appleby notes “With increased competition for a smaller total trade and a reduced use of Spanish shipping lanes in the Atlantic and the Caribbean by the Indies fleets, the situation was ripe for illegal and often violent incursions into the empire.”

France commissioned privateers from her merchant fleets and used them to lead continuously disruptive strikes against the incoming treasure fleets of the Spanish navy.

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184 Cordingly, Under the Black Flag, 36.

185 This story is further explained by Cordingly, Ibid., 36-37.

The riches of America continued to flow into Spain and “between 1596 and 1600, Spain imported treasure from the New World worth 34,428,500 pesos,” or approximately “$774 million.” The commissions of Francis I would allow French privateers and buccaneers to be the lead attackers of Spanish ships between 1524 and 1564.

By 1552 Spain and France were officially at war again and the riches located in the Indies gave the Caribbean a significant role in the war. As Kenneth Andrews notes, this was "the first time that French squadrons, with royal warships among them, appeared in the Spanish Caribbean." It is here that in 1554 one of the most successful French privateers, Captain Francois le Clerc, accepted the King’s commission. Le Clerc was known as Jambe de Bois because of his wooden leg and was possibly a model for the famous stereotype that later authors and, eventually filmmakers, adopted in their depictions of pirates. Francis I commissioned Le Clerc to sail along the coasts of Hispaniola and Puerto Rico where he succeeded in capturing numerous Spanish merchant ships. Le Clerc struck his most destructive blow to Spanish colonialism in 1554 when he launched an attack on Santiago de Cuba, Spain’s largest colony on the island of Cuba. For thirty days Le Clerc’s complement of eight ships and three hundred men sacked, burned, and looted the town. When finished, “Le Clerc and his followers destroyed Santiago de Cuba so thoroughly that it never fully recovered.” As Kris E. Lane points out "The Spanish quickly discovered that their cheapest means of defense against such

187 Cordingly, Under the Black Flag, 35.
188 Lane, Pillaging the Empire, 1998.
189 Ibid., at 25.
depredations was to abandon vulnerable coastal settlements until the marauders had had their fill.\textsuperscript{190}

**British Merchants and Piracy**

The French were not the only enemies of Spanish colonialism. Elsewhere in Europe “envy of Spanish treasure was pushing England to the brink of war.”\textsuperscript{191} Spain held a firm grip on Caribbean trade routes, which produced a large profit for the Spanish empire, but were elusive for England. As English and Spanish ties became frayed Elizabeth I began secretly sanctioning privateers to attack the Spanish treasure galleons and South American colonies. While French privateering had been part of the colonizing efforts, British privateering began as an alternative to colonizing the Americas. Until a colony could become productive and help pay ever-growing war debts however, Britain could find little reason to waste time and money on colonizing a region so far from home. Instead, the British crown became more interested in giving permission to private investors to undertake the expensive prospects of colonization.\textsuperscript{192} These wealthy merchants, backed by butchers, innkeepers, shipwrights, farmers, and other small investors, accumulated the capital to fund colonization missions to the Americas. These private investors foresaw the wealth that could be gained by setting up small colonies and using them as bases from which to attack the Spanish settlements and gold fleets. The narratives of Arthur Barlowe, Ralphe Lane, and Thomas Hariot in *The Roanoke Voyages, 1584-1590*, make this point with respect to the creation of the Roanoke colony

\textsuperscript{190} Lane, *Pillaging the Empire*, 26.

\textsuperscript{191} Williams, *Sea Dogs*, 84.

\textsuperscript{192} Appleby suggests this in his essay "War, Politics, and Colonization."
in North Carolina. Private groups quickly turned more directly to privateering:

“Elizabethan [privateering] was controlled by a remarkable network of big syndicates, financed and directed by lords lieutenants and sheriffs and high naval officers and Government officials.”¹⁹³ Ultimately, of course, England would create permanent settlements in the New World, but before that time she used the resolve of private businessmen to gain the capital she needed to build her empire. What England could not afford legally through colonization she would obtain through the use of her privateers.

And there were plenty of men willing to under take the task. While men like Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Francis Drake, and John Hawkins found that colonization and honest trading could take years to turn a profit, they quickly realized that could become profitable in a single voyage. Not only were these privateering men bringing money into the empire, but they were also helping put in place the tools necessary for future expansion. Under the guise of colonization and with the crown's "secret" blessing these private investors "stimulated a shipbuilding boom which created the basis for an ocean-going merchant marine, manned and led by seamen whose knowledge of the Caribbean and eastern seaboard of North America was unrivalled."¹⁹⁴

Like many historians, Lynne Withey brushes upon the impact privateering and piracy had on empire building, noting how in the mid sixteenth century England commissioned Commodore George Anson to sail up the western coast of South America.¹⁹⁵ Though the main goal of Anson's voyage was to discover future ports that

¹⁹³ Pringle, Jolly Roger, 27.

¹⁹⁴ Appleby, "War, Politics, and Colonization," 68.

¹⁹⁵ Other historians include Neville Williams, David Cordingly, and Kris E. Lane.
could be colonized for trade bases in the Pacific he was also searching for Spanish colonies to raid. His entire trip was a disaster. Two of his original eight ships had to return to England prematurely and a third wrecked off the coast of Patagonia. Poor provisions led to scurvy and the loss of two-thirds of Anson's remaining crew. Demoralized and weakened, the trip could have become an expeditionary nightmare, but in a single piratical attack he captured a Manila Galleon en route to Spain. The captured treasure amounted to over one million gold coins and thirty-five thousand ounces of silver, worth over four hundred thousand pounds. As Withey suggests "Anson's prize made a substantial contribution to reducing England's war debt, while conjuring up romantic images of pirate escapades."\textsuperscript{196} Though the amount of money Anson recovered did not pay off the whole of England's debts it still showed that privateering was more rewarding than exploration and colonization. It was the lust for that Spanish treasure that brought men like Sir Francis Drake and Henry Morgan to the Americas. In March of 1579, Drake managed to capture the Spanish treasure galleon \textit{Nuestra Senora de la Concepcion}, also known as the,\textit{Cacafuego}, due to its massive size and large number of guns. The galleon turned out to be the richest haul of Drake’s career containing “a great quantity of jewels and precious stones, 13 chests of royals of plate, 80 lb of gold [and] 26 tons of uncoined silver.”\textsuperscript{197} It took Drake and his crew six days to unload the treasure that would be valued at approximately fifteen million pounds, or approximately twenty-seven million dollars.


\textsuperscript{197} Williams, \textit{Sea Dogs}, 130.
The Spanish authorities were infuriated by the loss, so Drake chose to make his way across the Pacific and back to England instead of going back the way he came and into Spanish patrols. In September 1580, Drake arrived back in Plymouth as the first captain to survive the circumnavigation of the globe in only the second ship to have ever done so. While England looked upon him as a privateering hero of the country, knighting him in 1581, Spain viewed him as a ravenous pirate and demanded compensation for the huge loss in profit. Making matters worse for Spain "the Spanish government did not know how much booty was involved."\(^{198}\) Trying to keep this information secret they decided not to take an inventory of Drake's haul leading to questions of just how much Drake did capture. According to calculations the total value of plunder that Drake managed to obtain during the voyage would today be valued at approximately £68 million, or approximately $98 million. "But for this reserve of chested treasure in the Tower, [Elizabeth’s] subjects would have had to have borne a far more pinching rate of direct taxation throughout the long naval war with Spain that dominated the last eighteen years of her reign."\(^ {199}\)

As Drake continued his raids on Spanish holdings in the Americas their impact on the Spanish economy kept growing. As Drake biographer Harry Kelsey explains, Drake's plundering of the West Indies so decimated the colonies that they needed to be completely rebuilt. Kelsey writes, "Funds that King Philip badly needed to carry on his war in the Low Countries had now to be diverted to America," an embarrassment that

\(^{198}\) Kelsey, Sir Francis Drake, 214.

\(^{199}\) Williams, Sea Dogs, 145.
Philip would not soon forget.\textsuperscript{200} Drake's further raids into the West Indies and Cadiz not only served the purpose to strengthen England at the expense of Spain, but also gave Drake much needed experience with Spanish tactics. He would later use this information and experience as a Vice Admiral to defeat the Spanish Armada in 1588. For seamen like Drake piracy and privateering offered not only the riches of plunder, but the wealth of information in nautical experience they would later use to fend off attacks on England.

While Drake became famous for his maritime attacks, Henry Morgan achieved great historical notice for the attacks he led on Porto Bello and Panama. In 1667 the governor of Jamaica, Thomas Modyford, informed him that Spanish troops had been massing for an invasion of the island. Modyford persuaded Morgan to “draw together the English privateers and take prisoners of the Spanish nation, whereby you may gain information of that enemy.”\textsuperscript{201} This would not be the last time that pirates would be used in the role of scouting party. The crowd of privateers that Morgan assembled included ten ships and five hundred men. Morgan was given a commission from the governor to attack any and all Spanish vessels in an attempt to disrupt trade and to find out information on troop movements.

Morgan’s attacks plagued Spanish possessions in the Americas and created “enormous [Spanish] losses in terms of ships, buildings, mules, merchandise, fortifications, guns, labor, and so on.”\textsuperscript{202} Morgan’s raid caused the complete relocation of the colony of Panama to a site four miles from its original location. The attacks on

\textsuperscript{200} Kelsey, \textit{Sir Francis Drake}, 279.

\textsuperscript{201} Konstam, \textit{History of Pirates}, 78.

\textsuperscript{202} Lane, \textit{Pillaging the Empire}, 122.
Spanish colonies also forced further Spanish recognition of English territories in the Caribbean. Spain hoped by recognizing British colonial possession an agreement could be reached to force the cessation of British support for privateers. These piratical attacks left an indelible mark on the Atlantic world and helped fuel political dialogue between the two countries. Further imperialistic fires were fueled by the writings of Alexander Exquemelin whose book “is so packed with detail about the live and customs of the buccaneers that it is not surprising it proved popular…and has provided the basis for all serious histories of the buccaneers.”203 With its informative description of geography, flora, and fauna the text of Exquemelin helped influence future British investment in trips of colonization and open up the Atlantic to British merchants.

Appleby discusses this economic influence of piracy on European nations, explaining how the gains made by privateers and private investors were based on a get rich quick scheme that finally settled into a long-term colonial plan. Such a finding would suggest that privateering began as a private venture, became backed by the crown, evolved into a money making scheme, and then led to the success of royal colonies like Port Royal and Tortuga. As the new colonies in the Americas became profitable and began expanding the need for uninterrupted trade became more useful. When the European conflicts ended, as Rediker and other historians suggest, privateers turned to piracy. These acts of piracy began interrupting legal merchant trade and warranted the suppression of piracy.

Historian Niels Steensgaard explains how this Atlantic trade not only built up the economies of the British, but how a pattern of colonial growth can be determined by this

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203 Cordingly, Under the Black Flag, 40.
expansion of trade. By the 1660s "the growing importance of Asian and American commodities, already account[ed] for more than 24 percent of London's imports." Steensgaard separates the patterns of trade fluctuation into four categories: "The law of unpredictability of success, The law of cost-reducing innovations, The law of saturation, and The law of geographical transfer." With these four divisions the author is able to show how Atlantic trade not only created an economic boom for the Dutch and British, but how the pattern for this growth is easily discovered and explained.

As Atlantic trade grew, Steensgaard states that certain goods, such as tobacco, coffee, tea, etc., surprisingly took off to become huge imports that increased the economies of those European nations. All of these goods required colonial settlements or contact with an outside country for production. The land used for these early plantations was found in Port Royal and other colonies in the Caribbean which were evacuated of a pirate presence. Coastland used on the western half of North America for these plantations were initially explored and settled by private merchantmen who set up bases of operation for privateering and scouting.

And, Steensgaard also explains these goods created markets. These new Atlantic-colonial goods allowed countries, particularly the Netherlands and Portugal, to take advantage of climates or locations best suited for the manufacturing of certain products, locations scouted out by long time privateers like Francis Drake, Alexander Exquemelin, and William Dampier. This aspect of the Atlantic trade tied into the slave trade. As

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205 Ibid., at 152.
Philips notes, early Iberian-African economic gains hinged mainly on the trade that turned slaves into gold. With the discovery of gold in Brazil, Spanish and Portuguese trade necessities reversed, requiring the importation of slaves to obtain both gold and diamonds. Phillips’ argues that the cross-oceanic switch of trade location took power away from landlocked European countries and placed those European powers with nautical superiority in the driver’s seat of economic and political negotiations. With the Iberian discovery of vast amounts of further natural resources in the New World, Phillips suggests that European powers no longer required one another for importation of goods, but instead relied on the imports from their own Atlantic colonies. The switched focus to internal trade helped build the political structures required to communicate between metropole and colony. While not only having been responsible for introducing slaves in large numbers to the Americas, Phillips also states that Iberian-Atlantic trade led to an influx of new bullion supplies. These new precious metals, the author explains, deflated some European markets, making merchant trade profitable for the seller since more people were able to afford imported goods. As Phillips puts it “Trade to and from the Iberian empires served as a conduit for European agricultural and manufactured goods and American treasure, both inside and outside official channels.”

Few historians ever address in detail how important piracy's impact was on colonial expansion. For most historians:

There simply is no question that piracy was a legitimate practice in the early European state system. Pirates brought revenue to the sovereign, public officials, and private investors. They weakened enemies by attacking their shipping and settlements. They supplied European markets

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206 Phillips, "Trade in the Iberian Empire," 100.
with scarce goods at affordable prices. They broke competing states’ trade monopolies.\textsuperscript{207}

This does very little to handle just how much of an impact pirates had on expansion. More importantly, even fewer historians identify Europe's sudden stop in using pirates to expand their empires.

**Europe Retreats From Piracy**

Privateering would be recognized by the private men who carried out the trade as a profitable get-rich-quick scheme. As the gains of privateering became greater the crowns of many European nations began issuing more letters of marque. More importantly, as the profit grew the crowns of European nations were willing to openly support acts of piracy, going so far as having Queen Elizabeth help fund Sir Francis Drake's voyages. As Rediker points out however "piracy had long served the needs of the state and the merchant community. But there was a long-term tendency for the control of piracy to devolve from the top of society to the bottom."\textsuperscript{208} Rediker would point out that it was this very act of devolution from top ranking society to bottom ranking society-controlling piracy that made pirating unattractive to European governments. As lower class citizens began taking over piracy and, more importantly, gaining wealth by interrupting upper-class merchants, the need for piracy's extinction became more pressing. Rediker suggests that when the economic explosion for new Atlantic goods occurred the new innovations in sailing and warfare sailors helped to create were used against them adding to the complete disregard of the men who helped expand European Empires. As new American/Atlantic products became readily available in Europe prices

\textsuperscript{207} Thomson, *Mercenaries, Pirates*, 107-108.

\textsuperscript{208} Marcus Rediker, *Villains of All Nations*, 62.
could be fixed to allow a constant income into the European homeland. This new source of legal income meant that privateering and piracy were no longer as affordable, nor as desirable in European Empires. As Rediker states "Pirates now had to be exterminated for the new trade to flourish."209

Here again lies another economic impact of piracy, as Rediker points out "there was a zero growth in English shipping from 1715 to 1728," a result the author attributes to pirate activity.210 But Rediker does not explain this point completely, since he is concerned with the causes of why men became pirates. Although Rediker does not completely ignore the impact piracy had on the economic world, he simply moves on without focusing on just how impressive a feat this was.

In the end however, piracy was viewed by European powers as an archaic system of extortion that was no longer required. "With the revival of trade, piracy became a nuisance even to those powers that had previously given the pirates tacit support."211 For most European powers the use of piracy and privateering had passed its prime and it was time for the men who had protected the empires of Europe to be put out to sea. As Marcus Rediker writes:

when seamen—as pirates—organized a social world apart from the dictates of mercantile and imperial authority and used it to attack merchants’ property (as they had begun to do in the 1690s), then those who controlled the state resorted to massive violence, both military (the navy) and penal (the Gallows), to eradicate piracy.212

209 Rediker, Villains of All Nations, 144.

210 Ibid., at 35.


212 Rediker, Villains of all Nations, 62.
With the success of Drake’s and other privateer’s voyages backers began expecting large returns on their investments into future expeditions. “Buccaneering benefited the upper classes of England, France, and the Netherlands in their New World campaigns against their common enemy, Spain,” and numerous investors were ready to commission and outfit vessels with the hopes of bringing back as rich a haul as Drake had managed to obtain. For many of the inexperienced and poorly organized ventures the dreams of an easy strike against a Spanish treasure galleon and a quickly made fortune were never to come to fruition. Even more unfortunate pirates removed “the threat of Spain so effectively, the old filibusters had worked themselves out of a job.” In other words, with the loss of Spain as a credible threat many nations who used privateers turned against them and hunted them down for a quick drop at the end of a short rope, turning their backs on the very men who had helped them out.

Once again the pirate would become the center of political intrigue. Appleby illustrates how advances in nautical technology, storage, colonization, and farming all flourished and helped further the expansion of the imperial powers as they searched for economic gains. In fact, the economic losses that Spain was suffering from privateering attacks would eventually bring her to the bargaining table for peace. Spain agreed to recognize British claims to Jamaica in 1667 with the promise of cessation of British privateering practices. The Act for the More Effectual Suppression of Piracy in 1687 and the Treaty of Ryswick in 1697 also engrained the pirate in the annals of Atlantic history. Here too the economic impact of pirates can be seen in the opening statement of the Act:

214 Black, Pirates of the West Indies, 40.
Whereas frequent robberies and piracies have been, and are daily committed by great numbers of pirates and privateers as well on the seas as on the land of and in America, which hath occasioned a great prejudice and obstruction to the trade and commerce as well of our subjects, as of the subjects of our allies, and hath given a great scandal and disturbance to our government in those parts.215

Finally creating a profit through honest trade and no longer seeking war with Spain King James was forced to openly declare an end to privateering and the abolishment of royal support. Seeking to heal the black eye of Jamaica's governors, who had openly supported privateers in the King's name, the King recalled the old governor and appointed Sir Robert Holmes as commander of a squadron of ships "for suppressing of the said pirates and privateers."216

The Treaty Of Ryswick achieved the same ends, but ironically would be printed in both Dutch and French before finally being published in English to clear up confusion over the Treaty's purpose.217 The Treaty is filled with numerous demands for the rescinding of all letters of marque and the cessation of all commissions. Article III of the Treaty goes as far as demanding that the cost of any vessels taken as prizes be "accounted for, and whatever shall be so taken, shall be restored, with a compensation made for all damages that may arise thereby."218 More than half of the demands made in the document describe the


216 A Proclamation for the More Effectual Reducing and Suppressing of Pirates and Privateers in America, (1687).

217 Proof of this can be found in the preface to the Treaty of Commerce, Navigation, and Marine Affairs, Concluded and Agreed on at Reswick, (1697).

218 A Proclamation for the More Effectual Reducing and Suppressing of Pirates and Privateers in America, (1687).
need to destroy piracy, privateering, or prize courts. The document's main goal would then appear to make peace between rival nations at the expense of Britain's privateering fleet. Both the Treaty and the Act were passed in hopes of suppressing piracy against the East India Company who politically lobbied for an end to colonial aided privateering. Again pirates had affected the Atlantic system. Creating so much havoc on the economic system of Atlantic and European trade pirates forced an unsteady, but welcomed peace, which Europeans hoped would bring economic gain. Desiring profitable and unhindered trade European powers were willing to sit at the table in Ryswick and create a treaty of peace with the goal of destroying piracy.

One of the most famous privateers who was given a letter of marque and arrested for his disruptive actions is Captain William Kidd. Kidd was actually granted permission to go pirating, but after disrupting the trade of the East India Company he was deemed unwarranted. The Lords of Trade issued letters for "the apprehension of 'the obnoxious pirate Kidd'."^{219} The common goal of eliminating piracy in an attempt to make a profit once again shows how pirates remotely caused a peace among European nations. With complaints from the Merchants of London trading to the East Indies that pirate Henry Avery was causing "great damage to the merchants of England" it is clear to see that the economic impact of piracy was in full swing.^{220} While pirates left their mark on the political and

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^{220} *By the Lords Justices of England, A Proclamation*. (1696).
economic world of the Atlantic the settlements that were created in turn, left their mark on piracy.

Appleby further implies that it is in piracy that pirates gave their last benefit to European nations. In times of peace between European powers the privateering ventures, though still active as pirates, also searched for ports that could be used to resupply and repair ships making the long and dangerous Atlantic voyage. As historian N. A. M Rodger explains "the English…were interested in colonies of their own, it was chiefly as bases for naval operations." As privateers and pirates spread throughout the Caribbean they searched for locals to careen and resupply. Nicholas D'Oyley, governor of Jamaica, saw this pirate activity as a means to economic gain. D'Oyley states:

counted on gaining naval protection and some revenue from [the buccaneers] while [the buccaneers] acquired a superlative harbour, which was increasingly well defended, a good market for their loot, and better facilities both for repairing their ships and for stocking them for future voyages.

As time progressed the buccaneers and privateers of the Caribbean became even more significant to the economy of Port Royal. When buccaneers arrived they sold their wares to merchants at low prices and quickly used that money to purchase drink and pleasure throughout the colony. This expenditure of the buccaneers simply pumped the money back into the local economy. The merchants then uses the pirates' gold and silver "sends them to his representative in the metropolis, has them sold at a considerable profit, and is

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thus enabled both to buy more goods for sale in Port Royal, and to finance the equipment of plantations in the Jamaican hinterland."

For those buccaneers and pirates who made good on their voyages, the British colony of Port Royal, Jamaica offered “a ready market for their Spanish spoils.” It was in Port Royal and other such pirate havens throughout the Caribbean that large amounts of money would trickle through into the British Empire. It was nothing for pirates to “spend two or three thousand pieces-of-eight in a day – and next day not have a shirt to their backs.” When all the money was spent pirates put to sea again to continue their roving ways. The merchant vessels that peddled their wares throughout Tortuga, another pirate port, and Port Royal accepted these large amounts of money. “The hundred or so small ships which visited the island each year, service[ed] the needs of the planters and, of course, satisfying the desires of the privateers whose booty provided the major returns to pay for the imported goods.” With a regular market these pirate havens became big business and also helped in the protection and growth of royal colonies. Aid to the pirate port of Tortuga, in the form of ports to sell wares, also strengthened the British economy since a well defended port city made for an excellent spot to sell plunder. As Exquemelin reports "many [buccaneers] could not keep their money three days before it was gambled away…the tavern-keepers got part of [the buccaneers'] money and the whores took the rest."

223 Pawson & David, Port Royal Jamaica, 38.
224 Black, Pirates of the West Indies, 9.
225 Exquemelin, Buccaneers of the America, 82.
226 Earle, Sack of Panama, 105.
227 Exquemelin, Buccaneers of America, 104.
While pirate voyages not only managed to bring back gold to be spent in the empire, "English privateers seized a large number of prizes, the annual value of which amounted at least to £200,000," many of the raids and exploits were copied down by observers on board the ship and brought back to be published throughout Europe.\(^{228}\)

These exploits, such as Daniel Defoe’s, “A General History of the Pyrates,” offered high sales in European bookstores. Others, such as William Dampier’s, “A New Voyage Round the World,” is “a record of the exploits of some particularly enterprising buccaneers, [and is] also [known] for its wonderful descriptions of new lands, native peoples, and strange birds and animals.”\(^{229}\) Numerous explorers and navigators who would travel the waters of Dampier’s journey consulted his work. One admiral, James Burney who sailed with Captain Cook “wrote of Dampier: It is not easy to name another voyager or traveler who has given more useful information to the world; to whom the merchant and mariner are so much indebted; or who has communicated his information in a more unembarrassed and intelligible manner.”\(^{230}\)

As time marched on since pirates, who took little care in choosing a target, began attacking British ships as well. Such interruptions to trade began hurting Britain's capitalist agenda. As Rediker points out “the (British) government acted on complaints about the pirate rendezvous in the Bahama Islands, sending Woodes Rogers to destroy it and put a proper English government in its place.”\(^{231}\) Therefore, when piracy had lost its

\(^{228}\) Appleby, "War, Politics," 67.

\(^{229}\) Cordingly, Under the Black Flag, 84.

\(^{230}\) Cordingly, Under the Black Flag, 85.

\(^{231}\) Rediker, Villains of all Nations, 136.
luster with European powers in the 1700’s, these rousing towns became British colonies that needed little financial improvement for colonists to move in.

**Piracy and the American Colonies**

During the Golden Age of Piracy, approximately 1690 to 1730, an important point to make is who kept piracy going in America. While piracy was losing its usefulness on the continent of Europe a new theatre of importance was created by the very colonists who pirates had helped fashion. The following will attempt to show that the very colonists who would cry out for Revolution would be the very same who would keep piracy afloat after its Golden Years had past.

In the years leading up the American Revolution the Government of Britain had outlawed the importation of non-British products and forced a hefty taxation on all goods in general. This increase in economic tension helped foster the turn to piracy for importation that the American colonies became reliant on. With Asian cargoes of precious items being the target of some pirate vessels many American ports were anxious to make friends with pirates. In fact "Many of the great fortunes of colonial families in those places were founded upon pirate loot purchases as cheaply as possible."

Had there been no need for such people it is possible that Britain could have wiped piracy from existence in one fell swoop, but their attempt to control the colonists of America allowed the embers of piracy to smolder and return to a raging fire when limitations on importation were passed. Colonists depended on the very people they would later turn on for the cheap importation of their smuggled teas, clothes, spices, and even slaves for quite some time during the pre-Revolutionary era. Men such as Edward Teach, Dixey Bull,

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and Samuel Bellamy who were touted in their respected ports of call for their good deeds were later denounced when their usefulness passed its calling. Even the pirates realized they had been abandoned by their past business partners. Before his hanging Captain John Quelch said "I desire to be informed for what I am here, I am condemned only upon circumstances." He would later go on to warn future pirates saying "they should also take care how they brought money into New-England, to be hanged for it." These men and more helped bring the colonies the very life saving medicines and ammunitions they needed to fight off starvation and plague were given the gracious thanks of a quick drop from a short rope for being undesirables in the community.

As men like the Earl of Bellomont and other enforcers closed down American ports leaving no cheap goods and angering Americans these very same colonists turned to the pirate to help bring about some comfort of economic tidings. Whether it is in the form of importing, or in some cases exporting goods to other places. Pirates also turned their attentions to exporting American goods to other areas in order to obtain higher prices with lower tariffs. While many of these men would be called smugglers, make no misinterpretation of their trade, they were pirates for what Rediker would suggest as the right of striking back against mercantilism and the very British they would later fight against in the war as American privateers. When these actions became damaging to the local trade however, American colonies began denouncing pirate activity. As Judge Nicholas Trott of the South Carolina Court of Admiralty stated "the Law of Nations

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233 John Quelch was a New England pirate who attacked Portuguese ships. Portugal and England were allies at the time making Quelch's act piratical. What makes the case more intriguing is that the money recovered from his ship was paid out to the New England governor and men who helped in the trial and execution. The rest was sent back to England for the treasury. None of the money was returned to Portugal even though Quelch's actions were deemed piracy. "The Dying Speech of Captain Quelch, June 30, 1704," Taken from George Dow and John Edmond, The Pirates of the New England Coast: 1630-1730. (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1996), 377-378.
never granted to [pirates] a power to change the Right of Property."\textsuperscript{234} Such an interesting statement from a nation that granted privateering commissions in order to change the right of property.

As the impact of piracy on trade became clear the British government tried to step in. Piracy was now viewed as a crime "against the Law of Nations, destructive to commerce: and therefore particularly branded by our English Laws."\textsuperscript{235} The state began passing laws that anyone who "'truck[ed], barter[ed], exchange[d]' with pirates, furnished them with stores, or even consulted with them might be punished with death."\textsuperscript{236} Pirating would no longer be tolerated in the Atlantic at those people who had made their fortunes by buying and selling pirate wares were being informed of that. Fearing this some pirates (like Henry Morgan who became governor of Port Royal for a while) became respectable members of society. It would seem that many of the privateers and pirates would not only dance in the wind to end their days, but would also turn to become that which they most hated, merchants and plantation owners.

Piracy also created a boom in colonial economies. The passing of the Navigation Act in 1647 led to an outpouring of smugglers and pirates. These men were more than willing to steal goods from European powers and bring them to the American colonies where they could undersell the competition. Colonies saw pirates as the cheaper choice and welcomed their goods into the harbor. Many New England ports not only welcomed pirates, but also commissioned privateers. "In Rhode Island, the president and four

\textsuperscript{234} Rediker, Villains of All Nations, 128.


\textsuperscript{236} Rediker, Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea, 283.
assistants granted these commissions with the condition that the colony was to share in any captures.\footnote{237} This cheaper source of materials became a highly profitable venture for many coastal colonies and created a system of economic trade. Even more ironic, the large number of incoming slaves and immigrants imported to work the fields created a ready supply of volunteer pirates who would help further expand the American colonies.

Whether attacking Spanish ships, expanding European colonies in the Atlantic, or helping New World colonies thrive with their wares, pirates played a significant, yet understated role in the creation of an Atlantic world. Though many of their attacks were not for gold, but goods, these goods were sold throughout the Americas and helped struggling settlements and economies grow into the major ports and cities (Port Royal and Charleston to name two) necessary to establish and empire half way around the world. The economic impact of pirates, while usually focused on from a 'buried treasure' point of view, few studies truly do justice to just how much influence and effect pirate attacks had on establishing European powers and creating an early form of a capitalist society that sailed the open seas.

It was during the Golden Age of Piracy that many of the legendary privateers and pirates began the adventures that would solidify their positions in future generations. While famous novels and films portray pirates as plundering for gold and jewels the reality is that most pirates actually plundered in the form of sugar, rum, and even human cargo. For sixteenth-century privateers and pirates the Spanish treasure galleon, heavily guarded but packed with the treasures of the new world, became the ultimate trophy. “Spain’s weakening power after long years of international war and continuing civil war in the Netherlands allowed the French and the English to exploit the inroads their privateers had made.”238 While early forays against Spanish treasure galleons proved successful as the seventeenth century continued fewer and fewer vessels were being loaded to make the trip across the Atlantic and those that did make the journey did so with an escort of numerous gunships and manowars. The new target of choice for the upcoming pirates became merchant vessels. These targets would be the undoing of the pirate world. As war turned to peace and the emergence of new powers in the Americas became cemented the pirate lifestyle became too volatile. Nations that had used pirates to create their American colonies no longer saw pirate and privateering fleets as helpful, but rather as pests that needed to be removed.

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In the infant stages of piracy the very acts of nations to eliminate the trade were the very same acts that helped lead to its explosion of popularity. In the Spanish Caribbean the intense prejudice with which the Spanish attempted to eliminate the buccaneering threat of Hispaniola led to the tremendous hatred that would fuel future buccaneering voyages. The European attempts to control trading in the colonies of their American territories opened the door for illegal trading and the import of pirated goods from European merchant vessels. Furthermore “impressment, harsh discipline, poor provisions and health, long confinement aboard ship, and wage arrears had caused thousands of sailors to turn pirate.” With the atrocious treatment of regular seamen and the low pay of Jack Tar he was more apt to put up less of a fight and even desert to piracy to make more money. British attempts to pardon pirates “in 1717 and 1718 failed to rid the sea of robbers,” usually backfiring as pirates returned to their old ways when respectability became too boring in the colonies.

Empires were created and destroyed with the help of these often-unscrupulous men and women who sailed the open seas looking for plunder and adventure. Whether it was for Britain, France, Spain, or any number of the world’s countries piracy has always played a valuable part in the solidifying of powers and the obtaining of fortunes. For Armitage, the role of the pirate would have significantly affected the interactions among countries. Whether by forcing treaties, disrupting rival empires, or simply harassment, pirates played an integral part in England and Frances dealings with Spain. “Often operating at the boundaries of legitimacy, [pirates and privateers] absorbed the risks that

239 Linebaugh, Many-Headed Hydra, 160-161.

240 Rediker, Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea, 283.
governments could not afford directly, but which needed to be taken if France, and England were to establish claims to the potential wealth that overseas ventures promised.\textsuperscript{241} While many of the most famous pirates of the “Golden Age of Piracy” plundered for food, water, merchandise, tools, and other ship necessities, the pirates and privateers of empires amassed vast quantities of riches from enemy nations.

Pirates, like Sir Francis Drake, were responsible for mapping and exploring the western coast of the Americas and circumnavigating the globe. Men like Henry Morgan destroyed Spanish settlements and brought back huge sums of money that would help further expand the empire. Pirate havens such as Port Royal existed as huge mercantile centers and became new colonial havens of trade after the pirate threat had been removed. With the extinction of the pirate and buccaneer threats new trading companies would form throughout the British Empire in such areas as the Baltic, the Levant, and the East Indies and “In each of them the Queen had a stake, thanks to her proceeds from privateering.”\textsuperscript{242} While pirates and privateers may not have received the glory, overall this brave group of plunderers set out with investors and country behind them to protect and obtain the wealth that would help enlarge the empire.

As piracy grew so too did the systems of government they used to control their own way of life. As Marcus Rediker suggests in his text, \textit{Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea}, the act of piracy was a political statement in itself. Piracy was the merchant sailor’s attempt to lash out at the governments which tended to side with merchant captains in cases of physical abuse. Since the horrible working and health

\textsuperscript{241} Armitage, \textit{The British Atlantic World}, 181.

\textsuperscript{242} Williams, \textit{Sea Dogs}, 239.
conditions on board a merchant/naval vessel were not addressed by the political system of their day, Rediker would suggest that piracy was Jack Tar’s political protest against the world. “This condition was brought about by a period of peace and aggravated by an imperfectly developed maritime commerce that could not be quickly increased in order to find occupation for idle men.”

Pirate and privateering activity also made it possible for many who retired from the business rich to turn to an honest life of planting, although not all students of that class note its connection to piracy. Thus Christopher Brown explores the role of slavery in the Atlantic world in his study, and explains how the creation of a planter class, as a result of slavery, created a new consciousness in the Atlantic world that felt superior to one class of citizens, slaves, and fought the role of inferior with another, monarchy. While Brown clarifies that “the political history of slavery might be told as the rise and fall of the British Atlantic planter class, as the history of their efforts to establish, command, and sustain the institution of human bondage through a series of internal and external challenges,” in the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries, he does little to consider either the piratical background of the early planters or the way all planters benefited from piracy. Brown would have the reader understand that the extension of slavery to the New World influenced the culture, economics, and political systems that came into contact with them. For the author the most important contact is the creation of a political and social class system that evolved around slavery. It is even more probable

243 Dow and Edmonds, Pirates of the New England Coast, 5.

to suggest that the contact pirates had with their fences on the Atlantic coast of America helped establish their roles as planters when they retired.

While exploring the wealth of a rich upper class of planters (some of whom were retired privateers and pirates) that had not existed prior to American colonization, slavery also created an economic industrial boom in textiles and other mercantile goods. With the establishment of a cheap source of replenishable labor the new planter society found that they their economic stature made them able to influence the political situations of their respective governments. It would be many of these planters who would take the role of influence once held by pirates and their wares. Brown writes that political system of Old World Europe that had been closed to all but the nobility suddenly opened up to the political interests of the planter society. Even more interesting, Brown fails to mention the previous occupations of some of these lower class merchants/privateers. As this planter class grew, so did their geographical and political influence throughout the British Empire.

This new Atlantic political system, described by the author, begins to crumble when abolitionist views start to condemn slavery, leading to the planter class feeling betrayed (much like privateers) by the government they helped build and which profited through the planter society’s toils. Brown suggests "the planters were the men in between, at once the elite in the colonies where they lived and the subjects of an imperial state over which they had little control." Brown also clarifies how the Atlantic slave system easily created a threat from

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below in the form of slave insurrections, which had to be brutally subdued, much like piracy, adding further fuel to abolitionist’s arguments. As Brown explains, the Atlantic world was heavily built on the backs of slaves and the new class-consciousness created by the burgeoning aristocracy led to political upheaval throughout Europe and the Americas. As this paper has already shown those same backs once had been privateers, in some planters cases, or would become pirates, in the case of some African slaves.

Other cases of piracy impacting empire abound. Janice E. Thomson would appear to agree with Rediker while debunking Hollywood’s myth of piracy solely for profit. In her text, Mercenaries, Pirates, & Sovereigns, the author unintentionally argues for piracy’s political impact when she suggests “Piracy was not simply or always an economic crime—the theft of private property. It was also a political act—a protest against the obvious use of state institutions to defend property and discipline labor.”

Rediker’s argument has been very important to opening up this new literature on piracy. By focusing on the shipboard politics of a pirate vessel Rediker has been able to show just how far ahead of their political time pirates were. Yet, the author tends to lead his argument down the side of Marxist doctrine and establishes a group of sailors who were consciously throwing off the yoke of oppression.

Though it is true that pirates created their own set of rules to govern ship-life the facts still remain that piracy usually was for financial gains. Also, in light of the present argument, pirates often worked for the good of the empire, acting as the beachhead in the fight against other European powers. So, while Rediker takes into account the rise of people from below to begin a conscious rebellion against the political state, he fails to

246 Thomson, Mercenaries, Pirates, and Sovereigns, 46.
give necessary credit to those who fought for the state. Men like Francis Drake and
Henry Morgan led privateering expeditions to expand the empire’s reach and disrupt
Spanish colonization efforts. Still though, his work has done much to open up the field of
piracy.

Without these people from below, the Spanish harassment in the Caribbean by
England and France may not have overcome the treasure hoarding and imperially
encroaching powers of Spain. Had privateering attacks not become a thorn in Spain’s
side they may never have recognized English claims in the Caribbean. Had pirate attacks
not blown the cover of the Spanish treasure fleet Spain may have retained the financial
ability to continue its imperial dominance over other European nations. As the Pirate
King states, in the widely know Gilbert and Sullivan play, *The Pirates of Penzance (or,
The Slave of Duty)*, “many a king on a first-class throne, If he wants to call his crown his
own, Must manage somehow to get through More dirty work than ever I do.” Pirate
atrocities were no more horrendous then some of the stories of plotting and murder that
came out of the royal court. Both on land and sea the pirate legacy was a force to be
reckoned with and became highly romanticized in numerous European courts and
countries, as well as throughout the world. It is important to understand that the Pirate
also helped make empire a reality. Even with the truth behind the legends of atrocities
and plunderings associated with pirates, people’s hearts are still struck with a mixture of
fear and excitement at the sound of the canons blasting and the site of the hoisting of the
Jolly Roger.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jason Acosta graduated from the University of Florida in 2001 with a Bachelor of Arts in history. He also received a minor in education. In August 2003, he began a degree program at the University of Florida, pursuing a Master of Arts in American history.

While he was seeking his master's he also attained the position of middle school teacher of American history at St. Patrick Interparish School. For the last two years he has pursued his career as a seventh and eighth grade teacher, becoming the Student Government Advisor and performing as an adjunct professor of mathematics for the College Achievement Program at Santa Fe Community College during the summer sessions.

While he has achieved no major honor he sees the ability to attain his goal of writing his thesis, graduation, and maintaining his full time teaching job for the last two and a half years as his award. He will graduate with his master's in December 2005.