

2020

## Piratical Actors: Origins, Motives, and Political Sentiments, c.1716-1726

Corey Griffis

Western Washington University, [Corey.Griffis@wwu.edu](mailto:Corey.Griffis@wwu.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cedar.wwu.edu/orwww>



Part of the [History Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Griffis, Corey (2020) "Piratical Actors: Origins, Motives, and Political Sentiments, c.1716-1726," *Occam's Razor*. Vol. 10 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://cedar.wwu.edu/orwww/vol10/iss1/6>

This Research Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Western Student Publications at Western CEDAR. It has been accepted for inclusion in Occam's Razor by an authorized editor of Western CEDAR. For more information, please contact [westerncedar@wwu.edu](mailto:westerncedar@wwu.edu).



# PIRATICAL ACTORS

## Origins, Motives, and Political Sentiments, c. 1716–1726

By Corey Griffis

In the middle months of the year 1720, Clement Downing arrived at the settlement of Saint Augustin in Madagascar, a midshipman aboard the *Salisbury* on its journey to trade in India. Led by ex-pirate John Rivers from 1686–1719, Saint Augustin was well-known as a resupplying depot for pirates operating in the region and, like other settlements in the immediate vicinity, was populated by “30 to 50 ex-pirates, or men waiting for a ship.”<sup>1</sup> As ex-pirates, these men were said to have had “a very open-handed fraternity” with the Indigenous **Malagasy** populations; on rare occasions, the ex-pirates traded for **enslaved people** captured in local warfare and sold them to passing sailors or merchants.<sup>2</sup>

According to Downing’s journals, Malagasy traders from Saint Augustin asked the crew of the *Salisbury* to stay, feast together, and exchange goods, interactions that the Indigenous peoples of Madagascar often had with pirates, ex-pirates, and merchants friendly to men of a piratical occupation. Although the crew declined the invitation, Downing stayed in Saint Augustin long enough to note how the Malagasy, despite knowing very little English, often verbalized “wicked Execrations,” such as “many a ‘God damn ye.’”<sup>3</sup> Historian Arne Bialuschewski writes that “among the phrases that the Malagasy men must have learned [...] was ‘D[am]n King George,’”—a vulgarity which would not have fallen kindly upon the ears of any proud Englishman aboard the *Salisbury*.<sup>4</sup>

In such accounts, one implication remains noteworthy: the Indigenous populations near Saint Augustin must have learned these contemporaneously vulgar phrases from the pirates and ex-pirates who frequented the settlement as late as 1719 and who remained prominent in the region until about 1722. While this proclivity for blasphemous language aligns with the popular image of pirates as social scoundrels and bawdy drunks, one of the phrases that Bialuschewski singles out as prevalent—"Damn King George"—bears significance due to its political orientation. Scholars such as Bialuschewski and E.T. Fox have linked the phrase to symbolic concord amongst pirates with Jacobitism, a political movement that advocated for the restoration of the Stuart dynasty to the British throne.

Though the notion may run against the popular pirate mythos and anarchic imagery, evidence suggests that **Golden Age** pirates held political views contextualized by the politics of eighteenth-century imperial England, the country from whence most of them drew their origin. Nor were they simply opposed to all the political currents that ran through their time. Rather, they sailed upon some of these currents out of their own will—either out of sincere ideological conviction or out of superficial convenience. Political and economic currents eventually drew them in against their wishes, although in direct response to their actions. Such currents culminated in colonial societies turning against pirates; the enactment of prominent mass executions created a decline in piracy as rapid as the fomentation, ending the Golden Age of Atlantic piracy.

But while they lived and died, Golden Age pirates were diverse in terms of their political ideologies. There were convinced **Jacobites**, Jacobites of convenience, ex-privateers, aggrieved reactionaries, apolitical opportunists, and, only on rare occasions, the genuine swashbuckler who was in it merely for adventure. All of them sought the wealth of plunder, though many were quick to spend it, and nearly all of them held some sort of grievance with English society, politics, and economics. The nature of that grievance cannot be generalized across all piratical actors, nor can it

**BUT WHILE THEY LIVED AND DIED, GOLDEN AGE PIRATES WERE DIVERSE IN TERMS OF THEIR POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES.**

#### MALAGASY PEOPLE:

A Southeast African Austronesian ethnic group native to the island of Madagascar. Many Malagasy people were traded, stolen, and enslaved in the Americas during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

#### ENSLAVED PEOPLE (CHATTEL SLAVERY):

The enslaving of African peoples by White Europeans and Americans, occurring primarily between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. In this system, persons are denied the status of personhood and considered to be personal property (chattel) that can be bought and sold as commodities. The profits gained by American settlers and Europeans from the slave trade and slavery created huge economic development in major regions of the Americas and Europe.

#### GOLDEN AGE OF PIRACY:

A common designation for the period between 1716 and 1726, when maritime piracy was a significant factor in the histories of the Caribbean, Indian Ocean, and Atlantic Ocean. This essay focuses on piracy in the Atlantic.

#### JACOBITES:

Supporters of Jacobitism

be accurately ascribed to a revolutionary zeal. The basic ideological categorizations outlined tend to overlap; thus, the goal is not to develop a rigid scheme for classification but to synthesize and contextualize the varying motivations and political sentiments of piratical actors. In outlining the diverse motivations that shaped Golden Age of Piracy in the Atlantic, this paper develops a framework to better understand the broader relationships that pirates had with maritime communities and the imperial state.

### HOW THE SAILOR AND HIS GRIEVANCES SET OUT TO SEA

The Golden Age of Piracy began in late 1715 and early 1716, following the end of the War of Spanish Succession. The end of the war, which saw the English crown among the victors, was accompanied by the decommissioning of the majority of the British Royal Navy, resulting in mass unemployment amongst seamen. With few occupational opportunities available, some seamen found a livelihood in colonial fisheries; others became employed as logwooders, cutting and hauling timber from the *Hæmatoxylum campechianum* tree, which was valued as a source of brilliant red dye. Such occupations were associated with their own pressures, dangers, and unpleasantness.<sup>5</sup>

The sailors who remained in the employ of the Navy were subjected to “brutal discipline, and sometimes death.”<sup>6</sup> Such mistreatment was commonplace, with few substantive avenues for recourse or redress available. Captain Charles Johnson, the pen name of the unknown author of *A General History*, wrote that even those decommissioned sailors who managed to find employment with maritime merchants were “poorly paid, and but poorly fed,” and noted that “such Usage breeds Discontents amongst them.”<sup>7</sup> Whether formerly or presently employed by the Navy or by private men of commerce, such sailors had often been at work aboard ships for many years. While a significant majority were in their



mid-twenties during the Golden Age, such an individual would “not, by the standards of his occupation, have been [deemed] a young man.”<sup>8</sup> Such men would have worked from early youth to what was then considered middle-age, spending years developing skills that were particular to the maritime realm and toiling in an oft-abusive environment that required a hardened constitution and gritted teeth. Their grievances lay in the lack of decent work that utilized such varieties of labor; in being unable, after years of travail, to find a means of simply sustaining a livelihood. War had meant greater stability for them in terms of employment, even if it was not without danger and exploitation. Captain Johnson also perceived the inverse relationship between naval employment and piratical activity levels, stating that men who



might otherwise be “Breakers of the Peace, by being put into order, become solemn Preservers of it.”<sup>9</sup>

However, not all ex-Navy sailors who became pirates were commissioned to their former posts of their own volition; some had been targets of **navel impressment**, a practice of “extremely dubious legality” with a long history in American waters.<sup>10</sup> Thus, for some sailors who turned to piracy, the circumstances of their induction into life at sea were as much of a grievance as the conditions of the service itself.

Not all of those who turned to piracy were former navy sailors; alongside such individuals were those who “had been fishermen, baymen, or servants, and a few had been bargemen and turtlers.”<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, a significant minority of pirates were not from marginalized social strata or deprived circumstances. One of these exceptions was notable captain Edward Teach, better known as Blackbeard, who, from what can be gleaned from genealogical records and in-depth research done by historian Baylus C. Brooks, was “an educated aristocrat” from Jamaican planta-

tion society, “a veteran” of Queen Anne’s War, and may have turned to piracy “burdened by concerns for his family’s welfare.”<sup>12</sup> Teach’s place in the piratical mythos as Blackbeard may be outsized and sensationalized, but the man himself was very much of the world he lived in; like all pirates, he plundered and had connections to the same mainland society that he had left behind. He did not set a-sail with ‘**candles lit underneath his beard**’ and was far more likely to have sat by candlelight and written letters to individuals such as Tobias Knight, a colonial official in North Carolina. Knight’s correspondence with Teach was “found among Thaches [Teach’s] papers [after] his death.”<sup>13</sup> The presence of these letters, among other papers, tells us that Teach was a literate man, a skill that may have existed in perhaps 60 percent of the free male population at the time.<sup>14</sup>

However, such men as Teach were undoubtedly outliers in terms of their background. And for the many ordinary seamen who turned pirate directly from the navy or merchant ships, volunteerism was the rule and mutiny the exception. For most of the Golden Age, “pirates relied as much as possible on being able to augment their crews with volunteers,” and there was no shortage of willing recruits.<sup>15</sup> Typically, when pirates seized a merchant ship, they would extend an offer to those who had labored aboard a captured vessel, giving them the choice of freely submitting their signature to the articles of the pirate ship. Volunteerism was an attempt to ensure that new members were dedicated to the crew and the lifestyle that piracy encapsulated, given that a forced pirate was far more likely to turn against the crew, commit sabotage or mutiny, or desert at the first salient opportunity. It might be said that, though pirates engaged in activities that carried a great risk to life and limb and were prone to liberal engagement in a cornucopia of vices, they also sought to guarantee stability amongst themselves whenever it was possible. Pragmatism by no means necessitated sobriety.

#### NAVAL IMPRESSMENT:

The practice of forcing people into navel service without their consent.

#### CANDLES LIT UNDERNEATH HIS BEARD:

One of the many myths about Blackbeard is that he would light candles underneath his beard before battle; the resulting smoke would give him a demonic appearance. Although historically inaccurate, this myth fits well into mythologized image of Blackbeard as a particularly vicious pirate.

### ACROSS THE POND: TRANS-ATLANTIC TRADE, THE SLAVE TRADE ASIENTO, AND PIRATICAL OPPORTUNISM

In addition to the motivational strength of wretched material conditions and ample personal opposition, the end of the War of Spanish Succession coincided with and facilitated a marked increase in the exchange of goods across the Atlantic. The coerced opening of the Spanish Empire to British trade was one major factor in this growth. A significant point of contention during the conflict with Spain had been the English desire for an *asiento* agreement in relation to the **Trans-Atlantic slave trade**. The *asiento* was a sought-after commercial contract between the Spanish crown and foreign merchants or companies, wherein the latter were granted a monopoly on specified foreign exports to Spanish colonies in the Americas. Given the wealth of the Spanish Empire, holding an *asiento* for any product was considered an immense privilege. In order to tip the “balance of trade” away from France and in their favor, Britain made a slave trade *asiento* with Spain one of the stipulations included in the treaty that ended the War of Spanish Succession.<sup>16</sup>

Post-war growth was most certainly not limited to trade between Britain and Spain. For example, the total average annual value of import-export trade between England’s American colonies and the British Isles increased from 337,502 pounds sterling during the period from 1710-1715 to 448,838 pounds sterling during the period from 1716-1720, an increase in the total average annual import-export trade value of almost 25 percent.<sup>17</sup> Piracy was prevalent across many regions of the world during the Golden Age, but the combination of the British-Spanish slave trade *asiento* and dramatic growth in trade between Britain and its colonies provided particularly ripe opportunities for aggravated levels of piracy in the colonial Americas.

However, pirates themselves typically viewed enslaved African people as “worthless, disposable com-

### TRANS-ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE:

Oceanic trade that existed from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries in a triangular trade route carrying enslaved African people, cash crops, and manufactured goods between West Africa, Caribbean or American colonies and the European colonial powers. As a trade between European and African slavers, the slave trade murdered, enslaved, and victimized millions of African men, women, and children.

modities, and they treated them as such.”<sup>18</sup> There is evidence that at least one pirate crew operating offshore of West Africa “returned about 300 slaves to the crew of an English vessel because the marauders did not know how to make money [off of] them.”<sup>19</sup> Pirates who discovered a ship full of enslaved people would most often loot the ship for goods and then sink the vessel, killing all the Africans left aboard. In general, because pirates most often came from lower-class English backgrounds, they shared and perpetuated the racial prejudice of their countrymen. In contrast to the volunteerism that defined piracy’s labor supply, it was extremely rare for pirates to accept Africans into their crew as equals; “Black people under the black flag were usually slaves who fared no better than other Africans shipped in chains to the New World.”<sup>20</sup> While it is undeniable that some pirates participated in and profited from slavery, the majority operated as disruptors of the slave trade and did so in a manner fatal to the enslaved Africans they encountered. The typical European pirate cared only about the seizure and sale of “gold, silver and other valuables,” as opposed to the life, or the economic value attached to the life, of an enslaved African person.<sup>21</sup>

These facts did not matter to the British Empire and British merchants, however; regardless of whether a vessel was carrying enslaved people

or dry goods, pirates sank ships, stole valuable cargo, and occasionally killed sailors. Unlike the piratical activities of prior eras, piracy in the Golden Age was perceived by the state as a clear and present threat to English trade in the Americas and beyond, rather than as a valuable tool of the Crown against her imperial rivals. Whereas earlier pirates had centralized their harassment upon the Spanish, Golden Age pirates rarely drew any sort of meaningful distinction between vessels of differing origin. They would attack English ships as readily as they would Spanish merchants and kept numerous stolen national flags aboard their vessels for deception. Piracy had been seen less and less favorably since “the end of the seventeenth century” but became a particularly prominent issue in the years following 1713.<sup>22</sup> Initial complaints about a surge in piratical activities came from unhappy merchants, who pushed for changes in state policy and often collaborated with colonial actors to eliminate sea-bandits. Thus, attempts by the British empire to eliminate piracy were “driven by metropolitan concerns [about] colonial trade,” although there were also concerns about how the rampant mythologization of pirates might spread “notions of aggressive social mobility” that the ruling social strata considered threatening and undesirable.<sup>23</sup>

To go a-roving was most typically an “opportunistic and economically motivated exploit and, when they could, numerous pirates seized the chance to reenter colonial society.”<sup>24</sup> Merchant vessels were relatively easy targets, as they were often slower-moving, and recourse from maritime robberies took a longer time to materialize. By the time authorities were alerted, the culprits had generally already fled and divided up their stolen bounty. Because many men turned to piracy out of necessity more than anything else, it was not uncommon for pirates during the earlier years of the Golden Age to aim to “commit a few

successful strikes and then settle down somewhere,” not unlike many of their predecessors from generations past.<sup>25</sup> The easy availability of state pardons lent some observable credence to this rationale, as one of the first strategies that the British empire utilized to reduce piratical activity was the providence of amnesty to those pirates who willingly turned themselves in and disavowed their banditry. Often, those who took such amnesties were even allowed to keep their loot.<sup>26</sup> This policy was frequently abused by numerous pirates, including Edward Teach, who accepted numerous pardons from the colonial government of North Carolina and then promptly “resumed seizing vessels.”<sup>27</sup> His abuse of the pardon system was an example of the sort of policy failures that led the English colonies to engage in more

**UNLIKE THE PIRATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF PRIOR ERAS, PIRACY IN THE GOLDEN AGE WAS PERCEIVED BY THE STATE AS A CLEAR AND PRESENT THREAT TO ENGLISH TRADE IN THE AMERICAS AND BEYOND, RATHER THAN AS A VALUABLE TOOL OF THE CROWN AGAINST HER IMPERIAL RIVALS.**

drastic methods of suppressing piracy, including “a fragmented series of campaigns driven by local or, in some cases, individual motivations.”<sup>28</sup> A campaign of “mass executions” was carried out from 1719 to 1726, characterized by the parallel publication of myriad pamphlets that warned both of the moral impropriety and the capital offensiveness of piracy.<sup>29</sup>

In short, the Golden Age saw the economic motivations of pirates come into conflict with the economic motivations of the state, and, at this period in history, the reaction on behalf of the state was to eliminate those who committed piracy. Captain Johnson writes in the *General History* that one po-

tential solution to piracy could have been the establishment of a “National Fishery” in the likeness of the Dutch; a fishery would have employed men rendered jobless by the end of the War of Spanish Succession.<sup>30</sup> While there is no way to retrospectively test the validity of this theory, it highlights the role played by the state in, if not creating, at the very least ignoring the sociocultural tensions and economic circumstances that allowed piracy to flourish—particularly as an avenue taken by economically marginalized, lower-class Englishmen.

### “THAT’S GOT TO BE THE BEST PIRATE I’VE EVER SEEN”: PIRATES AND THEIR CONTEMPORARY MYTHOS

Predisposed by talent and circumstance, a few rare men who sailed did in tandem have a deep personal affinity for life at sea; “a roving adven’turous Disposition” that drove them to pursue wealth, notoriety, and something more.<sup>31</sup> Though the days of **royal patronage** that pirates like William Kidd enjoyed had ended by the beginning of the Golden Age, plenty of men still lived who saw the sea as a preferable way of life. Like Walter Kennedy, a prominent pirate of the era, they became familiar with the larger-than-life figure of the heroic and fantastically successful rogue through their stories. Many seamen “loved to hear about Henry Avery and no doubt others.”<sup>32</sup> Stories of piracy had wide popular appeal, and “the theme [was] a manifestly commercial one”; there was both supply and demand for books and theatrical productions formulated around the piratical lifestyle, in addition to word-of-mouth tales.<sup>33</sup>

Some of those tales were fictive, while others were rooted in accounts of the Caribbean buccaneers and “the essence of their glory days.”<sup>34</sup> More generalized stories about Robin Hood-like figures were popular among the masses, including among sailors who might have turned pirate, even if very few of those eventual pirates had “the idealism, the unselfishness, or the social consciousness” to become as romantic a

figure as were the protagonists of such stories.<sup>35</sup> Though some pirates may have been inspired by heroic tales or stories of the buccaneering era, “perhaps few [could] afford” to fulfill those roles, if those roles ever truly existed as anything other than ideations.<sup>36</sup>

Given the prevalence of these stories and folk heroes, many men of this time would have had their own ideas about what constituted pirate life. They would have had expectations of some variety of liberty and fraternity or seen some justificatory benefit to piracy as a form of **social banditry**. Thus, at least some of the sailors who became pirates during the Golden Age did so not simply as a response to their present conditions but also as a result of possessing certain ideas about what life at sea ought to or could look like. Aggrieved, they sought an idealized reality, a sort of maritime **Arcadia**. In this vein, they established societies at sea that were characterized by some level of genuine democracy and egalitarianism amongst white European crew members. Like Bartholomew Roberts and crew, they may have given “Every Man [...] a Vote in Affairs of Moment,” restricted onboard gambling, guaranteed compensation for lost limbs, and outlined a relatively equal distribution of plunder.<sup>37</sup> The notion of a seafaring society where such articles had voluntary force would likely have been a drastic improvement to life as pirates had previously known it, and would have been appealing regardless of whether a pirate had high-minded ideals or expectations.

It is perhaps possible to relate some of those stories, or story-myths, to the notion of nostalgia. Nostalgia has a complex and philosophically dense historiography and doubtlessly “developed over time and in relation to momentous historical change.”<sup>38</sup> What is now referred to as nostalgia was originally perceived as a medical disorder or physical ailment, rather than a common



emotional phenomenon. It was first described in 1688 by a Swiss physician, Johannes Hofer, who defined it as “sadness arising from the burning desire to return to the homeland.”<sup>39</sup> Over the centuries, the notion of nostalgia came to reveal the “subtle changes in perceptions of time and space” and “widespread sense of unease” caused by the “momentous social transformations of [Hofer’s] epoch.”<sup>40</sup> The emotion would only grow more observable in later eras of social change, with one French author from the mid-1800s noting that “he knew of no colleague who hadn’t dealt with a ‘nostomaniac’ sailor or at least once in their career.”<sup>41</sup> Such complex sensations of longing might have been a factor in the decision of some men, particularly mistreated sailors, to turn to a life of piracy during the Golden Age. Perhaps, for such men, the idyllic homeland that they wished to return to was one they knew only from stories—a homeland out at sea, always, in every moment, waiting over the horizon, in the perpetual offing. Such a utopian vision implies a dissident politics—both radical and reactionary.

It is, however, wise to observe that, although some pirates were explicitly inclined towards what might be considered radical actions and radical values, “to address radical pirates is not [...] to slip into a view that pirates *were* radicals.”<sup>42</sup> As previously outlined, the men who became pirates typically came from backgrounds that rendered a-roving almost a necessity, in the absence of other options. While some pirates may have yearned for the sea, by no means was a Romantic sentiment the sole driving force behind the Golden Age. Our modern myths about piracy are based in truth, but only in one of many: how an era is remembered rarely reflects the reality of that time. To the extent that the Golden Age pirates attempted to actualize the story-myths of the buccaneer and the social bandit, they ultimately became the stuff of story-myths themselves.

### DAMN KING GEORGE: JACOBITISM, PRETENDERS, AND ‘PRETEND PRETENDERS’ AMONGST THE PIRATES

As heretofore established, pirates were people—people driven by varying motives of survival, financial insecurity, storied nostalgia, revenge, and a desire for wealth and notoriety.

#### ROYAL PATRONAGE:

Prior to c. 1700, most pirates made their living as privateers who conducted piratical activities under legal auspices. They were individuals who were granted letters of marque by their home governments, permitting them to attack foreign merchant vessels and seize their goods. They were often funded by societal elites; some became elites, while others were exploited.

#### SOCIAL BANDITRY:

Social banditry is a popular form of lower-class social resistance involving behavior characterized by law as illegal but is supported by wider (usually peasant) society as being moral and acceptable.

#### ARCADIA:

Arcadia refers to a utopia where people may live simply and peacefully. The stories that inspired some Golden Age pirates to take to the sea frequently involved maritime egalitarianism or bountiful, pastoral island-oriented life, paid for via a temporary devotion to plunder. The buccaneers of early 1600s Hispaniola, who initially lived as rural meat and leather traders before turning pirate, were a particular inspiration.

Many pirates had families and had endured abuse or mistreatment. While they may have often broken eighteenth-century English societal conventions aboard their ships in terms of organization and conduct, they were not revolutionaries. Pirates were contextualized by and produced within the political realities of their time.

As a result, it is worthwhile to examine the explicit political sentiments that connected English-descended pirates to the society that brought about their birth and death. Most notably, many pirates expressed documented Jacobite sympathies or at least utilized Jacobite symbology and language as a tool to recruit volunteers and form ties among crewmembers. While difficult to define, Jacobitism can be most usefully described as support for the restoration of the deposed House of Stuart to the British throne. The Stuart line, embodied by James II, had been overthrown in the Glorious Revolution of 1688, after which William and Mary ruled for a decade. Following this interregnum in the Stuart line, Queen Anne ascended to the throne in 1702 and reigned until she died in 1714.<sup>43</sup> After her death, the House of Hanover inherited the British Crown, and no Stuart ever again reigned in England. Jacobites attempted an uprising in 1715 but failed.

The revolt did, however, coincide with “the dramatic increase” in piratical activities that occurred in 1716 and 1717, and evidence suggests that the events are correlated. Jacobitism frequently represented a general “defiance of authorities,” rather than loyal and comprehensive support for the exiled Stuart line, in part because it was “the only movement aimed at overthrowing the political regime in the British Isles at that time.”<sup>44</sup> The fact that an imperial crackdown on piracy closely coincided with the Hanoverian succession further fueled Jacobite sympathies among individuals who either engaged in piracy or otherwise depended upon it for their livelihoods.

Valuable to discussions of Jacobitism and piracy, the Flying Gang was a group of pirates who operated

in the Bahamas prior to the installation of Woodes Rogers as Governor-General of the colony in 1718. Marcus Rediker notes that approximately ninety percent “of the Atlantic pirates operating between 1716 and 1726” were part of two “lines of descent,” one of which was the Flying Gang, and the other of which was rooted in the 1722 meeting of George Lowther and Edward Low.<sup>45</sup> Rather significantly, there is “evidence of Jacobitism in both lines,” and of great interconnection between the separate crews that composed the Flying Gang.<sup>46</sup>

In many ways, historians E.T. Fox and Arne Bialuschewski dovetail in their interpretations of Jacobitism amongst the pirates of the Flying Gang and the broader Atlantic. They differ in what degree they perceive genuine adherence to the Jacobite cause, as opposed to a superficial usage of Jacobite symbology and idiom. Bialuschewski remains more skeptical of the extent to which piratical Jacobitism was sincere, determining that “true Jacobites did not make up more than a tiny minority among pirates” and had little wider influence in terms of what their contemporaries believed.<sup>47</sup> Fox, on the other hand, concludes that the movement “was sufficiently important to pirates to be worth proclaiming clearly and distinctly.”<sup>48</sup> Both historians view Jacobitism as a rhetorical framework and oppositional vocabulary for piratical society, citing support such as the christening of pirate vessels with politically-oriented names (e.g., the *Queen Anne’s Revenge*<sup>49</sup>) and the common usage of vulgar anti-Hanoverian phrases that were prominent across many Jacobite subcultures. Essentially, Fox and Bialuschewski find common ground in pinpointing Jacobitism as a unifying language of dissidence.

Fox offers highly convincing evidence, however, that the importance of Jacobite political sentiments was immense. It not only served as a tool for recruitment and social cohesion but

had direct implications for the history of Golden Age piracy. As previously established, the vast majority of pirates during the Golden Age were voluntary recruits, typically poached from the crews of captured merchant vessels. This voluntary labor was vital to the facilitation of egalitarianism in piratical bonds of fellowship, bonds that linked pirate crews and communities together both while at sea and at friendly port. However, as the Golden Age went into decline, the number of men who sought to become pirates decreased, resulting in an increased “proportion of forced men” on pirate crews in the years after 1720.<sup>50</sup> When, for a variety of reasons, “Jacobitism waned in the 1720s,” its usefulness as a framework for socialization correspondingly lessened. In turn, this affected the degree to which pirates were able to solicit volunteers.<sup>51</sup> Put simply, Jacobitism played a key role in stimulating the labor supply of Golden Age piracy. “[Without] a core of ideologically committed Jacobites” wielding the sentiment to motivate recruits, piracy may not have been as successful or widespread. Jacobitism “was not the only cause” of Golden Age piracy, but it was present as superficial speech, present as a generalized framework for social defiance, and present, to a lesser extent, as “a manifestation of [...] active support for the restoration” of the House of Stuart.<sup>52</sup>

Jacobitism amongst the pirate community thus indicates the presence of explicit political sentiments and language, a fact which further counters the mythologized image of pirate-as-swashbuckler. Rather, because of Jacobitism’s popularity in marginalized English subcultures, the prominence of the movement in piratical society reinforces the argument that pirates were most frequently sailors with a grievance, participating for reasons that had little to do with romantic expectations or adventurousness.

### A BRIEF CONCLUSION

The popular image of the pirate tends towards the liberated swashbuckler, standing apart from any nation, complex circumstance, or ideological sympathies. Though it has an adventurous and exciting appeal, this image fails to accurately represent the historical realities of Atlantic piracy, even those of the Golden Age that originated much of the present romanticized myths. From 1716-1726, the Golden Age period





saw a greater number of pirates than any other; and, indeed, they played a significant, disruptive role in maritime commerce and politics. They were intimately involved in acts of violence and thievery, including the murder of enslaved Africans and sailors, and they created a prolonged disturbance in the movement of goods and enslaved persons across the Atlantic. Such actions cannot be categorized as an expression of revolutionary desire. Golden Age pirates were deeply shaped by the sociocultural, political, and economic factors that defined the early eighteenth century in England and the colonial Americas, including the mass unemployment of seamen and the profitability of the slave trade. Reflecting these factors in numerous manners, they bore diverse motivations, often born out of unemployment, or exploitative conditions. Among their own European crew members, they created conditions that were often more democratic and egalitarian than those found in class-stratified aristocratic Europe and were influenced by the politics of popular Jacobitism. Many were familiar with the stories of the pirates who had come before them and were profoundly influenced by those narratives.

Simultaneously a part of mainland society and exiled from it, pirates were not idealized insurrectionists against the entirety of the established order, yet they also operated at a distinctive distance from the rest of their world. Coming from primarily downtrodden circumstances, pirates seized the imagination—terrified or fascinated, or perhaps both—of their contemporaries. Never were they one-dimensional, whether in piratical fraternity or in the cruelties that they visited upon the world. They were something far more interesting, if still elusive, still difficult to understand—they were people who went ‘a-pyrating.’

**THOUGH IT HAS AN ADVENTUROUS AND EXCITING APPEAL, THIS IMAGE FAILS TO ACCURATELY REPRESENT THE HISTORICAL REALITIES OF ATLANTIC PIRACY, EVEN THOSE OF THE GOLDEN AGE THAT ORIGINATED MUCH OF THE PRESENT ROMANTICIZED MYTHOS.**





- <sup>1</sup> Charles Grey, *Pirates of the Eastern Seas, 1618-1723*, ed. by Sir George Fletcher MacMunn (Purnell and Sons: London, 1933), 52-53..
- <sup>2</sup> Grey, 52-53.
- <sup>3</sup> Clement Downing, *A Compendious History of the Indian Wars [...]* (London: 1737), 81.
- <sup>4</sup> Arne Bialuschewski, "Jacobite Pirates?" *Histoire sociale/Social history* 44, no. 1 (2011), 147-164.
- <sup>5</sup> Mark G. Hanna, *Pirate Nests and the Rise of the British Empire, 1570-1740* (University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 367-368.
- <sup>6</sup> William Pencak, "Review: Jack Tar vs. John Bull," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies*, vol. 65, no. 1 (1998), 102-104.
- <sup>7</sup> Charles Johnson, *A General History of the Pyrates* (Dover Publications, 2015), 4.
- <sup>8</sup> Marcus Rediker, *Villains of All Nations* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 49.
- <sup>9</sup> Johnson, *A General History*, 63.
- <sup>10</sup> Pencak, "Review," 102.
- <sup>11</sup> Rediker, *Villains of All Nations*, 46.
- <sup>12</sup> Baylus C. Brooks, "Born in Jamaica, of Very Creditable Parents' or 'A Bristol Man Born? Excavating the Real Edward Thatche, 'Blackbeard the Pirate'," *The North Carolina Historical Review* 92, no. 3 (July 2013), 235-277.
- <sup>13</sup> "Minutes of the North Carolina Governor's Council, including a deposition, a remonstrance, and correspondence concerning Tobias Knight's business with Edward Teach," in *Colonial and State Records*, vol. 2, 341-49, <https://docsouth.unc.edu/csr/index.html/document/csr02-0181>.
- <sup>14</sup> Robert E. Gallman, "Changes in the Level of Literacy in a New Community of Early America," *The Journal of Economic History*, vol. 48, no. 3 (Sep. 1988), 567-582.
- <sup>15</sup> E.T. Fox, "Jacobitism and the 'Golden Age' of Piracy, 1715-1725," *International Journal of Maritime History*, vol. 22, no. 2 (Dec. 2010), 277-303.
- <sup>16</sup> Victoria Gardner Sorsby, "British Trade With Spanish America Under the Asiento, 1713-1740" (PhD diss., University College London, Nov. 1975), 6-12.
- <sup>17</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "Chapter Z. Colonial and Pre-Federal Statistics." in *Bicentennial Edition: Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970* (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of the Census, Sept. 1975), 1175-1177.
- <sup>18</sup> Arne Bialuschewski, "Black People Under the Black Flag," *Slavery and Abolition*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (2008), 461-475.
- <sup>19</sup> Bialuschewski, 462.
- <sup>20</sup> Bialuschewski, 469.
- <sup>21</sup> Bialuschewski, 462.
- <sup>22</sup> Bialuschewski, "Jacobite Pirates," 150.
- <sup>23</sup> David Wilson, "Protecting trade by suppressing pirates: British colonial and metropolitan responses to Atlantic piracy, 1716-1726," in *The Golden Age of Piracy: Readings on the Rise, Fall, and Enduring Popularity of Pirates*, ed. David Head. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2018), 89-110; Hanna, "Pirate Nests," 367.
- <sup>24</sup> Wilson, 102.
- <sup>25</sup> Hanna, "Pirate Nests," 368.
- <sup>26</sup> Hanna, 368.
- <sup>27</sup> Bialuschewski, "Jacobite Pirates," 156.
- <sup>28</sup> Wilson, "Protecting trade," 98.
- <sup>29</sup> Hanna, "Pirates Nests," 371-377.
- <sup>30</sup> Johnson, *A General History*, 4.
- <sup>31</sup> Johnson, 63.
- <sup>32</sup> Rediker, *Villains of All Nations*, 40.
- <sup>33</sup> Margarette Lincoln, "Henry Every and the Creation of the Pirate Myth in Early Modern Britain," in *The Golden Age of Piracy: Readings on the Rise, Fall, and Enduring Popularity of Pirates*, ed. David Head (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2018), 167-182.
- <sup>34</sup> Brooks, "Born in Jamaica," 235.
- <sup>35</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits* (Delacorte Press, 1969), 40-46.
- <sup>36</sup> Hobsbawm, 40-46.
- <sup>37</sup> Johnson, 211.
- <sup>38</sup> Thomas Dodman, *What Nostalgia Was: War, Empire, and the Time of a Deadly Emotion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 8, <https://chicago-universitypressscholarship-com.ezproxy.library.www.edu/view/10.7208/chicago/9780226493138.001.0001/upso-9780226492803>.
- <sup>39</sup> Johannes Hofer, quoted in Dodman, 22.
- <sup>40</sup> Dodman, 16.
- <sup>41</sup> Dodman, 146.
- <sup>42</sup> Bryan D. Palmer, "Review: Villains of All Nations," *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas*, vol 2, no. 2 (2005), 114-116.
- <sup>43</sup> Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Penguin Books, 1982), 121-124.
- <sup>44</sup> Bialuschewski, "Jacobite Pirates," 148-151.
- <sup>45</sup> Fox, "Jacobitism and the 'Golden Age' of Piracy, 1715-1725," 284; Rediker, *Villains of All Nations*, 80-83.
- <sup>46</sup> Rediker, 80-83; Fox 283-286.
- <sup>47</sup> Bialuschewski, "Jacobite Pirates," 157.
- <sup>48</sup> Fox, "Jacobitism and the 'Golden Age' of Piracy, 1715-1725," 303.
- <sup>49</sup> Fox, 293; Bialuschewski, 155.
- <sup>50</sup> Bialuschewski, 155; Fox, 298-299.
- <sup>51</sup> Fox, 296.
- <sup>52</sup> Fox, 302.