

Pirate Utopias



Under The Banner Of King Death



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This article first appeared in Issue 8 (1999) of the eco-anarchist journal *Do Or Die* which was published annually in Britain until 2003. *Do Or Die* has a website at:

<http://www.eco-action.org/dod/>



Jarvis, wrote: "These judges are so Voracious that the kind of empire so exact, that it is one of the hardest things in the World to draw those from it which have used it for so long."

The Rise of Piracy

The era of Euro-American piracy is ushered in by the discovery of the New World and the enormous empire seized by the Spanish in the Americas. New technologies allowed long sea voyages to be made with regularity and accuracy, and the new engines that emerged were not based so much on control of the land as control of the sea.

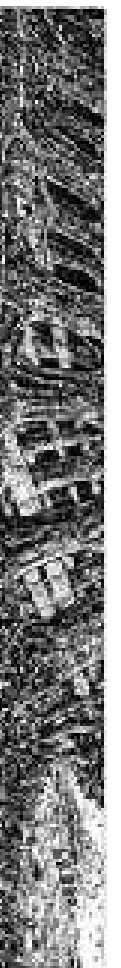
The Spanish were the model superpower of the first century, but did not go unchallenged for long; the French, Dutch and English all struggled to overcome the Spanish in the scramble for empire. It then proved so difficult that they were not above using piracy to attack the land-based Spanish and hit their colonies with the vast wealth the Spanish had plundered from the Native Americans. In wartime this razing would be legitimized as legal prize-taking but the rest of the time it was simply piracy with state-sponsorship (or at least tacit support and encouragement). Over the course of the 17th century, these embryonic empires finally overtook the Spanish and established themselves. With the new technologies, shipping was no longer just used for luxury goods but became the basis of an international trading network essential to the origin and growth of capitalism. The massive expansion of sea-borne trade in this period necessarily also created a large population of seafarers—a new class of wage-workers that had not previously existed. For many of them piracy seemed an attractive alternative to the harsh realities of the merchant service on the seas.

But as the new empires—especially the British Empire—materialized, attitudes to piracy changed. "The increasing discovery did not save the hard-headed

merchants and imperial bureaucrats, whose world of business deals and enterprises came into violent conflict with that of the pirates." The ruling class recognized that order, order, regular trade served the interests of a nation imperiled forever by her own piracy. So piracy was forced to end in the late 17th and early 18th century. Pirates were no longer state-sponsored gentleman-adventurers like Sir Francis Drake but despised wage slaves, outcasts, a multi-ethnic melting pot of unfortunate peoples. When there had come to an end of the edges between legitimate economic activity and piracy, most pirates found they had few of their old friends left and were increasingly regarded as "Brave and Brave of Day." As mainstream society rejected the pirates, they likewise became increasingly antagonistic in their rejection of it. From this point onward the very pirates were those who explicitly rejected the state and its laws and declared themselves in open war against it. Pirates were driven further away from the circles of power as the American colonies, originally beyond state control and relatively autonomous, were brought into the mainstream of imperial trade and government. Their development a direct result of loosening ties with state attacks were met with enrage from the pirates leading to greater state control.

"a dunghill wheron England doth cast forth its rubbish"

The Caribbean islands in the second half of the 17th century were a melting pot of religions and persecuted immigrants from across the world. There were thousands of deported Irish, Liverpool beggars, Royalist prisoners from Scotland, pirates caught on the English high seas, hydrophobes caught on the Spanish borders, exiled fugitives and Frenchmen outlawed without discussion and the captured prisoners of various uprisings and plots against the King.



Notes

1. David Hume, *Of Spain Under Charles V*, Johnson—A General History of the World, Edited by Michael Schudson, (London, 1972), p. 248.
2. For example, the East India Company was brought down to collapse by piracy in 1696. Robert C. Radcliffe—*Captain Kidd and the Restoration of the Pirates*, pp. 128-34.
3. Larry Larr—*Pirates and Libertarians*, (London, A Historical and Cultural Study, 1991), p. 6.
4. Martin B. Rodden—*Pirates of the Coast and the Deep Blue Sea: Barbary, Spanish, French and the Anglo-American Overseas Trade* (1700-1750), p. 238.
5. *Op. Cit.* 4, p. 205. *Op. Cit.* 2, p. 25, 342.
6. *Op. Cit.* 4, p. 271 and 274. "Various prizes were captured and brought by the pirates mostly from products by those who were still alive." *Op. Cit.* 2, p. 2.
7. Martin B. Rodden—*Libertaria: The Pirates' Utopia in Barbadoes* (London, 1991), p. 10.
8. Christopher Hill—*Radical Puritanism in Colonial America*, Vol. 1, pp. 102, 106-9; Peter Larkin Wilson—*Christopher's Voyage: Spiritual Journey and the First Atlantic Colonial Venture*, pp. 132-4; and *Christopher's Voyage: The Origins of North American Puritan Culture* (New York, Palgrave, 2008), p. 97. *Op. Cit.* 2, pp. 61-8.
9. *Letter to Sir John—Treatment of the Coast in Connecticut and the Pirates*, pp. 27, 29-30. *Op. Cit.* 4, pp. 68, 81; 2, *Op. Cit.* 2, pp. 65, 211, 220.
10. Richard Platt and Tina Chantler—*Photography: From the Invisible Specter to London, Earning Knowledge*, (New York, 2003), p. 22, 23.
11. Hill—*Radical Puritanism*, pp. 160-73.
12. *Op. Cit.* 4, p. 238; *Letter to Sir—TACD: The Religious Dimension: Toward Socio-religious Liberty*, *Pratt: American Puritanism*, (New York, Greenwood, 1991), pp. 24, 189-190. *Op. Cit.* 1, p. 97.
13. *Op. Cit.* 2, pp. 61, 178.
14. *Op. Cit.* 2, p. 234.
15. *Op. Cit.* 4, p. 201.
16. *Op. Cit.* 2, p. 131.
17. Larron—*Outlaw—A Pirate's Progress*. (New York, Norton, 1998). *Letter to Sir—TACD: The Religious Dimension: Toward Socio-religious Liberty*, *Pratt: American Puritanism*, (New York, Greenwood, 1991), pp. 24, 189-190. *Op. Cit.* 1, pp. 97, 108, 140.
18. *Op. Cit.* 2, p. 99, 288, 289. *Op. Cit.* 4, p. 264. *Op. Cit.* 1, pp. 112, 308, 340.
19. *Op. Cit.* 4, p. 261.
20. *Op. Cit.* 2, p. 87, 98, 175; Douglas Botting and the Editors of *The Yale Book—The Pirates* (New York, 2003), pp. 208-209; Robert Schudson, *Trust* (New York, 2002), p. 142; *Op. Cit.* 4, p. 278. *Op. Cit.* 1, p. 7.
21. *Cartledge—Liar Among the Pirates*, p. 271. *Op. Cit.* 2, p. 242; *Letter to Sir—TACD: The Religious Dimension: Toward Socio-religious Liberty*, *Pratt: American Puritanism*, (New York, Greenwood, 1991), pp. 24, 189-190. *Op. Cit.* 1, p. 97.
22. *Op. Cit.* 4, p. 285, 278, 277; *Op. Cit.* 2, p. 254; *Letter to Sir—TACD: The Religious Dimension: Toward Socio-religious Liberty*, *Pratt: American Puritanism*, (New York, Greenwood, 1991), pp. 24, 189-190. *Op. Cit.* 1, p. 97.
23. *Op. Cit.* 7, p. 113-4; W. Alfred Baker—*Pirate Accidents: American Seamen in the Age of Sea Quarrel* (New York, 1991), pp. 12-15. *Op. Cit.* 1, p. 228. *Op. Cit.* 2, p. 103 (unintended).
24. *Op. Cit.* 7, p. 111; Baker—*American Puritanism*, (New York, Greenwood, 1991), pp. 113-4, 240, 247.

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Waging War on the Whalers

Since 1975, modern-day real-life pirates: Sea Shepherd have named the world's ocean-warding vessels and sinking drifting vessels and fishing boats. The black ship with a black pirate flag is equipped with spades for dipping open the sides of enemy vessels and been reinforced with 18-ton steel concrete for ramming them. Flying the ocean version of the Jolly Roger—a skull above a crossed-decked's cross and skeleton—Nepere's Navy "have damaged in over 20 years of guerrilla war for marine ecology." Any sailing ship on the ocean is a target for Sea Shepherd.

Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, 3107A Washington Boulevard, Marina del Rey, CA 90292, USA. Tel: +1 (310) 301-3795
Source: David H. Moore—From Horatio (Golden, Colorado, February, 1995)

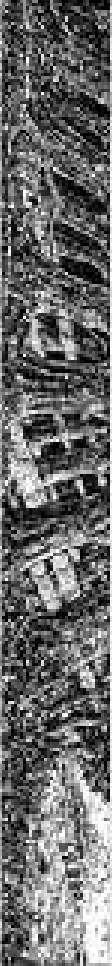


of ideas and practices developed around the Atlantic world, emerging in sometimes surprising places. In 1749, there was a mutiny aboard the *JMSV Chesebrough*, near Cape Cod. Cante off the west coast of Africa. One of the ringleaders—John Pacey—had been there before; he had once been captured with Bartholomew Roberts back in 1722. It was "old hands" like John Pacey who kept after the pirate tradition and ensured the continuity of ideas and practices. The mutineers hoisted pirate-club on "a white ensign." The term "to write" originated in mutiny; gunboats the "Great Mutineers" at Spight and the *Nave* in 1797 when sailors would write their sails to describe the economic flow of trade and the state's war machine. These English, Irish, and African sailors established their own "vowels" and "Silenced democracy" and some even talked of setting a "New Colony" in America or Madagascar.

The pirates prospered in a power vacuum, during a period of upheaval and war that allowed them the freedom to live effectively outside the law. With the coming of peace came an extension of control and an end to the possibility of pirate autonomy. This is not as surprising really when one considers that periods of war and turmoil have often allowed for revolutionary experiments, analyses, economies and anomalies to flourish. From the pirates of the 17th and 18th centuries to D'Aurizio's political Republic of Venice in the First World War, the Paris Commune in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War, The Diggers land communes in the English Civil War and the Makhovskii peasants in the Ukraine during the Russian Revolution, a tradition of resistance and innovation that experiments in freedom can find space to flourish.

end of the war also allowed great ships to continue on hunting down the pirates, and granted the British even larger commercial interests in the Caribbean, giving an extra incentive to these efforts. As the sea, more powerful state consolidated its monopoly on violence, the colonies were brought into line. The practice of dealing with pirates and treating in prison voyages had continued in the centuries long after it had become unacceptable at home. It was wiped out by an extension of state power from the mother country to enforce discipline on the colonies. The beginning of the end was marked by an incognito Sir Henry Morgan's return to Jamaica as Governor with express orders to destroy the pirates. Naval patrols flushed them from their lairs and most hangings dominated the beaches. Ultimately the pirates' war on trade had become too successful to be tolerated; the state was fighting to allow commerce to flow uninterrupted and capital to accumulate, bringing death to the meekness and revenue to the state's.

If we want to look for the heirs of the Robertson piracy of the Golden Age, we shouldn't necessarily only be looking at more recent pirates; but rather at how piracy fed into the Atlantic class struggle. Just as some of the initial impulses behind the piracy of the 17th and 18th centuries had come from land-based radical movements, like the Levellers, the flow



The proto-revolutionary movements of the Civil War of the 1640s had been suppressed and delayed by the time of the dawn of the great age of piracy in the late 17th century, but there is good evidence to show that some of the Diggers, Ranters, Muggletonians, Fifth Monarchy Men etc. fled to the Americas and the Caribbean where they inspired or joined these revolutionary pirate crews. Indeed, a group of pirates sailed in Madagascar on a peace-ship that "given the name of Ranters Bay." After the defeat of the Levellers in 1649, John Lilburne offered to lead his followers to the West Indies. If the government would free the soil, it also seems that the Ranters and Diggers banded together in the Americas than in Britain—as late as the 1690s there were reported to be Ranters in Long Island. This isn't surprising really as the New World territories were used by them as great colonies for its dispossessed and rebellious poor. In 1655 Barbados was described as "a dingy old wharfed England with coal from its ruble beds." Among these undesirable there would have been numbers of radicals—those who had provided the spark for the revolution of 1641. "Heron, the bearded rascal, who refused to die for his hat to the Admiralty, ended up in Barbados," as did many other men such as the Ranters intellectual Joseph Solomon. That the Caribbean had become a haven for radicals did not go unnoticed: in 1696 Samuel Mayhew advised Parliament not to sentence the Quaker heretic James Nayler to transportation lest he attract other settlers. It was clear at the time that the new British colonies in the west were seen as a haven of relative religious and political liberty, that much that they beyond the grasp of law and authority's.

But the European merchants discovered the African slave trade and the commercial possibilities of shipping Africans to the Caribbean, thousands of poor and working class Europeans were shipped to the new colonies as indentured servants—effectively a slave trade of its own. The only difference between the trade in indentured servants and the African slave trade was that in theory the slavery of these indentured was not considered eternal and hereditary. However, many were rebuffed and their contracts extended indefinitely so they never won their freedom. Slaves, a flexible investment, were often used as labor than the indentured servants.

However, the masters had great difficulty holding on to their servants who tended to go missing and abscond to the freedom of the myriad islands of the Antilles, or to isolated lines of coastlines or jungle. How they often formed little self-governing bands or

tribes of dropouts and runaways. In many ways, including the master-people before them. These men—slaves and soldiers, slaves and indentured servants, formed the basis for the Caribbean piracy that emerged in the 17th century—maintaining their egalitarian social structure even when at sea. As their numbers grew and more men docked to the rail they were amply on the Spanish-borne more unfortunates. After a raid they would make for a city like Port Royal in Jamaica, to spend all their money in one great binge of whoring, gambling and drinking before returning to their hunter-gathering existence on out of the way islands.

There were also of course up to 80,000 black slaves working on the plantations who were prone to the great and bloody revolts, as well as the last few remaining indigenous Indian inhabitants of the islands. In 1670 a slave rebellion on Barbados coincided with a white servants' uprising. In 1655, following a common gain, the Irish joined with the blacks in revolt. There were similar rebellions in Denmark, St. Christopher and Montserrat, while in Jamaica transported Montserratite rebels united with "narrow" Indians in revolt. This hedge-judge of the dispossessed were described in Jacobo's terms in great detail as "rascals, peevish, sullen before they are seen forth, and at best die and only in the mines." "In which a body of colonists of Antigua added "they be all multi-racial hatched of anger and class tension into which our transported or voluntarily exiled Ranters, Diggers and Levellers would have arrived and sort of which the great age of Euro-American piracy took shape with the emergence of the incursions in the Caribbean around the middle of the 17th century."

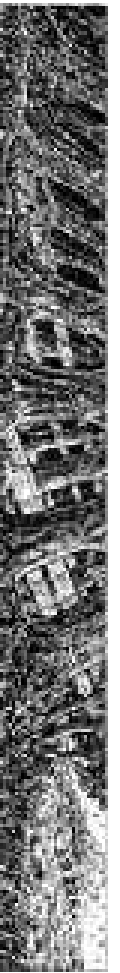
Arrgh, Jim Lad!

The overwhelming majority of pirates were merchant seamen who desired to join the pirates when their ships were captured, although a small number were runaways who had collectively seized their ship. "According to Patrick Pingle's *Jolly Roger*, pirate recruitment was most successful among the unemployed, escaped bondsmen, and bankrupted criminals. The high seas made for an incalculable leveling of class inequalities."

Many pirates displayed a fine sense of class consciousness; for example, a pirate named Captain Bellamy made the speech to the captain of a merchant vessel he had just taken on a pirate. The captain of the merchant vessel had just declared an invitation to join the pirate crew:



"Is this England? A map of the world which does not include England is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country in which humanity is always landing. And when humanity lands there, it looks at humanity, finds there, it looks out, and seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realization of Utopias."—Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*



"I am sorry they won't let you have your Schoop again, for I soon to do my own a Mischief, when it is not for my Advantage; damn the Schoop, we may sink her, and she might be of Use to you. That, damn ye, you are a stinking Piggy, and so are all those who will submit to be governed by Laws which rich Men have made for their own Security, for the commonly Whelps have not the Change otherwise to defend what they get by their Knavery; but damn ye altogether! Damn them for a Pack of crafty Rascals, and you, who serve them, for a Parcel of hen haired Ninnies. They will fly us, the Secondals do, when there is any thin Difference, they rob the Poor under the Cover of Law, Foreword, and we plunder the Rich under the Protection of our own Conscience; had you not better make One of us, than stand thus the Asses of those Villains for Employment?"

When the captain replied that his conscience would not let him touch the last of God and man, the pirate bellows continued:

"You are a devilish Conscience Rascal, damn ye, I run a free Prize, and I have as much Authority to make War on the whole World, as he who has a hundred Sail of Ships at Sea, and an Army of 100,000 Men in the Field, and this my Conscience will not hurt more in regarding with such wretched Puppies, who upon Sappers, will kick them about. Ditch at Pleasure."

Piracy was one strategy, in an early cycle of Atlantic class struggle. Seamen also used money and desertion and other tactics in order to survive and to resist their lot. Pirates were perhaps the most institutional and militant section of the proto-proletariat coalition by 17th and 18th century sailors. There were, for example, some hundred trouble-makers like Edward Bachmanor, a sailor who joined Kidd's crew in 1696; who had been arrested and jailed a number of times for agitation and rioting, or Robert Calliford, who repeatedly led mutinies, seizing the ship he was working on and turning pirate.¹⁵

During wartime, due to the demands of the navy, there was a great shortage of skilled maritime labor and seamen could command relatively high wages. The end of war, especially Queen Anne's War, which ended in 1713, saw vast numbers of naval seamen turn unemployed and caused a huge slump in wages. 40,000 men found themselves without work at the end of the war — running the streets of ports like Bristol, Portsmouth and New York. In wartime

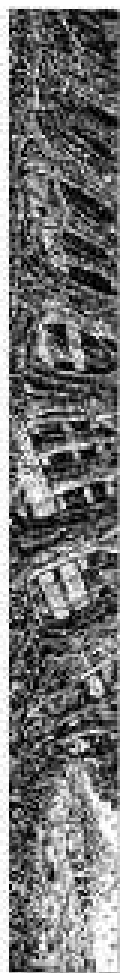
governing provided the opportunity for a relative degree of freedom and a chance of wealth. The end of war meant the end of governing tax, and these unemployed ex-prisoners only added to the huge labour surplus. Queen Anne's War had lasted 11 years and in 1713 many sailors must have known the size but warlike and the plundering of ships. It was commonly asserted that on the occasion of war pirates were turned private. The continuation of those scraps of men trained and experienced in the capture and plundering of ships suddenly finding themselves unemployed and having to compete harder and harder for sea and land wages was explosive — for many piracy must have been one of the few alternatives in any way.

Liberty, Equality, Fraternity

Having escaped the tyranny of discipline aboard merchant vessels, the most striking thing about the organisation of pirate crews was their anti-authoritarian nature. Each crew functioned under the terms of written articles, agreed by the whole crew and signed by each member. The articles of Bartholomew Roberts' crew begin:

"Every Man has a Vote in Affairs of Moment, but equal Title to the Fresh Provisions, or strong Liquors, at any Time seized, and may use them at Pleasure, unless a Secretary make it necessary; for the Good of all, to vote a Retirement, to Euro-American private crews rarely formed one commonly, with a common set of customs shared by the various ships. Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity entered and set over it hundred years before the French Revolution. The authorities were often shocked by their libertarian tendencies, the Dutch Governor of Mauritius met a pirate crew and commented: "These men had as much say as the captain and each man carried his own weapon in his blanket." This was profoundly threatening to the order of European society, where freedom was restricted to the upper classes, and provided a stark contrast to merchant ships where anything that could be used as a weapon was kept under lock and key, and in the tiny stateroom the primary purpose of the marines stationed on naval vessels was to keep the sailors in their places.

From ships operated on a "No Pay, No Pay" basis, but when a vessel was captured the booty was divided up by a share system. The sort of share system was common in merchant shipping, but had been placed out of shipping because a capitalist enterprise and sailors wage labourers. It still existed in privateering and whaling but pirates developed it into the



soft, fresh water and freshly arrived, these the pirates built Libertalia, renaming their ships of English, French, Dutch or African and calling themselves Euro. They created their own language, a polyglot mixture of African languages, combined with French, English, Dutch, Portuguese and more Malagasin. Shortly after the beginning of hunting work on the colony of Elmhurst, the *Victory* ran into the pirate, Thomas Fox, who decided to accompany them back to Libertalia. Such a colony was no more idea to Fox, he had lost his quartermaster and 25 of his crew when they had left to form a settlement there up the Malagasin coast. The *Liberty* — "Renamed to *Starve*" — aimed to boost their numbers by capturing another slave ship. Off the coast of Angola, Fox's crew took an English slave ship with 240 men, women and children below decks. The African members of the pirate crew discovered many friends and relations among the enslaved and worked off their fears and hardships, enabling them with the pleasure of their own life of freedom.

The pirates settled down to become farmers, build the land in common — "No Hedge bounded any particular Man's Property" — Purses and money taken at sea were "shared of into the common Treasury, Money being of no Use to these crew. Things were in common."

The Empire Strikes Back: The End of the Golden Age of Piracy

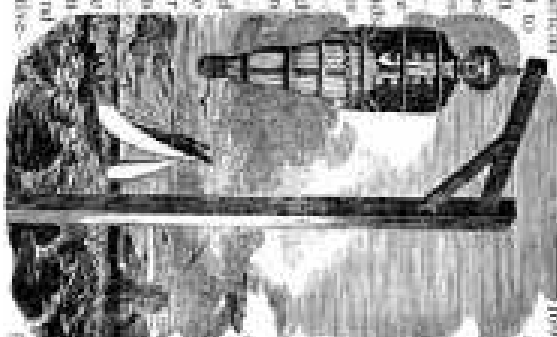
The Golden Age of Euro-American piracy was roughly from 1650 to 1725 with its peak in about 1720. There were very specific conditions and circumstances that led to the hey-day on the high seas. The port had opened with the emergence of the mercenaries on the Caribbean islands of Hispaniola and Tortuga. For most of this period piracy was considered around the Caribbean, and with good reason. The Caribbean islands provided innumerable hiding places, secret coves and uncharted islands, places where pirates could take in fresh water and provisions, rest up and lie in wait. The location was perfect, being just on the route taken by the heavily laden treasure fleets from South America back to Spain and Portugal; the Caribbean was effective

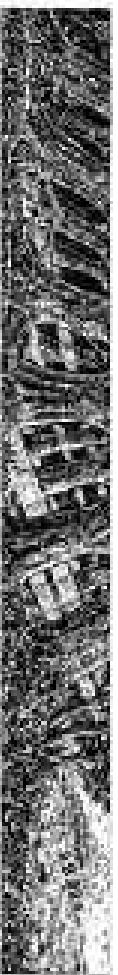
ly impossible for any navy to police and many islands were uncharted or uncolonised. All in all it added up to a freshwater paradise.

In 1700 a new law was introduced to allow for the salt retail and execution of pirates wherever they may be found. Previously they had to be transported back to London to stand trial and be executed at the last ride, mark or Whipping. The 'Act for the More Effectual Suppression of Piracy' also reinforced the use of the death penalty and gave rewards for catching pirate crews, but most importantly, it was not used by juries but by a special court of naval officers. The famous Captain Kidd was one of the first victims of this new law — indeed the law was partially nullified through specifically so that it could be applied to him. He was hanged at Execution Dock in Wapping and his body was then placed in a gibbet, covered with tar to help preserve it, and hung at Trinity Point to be a "Warning to all that see it." The blackboard and riting corpse was intended to serve as a very clear reminder to the common seaman of the risks of resisting the disciplines of wage labour.¹⁶

Kidd's case was unusual in that he was executed in London. After 1706, under the provisions of the new law, the new against the pirates would increasingly take place around the peripheries of Empire, and it wouldn't just be one or two corpses that dangled from crossbeams down near the tidemark, but sometimes literally of them at a time. In one particularly significant case in 1722 the British Admiralty tried 109 pirates of Bartholomew Roberts' crew and executed 52 of them at Cape Coast Castle on the Gulf of Guinea. The 57 Africans on board, free or not, were sold into slavery, which perhaps some of them had escaped for a short while.¹⁷

It was the disappearance of the unique favourable conditions of the Golden Age that ended the reign of the pirates. With the development of capital in the 17th century came the rise of the state, economically the important reason that wrecked the globe from 1688 onwards. The requirements of conducting these wars necessitated a large increase in state power. What, in 1713, the Treaty of Utrecht ended war between the European powers, the state's ability to actually police piracy was massively increased. The





One of the witnesses at their trial, a woman called Dorothy Thurnton, who had been taken prisoner by the pirates, said the women "wore Merino Jackets, and long Trowsers, and Handkerchiefs tied about their Heads, and that each of them had a Musket" and Pate in their Hands." Despite the fact Read and Bony were in men's clothing, their prisoner was no fool. She said that "the Reason of her knowing and believing them to be Women was, by the largeness of their Breasts."

Other prisoners taken by the pirates reported that Bony and Read "were both very good girls, cooking, and sewing much, and very neat, and willing to do any thing on board." Both women appear to have exercised some leadership: for example, they were part of the group designated to hand prizes—we both saw a table reserved for only the most Scarce and respected members of the crew. When the pirates "saw any vessel, gave Chase or Attack'd," the girl "wore Men's Cloaths," but at other times, "They were Women's Cloaths."

Readham, Bony and Read were all caught in 1720 by a British navy sloop off Jamaica. The crew were all finally drunk (a common event) and had in the hold—there was only one other spar from Bony and Read who he was brave enough to fight. In addition, Mary Read fired a pistol down into the hold "killing one and wounding others." Eighteen members of the crew had already been tried and sentenced to hang by the time the women came to court. Three of them, including Readham, were later hung in chains at public locations to act as a moral instruction and "Publick Example" to the seamen who would join their rotting corpses. However, Mary Read insisted that "When of Courage"—the largest—did not fear death. Courage was a primary virtue among the pirates—it was only courage that ensured their

Misson and Libertalia



The most famous prize was a that of Captain Misson and his pirate crew, who founded their "invented community." Their business empire of Libertalia in northern Madagascar in the eighteenth century was French, born in Provence, and it was here from the French worshiping Vietnam that he had his birth, departed by the desecration of the Papal Court. In Rome, he met into Cambrail—a "Pardoned" who over the course of long voyages with him to do his talk, gradually converted Misson and a steady portion of the rest of the crew to the front of atheistic communism.

"...the Fall upon Government, and show'd that every Man was born free, and had no more Right to what would suppose him as to the Air be respir'd... than the vast Difference betwixt Adam and Man, the one subsisting in Luxury, and the other in the most pressing Necessity, was owing only to Avarice and Ambition on the one Hand, and a predominant Subjection on the other."

Embarking on a career of piracy, the 200-segment crew of the *Warrior* called upon Misson to be their captain. They collected the wealth of the ship, deciding "all should be in common." All decisions were to be put to "the Voice of the whole Company." Thus they set out on their new "Life of Liberty." Off the west coast of Africa they captured a Dutch slave ship. The slaves were freed and brought aboard the *Warrior*. Misson declaring that "the Trading for those of our own Species, and if never be agreeable to the Eyes of divine Justice: That no Man had Power of Liberty of another" and that "he had not exchanged his Stock from the galling Yoke of Slavery, and ascertains to Liberty, to transform others." A very important note: added to their numbers was the 1000 French, English and Dutch recruits and freed African slaves.

While cruising around the coast of Madagascar, Misson found a perfect bay in an area with fertile



most egalitarian form—there were no shirts for men or women in merchants, there was neither one hierarchy of major differentiation—everyone got an equal share of the booty and the captain usually only 1 or 1 1/2 share. The wreck of *San Hellany's* pirate ship the *Wrecked*, which was discovered in 1984, provides good evidence of this—among the artifacts recovered was one West African gold Akan jewelry which "had been boxed apart with their kofi marks, which suggested that there had been an attempt to divide it equally."

The hardness of life at sea made mutual aid into a simple survival tactic. The mutual solidarity of fellow crew was carried over into pirate organizations. Pirates often went into "consortage" with one another where if one died the other got his property. Pirate articles also commonly included a form of mutual aid where injured shipmates unable to participate in the fighting would receive their share as a pension. Pirates took this sort of solidarity very seriously—it kept one pirate crew compensated their wounded only to discover they had nothing left from the articles of Bartholomew Roberts' crew: "If... any Man should lose a Limb, or become a Cripple in their Service, he may to have 500 Pieces, out of the publick Stock, and for lesser Hurt, proportionably." And from those of George Lowther's crew: "We may shall have the Misfortune to lose a Limb, in Time of Engagement, shall have the Sum of one hundred and fifty Pieces Sterling, and remain with the Company as long as he shall think fit."

Pirate capitulations were devised and could be deconstructed at any time for abuse of their authority. The captain enjoyed no special privileges. He "or any other Officer" he allowed an more blood than another man, and the Captain cannot keep this "Obligation to himself." Capitulations were "deposed for cowardice, cruelty, and unwillingly, for refusing to enter and plunder English Vessels"—the pirates had turned their backs on the state and its laws and no lingering feelings of guilt, then were to be allowed. The captain only had right of command in the heat of battle, otherwise all decisions were made by the whole ship's company. This radical democracy was not necessarily very elegant: when pirate ships tended to number rather aimlessly as the crew changed its mind.

The original businessmen had called themselves the "Gentlemen of the Court"—an apt term as pirates swapped ships, met up at private-crew points, joined together with other crews for coordinated raids and met up with old ship mates. Although it might seem surprising that over the whole course of the world's

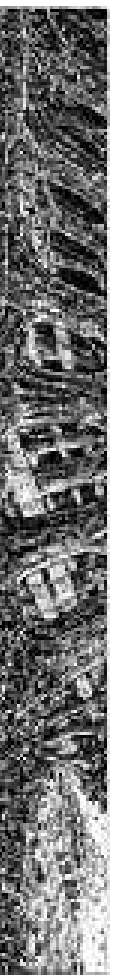
occurs the pirates kept in touch and met up with each other, they continually returned to the various "free ports" where they were welcomed by black market makers who would buy their goods. Pirate crews recognized each other, didn't attack each other and often worked together in large fleets. For example in 1695 the crews of Captains Avery, Fane, White, Moore, Fize and Wake all met up for a coordinated raid on the annual Madelon pilgrim fleet to Mexico, the six ships concentrating at least 500 men. They also met up and had parties together. Like the "seamanlike" when the crews of Blackboard and Charles Vane joined forces on Santa Catalina's Denmark Island in 1718 (see picture on page 11). There is even evidence that there was a unique pirate language, which had a red sign the pirates were providing their own fashion culture. Philip Ashton, who spent sixteen months among



The crew of Thurnton Avon debate the law by holding a mock trial. The judge, using an old tin gavel as a robe and a trap rod as a gavel, sits at a meagre pine tree and declares: "I'll have just Avon, Readham, my own 'I sit here to hear Reason— we go according to Law."



and jury of their Liberator might be said "I



plots in 1722-3, reported that one of the captives "according to the Pirates usual Custom, and to their proper Advice, asked me, If I would sign their Articles": There is also a hilarious account of how a pirate capture "was of his life [by] more than of Caring and Dancing" — suggesting that one feature of this pirate language was the liberal use of this phony and swearing. Through spitting and cooing and men jumping from ships to ship a great comedy is based amongst the various pirate crews, sharing the same culture and customs and over the course of time developing a specifically "pirate consciousness." The prospect that this pirate community might take a more permanent form was alluded to by the authorities who feared that they might set up "a Commonwealth" in uninhabited regions, where "no Power in those Parts of the World could have been able to dispute it with them."²⁶

Revenge

The particularly important part of what we might call the "pirate consciousness" was revenge upon the captains and crews who had previously captured them. The pirate Howell Davis stated "their reason for giving a printing were to revenge themselves on those Merchants and great commanders of Ships." On capturing a merchantman pirates would commonly administer the "Damnation of Justice," comprising the Murder of the Commander's Advisor in their Men, and those against whom Complaint was made "were Whipt'd and pickt'd" (ironically, one of the favorite tortures inflicted upon captured captives).

was the "Sword" — a sword meaning to allow battle or movement — in which the offender was made to run round and round the mizenmast between decks to the tune of a merry jig while he was encouraged to grieve by the surrounding pirates jostling his back side with "Blasts of Swords, Beckons, Compaines, Furies, &c." It seems the pirates were determined to give the maker a taste of his own medicine — protesting a literally vicious smile or twofold merriment of the scummin' leeching life. The moral retribution of these sea-borne righteous-of-wrong has to be Philip Byam, who when apprehended in 1726 confessed he had killed 17 Masters of Vessels.²⁷

Radical historian Mirra Rosdolsky has uncovered interesting evidence of pirates' concern with retribution in the names of their ships — the largest single group of names are the ones involving revenge; for example Blackbeard's ship the *Queen Anne's Revenge* or John Cook's wonderfully named *New Jack Revenge's Revenge*, Merchant Captain Thomas Chedoke got it just right when he described the pirates, who captured his ship as pretending "to be Robin Hood's Men": "There is further evidence for this in the name of another ship — the *Little John* belonging to pirate John Wood. Peter Lamborn Wilson says "naval officers as a profession insight into his ideas and the image of himself clearly he considered himself a kind of Robin Hood of the sea. We have some evidence he gave to the poor, and he was clearly determined to feed from the rich."²⁸

The response of the state to these merry men of the seventh sea was brutal — the crime of piracy carried the death sentence. The early



The Pirates Striking off the arm of Captain Botswick: Botswick's ship was intercepted on route from Barbary; some of the crew joined the pirates and turned against their own captain—apparently catching his arm off.

years of the 18th century saw "total effluvia and pirates [locked] in a system of reciprocal terror" as pirates became more organized to maintain society and the authorities, ever more determined to hunt them down. Rumors that pirates who had taken advantage of the latest royal pardon were on unmarking the golden era increased mistrust

his head with a dagger. She then turned pirate and became captain; her ship among the African coast carrying gold ships. There were also other less successful women pirates; in Virginia in 1728, the authorities tried Mary Hopley (or Hovey) and three men for piracy. The three men were sentenced to hang, but Hopley was released. Mary's husband Thomas was also involved in the piracy but seems to have escaped capture. Mary and her husband had been transported to the colonies as convicts a year earlier. Three years later in 1729, another depraved

In June 1780, when the privateer *London* was broken open and the prisoners (including the *Golden Rover*) were released, "A great deal of men had been seen taking a cruise and working an antique black and red flag, the standard banner of an opposing army." This man's name was James Jackson and he had the manner, in describing London's most private with a spear of "Avery, by Heaven!" It would not be so long (so much) to suggest that the "Avery" might indicate Jackson was a sailor — sailors had always been the most common source of the vocabulary, in which case black and red flag signaling would be broader-scale words of London could easily have done this to the black and red flag of the Caribbean several years earlier. The three remarkably precise Louise Middel and Alfred paid or back in the 18th century of the pirates.²⁹

The old and then, too, again in the Caribbean in 1790. After a huge three-week period of the old pirate stronghold of Hispaniola, took (named) the "Squire" American name "Pillar" and became the "squire's" first independent black pirate, led by Thomas Davidson, the rebels advanced by force of three copies to win their liberty. The red and black flag of black became a banner of freedom to rights and respect among many blacks, especially in sailors who would sail in black, become Muslims and then return home flying a red and black flag. American slaves about a red and black banner would rise and seek refuge in that.³⁰

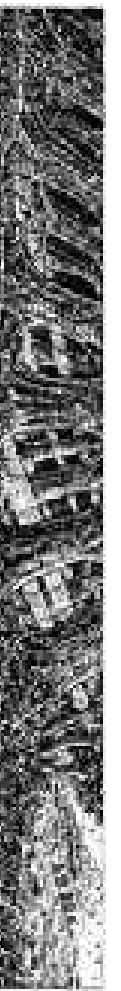
For a certain William Davidson, we are informed, "As a diversion above he protected the black flag with skull and cross bones, that in the 18th and 19th said this Slave." The flag itself "Derives from a black man from the 17th and occurred in 1820. He was born in Kingston, Jamaica, probably in the 17th century, and from one pirate captain, he spent three years at sea, was a white sailor, and then Peter and may have had some experience to Thomas L. Davidson and the revolution in Haiti. He was finally executed on November 1820 with others for being part of the "Cato-Slover conspiracy," to assassinate the entire cabinet while they were at dinner. This was intended to lead to attacks on Mission House and the Bank of England, the signing of arbitrary and to give the spark for a revolution in Haiti.³¹

Be Proud to Be the Jacky Rogers!

female contact was on trial for piracy in the colony of Virginia. A gang of six pirates were sentenced to hang, including Mary Croston (or Crockett), who along with Edmund Williams, the leader of the pirate gang, had been transported to Virginia in a field in 1728.³²

However, the women pirate about whom we know the most are Anne Bonny and Mary Read. Mary Read was born as an illegitimate child, and brought up as a little boy by her mother in order to pass her off to her relatives as her legitimate son. She had to be taught to deal with the harsh circumstances of her life and by the time she was a teenager she was already "growing bold and strong." Mary seems to have faced her male identity and embraced herself as a sailor only man-of-war and then as an English soldier in the war in Flanders. At the end of the war she joined a Dutch ship bound for the West Indies. When her ship was captured by "Calford" Jack Rackham's pirate crew, which included Anne Bonny, she decided to throw her lot in with the pirates. She seems to have taken to pirate life and began a new romance with one of the crew. When the lover got into an argument with a fellow pirate and was challenged to settle it in the pirate's customary way "by sword and pistol": Mary sawed her lover by jacking a fight with the commander, challenging him to a duel two hours before that he was due to fight with her lover and then running him through with her cut-throat.³³

Anne Bonny was born the illegitimate child of a "Maid-Servant" in Ireland and second in name this guise, her father protesting she was the child of a relative entrusted to his care. He eventually took her to Charleston, South Carolina, where they no longer needed to keep up the pretense. Anne grew up into a "wonder" woman of "Tender and courageous temper." Indeed, one time "When a young Fellow would have lain with her against her Will, she had him see that he lay off of in a considerable time." She was going to the Caribbean where she fell in love with the captain of a pirate crew called "Calford" Jack Rackham (so called because of his unshakable and cowardly death wish). Anne and "Calford" Jack, "finding they could not by far amuse enjoy each other's Company with freedom, resolved to run away together, and enjoy it in Sight of all the World." They stole a ship from the harbor and for the next couple of years Bonny and Rackham's shipmate and lover as their own (which were also included Mary Read) engaged in night doubling, when seized them from a ship they captured) traded shipping in the Caribbean and American coastal waters.³⁴



and good order on board ship, as Minister John Parrot wrote of captain to merchant John Loring.

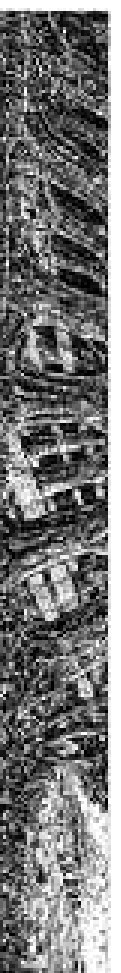
"The Death of New Davis is the most Profitable Menace to give Life to your Trade." J.R. Barr in *Seafaring and the Pirate*. *Providence* suggests that the vast majority of pirates were homosexual, and although there isn't really enough evidence to support this, nonetheless to indulge in these things a pirate colony was probably guaranteed the extra place you could be. Some of the early buccannery of Hispaniola and Tortuga lived in a kind of homosexual union known as a *marriage* (from the French for 'father' and possibly the origin of the word 'marriage' in comparison, holding their possessions in common, with the survivor inheriting). Even after women joined the buccannery, marriage continued with a partner sharing his wife with his partner. Louis Le Carle in his *Discovery of a Buccaneer* complained about homosexuality on Tortuga, where he had to fight men back in hand-to-hand combat. Eventually the French Governor of Tortuga imposed hundreds of penalties, trying thereby to wean the buccannery away from this practice. The pirate captain Robert Califford had a "great custom" John Seaman, who lived with him, Seaman men brought "greatly" boys" as companions. On one pirate ship a young man who advised a homosexual relationship was put in stocks and maltreated, but this seems to have been the exception rather than the rule. It is also significant that in an pirate articles are there any men against homosexuality.

Pirate Women

The freedom of life under the Jolly Roger extended to another perhaps surprising group of sea-robbers: women pirates. Women weren't quite as rare as you might think the 17th and 18th centuries as you might imagine them to have been. There was a fairly well established tradition of women cross-dressing in order to seek their fortune, or to follow husbands or lovers to sea. Of course the only women we know about are the ones that got caught and exposed. There were successful sailors born out of this anonymity. Even so, it would seem that women aboard pirate ships were few. Immediately this may have contributed to the pirates' downfall—they were relatively easy for the state to catch because the pirate community was widely dispersed and inherently fragile; they found it hard to retaliate or retaliate their own terms. By comparison, the much longer lived and more successful pirates of the South China Seas were organized in family groups with men, women and

children all at sea together—thus there was always a new generation of pirates to hand.

Just as pirates in general defied themselves, in opposition to the emerging capitalist social relations of the 17th and 18th centuries, so also some women found in piracy a way to rebel against the emerging gender roles. For example, Christina de Berry, born in England in 1626, followed her husband into the navy by dressing as a man. When she was forced aboard an Africa bound vessel, she led a mutiny against the captain who had assumed her, ending off



The Black Flag



"Why is our flag black? Black is a shade of rebellion. The black flag is the signpost of all flags. It is a sign of rebellion which passes human law against itself and shows the unity of all human beings. It is a road of anger and courage at all the blood crimes against humanity perpetrated in the name of absolute justice: gods or angels." "

We all know that pirate flag, the 'Jolly Roger'—the skull and crossbones flag. The most likely derivation of the name 'Jolly Roger' is as an Anglicization of the French *le drapeau*—the red or 'bloody' flag that pirates originally used before the more well-known black. The red flag is widely known as the international symbol of protest and rebellion and revolt and the black flag has historically been the flag of the anarchist movement. These two notions eventually foundered combined in the anarchy, anarchy, red and black flag of the Spanish revolution of 1936. "

The earliest definite report of the black flag being flown by pirates—or used in a similar way—is of the famous pirate Captain Micaldo leading a crowd of 6000 men to the island of Tortuga in 1665. The black flag was used to mark the capture of ships with a black flag on March 30, 1684. However, there are reports that the flag flew a small and crossbones flag 12 years earlier in 1671, while leading the summit's foundation of the revolutionary flag. Captain. The Black Chamber even had a daily paper called 'The Pirate'.

and antagonism: the pirates resolved "no longer to stand in any office of employment but in case of need to defend themselves on their fatherless-companions who may fall into their hands." In 1722 Captain Luke Knox was granted £2,500 for the loss of his career, after sailing over 8 pirates. "No being obliged to quit the Merchant service, the Pirates threatening to torture him to death if ever he should fall into their hands." It was by no means an empty threat—in 1720 pirates of the crew of Bartholomew Roberts "openly and in the daytime burnt and destroyed" vessels in the Road of Adenore (St. Paul) and had the audacity to invade HM. Fort" arranging the execution of "their comrades at Seville". Roberts then sent word to the governor that "they would come and burn the town (Seville) itself about the time for hanging the Pirates there."

Roberts even had his own pirate flag made showing him standing on two skulls labeled ABH and AMH—"A Barbican's Head" and "A Merchant's Head"—later that same year he gave substance to his vendetta against the two islands by hanging the governor of Martinique from a guano. As a result, were offered for the capture of pirates, the pirates responded by offering rewards for certain officials. And when pirates were captured or executed, other pirates often revenged their brethren, attacking the town that condemned them, or the shipping of that port. This sort of solidarity shows that they had developed a real pirate community, and that those sailing under "the banner of King Death" no longer thought of themselves as English or Dutch or French but as pirates."

Piracy and Slavery

The Golden Age of piracy was also the hey-day of the Atlantic slave trade. The relationship between piracy and the slave trade is complex and ambiguous. Some pirates participated in the slave trade and shared their contemporary attitudes to Africans as commodities for exchange.

These men, and all pirates, participated in the slave trade. Indeed large numbers of pirates were ex-slaves; there was a much higher proportion of blacks on pirate ships than on merchant or naval vessels, and only rarely did the overseer who stood their presence refer to them as "blacks". Most of these black pirates would have been runaway slaves, either joining with the pirates on the coast of the tropical West Indies, deserting from the plantation, or sent as slaves to work on board ship. Some may have been free men, like the "free Negro" seaman from



A group of pirates, among them Gibbs and Munsley, burying their treasure on Bonan Island. This engraving is unusual for the core depiction of an African-American pirate, although in fact there were many of them.

Departed who in 1721 led "a Manning, that we had too many Africans, and that the work was too hard, and what not." Sailing in general offered more autonomy in ships than life on the plantation, but piracy in particular, would—although it was a dis-order, one of the few choices at freedom for an African in the 18th-century Atlantic. For example, a quarter of the men-handred among crew of Captain Bellamy's ship the *Whydah* were black, and even more accounts of the sinking of the pirate vessel off Wadsworth, Massachusetts in 1717 report that many of the corpses washed up were black. Three historian Kenneth Kinzer argues that although the *Whydah* was definitely a slave ship, the blacks on board at the time of the sinking were members of the crew, not slaves. Initially because pirates, along with other men, "men were it so recognizable a portion of landowners," a black man who knew the ropes was more likely to win respect than a landowner who didn't. Kinzer notes: "Pirates judged Africans more on the basis of their language and sailing skills—in other words, on their level of cultural attainment—than on their race."

Black pirates would often lead the boarding party to capture a prize. The pirate ship the *Morning Star* had "a Negro Cook chiefly arm'd" in the boarding party and more than half of Edward Crahan's boarding party on the *Thynon* were black. Some black pirates became quartermasters or captains. For example, in 1699, when Captain Kidd dropped anchor in New York, two slaves were there to meet



being one of a those “Male was a little black man... who, as it was said, had been formerly Captain Kidd’s Quarter-Master.”²

In the 17th century, blacks found on pirate ships were not tried with the other pirates because it was assumed they were slaves, but by the 18th century they were being executed alongside their white brethren. Still the most likely fate for these black pirates, if he was captured, was to be sold into slavery, whether he was a freeman or not. When Blackbeard was captured by the Royal Navy in 1718, five of his eighteen men were “sent back and according to the Governor’s Council of Virginia the two blacks were ‘separately sentenced with the rest of the Crew in the name Acts of Piracy.’” A “wasteful Fellow, a Negro” named Casare was caught just as he was about to blow up the whole ship rather than be captured and most likely returned to slavery.³

In 1718, the ruling Council of the Colony of Virginia worried about the connections between the “Ravage of Pyrates” and “an Insurrection of the Negroes.” They were right to be concerned. By 1716 the slaves of Antigua had grown “very impatient and insubmitting” and reportedly many of them “worn off to join those pirates who did not seem to be concerned about color differences.” These connections were multi-Atlantic, stretching from the heart of England in London to the slave economies in the Americas and the “Slave Coast” of Africa. In the early 1720s a gang of pirates sailed in West Africa, pirating and intermingling with the Kru—a West African people from what is now Sierra Leone and Liberia, renowned both for their seamanship in their long canoes and when employed for their leadership of slave revolts. The pirates were probably members of Bartholomew Roberts’ crew who had fled into the woods when attacked by the Navy in 1722. This alliance is not so unusual when you consider that of the 157 men who didn’t escape and were either captured or killed on board Roberts’ ship, 45 of them were black—probably neither slaves nor pirates but “black seafarers, commonly known by the name of ‘graces’”—independent African mariners, primarily from the Sierra Leone region, who would have joined the pirates “for a small demand of wages.”⁴

We can see the way these connections were spread and the how the pirates’ legacy was disseminated even after their defeat in the face of some of those captured on Roberts’ pirate ship: “Negroes” from the crew grew mutinous over the poor conditions and “this Contentment” they received from the Navy. “Many of them” had “found a long time” in the

“pyratical Way” which obviously for them had meant better food and more freedom.⁵

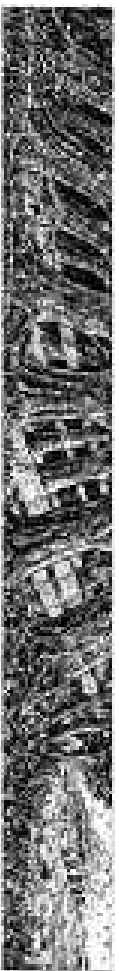
Going Native

Lieut. Water was a French surgeon who joined the buccannier crews in the Caribbean in 1677. While returning from a voyage to the East Indies he met with an accident and was forced to recuperate in an Indian village, eventually adopting Indian customs. This is the description of the return of some English sailors in the village:

“I sat awhile, idling upon my haun among the Indians, after their fashion, gained as they say, and at last got but coldly about the night, and with my nose-peace hanging over my mouth. ‘Twas the better part of an hour before one of the crew, looking more narrowly upon me, cried out, ‘There’s our doctor,’ and immediately all congratulated my arrival among them.”⁶

This sort of adopting out and going native was not always accidental. The buccanniers of the Caribbean originally got their name from buccan, a practice of smoking meat they had learnt from the native Aruacan Indians. The buccanniers were originally land squatters on the large Spanish-owned island of Hispaniola (now Haiti and the Dominican Republic)—they turned to piracy following Spanish attempts to oust them. On Hispaniola they followed a way of life essentially identical to the native people who had preceded them. This sort of “marooning life” was very clearly identified with glory—far from the buccanniers of Hispaniola and Berlogia the main other groups of European dropouts in the New World were the “ignominious” of Italy of Campochi (now Montecarlo and Bellino), a “vital drunken crew” who were, considered by most observers to be interchangeable with pirates. They consciously chose a non-acculturative life living in independent communal settlements on the world’s periphery.⁷

The pirates’ relations with the native peoples they encountered were split. Some pirates would enslave people they encountered, make them work, rape the women and steal. But other pirates scented down and intermarried—becoming part of the society. Particularly in Madagascar, the pirates, mixing with the native population had produced “a dark Malabar Race” that “Carries and cultural exchange between pirates, sailors and Africans led to the clear similarities between men, slaves and African seags. In 1749 some sailors were court-martialed for slaying a



“negro seag”:⁸ These sort of connections went in both directions and were not as you might imagine. A pirate called William May, attacked on the Madagascar island of Belmont got a shock when he was addressed in fluent English by one of the “negroes”. He learned that the man had been taken from the island by an English ship and had lived for a while in Bechoval (now in London, before returning home. The new friend saved him from being captured by the English and taken to Bombay and honored.”⁹

It is a common feature of what you might call “pirate identity” that pirates thought of themselves as free kings, as autonomous individual enterprises. This was partly to do with the dream of wealth—Henry Avery was accused for the enormous wealth he plundered, some believed he had set up his own nation more remarkable enterprise—because for he sailed out as a slave in the French colony of Martinique. Abraham Samuel, “rolin’ boy”, the King of Fort Dauphin, Samuel was a runaway slave who joined the crew of the pirate ship *Jolly and Revenge*, eventually becoming quartermaster. In 1696, the pirates captured a large and valuable prize and decided to retire and settle down in Madagascar. Samuel ended up in the abandoned French colony of Fort Dauphin where he was identified by a local princess as the child she had borne to a Frenchman during the occupancy of the colony. Samuel suddenly found himself declared heir to the southernmost of the kingdom. Sources and merchants, flooded in at his business with “King Samuel” but he remained suspicious for his pirate connections, allowing and assisting them to loot the merchants who came to trade with him. There were a number of slavers, Frenchmen, and, schemers in the ports and harbours of

Madagascar—pirates or slaves who had become local leaders with political ambitions of as many as 800 men.¹⁰

Sex and Drugs and Rock n’ Roll

The pirates certainly seem to have had more fun than their poor suffering counterparts on naval or merchant vessels. They sure had some pretty wild parties—in 1669 just off the coast of Hispaniola, some of Henry Morgan’s buccanniers blew up their own ship during a particularly riotous party, which did all good party celebrations included much drunken brawling of the ship’s guns. Sometimes they set light to the gunpowder in the ship’s magazine and the resulting explosion usually destroyed the ship. On some voyages alcohol ran “as freely as diarrhoea” and for many was the promise of unvarnished good action had been one of the main reasons behind leaving the merchant service to become a pirate in the first place. However this sometimes backfired—one group of pirates took three days to capture a ship because there were never enough sober men available. Sailors in general disliked a “stink water” voyage—one reason being that in the tropics the water tended to get things living in it and you had to strain it through your teeth.¹¹

No pirate celebration would be complete without music. Parties were renowned for their love of music and often had musicians for the duration of a voyage. During the trial of “Black Bart” Bartholomew Roberts’ crew in 1722, two men were acquitted as being “only musicians. The pirates seem to have employed music in battle, as it was said of one of the men, James White, that his “musicalness” or music was upon the people to tune of action.”¹²

For some men the freedom that piracy offered from the constrained world they had left behind extended to sexual life. European society of the 17th and 18th centuries was strongly anti-bourgeois. The Royal Navy periodically conducted brutal anti-burgery campaigns on ships on which men might be condemned together for years. In both the navy and the merchant service it was considered that sexual life was limited to work

