

Piracy in a Mercantilist Society

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Beginning with Columbus' second voyage in 1493, The Spanish began to colonize the Caribbean<sup>1</sup>. Originally they dominated the region, controlling most of the land and wealth. To monopolize this wealth, they created an economic system called mercantilism. Mercantilism is an economic policy that is based on internal trade between the mother country and its colonies. Mercantilism also discourages imports in order to keep its bullion while using exports as a way to gain more money. Not surprisingly, other nations followed Spain's example and attempted to create colonies and a mercantilistic trade system. Also, the rival European nations such as the French, Dutch, and English challenged Spain through a variety of actions. They engaged in piracy, smuggling, and open warfare. There were two kinds of pirates. One kind were supported by their country through investments and privileges. They shared their plundered wealth with the crown and other investors. Examples of these pirates were Sir Francis Drake and Sir Henry Morgan. The second kind were private entrepreneurs who kept all the wealth themselves, but had limited shelter and support. Examples of this kind of pirate are Blackbeard and Calico Jack.

The Spanish controlled the majority of the land therefore they controlled the majority of the trade. The Spanish were stockpiling their bullion and the other naval powers in Europe were interested in obtaining similar riches. With wealth not being spread around to the other countries, piracy flourished in the areas of the Spanish colonies; the Caribbean being one of these locations. However, piracy comes from a situation that breeds the attitudes of the pirates. The pirates had to have something in mind to initiate their actions on the sea as well as the land. Even more intriguing was the effect piracy had in the Caribbean.

This essay will focus on how piracy in its golden age exploited the mercantilist economy of the European empires to their advantage and prospered. After all, the mercantile economy practiced in Europe at the time is what created a need for privateers in other nations in order to

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A

compete with the Spanish in the Caribbean. The pirates between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries took advantage of the political and economic climate of Europe in order to attack merchants and towns that lacked proper protection from their empire. These raids and attacks were very well planned. The pirates were knowledgeable sailors and knew the trade routes of the merchants. They did not typically go out to sink ships and kill everyone in their path. The main goal of the pirates was to procure the spoils that the ships could offer. With all of Spain's wealth from her colonies traveling through the Caribbean, the area had plenty of plunder for the taking because if there had been no wealth, the pirates would not have formed in such large numbers in the Caribbean. Plunder was pretty much anything the pirates could get their hands on which ranged from gold coins to fishing nets. Basically anything that had a market or was of use to their ship and its crew. While money was a goal of the pirates, they also needed supplies and that is why pirates would take items that were of little value at a market, but in high demand on the sea. Because treasure ships were so well guarded, merchant ships were the main target. Pirates were not looking for a hard fight, which is why they avoided treasure fleets unless they had a large advantage. These merchant ships rarely carried bullion; instead they carried items such as fur or cocoa. To profit, the pirates needed to sell the goods. This is where the black market and safe harbors came into play, topics which will be discussed later in this paper.

Books such as *Peter Pan* and movies like *Treasure Island* and the recent film *Pirates of the Caribbean* have created a Romantic idea of piracy to the general public. These fantasy worlds of pirates have shaped many peoples mind of what pirates are. This is not helpful however, when trying to examine the reality behind piracy. This essay makes a strict division between "romanticism" and actual pirates. One of the newer authors on the subject of piracy is David Cordingly. He writes his book *Under The Black Flag* with a purpose of exposing the

truths about piracy. This comes to importance in the topic of pirate goals, which is to procure loot and make a profit selling it in another nations' markets. He removes the romance of piracy to expose what really took place on the ships the pirates were looting, the trade they involved themselves in, and how it all came together. His thesis "The aim of this book is too examine the popular image of pirates today, to find out where this image came from, and to compare it with the real world of pirates"<sup>2</sup> is very important because he gives a much darker view of pirates and how they operated, which in turn will uncover how they were able to exploit the mercantile system to their advantage. He takes the romanticism out of the topic and exposes the realities involved in piracy and how it all worked, which is important to keep in mind when looking at how the pirates survived and lived off the mercantile inefficiencies of their time. He does everything he can to dissolve the romanticism of piracy in order to show the reader that pirates were really not all fun and games.

When Cordingly writes about "Into Action Under The Black Flag"<sup>3</sup> he is giving the reader a look into the who, what, where, and when of pirate looting. To fully understand the impact piracy had in the Caribbean, it is important to know how they plundered the valuables and the methods they used to both procure it as well as sell it. Their methods of plundering will be mentioned later in this essay. Cordingly writes about what and why some spoils was taken, as well as why some was not. It is this kind of information that is included in the many examples given by the author that will show how the pirates cut into the economy of the Spanish. Cordingly also makes sure to note how brutal piracy really was by describing actual documented pirate attacks. He spares no details in how pirates would obtain information through torture as

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<sup>2</sup> David Cordingly, *Under the Black Flag: The Romance and the Reality of Life Among the Pirates* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1995) xiv.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 104

well as how they treated captives. It is with these illustrations that he makes his point of how unromantic piracy really transpired.

Cordingly also brings up the areas of trade available to the pirates in “Pirate Islands And Other Haunts”<sup>4</sup> Cordingly writes of the safe harbors and cities where pirates were encouraged to frequent in order to stimulate the economy as well as the defenses. He makes note that without safe harbors, pirates would not have flourished the way they did because they would not have a place to trade, repair, or even spend their money. This subject is a main focus in this essay because his argument is that piracy did have an effect on the Caribbean to the point that safe harbors were created in order to act as black markets where the pirates could trade their loot without questions.

Kris Lane writes his book *Pillaging the Empire* from the perspective of the Spanish. Unlike Cordingly, he is not interested in removing the romanticism of piracy. He finds that too many authors have over or underestimated the role of piracy and have come to either glorify or chastise the pirates. His view is more of the traditional view of pirates and he does not try to depict pirates as murderers the way Cordingly does. He takes his time in approaching the exploits of the pirates because of his in-depth description of the different types of “pirates.” In these descriptions, he explores the origins as well as the conditions that gave rise to piracy. He takes a periodical approach when he comes to talk about the pirates and their exploits by separating the different eras of piracy. He begins with the sixteenth century corsairs and moves on to the Elizabethan privateers, the Dutch sea rovers, the seventeenth century buccaneers and then ends with the suppression of piracy. In each category, the pirates are different because of the environment that they are in. For each era, he talks of the basic mechanics of piracy such as where the pirates came from and who they were associated with. He also writes of the areas of

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 141

focus for the pirates to attack and the places that they sold their booty, which changes as the governments evolve and the economic systems change. With changing economic and political policies, piracy itself had to change in order to adapt to the new systems. Eventually though, Lane concludes that piracy reached the end when they were no longer needed because of the nations no longer requiring their help because they had become settled in the area and did not want the pirates attacking them.

While covering the pirates in this time period he also makes sure to discuss the situation of the colonizing countries during the time period. His discussion of the European politics is important to understand since pirates were often plundering ships with the support of a country at war with another. The practice of privateering is important in order to understand how much of the economics of piracy influenced. This is why Lane's thesis, "As will be seen, piracy in the Americas took many forms during the long period between Columbus's landfall and the great pirate trials of the early eighteenth century"<sup>5</sup> works so well with this essay.

Piracy and its effects on colonial life is another important aspect to consider and Shirley Hughson writes from an interesting perspective on this topic. She writes of piracy and how the practice affected the Carolinas during the seventeenth and eighteenth century. This essay is a very specific essay that is focused only on piracy in the Carolinas and the effect that the pirates had on the society and economics as well as the politics concerning the governance of piracy. She articulates how the English policy towards pirates was not always friendly. The English government did not approve of piracy and discouraged it with public hangings. This was not always practiced by the colonials though. She reminds the reader that the settlers of the English colonies were not always of high moral standards. Many homeless and prisoners were sent to colonize the Carolinas. She writes "The countries of Europe, when anxious to rid themselves of

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<sup>5</sup> Kris Lane, *Pillaging the Empire* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc, 1998) 3.

turbulent elements, offered special inducements to the objectionable individuals to emigrate.”<sup>6</sup> These men were given land to entice them to move away from their homeland. By this, she conveys her thesis by describing the type of colonists that were occupying the Carolinas and would be trading with or even joining the pirates who ventured there. She continues to talk of the trade with the pirates, and how for a long time, the colonists prospered from the trade. This continued until there was strong governmental control that the trade ceased. Her thesis shows that the relationship between the colonials and the pirates were intertwined with each other. This argument supports my thesis by showing that the pirates were involved in a trade that was strong enough to win the support of colonials despite the reputation of being ruffians. This support that the pirates garnered is what gave them a place to trade the goods they had stolen from the Spanish. This upset the Spanish not only because it was a drain on its merchants, but also because it was going against their mercantilist system that was supposed to keep their colonial goods in Spanish hands, not in another nation’s through free trade.

Since pirates were interrupting the economic system of countries like Spain, it is important to understand what the economic system of the time was. Therefore, mercantilism needs to be understood before appreciating the effects piracy had on this system. A great description of mercantilism is written by Jonathan C. Brown, “Mercantilism is the economic system of the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries in which European nations sought to increase national wealth and power by exporting manufactured goods and importing precious metals in return.”<sup>7</sup> This system did not support much trade outside of each empire. The leaders of the European empires sought to keep the raw materials of their colonies inside their empire in

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<sup>6</sup> Shirley Carter Hughson “The Carolina Pirates and Colonial Commerce, 1670-1740” in *Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science*, ed. Herbert B. Adams ( Baltimore: The Friedenwald Co., Printers, 1894) 246.

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan C. Brown, *Latin America: A Social History of the Colonial Period* (Belmont: Thomson Wadsworth, 2005) 107.

order to provide materials for their growing industries. Spain was a great example of a mercantile economic policy because of their attempt to “Create for Spain a monopoly of all trade and shipping with the Indies.”<sup>8</sup> With such an internal policy in place, external trade was highly regulated by tariffs and licenses that restricted trade.

With this mercantile economic system in place, the Spanish had a monopoly on the bullion and other goods, such as sugarcane, that were being produced from the American colonies. There were some smugglers that involved themselves in illegal trade, but this is not considered piracy. Pirates preyed on the smugglers the same as they did any other merchants in the Caribbean. The smugglers that were in contact with outside nations were still not large enough in number or capable of shipping enough products to other European nations as they would like.

This is where the pirates came into play. They were adventurous enough to steal goods out of the Spanish hands and, as long as they did not become too infamous, they had ports willing to trade for the stolen goods. So, who were these pirates that attacked the economies of the European nations? They were not foreigners; the majority of the pirates actually consisted of the men that came from the colonies in the Caribbean. There were some natives and black slaves that became pirates, but they were not the majority. The ranks of pirates in the Caribbean grew because the majority of the settlers in the new colonies were, as Hughson puts it “...banished criminals of the lowest class, and in numbers of cases the leaders, while not really depraved characters, were at least agitators of a type whose presence would by no means conduce to the political health of any community.”<sup>9</sup> The Caribbean was not settled by the established nobility and their loyal serfs. Nobles came to the colonies as a last resort because political, social or

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<sup>8</sup> C.H Harding, *The Spanish in America* (Orlando: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Inc, 1975) 293.

<sup>9</sup> Hughson, 247



business reasons. The Caribbean was a major source of wealth, but they did not have the royal court and its culture. This meant that the nobles with land and money did not want to move to the Caribbean. They would be giving up their prestigious land in Europe and their political aspirations would diminish being so far away from court. The nobles in political trouble or those that were broke came to the Caribbean because they had little to lose. Moving to a colony in the Caribbean meant that they could either start over with their business or stay alive by avoiding the hangman's noose because moving to the new world meant that they would have a fresh start.

The lower classes came for a couple reasons. They were either sent to the Caribbean as a way of getting rid of unwanted elements of society in Europe, or the promise of land would entice them into making the journey. It was often the discarded European peasants that were sent to the Caribbean. "There, trade was rich but settlement was thin and defense difficult. There the idle, the criminal, and the poverty-stricken were sent to ease society in the Old World."<sup>10</sup> They were typically not going straight into piracy as soon as they arrived in the Caribbean. Many of them did work on boats though, generally as laborers which would show why they had such intricate knowledge of ships. Pirates were known for their prowess on the sea and the knowledge that they had of the areas they haunted. This would be because many pirates were previously employed on merchant ships. Life on a merchant ship was rough and unrewarding. The sailors would endure hard labor for little pay, but they would learn a lot about sailing. Many of the merchant sailors would eventually leave the legal trade for piracy in order to make more money and work in a more democratic environment.

It is not enough to just say that the pirates came from slaves, poor merchant sailors, criminals, or even troubled nobility. Henry Morgan became a famous privateer and had for a

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<sup>10</sup> Violet Barbour. *Privateers and Pirates of the West Indies*. The American Historical Review Vol. 16, No. 3 (Apr., 1911), 529.

father “a rich yeoman, or farmer, and of good quality in that country, even as most who bear that name in Wales are known to be.”<sup>11</sup> Morgan did not want to follow in his fathers footsteps though and left for Barbados as an indentured servant on a ship. He gained his freedom and turned to piracy, and he was quickly made captain by his comrades because of their success. Henry Morgan became one of the most famous pirates to sail under the English flag. He was supported by the English Crown and made successful raids on the Spanish ports of Portobello, Maracaibo, and Panama in the Caribbean.<sup>12</sup>

Pirates have been depicted as cruel anarchists by many stories. Hollywood has even depicted pirates as bloodthirsty men that would kill and steal anything in their path. While the theft of everything is partly true because of their practices of plundering, the bloodthirsty anarchist view of them is not correct. Pirates were actually very democratic. A pirate did not just make himself captain and receive loyalty from the crew. It has been found that “The pirate crews operated as democracies, in which majority vote determined who commanded, where to sail, and what to attack.”<sup>13</sup> The cruise was planned out and discussed before the ship set out. The division of the shares was agreed on and then the pirates would set sail.<sup>14</sup> If any discrepancies came up during the voyage, mutiny was a very real possibility. Pirates liked their freedom and considered themselves equals. They would not stand to be treated harshly or unfairly. A reason that pirates did not like unfair treatment is that many were past sailors on merchant ships and had bad experiences. On these ships, the sailors received meager pay and had to follow the command of a captain who was often times a cruel one. With treatment such as this, the pirates would actually hold trial for the captain of the merchant vessels that they

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<sup>11</sup> John Esquemeling, *The Buccaneers of America* ed. James Burney (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1951) 120.

<sup>12</sup> Cordingly, 43

<sup>13</sup> Alan Taylor, *American Colonies: The Settling of North America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001) 295-296.

<sup>14</sup> Esquemeling, 188-189

plundered and if the crew said that the captain was cruel, the captain would be killed, or if he was a good captain his life was spared. The crews themselves were left alive and given a chance to join the pirate ranks. This is another reason why many sailors would join the pirates. Conditions were better, pay was better, and the government of the ship was democratic instead of the military dictatorship on the merchant ships.

It is important to understand that there were women pirates as well. While few have ever been documented, it is probably because of the sexism of the time. Women were not supposed to be on a pirate ship and especially not fight on them. Because of this popular opinion, women would have to dress in disguise if they were to become pirates. With this disguise, it is understandable why little has been said of female pirates. There are two notable women though that did join the ranks of known pirates. The two women were Anne Bonny and Mary Read. Anne Bonny was courted into the life of piracy by a lesser known captain named Calico Jack (John Rackam was his real name). Calico Jack did not become as powerful as Blackbeard, Bartholomew Roberts, or Henry Morgan. Calico Jack kept to cruising in a small sloop and harassed the local traders instead of cruising for Spanish galleons. Anne Bonny and Calico Jack had a child, and Calico Jack quickly went back to piracy. Cordingly then finds “Calico Jack sent for her and she rejoined his crew, dressed as usual in men’s clothes.”<sup>15</sup> Anne rejoined the pirates and set sail to find that one of the other crew members was, in fact, a female as well. She brought this up to Calico Jack and the three of them kept it a secret to themselves. It was when this crew captained by Calico Jack stole a sloop in Nassau that the English government declared them pirates and sent ships after the sloop. It was a Spanish privateer that was hunting pirates that caught them. What made the capture of this boat significant was that “The only resistance

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<sup>15</sup> Cordingly, 57

came from Mary Read and Anne Bonny.”<sup>16</sup> This action is what made the females known in pirate history. They did not have to become as notorious as the other known pirates, they just had to show courage when it failed the rest of the male crew.

Understanding the background of the pirates is important because it helps show how pirates became so knowledgeable of the different trade routes in the Caribbean. The pirates also came into the knowledge of the whereabouts of the Spanish Navy and where it was, and more importantly where it wasn't “The local authorities complained that Spanish merchants and ships neglected the ports of the Antilles and Tierra Firme east of Cartagena and that foreign smugglers and corsairs infested their coasts.”<sup>17</sup> This “neglect” was because of the lack of a Spanish Naval power to stop the pirates in the Caribbean. Pirates knew where to raid and avoid the naval fleets sent to stop them. The foreign ports of its enemies in the Antilles also hurt the Spanish because the pirates had short traveling distances between safe harbors and ports to raid, but that will be explained later. For now the comprehension of the link between piracy and the merchants is important. In the end, most pirates were disgruntled employees with a great deal of knowledge about their previous employers and how to take the goods that they carried.

Spain had made many enemies in Europe because of their reluctance to trade the goods that were brought back to Spain from the colonies and their monopolistic empire overseas. Spain had even received support from the Pope when he gave Spain the right to all lands west of a line close to the western edge of Brazil in 1494 with the Treaty of Tordesillas.<sup>18</sup> While Portugal received support from the pope for the lands east of the line, countries such as France, England and Holland were left out. This feeling of being left out of the trade and political conditions in

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 59

<sup>17</sup> Kenneth Andrews, *The Spanish Caribbean: Trade and Plunder 1530-1630* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978) 54.

<sup>18</sup> Brown, 105

Europe led to the formation of letters of marque. These documents were meant to give sailors the legal right to attack a certain country's ships and in return they could receive hospitality from the host nation's ports. While these letters were highly sought after, it was not because of their safety in that, "letters of marque were desirable because they enabled the holder to bring his prize into port and sell it, not because they minimized the danger to his life."<sup>19</sup> The Spanish tried privateers the same as pirates and in practice privateers really were nothing more than pirates with government backing. The French were the first to use this method to weaken the Spanish. Hostilities between Francis I and Charles V gave the French an excuse to start pillaging the coasts and merchants in the Caribbean which led to Spain's first defensive policy of sending two caravels to protect Cuba's coast.<sup>20</sup> The Dutch and the English soon came to the same conclusion as France on how to stop Spain and began supporting privateers themselves. These privateers were cheap labor because all the countries had to do was allow their trade in ports and they received Spanish goods for a cheap price as well as a defense of the area because the privateers needed the safe havens that the host countries provided.

With pirates knowing the trade routes and ports of the merchants in the Caribbean, knowing how they acted on this knowledge is the next step. First thing to note though is that it was predominately merchants that were attacked, not a military vessel or port other than in a couple rare instances. Also important to understand is that treasure fleets were not sailing unguarded daily throughout the Caribbean. The Spanish treasure fleet was highly guarded by a navy escort in order to protect the bullion they treasure ships held. Remember that while the merchant ships did hold valuable cargo, bullion was the most important aspect of the mercantilist economy of the time. Another thing to remember is that not all pirates had the fleets that

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<sup>19</sup> Barbour, 531

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 531

Blackbeard, Bartholomew Roberts and Henry Morgan had. Instead most used a small sloop to take the small merchant vessels and left many of the larger armed merchants alone.

If pirates had never gone into battle with a merchant ship or pirate hunters the romanticism would not have become what it has today. While Blackbeard is probably considered the most famous of all the pirates, it was actually Bartholomew Roberts, or otherwise known as Black Bart that was the most successful. He was one of the few pirates that were able to command a fleet of ships and the *Royal Fortune* was his flagship.<sup>21</sup> Black Bart was not as charismatic as Blackbeard was, but he was a brilliant captain and was able to pull off very risky attacks to disrupt the Spanish trade such as the following attack:

Roberts was cruising along the South American coast when his ship caught up with a fleet of forty-two Portuguese merchantmen off the Bay of Los Todos Santos. The merchantmen were waiting to be joined by two warships before setting off in convoy to Lisbon. Roberts coolly came alongside one of the ships and threatened to kill her crew if they made any signal of distress. Her captain was ordered to come aboard the pirate ship, where he was interrogated by Roberts.

Having discovered that the richest ship in the fleet was a powerful vessel of forty guns and a crew of 150 men, Roberts immediately headed towards her. He took with him as his prisoner the Portuguese captain onboard Roberts' ship. The captain of the big merchant ship became suspicious and began clearing his ship for action. Roberts immediately fired a broadside at her, came alongside, flung out grappling hooks and boarded her. After a brisk fight she surrendered.<sup>22</sup>

This was one of the largest thefts ever for pirates. The ship was holding gold molders which was a form of gold currency, as well as a large shipment of goods such as tobacco. These goods ended up selling for great prices, and these pirates had a very uncommonly large haul. It was Roberts's ingenuity that gave them the clean attack and getaway. This is not the only instance of him doing that though. Black Bart was able to lead his crew to an unusually large payload more

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<sup>21</sup> Cordingly. While the *Royal Fortune* was the flagship of his fleet, the ship itself was in constant change. Whenever Roberts found a ship that was better he would replace his flagship with the new one and re-name it *Royal Fortune*

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 109.

often than most captains. His life came to an end on the coast of Africa though. A British war ship found him in a bay and started battle in which “He had now perhaps finished the fight very desperately, if death who took a swift passage, in a grape-shot, had not interposed, and struck him directly on the throat.”<sup>23</sup> His men tossed his body overboard before surrendering because that had been the request of Roberts.

Cordingly uses a great example of how pirates typically conducted their pillaging of a ship by writing of the attack on the merchant ship *Samuel*. “The pirates swarmed on board the *Samuel* and began taking the ship apart. They tore open the hatches and attacked the cargo like madmen, cutting open bales, trunks, and boxes with their boarding axes and cutlasses.”<sup>24</sup> This differs from the previously mentioned assault by Roberts, but that was a rare find. Merchants were the typical targets and they characteristically be sailing alone, giving pirates the time to search for all the plunder they could from a ship.

Blackbeard like Roberts, died in battle against the British.<sup>25</sup> While Roberts was a successful pirate, he did not achieve the fame that Blackbeard had and the story of how Blackbeard died as described by Defoe is legendary. Blackbeard was attacked at his hideout near the Okerecock inlet off the coast of North Carolina. The governor of North Carolina informed Captain Maynard of where Blackbeard’s hideout was and he was able to sneak up and surprise a hung-over pirate crew. When Maynard arrived in the morning, Blackbeard and his crew of 25 shot at Maynard’s sloops and did considerable damage. Maynard knew he could not board Blackbeard’s ship and win, so he had his men lie hidden hoping to ambush Blackbeard’s men when they boarded his ship. They did as Maynard hoped and were quickly ambushed. Blackbeard moved straight for Maynard and both of them shot at each other but only Maynard’s

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<sup>23</sup> Johnson, 213

<sup>24</sup> Cordingly, 106

<sup>25</sup> See Appendix B

bullet hit. Blackbeard did not go down though. Instead he “then engaged with swords, till the lieutenant’s unluckily broke”<sup>26</sup> At this time Blackbeard was attacked from behind by another man and was wounded. It took “five shot in him and 20 dismal cuts in several parts of his body.”<sup>27</sup> With that Blackbeard died.

While Blackbeard’s death is a popular story, the part that is left out is how he as well as other pirates helped the Carolina colonies. Often in the Carolinas the colonists “would meet with rich prizes, ships of treasure and plate, and on coming into the colony would scatter their gold and silver about with so generous a hand that their appearance soon came to be welcomed by the trading classes.”<sup>28</sup> With this abundant flow of money, the traders supported the pirates and ignored the requests of England to not trade with them. The pirates needed to dispose of the contraband quickly and would sell the goods at a low price. This low price made for a good profit when sold to England or cheap luxury when kept in the colonies. The pirates would also stimulate the economy of a colony with the amount of money they spent. Pirates would buy lavish dinners and frequent the pubs which infused more money into the local economies. It is easy, therefore, to see why pirates helped the economy of the American colonies while hurting that of the Spanish.

The Carolina colonists did not seem to mind the pirates at all. They did not find it their business to know where the goods the pirates traded came from. The colonists did not mind the behavior of the pirates either. In Hughson’s research she found that “They paid their scores like honest fellows, and paid them in broad gold pieces at that; they interfered with no man, and conducted themselves in as respectable manner as any sailor on shore was expected to do.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Johnson, 96

<sup>27</sup> David Cordingly 198

<sup>28</sup> Hughson, 249

<sup>29</sup>Ibid, 251



This goes to show that she found pirates to not be as “rowdy” as common opinion today believes them to be.

The Carolinas were only one example of safe harbor for pirates. It was lost with the American Revolution. Although the American colonies had grown from the trade, the new government that formed looked down upon the practice. This was not true however, during the war of 1812 when Andrew Jackson and Governor Claiborne of New Orleans “would issue a proclamation to the smugglers in hiding”<sup>30</sup> to gain their support to fight off the British.

The two ports that were the most important to most pirates for trading though, was Tortuga and Port Royal. Tortuga was a small trading outpost on an island north of Hispaniola. It was located at a place very convenient for raiding the ships of the Spanish on their way to one of the Cuban ports, as well as a staging point for an attack on the ports themselves. The French took control of the outpost and turned it into a thriving port. When the Spanish retook it, the island changed hands a couple times, but the Spanish could never hold it or get rid of the pirates. The French colony was there to stay and it was not going away.

For the Spanish it was not that the French had a colony on Hispaniola rather, the colony gave full support to the pirates who raided their ports. Its pirate-friendly atmosphere was partly due to “The governors encouraged them in their piracies because of the wealth that they brought back to the island.”<sup>31</sup> The people embraced the pirates because they were a main source of income. The pirates stole many Spanish goods, and they ended up in the storehouses in Tortuga which gave the French traders cheap products to send back to Europe for a good profit. It became a base for pirates which often took the form of privateers. During the reign of Louis XIV and his wars “the *filibusters* of Tortuga terrorized the trade of the West Indies by their

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<sup>30</sup> William C. Davis, *The Pirates Laffite: The Treacherous World of the Corsairs of the Gulf* (Florida: Harcourt Books, 2005) 209.

<sup>31</sup> Barbour, 539

indiscriminate seizure of ships and cruelty to captives.”<sup>32</sup> The colony was a very important outpost for the pirates because of the freedom of trade. Merchants were typically indiscriminate about who they did business with, as long as they made money. This was the mentality of the colony and the reason why pirates were welcomed there.

Havens such as Tortuga are the reasons that piracy could survive in the hostile mercantile society. The ports such as Tortuga challenged the mercantile system by allowing the pirates to trade Spanish goods that would not have been sold at such a low price, or to the competitive empires, where trade was not occurring in any other form. The mercantile economy was not very conducive to outside trade and “because mercantilism with all its protections, licenses, exclusions, and prohibitions was economically inefficient, the system did not work well in practice.”<sup>33</sup> This is where piracy comes into play. The pirates were able to steal the trade goods from other countries and sell them to their host countries or bring them to smugglers in order to make a profit. Since pirates rarely had the chance at looting bullion, it was the trade of tobacco, sugar, coffee and other products that made them rich. Without a place like Tortuga, they would not be able to make money. The eventual lack of safe harbors, an increase in pirate hunters, and the withdrawal of royal support is what led to the downfall of piracy. Ironically enough though, the golden age of piracy came to an end as mercantilism was becoming outdated, just as it came into being in the Caribbean with the rise of the economic system. When the capitalist free economy began to be practiced, pirates were no longer needed to procure the goods from other countries. So in the end pirates exploited the mercantilist economy until it was no longer in existence, and with the new economy, piracy in the Caribbean faded away.

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<sup>32</sup> Barbour, 539

<sup>33</sup> Brown, 108