A Thesis
Entitled

“The transition from Maritime Knights to Enemies of Mankind”: As seen in the stories of William Kidd and Stede Bonnet.

by

Ashley Riehle

Submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements of

The Master of Arts in History

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An Abstract of

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This thesis will examine the way that two particular pirates were pawns in the changing political and economic world of South Carolina on the one hand and the British Empire on the other. This allows some conclusions to be drawn about the direction that the empire was taking at this time and the North American colonial participation in this transition. This shift involved legal definitions, but also involved looking at the pirates in a different way. A good example of this is the comment of Judge Nicholas Trott, who presided over the case of Stede Bonnet in South Carolina in 1718. He declared that the word pirate had once meant “a maritime knight,” but now the pirate was “a sea-rover…coasting hither and thither to do mischief.”\(^1\) The British Empire turned on those who used to be friends and the reasons for that reversal may suggest the growing power of wealth during the Golden Age of Piracy (1650-1730).\(^2\) While the pirates were used as

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\(^1\) The Tryal of Major Stede Bonnet, and Other Pirates (London, 1719), 8-9.

\(^2\) The term “Golden Age of Piracy” was popularized by the historian John Fiske in 1897. He stated “at no other time in the world’s history has the business of piracy thriven so greatly as in the seventeenth century and the first part of the eighteenth. This definition
privateers during times of war, during times of peace they became a liability. These changes sometimes occurred within a matter of hours. Some men were lost in this shift. Most notable was William Kidd, executed in 1701, in order to create peace and secure trade. Although Kidd’s case is well-known, the North American colonies’ relationship to the pirates has been relatively unexplored; yet it is crucial to comprehending piracy’s role in the transatlantic community of the early eighteenth century. The life and trial of Stede Bonnet (1718), who was usually dismissed as eccentric in pirate lore, will be examined in order to understand the complex relationship between the colonial government of South Carolina and the colonies’ rise as a center of vital trade. Ultimately, when the pirates stood in the way of the government, they were executed, despite blurred legal lines.

Despite any official changes in the status of piracy, what persisted were the images of the pirates. The more criminalized the pirates were (according to law), the more mythical the pirates became. In the fictional literature, today as in the past, pirates have maintained a hold over the imagination. The hold is also apparent in scholarly literature, where the study of piracy sometimes becomes secondary to a debate about the true character of pirates.

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was used by 20th century maritime scholars. John Fiske Old Virginia and Her Neighbors (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1897), 395.
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## Contents

Abstract iii

Acknowledgements v

Contents vi

Chapter 1- Introduction 1

Chapter 2- Pirates and Perception 8

Chapter 3- Piracy in Transition 25

Chapter 4- Evolution in South Carolina 38

Chapter 5- Trials and Tribulations 50

Conclusion 72

Bibliography 76
Chapter 1

Introduction

When one thinks of a pirate, it usually evokes images of fanciful dress, talking parrots, buried treasure, and wooden legs. Sometimes, it is hard to distinguish myth from reality. A pirate’s image tended to be embellished by those who wrote about them, such as Charles Johnson and the famous early naval historian, Samuel Eliot Morrison.¹ Pirates were presented as men who led carefree and licentious lives full of drinking, merriment, and immorality. Most importantly, pirates were presented as bandits who refused to submit to the powers that be, which was not always true—since pirates served the crown as privateers. In Charles Johnson’s *A General History of the Pyrates*, he reprints “An Abstract of the Civil Law and Statute now in Force.”

A Pyrate is Hostis humanis generis, a common enemy, with whom neither Faith nor Oath is to be kept….And by the Laws of Nature, Princes and States are responsible for their Neglect, if they do not provide Remedies for restraining these Sort of Robberies. Tho’ Pyrates are called common Enemies, yet they are properly not to be term’d so. He is only to be honour’d with that Name….who hath a Commonwealth, a Court, a Treasury, Consent and Concord of Citizens, and some Way, if Occasion be, of Peace and League:

But when they have reduced themselves into a Government or State….then they are allow’d the Solemnities of War and the Rights of Legation.\textsuperscript{2}

The example that Johnson provided showed contemporary definitions of piracy during the time Johnson’s book was published (1724). According to the law, pirates were not just enemies of the state, but enemies of the entire world. Pirates’ crimes seem to have been not only against property, but also against human nature, as they were not fit to be trusted or deserved any sort of faith or confidence whatsoever. Those nations that did not effectually stop the attacks of the pirates were just as guilty as the offenders themselves. Yet pirates were not deserving of the term enemy as stated by the law. The statement that an enemy must possess “a commonwealth” and a “court” spoke to the changing structure of piracy in the early eighteenth century. It was during the late seventeenth century and the early eighteenth century that piracy in the Caribbean really thrived, leading to the term “The Golden Age of Piracy” being coined by historian John Fiske near the turn of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{3} The freebooters, who rose to prominence after the end of buccaneering in 1697, were increasingly anti-authoritarian. In addition to rejecting government rule, the pirates, were also devoid of property, as they found themselves being driven out of the Caribbean. Likewise, in the 1718 trial of Stede Bonnet, Judge Nicholas Trott termed a pirate as “a sea-rover…coasting hither and thither to do mischief.”\textsuperscript{4} Pirates found themselves in this transition—from maritime knight to enemy of mankind—and the stories of William Kidd and Stede Bonnet exemplify this well.

\textsuperscript{2} Daniel Defoe [Charles Johnson], \textit{A General History of the Pyrates}, edited by Manuel Schonhorn (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), 377.
\textsuperscript{3} John Fiske, \textit{Old Virginia and Her Neighbors} (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1897), 395.
\textsuperscript{4} \textit{The Tryal of Major Stede Bonnet, and Other Pirates} (London, 1719), 8-9.
In reality, piracy in the early eighteenth century was trapped in a changing political, economic, and social landscape. Depending on when peace was made between nations, a man was constantly teetering between pirate and privateer. It is important to make this distinction and to separate piracy from the men themselves. Captain Kidd exemplifies this since he started as a legitimate privateer but was later killed by the very nation that sponsored his voyage. His death was a result of an expanding empire and British desire to assert greater control over trade in the Indian Ocean. Stede Bonnet was executed because of increasing pressure on the colonies to protect British trade and fortune. Both men are well-known figures in the “Golden Age of Piracy,” yet their stories have more to offer than just swashbuckling stories.

Chapter One examines the myths surrounding the pirates and how they were created and perpetuated. The early pirate writer, Charles Johnson, who was until recently believed to be only a pseudonym for Daniel Defoe, did much to educate the public on pirates and their lives. Sometimes dreadful and sometimes comical, these men were forever remembered to history through his words. Always studied for how they affected commerce, they have recently been examined as their own entity, thanks to the likes of Marcus Rediker and Christopher Hill. Pirates are not without their controversy, however, and this chapter examines the different arguments surrounding the study of pirates and piracy. It also describes the different types of men who comprised the buccaneers, privateers, and pirates. Privateers were legal pirates, holding marques given by the king or government official that allowed them the right to attack an enemy ship during the time of war. In a matter of hours, their status could be changed from legal to illegal depending on the tides of war. It was the sudden unemployment that turned many of these
men to piracy. Determined by location, the buccaneers lived on the island of Hispaniola, hunting cattle left by previous settlers. The economic as well as social factors in the Caribbean would create a new group of men who lived off the land and created a brotherhood, or as they termed themselves, “The Brethren of the Coast.” They included men of English, French, Dutch, Irish, and Scottish origin. These men attacked Spanish ships and contributed to the rise of the British Empire in the Caribbean, because of their conquests of many islands. While they were exterminated by the year 1697, they led the way for a different sort of maritime man. The freebooters arose during the years after the end of the War of the Spanish Succession. Mostly Anglo-American, they were anti-authoritarian, denying allegiance to their homeland and declaring war on the whole world. They were alarming to the British Empire, and an extermination campaign was leveled against them. Despite being enemies of an organized empire, they were often organized themselves, creating guidelines to be followed. Sometimes characterized by historians as democratic, they provided for their own if injured and there is evidence that some African men served as equals aboard some pirate ships. These men sought to correct wrongs done to sailors and offered little mercy to captains that were found unfair.

Chapter Two will examine the transitions that pirates faced in relation to the British Empire. While cherished during the reign of Elizabeth I, they enriched her rule with the gold from the Spanish. Known as the “Sea Dogs,” these men would become the basis for the Caribbean buccaneers. When James I made peace with Spain, these privateers were recalled from their positions and made into outlaws—villains of the crown and a threat to lasting peace with Spain. James I sought to rid England of the pirates, issuing proclamation after proclamation, but to little avail. One relatively
unexplored study in the area of pirates is the relations between the colonies and their acceptance of pirates. The British colonies all along the Atlantic would come to welcome piracy, despite the disapproval of England. An effort to further increase trade with the colonies, the Navigation Acts, would prove disastrous and only drive the colonies further into the arms of the pirates. Many colonial officials were involved with the pirates—for instance, North Carolina governor Charles Eden. His friendship with Blackbeard was well-known. Kidd and Bonnet were both trapped in changing political and economic atmospheres—Kidd was sacrificed to pacify trade in the Indian Ocean while Bonnet and his men were used during the campaign against the pirates. As William Kidd was hanged on May 23, 1701, parliament must have felt pretty confident that they were proving to the merchants in the Indian Ocean that they were rooting out piracy—creating a safe trade. Stede Bonnet committed more acts of piracy against Charleston, South Carolina, and yet he was almost freed. The different attitudes that existed in the colonies had something to do with this occurrence.

Chapter Three examines the economic and social makeup of South Carolina, from its foundation to the beginning of the eighteenth century. The Fundamental Constitution of Carolina established a hierarchy that was to determine the structure of the new colony. Originally intended to be strictly ruled by Proprietors and nobility, the settlers who did occupy the colony had little respect for the guidelines. The “Goose Creek Men” would rise as the key players in the fight against the control of the Proprietors. Settlers in the New World were not always the most desired, according to historian Shirley Carter Hughson. The complex structure of Charleston proved to be a challenge, however. While pirates had surrounded the coast years prior to the development of a colony, the new
settlers created greater opportunities for the pirates, as they found friends and willing trading partners. This alliance would not please everyone, however. It soon became necessary to weed out complacent officials. Carolina proved to be a pivotal point of interest in the growing British Empire. As Carolina’s economic importance in the world shifted, so did the need to eliminate piracy around the coast.

Lastly, Chapter Four relates the crimes and trials of William Kidd and Stede Bonnet. In the last years of the seventeenth century, Kidd sailed as a privateer in the Indian Ocean in order to hunt pirates and gather riches for himself and his voyage’s backers. During this mission, he ended up killing one of his own men and being accused of piracy himself. His trial was mostly to show that the government of England would not tolerate its men unfairly plundering the vessels of allies. Stede Bonnet was a contributing member to a terrifying blockade in Charleston’s history, during May 1718. Bonnet was also responsible for apprehending several ships and killing government men. After he was captured, he managed to escape with the help of the locals. When he was returned to trial, he was pronounced guilty, despite the cries of the townspeople who had taken pity on him and asked for his release. His trial was one of the most memorable in colonial history, with Judge Nicholas Trott establishing the determination for distinguishing a pirate from an innocent sailor—that of choice.

While Captain Kidd’s example shows the imperial side of piracy, the Stede Bonnet case offers a glimpse into the evolving structure of the British North American colonies and the internal divisions facing Charleston in the early eighteenth century. It can also help one to understand the struggle of South Carolina’s people to find their place
in the British Empire and yet establish their own authority. Perhaps it can further illuminate the broader colonial struggle.
Chapter 2

Pirates and Perception

Pirates have often fascinated scholars and pop culture alike—perhaps because what we know of them tends to be myth. Some of this myth comes from the early historians themselves. Samuel Eliot Morison, for example, was a naval historian during the romantic era (the late nineteenth century). and gave in to the literary culture that surrounded him. The sailors that he wrote about fit a certain stereotype—youthful men in search of an adventure, heading out to sea in hopes of an exciting life.1

One of the most well-known authors on piracy was Captain Charles Johnson, previously believed to be Daniel Defoe. Johnson was the author of The General History of the Pyrates. This book had an impact on the perception of pirates—therefore it is important to understand Johnson’s perspective and why he wrote of pirates in the way he did. According to Joel H. Baer’s essay, “‘The Complicated Plot of Piracy’: Aspects of English Criminal Law and the Image of the Pirate in Defoe,” much of Johnson’s analysis of the pirates suited the sentiments of the day in which it was written. As Baer notes, “in an age for which ‘sociability’ and ‘human nature’ were nearly synonymous, men who flagrantly and at times proudly cut themselves free of social bonds were

dreadful creatures.”\(^2\) Johnson believed the pirates to be “sadistic” and that “the state of their souls needed to be emphasized.” Johnson saw it as his duty to accurately describe the men as brutes (and not necessarily accurately describe the men).\(^3\) When Johnson mentioned Blackbeard, he wrote that he was capable of inflicting “the most abominable wickedness imaginable” upon his enemies.\(^4\)

Neither William Kidd nor Stede Bonnet matched the image of the pirate. Both were notorious pirates, who did very little to actually earn the title. In reality, these men were some of the least successful during their day. However, the mystique that surrounds them and their crimes was enough to convict them. Kidd and Bonnet were wealthy men, with little need to go privateering or pirating, except greed and adventure. A pirate’s life, in reality, was not always glamorous, as both men ultimately discovered.

*A General History of the Pyrates* describes the life and death of William Kidd.

We are now going to give an Account of one whose Name is better known in England, than most of those whose Histories we have already related; the person we mean is Captain Kid, whose publick Ttryal and Execution here, rendered him the Subject of all Conversation, so that his Actions have been chanted about in Ballads; however, it is now a considerable Time since these things passed, and tho’ the People knew in general that Captain Kid was hanged, and that his Crime was Pyracy, yet there were scarce any, even at that Time, who were acquainted with his Life or Actions, or could account for his turning Pyrate.\(^5\)

Kidd started as an “agent of King William III of England, New York merchant and property owner, as well as husband and father” and became a convicted pirate,


\(^3\) Ibid., 67.


hanged at the gallows and put postmortem in chains to dangle in the sun as an example.\(^6\) While the name Captain Kidd conveys images of a ruthless and devious character, the real man was never quite so evil or successful as a pirate. The real man was caught more or less in a political trap. Kidd sailed for some of the wealthiest men in Britain and was undoubtedly a pawn in the end.\(^7\)

While Kidd was used to a life at sea and was a skilled captain and privateer, Stede Bonnet turned pirate on a whim. Stede Bonnet was a man whose actions were shrouded in mystery. Because he was a wealthy plantation owner, his friends and family had trouble gathering ideas of why he may have abandoned his family and his status to seek a life of piracy. Many claim that he suffered from a mental disease that robbed him of his sanity. Indeed, this is why Johnson writes in his *General History of the Pyrates*, that Bonnet was “pitied rather than condemned, by those that were acquainted with him, believing that this humour of going a pyrating, proceeded from a disorder in his mind, which had been but too visible in him, some time before this wicked undertaking.”\(^8\) Johnson also stated that Bonnet found trouble within the married state and sought a life of illegal activity in order to escape his “nagging wife.”\(^9\)

Stede Bonnet was descended from the earliest settlers to Barbados. His grandfather, Thomas Bonnet, eventually acquired more than four hundred acres that comprised his estate on Barbados at the time of his death in 1676. Stede’s father died when the child was only six years old, and he inherited the family property when he

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\(^7\) Ibid., 440.

\(^8\) Ibid., 95.

reached adulthood. At the age of twenty-one, Bonnet married the daughter of a prominent planter. In just six years, Bonnet had gained some success as a planter. The planters of Barbados thought it necessary for the island to have a good militia because of their fear of the high number of slaves and indentured servants who might at any time plot a revolt. Stede Bonnet was a major in this militia, because of his status, not necessarily ability.  

To understand the significance of what happened, it is important to understand how historians have interpreted the facts. With his book, *The Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution* (1965), the historian Christopher Hill revitalized the study of pirates when he began inquiring into the lives of the radical dissenters during the English Civil War. He found that when the monarchy was restored, the men who had opposed the king fled to the Caribbean. He believed that their ideas about revolution and authority inspired the population, which consisted of mostly felons, religious dissenters, and the poor. Christopher Hill believed that pirates were drawn to the egalitarian structure of the pirate life. Other historians built on Hill’s studies, depicting an overtly democratic system that the pirates maintained.

Marcus Rediker, one of the most prominent scholars of maritime history, continued the study where Christopher Hill left off. Rediker believes that the study of pirates and piracy “must be made to speak to larger historical problems and processes.” He believes that the men who were pirates must be separated from the myth and that instead of focusing on pirate versus nature, historians should focus instead on pirate

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10 Ibid.,
versus government.\textsuperscript{12} Kidd and Bonnet are good examples of this, since both men’s struggle ultimately ended up being against the government. To this end Rediker studies how seamen freed themselves from harsh conditions on board merchant vessels, how they resisted and organized themselves. He believes that it is vital to study the men according to their own desires instead of those of the captains and royal officials. This gives a better analysis of what really occurred during the years of burgeoning British commerce. As the British Empire and its commerce grew, so did the need for organization and resistance among pirate crews. \textsuperscript{13} After the Glorious Revolution (1688) England was increasingly involved in war and depended more and more on a stronger naval state. Naval spending was, at intervals, greater than army costs. The great lengths that Britain put into building a strong navy were apparent, and with the exception of the Dutch, unparalleled.\textsuperscript{14}

One area of study still relatively unexplored is the difference in sentiment that existed within the span of almost two decades, “across the pond.” Just as the study of pirates is important to understanding the reworking of the British commerce, it is also necessary to the understanding of the need for greater control in the colonies. Shirley Carter Hughson’s book, \textit{The Carolina Pirates and Colonial Commerce}, was a study of the pirates who often visited the Carolina coasts for two centuries. It also examined the ways in which they affected the life and commerce of those involved and their eventual elimination. Hughson rightly claims that the colonies inherited an original hatred of piracy from the mother country. However, he is able to retrace the colonists’ acceptance

\textsuperscript{12} Rediker, \textit{Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea}, 5.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 6-7.
of piracy and, further, how they grew to “encourage it.” Hughson points out that the friendship with the pirates led to the colonial matters being transferred from the hands of the colonists to those of the king. This tightly held power would add to tensions in terms of relations between the colonies and Great Britain in the eighteenth century.

Another prominent book concerning the study of piracy is *Captain Kidd and the War against the Pirates* by Robert C. Ritchie. Ritchie’s book focuses on the means used by countries and people to define piracy, breaking down the term “piracy” and studying the ways in which piracy was directly linked to the state during the early modern era. To do this, Ritchie created three categories for pirates. These were “officially sanctioned piracy”—this type of piracy was considered illegal, but most often ignored by countries since it was too beneficial for their pocketbooks. The second was what Ritchie believed was “commercial piracy,” which involved merchants and those who lived far away from the country that ruled their lands. This piracy was practiced in order to get goods and money not often found. Finally, the last he called “marauding,” which was both organized and anarchistic. The marauders contained both men who had ports that they worked from and also men without a home who roamed the seas. Ritchie’s main argument is that piracy was not a main concern for the British officials until piracy reached the last stage, where pirates claimed no home base and warred against nations. When these out-of-control men threatened all the waters of the world, there was a plan to exterminate them. The rejection of pirates was directly related to the stabilization of the British Empire, where organization and structure would allow for greater profits. The main subject of Ritchie’s book, Captain William Kidd, serves to show the political stakes of piracy during the early eighteenth century. Kidd was not exactly a pirate according to
conventional British merchant rules, but neither was he a gentleman, with enough prestige to deliver him from his enemies. He paid the price of being trapped in political upheaval.  

In *Villains of All Nations*, Rediker focuses on what he describes as the two terrors that were committed on the sea. The first was committed by “ministers, royal officials, and wealthy men who wanted to protect property.” The second form of terror was committed by the pirates. These men (and in some cases, women) used terror to get money and goods, seek revenge, and punish resisters. Eventually, the terror practiced by the rulers won out, as evidenced in the deaths of William Kidd, Stede Bonnet, and Bonnet’s men.

Scholarly writing has become filled with different voices concerning the true nature of pirates. While historians like Rediker believe that pirates offered a great example of democracy and unity that was not, or is not, present in capitalist society, Peter T. Leeson, an economist and author of *The Invisible Hook*, offers a different perspective. His view is that pirates organized and provided for one another not out of a sense of higher morality, but rather because it encouraged better profits, since piracy was a lucrative business. Leeson believes that the articles pirates signed and the security that was awarded them in case of an injury, served a material purpose, as did treating African American men as friends rather than slaves. In case of capture, a slave might be very

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16 Peter T. Leeson, *The Invisible Hook: The Hidden Economics of Pirates* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009), 172-74. The most well-known women pirates were Anne Bonny and Mary Reed, who sailed as cross-dressers as part of Captain “Calico” Jack Rackam’s crew. Women were generally prohibited from sailing with pirate crews as it was believed they would invite too much conflict.
willing to turn on those who imprisoned him and make sure that they all hang for piracy. Also, men who received far less in booty than their captains had more of a reason to not attack merchant vessels or take care of the ship. Leeson concluded that pirates’ equality and benefits were “piratical means, used to secure cooperation within pirates’ criminal organization, rather than piratical ends, as they’re often depicted.”

Rediker believes that the romance of the pirate was brought about by the fact that the men lived with “the constant threat of danger” and lived hanging in the balance of this world and the next. Rediker also believes that this sort of excitement speaks to the American idealization of those who have “conquered nature.” There is another reason why Americans romanticize a good pirate story—pirates are often depicted as the underdog while the governments and the merchants who have tried to exterminate them are portrayed as villains.

As Robert Ritchie points out in *Captain Kidd and the War against the Pirates*, “the society that destroyed the buccaneers would ultimately make them a staple of popular culture.” Turning pirates into heroes began in the late eighteenth century; during the nineteenth century, the United States’ popular culture would adopt the pirates as one of their mythical figures. Ritchie states that “the exploits of the pirates also provided a middle-class audience with stories of adventure that took place in exotic locations outside the possibilities of their own lives.”

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18 Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 3. A great example of the myth and popularity of the pirates that exists today is the *Pirates of the Caribbean* movies. Now on the fourth movie, they have become a powerful source of information (fantasy) to the movie-going public.
19 Robert Ritchie, *Captain Kidd and the War against the Pirates*, 237.
The common belief is that pirates were radical, however; that notion does not always match the facts. In the case of Kidd and Bonnet, neither fit the descriptions of typical pirate. There were certain characteristics attributed to pirates. While the attributes varied from crew to crew, they were fairly uniform. But of course, the way each historian interprets the motivations and actions of the pirates is different. Rediker studies piracy through their organization, allegiance to egalitarianism, and their anti-capitalist tendencies. According to Rediker, piracy allowed men to experience life on their own terms for a little while. Many only lived for a couple of years as pirates. However, this life granted greater freedoms, including equal share in the plunder, better nourishment than offered on a merchant or navy vessel, a chance to pick who led them, and also a type of solidarity in which others supported them if injured. This was all in contrast to the life that many of them led when working for merchants or as part of the navy. Those conditions were extremely poor and included horrendous disciplinary action, measly wages, and threatening conditions. While life at sea was dangerous, the life of a pirate offered at least some quality of life before the impending death.  

The most common way that a man became a pirate occurred when a merchant vessel was seized. The pirate captain asked the sailors if they would like to join the pirate crew and many of them did. Eventually, as it became more and more risky to be a pirate, many men who volunteered tried to make it appear as if they were forced. In

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the chance that the pirates stood trial for their deeds one day, a plea of “not guilty”
might work if the poor young pirate had been unwilling. In the later years of the
freebooter age, men were more reluctant to “go on the account”—as becoming a pirate
was termed—and some crews had to be forced into piracy, especially those who had
desirable skills such as carpentry or medical training. Compulsion was in direct
opposition to the ethos of the pirates, though, since so many were forced by press-gangs
to join merchant vessels or the navy. Another possible way to become a pirate was
through a ship uprising. These mutinies accounted for the origins of one in five pirate
ships.²²

While Johnson created the image of the “dreadful” pirate, he also displayed them
as having admirable attributes. This perpetuates the “romantic” figure of the pirate—
someone to be feared, yet also admired. The myth of the pirate is that they were generally
a disorderly bunch; in fact many detailed guidelines ruled the pirate ship. These rules had
to be ratified by the crew and dealt with issues of rations and discipline. The pirate
captains were elected by the crew and likewise could also be taken from power. Cruelty
was a surefire way to get oneself removed from the captaincy. There was also a sort of
checks and balances system to piracy, to ensure that one man did not gain too much
power. The quartermaster was responsible for keeping peace among the crew and equally
distributing the goods.²³

Johnson recorded in his book, The General History of Pyrates, the articles that
existed aboard the ship of Captain Roberts. There were eleven points to the articles
concerning rights of the pirates and the punishments to be inflicted upon those in

²² Rediker, Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea, 262-63.
²³ Ibid.
disobedience. Many articles deal with equality, such as “every man has a vote in affairs of moment,” which meant provisions of food and liquor to men after a vessel had been taken. The captain and the quartermaster received two shares of the captured plunder; the master, boatswain, and gunner received one share and a half, while the officers gained one and a quarter parts of the prize. Any man who denied his fellow pirate his fair share faced the risk of being marooned (which meant the offender was left on an uninhabited island with nothing but a gun with some ammunition and a little water). Perhaps unique to Roberts was the fact that he monitored his men’s drinking, since he himself was a teetotaler. One of the articles states that the lights must be out by eight o’clock. Any drinkers continuing into the night must do so outside of the cabins. Death was the punishment to any man who was found having smuggled a woman or young child on board, as was abandoning the ship during a battle.24

While the terms pirate, privateer, and buccaneer all seem to be synonyms for the image of the pirate, each varied a little in the way they were organized, acted, and in their general history. To scholar Kris Lane, piracy must be studied through its earliest North American forms—buccaneering. Buccaneers were comprised of men from several different nationalities, including the Dutch, French, English, Scottish, and Irish. The rise of the buccaneers correlated with the decline of Spanish control in the Caribbean. These men were usually indentured servants, marooned sailors or those living on the outskirts of society. Because of the animals introduced by the Spanish and the decline of the native population, buccaneers were able to live in collective societies separate from towns. The cattle that were abundant on Hispaniola were made into a sort of “beef jerky” using a

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buccan. These men were called “boucaniers” and eventually buccaneer. These men joined forces and attacked Spanish merchant vessels for goods, which they distributed among themselves. The rise of Oliver Cromwell as Lord Protectorate at the end of the English Civil War (1653-1685) did much to help solidify the buccaneers in the Caribbean. Cromwell’s attack on the Spanish hold of Jamaica in 1655 secured it as an English stronghold, as did the several thousand (nearly 5,000) inhabitants that came from Ireland and Scotland, whether by force or by choice. Soon Port Royal, Jamaica, became a favorite spot. The buccaneers would fade out by the year 1697 with the capture of Cartagena—many of them having adjusted to civil life or becoming more piratical. The War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1713) allowed for the new pirates, the freebooters. According to Kris Lane, there were several differences between the buccaneers (mid-seventeenth century to 1697) and the freebooters of the Golden Age (roughly 1713 to 1726), most notably, the freebooters’ “universal rejection of national and religious authorities,” their predominantly “Anglo-American origin,” and the fact that most were originally lower-class mariners. Rather than enemies of Spain, freebooters were enemies of the men they used to work for. The expeditions to rid the seas of the freebooters were severe and caused men to break their ties (however weak) to their nations and develop an anarchic, or anti-government, point of view. The imperial

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27 Lane, *Pillaging the Empire*, 164-65.
campaign to end piracy was successful—hardly any pirates were to be found in the waters around the colonies by the 1730s.  

To historian Janice Thomson, it is important to understand the legal aspects of piracy. The act of privateering basically consisted in attacking a ship of an enemy nation and using its goods to benefit the country of the privateer. An official mandate made this legal. Piratical activity involved the same components, except for the fact that the pirates, not the government, took the goods. Piracy has been considered by governments to be violence against others “acting independently of any politically organized society.” The main difference in the two is the fact that there is no country or state to blame or hold responsible for the acts of the pirates.

The line between legal pirate and illegal pirate was forever changing. While the men who later became pirates served a purpose during times of war, they became unruly and unwilling to submit to the powers that no longer wished to be hurt by the services they provided. However, with many men being unemployed at a war’s end, it was difficult to go back to a lifestyle of simply being a sailor, especially since so many of them turned pirate in order to escape cruel captains. The men would not easily turn back from their lives as privateers. For example, Benjamin Hornigold, Blackbeard’s mentor, once declared that he and other pirates had “never consented to the Articles of Peace with the French and Spaniards.”

28 Ibid., 165, 171-74, 192.
30 Rediker, Villains of All Nations, 7.
Words change meaning over time. The key point is changing distinctions, not only to historians, but also pirates. The famed buccaneer Henry Morgan did not like to be termed a pirate. When the English version of *The Buccaneers of America* by Alexandre Exquemelin was published in 1684, Morgan read and immediately complained about the book. He was presented as a murderer and a man who inflicted torture upon his enemies. These claims led him to sue for libel. He stated that “there are such thieves and pirates called buccaneers who subsist by piracy, depredations and evil deeds of all kinds without lawful authority that of these people Henry Morgan always had and still has hatred.”

At this time in his life, Morgan was a knight and lieutenant-governor of Jamaica, after having secured the island for the British crown. In his opening arguments during the trial of Stede Bonnet, Judge Nicholas Trott declared before the court that the word pirate was originally a kind word, meaning a sort of “maritime knight.” However, within time, “pirate” found a new definition, one that declared they were “sea-rovers or robbers” and restless spirits, “wandering up and down, and resting in no place, but coasting hither and thither to do Mischief.” Words were important depending on nationality as well. The buccaneers were heroes to the English during the conquest of the Caribbean but were denigrated as pirates by the Spanish.

32 Ibid.
33 *The Tryal of Major Stede Bonnet, and Other Pirates* (London, 1719), 8.
34 Ibid., 9.
The trial of Captain Kidd proved to be a struggle to define what constituted as piracy and what did not. It forced the government to legally acknowledge that some of their own “privateering” practices were now considered piratical. Captain William Kidd started out as a privateer, but turned pirate, according to the English government. Kidd’s crew consisted of a mixture of old privateers, who were ready to find their fortunes and who were most likely married and had reason to be at sea, and the new seamen of the early eighteenth century—men who choose a life away from landed society and wished to create their own lives at sea.\(^{36}\) In 1698, after not being able to find a ship to plunder, Kidd attacked a Muslim ship, which had always been legally defined as plunder. Once Kidd did such a deed, he moved into the realm of piracy. Johnson stated that there was no reason for this change in Kidd, but he believed that he did not mean to turn pirate. He stated that “while he had hopes of making his fortune by taking of Pyrates; but now, weary of ill Success, and fearing lest his Owners, out of Humour at their great Expences, should dismiss him, and he should want Employment and be mark’d out for an unlucky Man; rather, I say than ran hazard of Poverty, he resolved to do his Business one Way, since he could not do it another.”\(^{37}\) Kidd stated to the court that “If ye design I was sent upon, be illegal, or of ill consequence to ye trade of ye Nation, my Owners who knew ye Laws, ought to suffer for It, and not I, whom they made ye Tool of their Covetousnesse. Some great men would have me dye for Solving their hononor, and others to pacify ye Mogull for injuryes done by other men, and not my selfe, and to secure their trade…”\(^{38}\) In other words, Kidd believed himself only to be a tool of his

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\(^{36}\) Ritchie, *Captain Kidd and the War against the Pirates*, 67-68.


\(^{38}\) Ritchie, *Captain Kidd and the War against the Pirates*, 210.
backers’ greed. His purpose was to bring them money, through any means possible, but when he caused more trouble than good, they choose rather to declare his actions piratical and see him dead, if only to further increase their pocketbooks by saving trade relations with those on the Indian coast.

Stede Bonnet was a great example of a man trapped in the transition from legal privateering to illegal piracy. Being a gentleman, he did not fit in with his crew or other pirate captains, and therefore seemed more like a privateer. In other ways, Bonnet was set apart from other pirates of his time. He had relatively no knowledge of sailing or how to handle a boat, which is odd, since most pirate captains were able leaders and excellent sailors and were chosen by other crew members to lead based on these skills. Bonnet’s dependency on his officers for help handling the ship cost him the respect of many of his crewmen, of which there were over seventy.39 Hoping to gain some loyalty and respect, Bonnet instead paid the men in wages, and the assurance of the money they would receive must have somehow convinced some men to sail with him to the new colonies.40 In addition to paying the men wages, he also bought a ship and supplied it with ten guns all out of his own pocket. His new sloop, which remained docked at harbor, hardly went unnoticed. Historian Hugh Rankin states that “Bonnet gave out the story that he had purchased the sloop to work up an inter-island trade.”41 However, this would be far from the case. He had collected his crew from local taverns, named the new vessel the Revenge, and headed away from his home in the middle of the night in

39 Butler, Pirates, Privateers, and Rebel Raiders of the Carolina Coast, 55.
40 Ibid.,
1717.\textsuperscript{42} Bonnet resembled more of a privateer than a pirate, by outfitting his own vessel and supplying his own crew. These facts could have helped him in his trial, to show his innocence as a pirate.

The major battles against the pirates would help create the legend of the pirates that still exists to this day. Probably more than any time in pirate history, the Golden Age really created the romance of the pirates. As Marcus Rediker states, “pirates lost the clash with the rulers of their own day, but they have decisively won the debate ever after. They captured the good ship \textit{Popular Imagination}, and three hundred years later they show no sign of surrendering it.”\textsuperscript{43} Pirates will forever be caught between the lines of good and evil, necessary and nuisance, fantasy and reality. However, they do not seem to be fading from the American culture anytime soon—nor from American history, since they assist in the understanding of the evolution of the relationship between the colonies and the empire.

\textsuperscript{42} Rankin, \textit{The Golden Age of Piracy}, 92; Defoe, \textit{A General History of the Pyrates}, 95. 
\textsuperscript{43} Rediker, \textit{Villains of All Nations}, 175.
Chapter 3

Piracy in Transition

The Atlantic world was usually at war during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, whether it was with the War of the League of Augsburg (1689-1697) or the War of the Spanish Succession (1702-1713). Marcus Rediker points out that for most of the men who later became pirates, their lives were dominated by these wars. In the year 1712, the British Royal Navy employed 49,860 men. In just two years, that number dwindled to 13,475 men. After the end of the War of the Spanish Succession, men were once again looking for work. The Treaty of Utrecht (signed after the latter war) had great implications for Britain—it allowed the importation of nearly 5,000 slaves a year into the New World colonies. The wars in Europe had once been fought over religion, between the Roman Catholics and the Protestants, but these new wars were over territory and trade; whoever controlled the waterways and colonies controlled the wealth. However, with trade becoming the main source of war, it was now necessary to fight for the most envied of all locations—the Caribbean.¹ Each power had a specific reason for wanting

control in the islands. The English sought tobacco, the Dutch wished to import salt, while
the French wished to acquire hides. Another staple of the Caribbean was sugar. By the
year 1650, the sugar crop in Barbados was valued at 3 million pounds. Port Royal,
Jamaica, seemed to have several of the wanted items; these included sugarcane, molasses,
tobacco, indigo, cotton, rum, slaves, and Spanish gold.

England was considered a “marginal power,” according to historian John Brewer,
during the reigns of Henry VIII, Elizabeth I, and James I. Its military expenditures were
minimal. During the sixteenth century, ships were still mostly funded by private
individuals. Privateering did not benefit the monarch as much as it did private persons.
After the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660 England started to regulate its naval
administration and created a basic naval discipline that helped establish it as a formidable
military power. What is perhaps most important is the “shift in priorities, a move away
from the continental military expeditions of the late middle ages towards a foreign policy
directed at commercial expansion and national prosperity.” The constant war and peace
cycle that Europe went through created disgruntled privateers. After the War of Spanish
Succession which ended in 1713, there was a massive explosion in piracy. The huge
numbers of unemployed men turned to the profession as a way to make a living. It was
this swell in pirate numbers that was termed the “Golden Age of Piracy.” These men
would join together and organize against the English and pose a problem for their trade.

2 Jon Latimer, *Buccaneers of the Caribbean* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,
2009), 35.
3 Latimer, *Buccaneers of the Caribbean*, 94.
4 Douglas Burgess, *The Pirates’ Pact: The Secret Alliances Between History’s Most
5 John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688-1783*
Along with the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), it seemed for a while that there would be a balance of power in the New World and that such wars over territory and trade were no longer necessary.\footnote{Marcus Rediker, \textit{Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age} (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 19-24.}

As Douglas Burgess states, “the crown, in quick succession, issued proclamations that first commissioned privateers, then outlawed them, then pardoned them, then revoked the pardon and ordered them hanged, then gave privateering commissions anew to those left alive.”\footnote{Burgess, \textit{The Pirates’ Pact}, xv.} No quote better sums up the constant uncertainty that pirates lived in. As the official attitude toward privateers changed, so did their titles. All buccaneers or privateers could be considered pirates at some time, but not all pirates were buccaneers or privateers. It is important to note that the acts of piracy themselves never really changed. Attacking and plundering a vessel were consistent with privateering, buccaneering, and piracy. More than anything, pirates were a liability. It was perfectly acceptable for privateers to attack during wartime, but when it came time to make peace, they were expected to stop their ways. As Janice Thomson stated, “the practice of privateering produced the problem of piracy….In this period, large-scale piracy was a European problem. It was Europeans who organized piracy. It was Europeans who were the main targets of piracy. And it was Europeans who provided the economic and legal infrastructure that supported piracy.”\footnote{Janice E. Thomson, \textit{Mercenaries, Pirates, and Sovereigns: State-building and Extra-Territorial Violence in Early Modern Europe} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 54.} Much of the Caribbean was conquered for the
British because of the buccaneers. Yet when the buccaneers came to be a nuisance and liability, the English government turned on them. This shows how quickly a man was able to turn from hero to villain in an ever-evolving political landscape.

Piracy’s popularity within the governments of nations has varied in its ability to benefit or hurt a nation. Great Britain had a rich history of varying regulations concerning piracy. As Douglas Burgess stated, early English law was using the word *piracy* to describe any situations they did not like at the time, occurring in whatever place caused the most problems. The first privateering permit was given by Henry III in 1243. In 1413, piracy would be declared high treason. Henry VIII used privateers during his war with France. Marques (a license to a private citizen to seize property of another nation) were permitted in peace times as an effort to allow merchants to reclaim lost goods. It did not matter what vessel was attacked; if property was stolen by a certain nation, the injured party could attack a vessel of that nation for retribution.

During Elizabeth I’s era piracy was legitimized—not only by legal reasons by also by the pirates themselves. These men, according to Burgess, were “forbearers of the seventeenth century” pirates. Rather than amateur men hired by the crown, these men were highly skilled. The privateers used during Elizabeth’s reign offered several advantages. Privateering voyages trained new seamen and also gave mariners an opportunity to fight Spanish sailors before reaching actual warfare; therefore, they were prepared for battle. Also, the means used to fight Elizabeth’s privateers exhausted Spain’s resources and likewise stole the wealth that they were attempting to gain from their

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10 Ibid., 15.
colonies in the Americas. While Spain was losing profits, England was accumulating fortunes, thanks to the privateers. As pointed out by Burgess, the success of the privateers showed the importance of trade at this time and how its interruption could severely damage a country. Much of Elizabeth I’s wealth and power was gained by the privateering accomplished by Francis Drake and others who sought to destroy the stronghold that Spain held in the New World. Elizabeth’s “sea dogs,” as they were named, included Walter Raleigh and John Hawkins. The sponsors of these voyages, when not the crown, were men who were filled with “religious zest for the Protestant cause as well as interest in commercial enterprise.” It was Drake who would be used as an archetype for the pirates to come, not only for his skill but also as an example of the crown’s use of pirates.

“The privateers acted in accordance to Elizabeth’s law, while pirates acted out against James’ law,” declares Burgess. Once again, the legal ax fell. After her death in 1603, when King James I took the throne, peace was made with Spain; thousands of privateers were suddenly out of a job, and a new effort to eliminate the pirates was underway. During his first year as king, James issued “A proclamation concerning warlike ships at Sea.” This called for the privateers to end their privateering ventures in an effort to make lasting peace with Spain. Later, “A proclamation to represse all Piracies and Depredations upon the Sea,” was declared, which stripped mariners of their marques and forbade the distribution of any more. James made several more decrees

11 Thomson, Mercenaries, Pirates, and Sovereigns, 22-23.
12 Burgess, The Pirates’ Pact, 27.
13 Ibid., 28-29.
15 Burgess, The Pirates’ Pact, 28-29.
between the years 1604-1609, including “A proclamation for revocation of mariners from forreine services (1606)”—barring Englishmen from serving on ships that might attack the Spanish. Lastly, his 1609 “Proclamation against Pirats” was clearly an effort to further drive the point home, by naming them pirates.17

The problem did not just lie in foreign waters, but also around the harbor towns of England and Ireland, where pirates traded with the citizens and the citizens made a living off selling goods to the pirates. Even those responsible for the capture of the pirates were involved in trading with them.18 And here was the difficulty that James had in eliminating the pirates—he simply did not have success in getting officials to uphold the proclamations that he had promulgated. Much to his dismay, the fact that he had decreased the Royal Navy and put men out of jobs worked against him. He made enemies with sailors and the men who had grown rich off of their endeavors. Near the end of his reign, he allowed for pirates to be pardoned—simply by repenting and declaring that they would no longer commit piratical acts. They were even allowed to keep the goods that they had accumulated. However, this just allowed for men to gather wealth while escaping the punishment. Needless to say, this did not help James accomplish his goal of an England free of pirates and an enduring peace with Spain.19 Later James I bragged about the number of pirates he had hanged during his reign. He claimed that he had

16 Ibid., 35.
19 Burgess, The Pirates’ Pact, 30-34.
executed more pirates in a few years than in the last one hundred years before him. Given and Henry VIII’s lackadaisical attitude toward them and Elizabeth’s encouragement of piracy, this claim was not all that impressive. Unfortunately for James I, his lack of use for the pirates only allowed for others, such as merchants and those not tied to the crown, to sponsor piracy themselves.

Piracy flourished not only off the shores of Britain, but in the Caribbean as well. Captain Johnson remarked that the West Indies were filled with pirates for several reasons, one of the most important being the fact that the unpopulated islands afforded the pirates many places where they could clean their vessels and make repairs without being found. Also, there were a great number of trade ships that sailed to and from the West Indies from many nations such as France, Spain, The Netherlands, and particularly England, as Johnson pointed out. The profitable slave trade also provided opportunities for plunder. Lastly, the islands and harbors made the possibility of being chased quite difficult and no doubt dangerous for those that attempted such a feat.

Buccaneering gained men because of a poor economy and the increase in slave labor. Once a person’s indentured servitude was over, he or she had little job prospects and along with some runaway slaves, may have decided to join the “Bretheren of the Coast” as the buccaneers termed themselves. According to Hilary Beckles, the indentured servitude experienced in the West Indies during its settlement was significantly different from the traditional version of English servitude. These men had

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22 Daniel Defoe [Charles Johnson], *A General History of the Pyrates*, edited by Manuel Schonhorn (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, 1972), 31-34.
fewer rights than originally intended, and this sort of labor was dubbed “near slavery.” In Barbados, there were 12,000 servants by 1652. While the white indentured servants originally possessed the necessary basic education and skills that made them preferable to African slaves, by the mid 1650s, they were mostly ousted by the importation of more slaves, because of an increase in the market for sugar. Even though the indentured servants did not have many rights, as citizens of England, they possessed more legal rights than African slaves. Therefore, the indentured servants were no longer wanted as a labor force and turned to other endeavors.24

Pirates were welcomed in the colonies that bordered the Atlantic Ocean. The pirates were able to trade their goods (gathered from the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf) in the colonies because the colonial governments could claim that the goods were received legally. Even voyages were sometimes endorsed by colonial officials. The colonists were able to buy expensive and luxurious goods at a cheap price.25 Piracy was such a part of the configuration of the societies that it found its way into the colonial governments. Therefore, rooting out the problem was more complicated than simply telling the colonists to stop befriending pirates.26 Also, men in the colonies became pirates themselves. They came from various different places—merchant families from

23 Latimer, Buccaneers of the Caribbean, 94-95.
26 Burgess, The Pirates’ Pact, 169.
the east coast states such as Massachusetts and Rhode Island, plantations in South Carolina, Bermuda, Tortuga, and Barbados.27

Evidence of friendship between the colonial government and the pirates came from one of the biggest scandals in the British colonies. It involved the governor of North Carolina, Charles Eden, and his agent, Tobias Knight, and a well-known (and feared) pirate named Edward Teach, a.k.a. Blackbeard. Fed up with the havoc that Blackbeard was causing along the coast, Virginia governor Alexander Spotswood sent out Captain Robert Maynard to stop the dreaded pirate in his tracks. A battle occurred on November 21, 1718, and ended in the death of Blackbeard and several men from his crew. While looking through his effects, Maynard found some alarming pieces of evidence that would implicate the officials in North Carolina in trading with the pirates. Among his notes included a letter from Tobias Knight declaring that he was a true friend of Blackbeard’s and thanking him for the twenty hogsheads of sugar that he received as well as the sixty hogsheads of sugar that Governor Eden was given. Also, there were letters addressed to Blackbeard from New York merchants assuring the pirate of safety. When these facts were exposed, Governor Eden accused Maynard himself of piracy, declaring that Blackbeard had been recently pardoned and had put piracy behind him.28 Events like this further blurred the line between legal and illegal piratical acts.

Trade laws, imposed to secure colonial trade for the empire, also made piracy attractive. The Navigation Acts, first issued by Oliver Cromwell in 1651, declared that “no goods could be imported into England or the colonies except by English ships

27 Ibid., 32.
manned by English captains.”

Since colonists were only allowed to trade with England, this hurt colonial free trade immensely. As colonial captains had little product to ship across the seas, their mariners faced more and more unemployment. This in turn produced more men becoming pirates. The cities that were hardest-hit by the acts were Newport, Rhode Island, and Port Royal, Jamaica. The original intent was to hurt the Dutch trade in the New World, but its effects were the opposite. By 1695, the desire for smuggled goods in the colony was so plentiful that there was an estimated sixty pirate captains operating off the ports of New York, each with nearly seventy to one hundred sailors on board. So profitable were their journeys that they could each expect to receive anywhere between 1,000 and 1,500 pounds.

Not only did piracy pose a threat to the wealth of England, it also posed a threat to the business of transportation, since so many men choose to become pirates rather than work aboard a merchant vessel or a navy ship. During the thirteen years that followed the War of the Spanish Succession (1715-1728), Britain’s shipping did not grow at all. This was because the pirates were able to take as many goods from the British during the peace time years as the belligerents did during the war. About 2,000 ships were taken during the war; however, pirates were able to take that many plus a few more. The most successful of this time were Bartholomew Roberts, with an

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28 Ibid., 8.
29 Ibid., 43.
30 Ibid.
31 Latimer, *Buccaneers of the Caribbean*, 98.
impressive four hundred ships captured, along with Edward Low, who was responsible for one hundred and forty, and Blackbeard and Sam Bellamy, with about fifty ships.  

In the Golden Age of Piracy, what was most upsetting to the British officers was the violent way that the pirates started attacking English ships. Pirate crews disposed of their captains if they choose not to take English vessels, such as in the case of Benjamin Hornigold in 1717. Also, the pirates converged in places such as the Caribbean and the African coast, therefore threatening the slave trade by raiding the slave ships.

What changed were the pirates themselves. Always shifting from illegal to legal, the freebooters of the golden age demonstrated a different type of pirate—one that was not afraid to wage war against his former homeland (England). Rather than the buccaneer who occasionally plundered an English vessel, the pirates of the early eighteenth century used an “us versus them” mentality that more than anything offended and threatened to weaken the British Empire. In order to combat these men, the British government took greater legal measures. In 1700, parliament passed “An Act for the more effectual Suppression of Piracy.” Under this act, those who mutinied or did not defend the ship during a pirate attack satisfactorily were considered pirates. In an effort to turn the pirates away from their chosen profession, King George I offered pardons in 1717 and 1718. However, these pardons did not often work, much to the chagrin of many government officials. These pardons often allowed the pirates to confess and be forgiven by the government, and continue on their course without changing their ways. Also, the pardons only extended to crimes that were committed within certain time frames and pirates had

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to be forgiven in specific geographical areas. Further efforts to challenge the pirates occurred in 1721, when it was decided that sailors who did not properly defend the ship could receive the loss of wages and half a year in jail. Worse than that, cooperation with pirates could be met with death. Navy ships were required to chase and fight pirate ships. Rewards could be reaped if naval captains fought against the pirates. Any captain who refused to defend his ship and merely allowed the pirates to take the goods was forbidden to command a ship for England ever again.

Captain William Kidd was caught in the transition of piracy because he started off as a privateer and later was hanged as a villain. His voyage would be financed by wealthy men who would later turn on him when the noose fell around his neck. Unfortunately for Kidd, the same time that he found himself on a floundering voyage to the East would mark the time when England found it necessary to cut ties with privateers and pirates. Measures were taken to eliminate the main factors that the British saw as roadblocks to successful trade in the Indian Ocean. Such a well-known name like Kidd’s would be just the example to show the world that England was not afraid to kill its own men if it meant fair and secure trade. All of these factors helped secure the death of Kidd.

For Stede Bonnet, a gentleman from Barbados, the political climate of the day seemed too charged to let him or his thirty plus men live. Bonnet and his crew were caught in the transition from acceptance of the pirates to full out extermination. The number of pirates killed in Charleston the year Bonnet was executed was unparalleled.

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36 Ibid., 19-46.
and can be seen as nothing but an assault on any persons who even willingly associated with pirates.

The transition from privateer to pirate, may appear as simple as declaring an action legal or illegal. As we have seen, sometimes that line was blurred and men were caught in the crosshairs. While myths and perceptions surrounded piracy as a whole, they also encompassed the pirates themselves. Pirates have tended to blend together as one, while in reality they were individuals, responding to different phases in the British Empire and causing the Empire to respond to them. Ambiguity seemed to be the order of the day.
Chapter 4

Evolution in South Carolina

Charleston, South Carolina, provides an excellent example of the changing regard for pirates in the early eighteenth century. It was necessary to rid Charleston of the embarrassment of corrupt officials who associated with the pirates. Not all people of the colony grew to loath the pirates. Many would retain sympathy for them, which would rise to the surface during the strongest military campaign against the pirates. The Stede Bonnet case of 1718 marked a specific turning point in the treatment of pirates by the legal officials of Charleston, South Carolina. At one point, the British Empire’s strict Navigation Acts made piracy acceptable, if not legal, as did the cultural makeup of Charleston. It was the colonial need for cheap goods and the desire for exotic luxuries that provided the pirates with a free pass to commit their crimes. However, in due time, the tides turned on the pirates and they were no longer welcomed. Several factors led to this, including the expansion of South Carolina trade and the success of the cash crops, the need for England to exert economic control over South Carolina, and the growing hostility exhibited by the pirates.

South Carolina was heavily desired by several peoples—the Spanish, French, English, pirates, and the Native Americans. Carolina started for the British as a strategic location between the Spanish strongholds, such as St. Augustine, and the French, who
inhabited the southern region in present-day Mississippi. It was also populated as a way to threaten Spanish power in the New World. The Carolinas seemed less secure than the other British colonies on the mainland.\(^1\) Growing expansion on the frontier of Charleston meant that settlements pushed into Native American lands. It was essential to try and build good relations with the Native Americans—but it proved challenging. Charlestonians would become involved in warfare between the different tribes (Savannahs, Yamasees, Creeks) and constantly transferred their allegiance among the different peoples.\(^2\) The warm seasons that South Carolina experienced created an excellent opportunity for the seacoast to be attacked no matter what time of year. Spain proved a constant threat. Charleston was on its own when it came time to fend off attackers. In fact, when the British Government revised the collection system, they found it most efficient to include Charleston with the Bahamas. Being set apart from its fellow mainland comrades, Charleston, as historian Edward McCrady states, developed more of an independent state of mind.\(^3\)

The settlement of Charleston was intended to be for the ruling classes.\(^4\) As Meghan N. Duff writes in her article, “Creating a Plantation Province,” the eight noblemen who were granted land in the new colony from Charles II were considered by him to be “true and absolute proprietors” whose goal it was to draw a profit from the

\(^1\) Edward McCrady, *The History of South Carolina under the Proprietary Government 1670-1719* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1897), 4-6.
\(^3\) McCrady, *The History of South Carolina*, 4-6.
settlement, as well as govern. These men were also allowed to administer honors among the people (the proprietors could add to members of the aristocracy), as well as give land grants and collect fees. They wished to create a colony that was geographically and socially to their pleasing. The proprietors wanted to have strict control over the people who owned the land. In the Fundamental Constitution of Carolina, the ideal land division was as follows: “each county would contain eight seignories of 12,000 acres belonging to the eight proprietors, eight baronies of 12,000 acres granted to a hereditary nobility, and four precincts (each with six 12,000-acre colonies) to be planted by freemen.” These goals did not come to fruition, however. Problems with the governance, the environment, and rebellious settlers foiled these plans.

Class divisions were noticeable from the start of the colony and as Charleston’s place in the empire grew, the Proprietors’ desire to control grew as well. The practice of bringing more and more people over to the new colonies was encouraged in Carolina with the promise of land allotted to men who could bring their own labor force with them. Sometimes they brought men considered vagabonds and thieves in England, and sometimes they only kept them around long enough to obtain the land. Carolina had a problem encouraging “desirable” settlers to come to the newly founded colony, and those who did come chose to settle wherever they wished and held little regard for the carefully developed land allotment. Shirley Carter Hughson states that those flocking to the American colonies were to revel in a world where the power to enforce the laws remained relatively weak. In this way, he believes that this class of people only “needed

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5 Ibid.
6 Ibid., 1-17, 2.
7 Ibid., 1-17.
an opportunity” to allow their passions to run free and to cause problems in the new colonies.⁸ A short time after the founding of the colony, by the 1670s, the Proprietors were not satisfied with the goings-on of Charleston. The men had supplied the colony with the primary capital, along with an annual one hundred pound contribution toward the growth of the colony, but the colonists resisted them. Their biggest opposition would arise from a group called the “Goose Creek Men,” consisting mostly of Anglicans from Barbados. These men later viewed themselves as the protectors of freedoms, as opposed to the Proprietors.⁹ With several different classes jockeying for land and power, it is no wonder that the pirates were able to find several different citizens willing to trade.

South Carolina’s makeup became complex and deviated from the original blueprint for the colony as the majority of the population came from the British controlled islands of Barbados and the West Indies—lands that were accustomed to dealing with pirates. The number of people flocking to the Carolina settlement from the Caribbean increased year by year.¹⁰ These were the settlers who introduced a new aspect into the colony—slavery and mostly the plantation system. With the increase of rice production in the 1690s, the need for slave labor increased. From the beginning of the eighteenth century, almost half of all slaves brought into the country passed through Charleston and nearby Sullivan’s Island. By the year 1708, they comprised half of the settled Carolina population. This number continued to rise and by the time that the

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¹⁰ William J. Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston! The History of a Southern City* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, 1989), 5.
Proprietary Government was overthrown in 1719, only one-third of the population consisted of white settlers. In certain parts of the colony, the numbers might have been as high as eight slaves to one white settler.\(^{11}\)

Africans were not the only people who were turned into slaves. Since the beginning of the colony, the people of Charleston involved themselves in the trade of Native Americans, against the wishes of the proprietors. The proprietors made it clear, by law, that it was illegal to make an Indian into a slave or to remove him from the land without his agreement. The Indian slave trade proved to be a lucrative business, however, and the outcries were simply ignored. Starting in the 1670s, Indians were sent to the West Indies, where they brought in more money. Thus the exporting of Native Americans continued to the Caribbean and to the northern New England colonies. The number may have been as high as 12,000 exported by the year 1710. In Carolina, the Indians also served as slaves and made up a little over ten percent of the population of slaves.\(^{12}\) The need for a controlled labor force would make slavery profitable and attractive.

In addition to class struggles, there were also religious differences. During the reign of James II, religious dissidents flocked to the colonies in order to escape injustice, fearing that they would become subject to Catholicism once again. Also, an influx of Huguenots provided for more immigrants to the Carolinas after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685).\(^{13}\) These people often promoted trade and manufacturing and were

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considered to be in Carolina “some of its best and most industrious inhabitants.”\textsuperscript{14} The second largest occupation group of the Huguenots was the merchants, while others who acquired wealth within the colony were the landed gentry.\textsuperscript{15} The proprietors had intended for the colony to support the Anglican Church and also religious toleration and in this way to appeal to peoples of all faiths. In order to persuade more Huguenots and dissenters to come to the colony, they put more dissenters in places of power.\textsuperscript{16}

With a growing population showing disdain for the rules of the Proprietors, it was no surprise that the pirates would find friends in the new settlement. Pirates were accepted with open arms into the colony because they spent their money generously with the people of the Carolinas. The pirates mostly came from the Caribbean region and populated the coast of the mainland. While some men eventually joined the ranks of pirate crews, the ringleaders themselves hailed from places such as Jamaica and the rest of the West Indies. The pirates now had a nearer group of people with whom they could barter and also recruit men into the occupation of pirating. Indeed, these new Carolina settlements put the pirates into closer proximity to attack Spanish vessels and then trade some of the plundered goods for necessities. Likewise, not only did the colony’s economy benefit by the infusion of Spanish coin, but the threat that the pirates constantly posed did much to deter the Spanish from attacking the English colony. As long as the pirates scared the Spanish Empire, the colonists were spared from complete destruction.\textsuperscript{17}

In exchange for the gold they had, they could receive more weapons, food, and clothes.

\textsuperscript{14} Bartholomew Rivers Carroll, \textit{Historical Collections of South Carolina Vol. 1} (New York: Harpers & Brothers, 1836), 87.
\textsuperscript{15} Bertrand Van Ruymbeke, “The Huguenots of Proprietary South Carolina,” in \textit{Money, Trade, and Power}, 34-35.
\textsuperscript{16} Weir, \textit{Colonial South Carolina}, 54, 64.
\textsuperscript{17} Hughson, \textit{The Carolina Pirates and Colonial Commerce}, 12-14.
Since it was not clear how the pirates gained the goods they sold into the colony, the actions of the pirates were considered smuggling, rather than just blatant theft. The people of Charleston acquired silks and wines from the pirates, which were exotic and cheaper through trade with the pirates than with the English. The money the pirates had could buy friendship, and they shared their money well with those in the colony so that they were able to befriend even those in the government.18

The English only provided yet another reason to welcome the pirates. As Hughson determines, the Navigation Acts would serve “as the most potent force in causing the toleration of the pirates in America.”19 Hughson states the situation best when he wrote that “they could hardly have been expected to resign so profitable a connection with the pirates, merely at the command of a board of gentlemen three thousand miles across the sea, who only looked upon the colony as an enterprise for the betterment of their private fortunes.”20 As Walter Edgar points out, the colonists’ support was essential to stopping piratical activity in the colonies.21 Therefore, as long as the pirates were civil and did not cause problems within the colony, they were not asked too many questions and did not fear punishment.22

Not only the citizens of Charleston, but also the government accepted the pirates as well. Hardly a governor could take office before he was accused of being a cohort of the pirates. In the mid-1690s, there was evidence from the testimony of pirates when they faced trial in England that the province of Carolina had benefited them immensely. Soon

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18 Carroll, *Historical Collections of South Carolina Vol. 1*, 86, 172.
20 Ibid., 27.
22 Ibid., 14-15.
enough, accusations abounded and no colonial official escaped. When Edward Randolph, surveyor general of the customs service in the North American colonies, collected the king’s revenue, he realized that the profits of England were suffering at the hands of the pirates, and he did not hesitate to point fingers at Carolina’s Governor Archdale, stating that “he permits Pyrates to land and bring their money quietly ashore, for which favour he was well paid by them.”

Robert Quarry was given the role as governor in 1685 and was known for his acceptance of the pirates which resulted in his removal from office after only two months; his reputation did not suffer, though, as he seemed to continue to be prestigious until his death.

Jamaica even petitioned for the Carolinas to stop befriending the pirates. The governor of Jamaica, Sir Thomas Lynch, went so far as to ask England to directly involve themselves in the affairs of the Carolinas because of the friendship given to the pirates caused problems for the island. Lynch claimed that there was “great damage that does arise in his Majesty’s service by harboring and encouraging pirates in Carolina.”

The amount of money being lost for the crown was noted by Edward Randolph when he claimed that, “if the crown would take over the colony, the king would be the richest prince in Europe.”

Charleston’s judicial system did not prosecute the pirates but rather allowed for them to go unpunished. Several of the Proprietors expressed their concerns in a letter

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23 Mrs. St. Julien Ravenel, Charleston: The Place and The People (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1906), 70; Weir, Colonial South Carolina, 89. In reality it was not just the southern colony that befriended the pirates, but the New England colonies as well, most notably New York and Pennsylvania.


25 Ibid., 18.

26 Weir, Colonial South Carolina, 89. Randolph was, as Weir claims, a roving investigator.
written to the colonial Department Secretary in on April 10, 1693. The colonial
government had recently decided to provide for “indifferent jurymen” for all of the cases
of the colony, be they civil or criminal, from a sort of lottery. This act allowed for the
names of men to be picked at random, hopefully providing an unbiased trial for the
defendant. However, this was worrisome to the Proprietors for it provided a way for the
“most enormous crimes unpunisht, especially Pyracy.”27 The men who opposed this act
believed that the way the colonists were divided could allow for the sheriff to ensure that
every trial included some “notorious favorers of Pyrates, who coming prepared for it may
be able to constraine the rest of the Jury to consent to what verdict they please.”28 Not
only was that harmful to the citizens of the town as well as the peace between nations, but
also dangerous to the trade of England itself. Juries allowed the pirates to escape trial,
and many of the men assimilated themselves with the people of the town.29

The need for safe ports was steadily increasing. The settlement was growing—
merchants and other industrious citizens were coming into town, as well as greater
numbers of slaves. There was an outbreak of war between Spain and France in 1684,
which saw the Carolinas take part by granting privateer commissions.30 After peace was
made, Charles II called for these commissions to no longer be granted; however, no one
paid much attention to his wishes. It was important for the commissions to be recalled
and privateering to come to an end if peace was to be lasting. If privateers still attacked
former enemy vessels, it would not appear that the war was really over. Much like his

27 William J. Rivers, A Sketch of the History of South Carolina to the Close of the
Proprietary Government by the Revolution of 1719 (Spartanburg, SC: The Reprint
Company, 1972; orig. pub. 1856), 436.
28 Ibid.
30 Rivers, A Sketch of the History of South Carolina, 146.
predecessor, James II (1685-1689) tried to end the piracy in Carolina, for he did not want war and the pirates threatened peace by attacking allied ships.\(^{31}\) Nothing really worked in favor of the king, until he sent forth Sir Robert Holmes to physically stop the pirates in the West Indies and make sure that those accused of piracy were not released by loopholes in the system.\(^{32}\) In addition, rather than take those accused of piracy back to England, where they might escape on-route, or waste time and resources, a law passed in 1699 granted greater freedoms to those colonies and their courts for condemning (and executing) pirates. Not only was this a hint that the colonial governments were looking to enhance their fight against the pirates (or in some case, start the fight), it also gave further incentives. England offered money to those who turned in pirates and punishments for those officials who did not adequately fight against piracy. The law also provided for money to be given to those hurt fighting the pirates, and in the unfortunate case that the men should be killed, the government would take care of their families.\(^{33}\)

Soon, even some of the wealthier citizens wanted to see piracy abolished, as the economy of the colony shifted. Rice had been one of the first cultivated crops that were tried in Carolina, but yielded little results within the first decade or so. However, once the rice crop grew in abundance, it became a staple crop of the colony and more land was used for this purpose.\(^{34}\) While Charleston experienced a varying degree of success with previous crops, the rice provided a way to get rich. Even though the rice merchants could still only sell within an English market, opportunities abounded for them to become wealthy. Indeed, near the end of the eighteenth century, the South Carolina planters

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32 Ibid., 26.
33 Ibid., 42-43.
34 Weir, *Colonial South Carolina*, 145.
would become some of the wealthiest men in all of the British Empire. It was of complete necessity that the rice, which had to go to the markets in England for trade, arrive, undisturbed by piratical activity. In 1699, there were not sufficient ships to carry the crop. Between the years of 1706 and 1716, the commerce expanded tremendously, more than doubling the number of ships that left the port of Charleston. In 1706, the number had been 68 vessels; ten years later, it was 162.

During 1715, the Royal Navy had expelled the majority of the pirates from the Caribbean; however, they flocked to the Atlantic coasts. There would be an estimated 1,500 pirates parading off the coast of present-day North Carolina. For the merchants of Charleston, their ports had been relatively pirate-free for a number of years until their removal from the Caribbean. The raids began to increase and damaged much of their trade. Economically, the Caribbean, Charleston, Africa, and England were all tied together as part of the “triangular” trade. R.C. Nash writes that “the creation of a plantation export economy depended, in turn, on a large-scale transatlantic traffic in coerced labor, first in white indentured servants and then, from circa 1650, in black African slaves.” While it was important not to interfere with the profits of rice, it was also detrimental that the labor force, slaves, not be meddled with as well. Pirates were known for plundering slave vessels and taking some of the slaves at markets for their

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36 Hughson, The Carolina Pirates and Colonial Commerce, 44.
37 Weir, Colonial South Carolina, 86.
38 McCrady, The History of South Carolina, 565.
own profits. The men who were not sold sometimes became part of the crew of pirates.\footnote{Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, \textit{The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic} (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 165.} If this valuable commodity was lost, the plantation system might not have been able to survive.

However, pirates, being known as the “enemies of mankind,” did not show favor for long, and soon enough the pirates wore out their welcome. The people of Charleston, once friends of the pirates, now became foes. Acts of wrongdoing were only permitted when they were against enemies, but when they threatened the ships that were trying to leave the Charleston harbor, there was no way to get rid of the pirates fast enough. Once the pirates had been close to the people of Carolina, at their local spots, the Cape Fear River and New Providence and even on their very streets; however, now their proximity was a liability.\footnote{Ravenel, \textit{Charleston: The Place and The People}, 70.} During the late seventeenth century, the pirates only grew in power and also in audacity. They no longer sought to be friends with those they hoped to trade with; rather “what they wished, they demanded.”\footnote{Hughson, \textit{The Carolina Pirates and Colonial Commerce}, 30-31.} The pirates were rumored to be preparing to burn down Charleston. While these threats amounted to nothing, they did not endear the pirates to the people any longer. Stede Bonnet played a role in this tumultuous time for Charleston, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Bonnet and his actions against the town of Charleston would help solidify a campaign to end piracy in the Carolina waters. The merchants of Charleston turned on the pirates, as England had.
Chapter 5

Trials and Tribulations

This chapter offers evidence that Kidd and Bonnet, along with some of their men, were condemned as guilty before they were heard at trial. Both men claimed innocence, instead claiming to be privateers, but neither could defend adequately the evidence used against them. Ultimately, politics played the biggest role in each case, with each man being on the wrong side. The hopes of freedom and the way both men approached the government that held them were quite similar. One stark difference is the execution of Bonnet’s men, which exemplified the extermination campaign that occurred later toward the end of the golden age of piracy, where the goal was not to stop piracy, but to completely get rid of the pirates.

In contrast to Kidd’s situation, many of the townspeople and even some government authorities pitied Bonnet. Two factors were at play here—the British Empire and the merchants of England, and those who were subjects to them. Also, the makeup of Charleston, South Carolina, was far more diverse than that of England. While the people of England may have viewed solidarity through joining against one common enemy (Kidd), Charleston did not.

William Kidd had learned to depend on patronage early on in his career, and it proved to be his downfall. He did not show up in records until he was about forty-four
years old. It was then that he was in the Caribbean, around 1689, aboard a ship comprised of French and English men. This was later stolen and taken over by the Englishmen, who made Kidd their captain. Kidd proved to be more of a privateer rather than pirate, and his crew disliked him for it. He ended up losing his crew and his ship—but gained the respect of the higher officials in the British Caribbean colonies.¹

Signing on to be a privateer in the year 1695, Kidd walked a fine line between legal acts (and so did his backers). Near the end of the seventeenth century, the king did not like to give out commissions for privateering, but the strain of financing a war with France twisted the king’s arm. A voyage to capture pirates (and their goods) was devised by Robert Livingston, Lord Bellomont, and William Kidd, as well as three anonymous Whig backers. The goal was to help secure trade and make a profit, of course. It was not without risks, though. If Kidd made no money, he was responsible for repaying the three backers.² Captain Kidd was given two commissions for his voyage. One was from King William III, which proclaimed that “now Know yet, that we being desirous to prevent the aforesaid Mischiefes, and as much as in us lyes, to bring the said Pyrates, Free Booters and Sea Rovers to Justice, have thought fit, and do hereby give and grant to the said William Kid, to whom our Commissioners for exercising the Office of Lord high Admiral of England, have granted a Commission as a private Man of War, bearing Date the 11th Day of December 1695.” It also stated that the goods that any pirates had must be given to Kidd and those men brought to trial.³ Another commission in the possession of Captain

² Richie, *Captain Kidd and the War against the Pirates*, 43-54.
³ Daniel Defoe [Charles Johnson], *A General History of the Pyrates*, edited by Manuel Schonhorn (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, 1972), 441.
Kidd was the Commission of Reprisals, which allowed him to take French vessels during the war.⁴

Kidd’s downfall revolved around two main events: the killing of William Moore, ship’s gunner, and the taking of the vessel *Quedah Merchant*. The venture of Kidd was a disaster. They were running out of supplies and failing to capture many vessels. William Moore challenged Kidd’s authority. When Kidd called him a “lousy dog,” it prompted Moore to reply that he was that way because “you have made me so; you have brought me to ruin and many more.” To this Kidd threw a bucket at Moore’s skull, leading to his death the next day.⁵ The second part of his downfall, the capture of the *Quedah Merchant*, occurred in 1698. The *Adventure Galley*, Kidd’s ship, flew the French colors and called out to the *Merchant*. John Wright, the English captain commanding the ship put up the French flags as well and sent his gunner, a Frenchman, aboard Kidd’s vessel, trying to pass as a captain. Kidd flew up his English flags and counted the vessel as his lawful prize.⁶

The success of the East India Company (EIC) depended on the failures of the pirates. The East India Company had experienced sensational high returns on investments, peaking during the 1680s. Eventually, stock holders were able to receive fifty percent dividends. In the ten-year span between 1681-1691, the stock rose 450 percent. A war with the Mughal Empire ultimately brought harder times upon the EIC, since they were not able to win and in the end bargained for peace—with great financial costs. So when the *Quedah Merchant* was taken by Captain Kidd, the Muslims did not

⁵ Ritchie, *Captain Kidd and the War Against the Pirates*, 106.
respond well. One of the Armenian merchants aboard the ship, Coji Babba, tried to buy back the ship from Kidd, but Kidd refused.\textsuperscript{7} There were rumors that Captain Wright did not attack Kidd or defend the ship. Kidd claimed that he had shown them a commission for him to take the vessel, given by the king himself. Because of this act, the president of the EIC neglected to issue the pardon that had been given to the pirates in exchange for their retreat from the Indian Ocean. Emperor Aurangzeb of the Mughal Empire declared that those who had been victimized by the pirates must be paid back by the European countries, for failure to control their pirates. He also demanded that Muslim trade be guarded more closely. The French and Dutch traders were able to give sufficient bribes and were freed from these stipulations. The English living along the Indian Ocean received the full of brunt of the situation, with the Indian people outside of the factories refusing to even give them food. The East Indians believed that all pirates were English since so many of their ships that were taken by pirates were comprised of British men.\textsuperscript{8}

Bonnet’s downfall also involved a partnership, but one with the notorious Blackbeard in September 1717. Blackbeard was allowed by Bonnet to take over command of his vessel.\textsuperscript{9} This mistake would eventually prove to be fatal for the major. While Blackbeard and his new crew plundered vessel after vessel, Bonnet resigned himself to his old pastimes, mostly notably reading. One of the victims of Blackbeard was Captain Codd who related that “on board the pirate sloop is Major Bennet [Bonnet], but has no command, he walks about in his morning gown, and then to his books, of

\textsuperscript{7} Defoe, \textit{The General History of the Pyrates}, 444.
\textsuperscript{8} Ritchie, \textit{Captain Kidd and the War Against the Pirates}, 128-37.
which he has a good library on board.” In May 1718, both men would embark upon an expedition that would gain them notoriety and hatred by the people of the colonies. 

During this month they initiated a blockade of Charleston, South Carolina, and a total of five ships were taken at the port. They also prevented several ships from leaving Charleston at the time. The main purpose of this adventure was to collect medicinal supplies for the crews, of which there were about four hundred men. After a couple of days with no sight of a boat from the officials of the town, Blackbeard sensed that he was not being taken seriously and moved all of his vessels closer to the harbor of Charleston, declaring that he would kill every last person in the city. Blackbeard’s guns were ready to fire, which caused mass pandemonium in the town, with everyone fearing for their lives. This brought about the desired effect for Blackbeard, for Charleston (suffering from threats and a blockade which had hurt their trade) eventually caved in to his demands, and soon a small boat came to Blackbeard, carrying the medicine (worth between three hundred and four hundred pounds).

The people of Charleston had been ill-prepared to fight the pirates. The governor had ultimately decided to call a council together to determine the best course, and the council had found it necessary to give into the pirates’ demands. However, the insults that the town suffered would be remembered in the coming months. It was not until 

13 Karraker, *Piracy was a Business*, 148.
June 1718, in North Carolina, that Bonnet was able to once again control his own vessel.\textsuperscript{15}

Over the next few months, Bonnet backslid into acts of piracy, sprinkled with little acts of compassion to the ship owners. In the Virginia Capes and the Delaware Bay, he plundered vessels from Bermuda and captured a slave ship, and after taking the goods he sought, he sent the ship to what Rankin referred to as a “safe” slave market. While robbing a man of tons of foodstuffs from his vessel, he returned to him some molasses from another plunder as sort of barter system. Bonnet did not reimburse all of the men for their goods, however, and he captured over a dozen vessels in the Atlantic waters, many in the Cape Fear region.\textsuperscript{16} When in Port Lewis, he promised to “burn the town” if the crew was jeopardized when landed to release several prisoners.\textsuperscript{17}

Colonel William Rhett, a prominent merchant heavily involved with the government of Charleston, was sent to capture Bonnet’s crew.\textsuperscript{18} While both sides readied themselves for what was to come, Bonnet took time to write to Governor Johnson.\textsuperscript{19} Bonnet wrote that “he would plunder and burn every ship that had the temerity to sail out of Charleston harbor.”\textsuperscript{20} On October 3, 1718, Stede Bonnet and his crew of over thirty men entered Charleston, this time as prisoners.\textsuperscript{21}

Significantly, Bonnet was separated from his crew (after all, he was a gentleman), and was placed at the town marshal’s own home while the men were thrown into the

\textsuperscript{15} Butler, \textit{Pirates, Privateers, and Rebel Raiders of the Carolina Coast}, 60.
\textsuperscript{16} Rankin, \textit{The Golden Age of Piracy}, 95-96.
\textsuperscript{17} Hughson, \textit{The Carolina Pirates and Colonial Commerce}, 90.
\textsuperscript{18} Butler, \textit{Pirates, Privateers, and Rebel Raiders of the Carolina Coast}, 64-65.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 65.
\textsuperscript{20} Rankin, \textit{The Golden Age of Piracy}, 98.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 100.
watch house, where they were monitored closely. Within a few days, two men, David Herriot and Ignatius Pell, agreed to testify against their former companions and were taken from the rest of the crew to stay with Bonnet. On October 17, “An Act for the more speedy and regular trial of pirates” was passed by the Assembly, in order to create a way to get rid of the pirates who were currently infesting their coasts to such an alarming degree. While certain laws already on the books made it possible to legally punish the pirates, the act showed a willingness to hasten the matter.

Judge Nicholas Trott, originally from England, would preside over the trial. He had been known for overstepping his political boundaries and making political enemies. Trott also was known to be a strong Anglican, like his brother-in-law, William Rhett. The colonies had an infusion of different religious ideas—Anglican, Huguenot, and other religious dissenters—who sometimes jockeyed for power.

While both men stood trial for piracy and murder, the governments of England and South Carolina used the trials, not just to condemn the men, but also to make other statements. Kidd’s trial attempted to show that England was getting rid of the pirates for India and creating greater order in terms of trade and organization of their men and means. Both men were treated differently; Kidd was mocked and turned into a fable. London was giddy to hear all about Kidd’s account. There were even rumors that he might get a last-minute pardon from the king, but ultimately one of his men received it instead. This shows the changing atmosphere against the pirates.

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22 Ibid., 100.
Kidd’s final act was to write to their enemy, Robert Harley, who was the Tory Speaker of the House of Commons. He told Harley that if he could go to the West Indies, he would recover the 100,000 pounds he had hidden to be used for the benefit of the government. He promised that if he failed, he would submit to execution. However, Harley seems to have ignored him. Kidd was running out of chances, as is illustrated by the fact that Coji Babba came from India to watch the trial (which was fortunate, so he could return to India and inform others about the justice of the English system and conclude that perhaps all pirates were not Englishmen after all).  

While both men had a fair trial according to the standards of the day, it cannot be denied that Kidd and Bonnet were at a disadvantage. The political tension assured Kidd of a guilty verdict. He also did not have time to adequately prepare himself for trial and was missing his French passes, used to take the *Quedah Merchant*. Without this piece of evidence, Kidd could not adequately show that he had taken the vessel legally.

Bonnet’s trials showed that South Carolina was eliminating pirates for England. In contrast to Kidd, Bonnet was pitied. This shows the difference in sentiment that existed within the span of almost two decades, across the pond. The colonists were still not quite ready to agree with England that pirates were all evil. The trial of Stede Bonnet and the legal ramifications set something of a precedent in the colonial legal system. In order to reach that precedent, Trott needed to rewrite history and remember England as a

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26 Ritchie, *Captain Kidd and the War against the Pirates*, 220-222.  
nation that abhorred piracy and did everything in its power to rid her waters of the sea-robbers who had for so long destroyed commerce and trade.\textsuperscript{28}

Piracy was usually accepted unless it complicated the trade of the affected nation. In Kidd’s case, the East India Company was affected by the belief that all pirates were of English origin and that the English should not be considered good trade partners. Likewise, with Bonnet’s case, a rise in South Carolina exports made piracy a now-unwanted side effect of their former friendship. During the trial, the attorney-general, Richard Allein, reiterated the words of Judge Trott and stated to the jury that, “if a stop be not put to those depredations, and our trade no better protected, not only Carolina, but all the English plantations in America, will be totally ruin’d in a very short time.”\textsuperscript{29} He used the instance of the previous May (the threatened assault by Blackbeard) to denote how close Charleston was to becoming like Jamaica—completely overrun by pirates. He made sure to mention that some of the men that wreaked havoc on Charleston now stood ready to face trial.\textsuperscript{30}

The power was shifting during Kidd’s time, just as it was during Bonnet’s. When Kidd had left, the Whig Junto was at the peak of its power. However, the war that dragged on in 1697 brought the peoples’ discontent with the government to the surface. This allowed the Tories to strike in 1698 against the Whigs and gain public support.\textsuperscript{31} As Whigs left political offices, they were replaced by Tories. Ultimately, the Whigs started losing the support of William III. On the Tory side was the East India Company, which

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{28} The Tryal of Major Stede Bonnet, and Other Pirates (London, 1719), 3-4. Hereafter referred to as Stede Bonnet Trial.
  \item \textsuperscript{29} Stede Bonnet Trial, 8.
  \item \textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{31} Ritchie, Captain Kidd and the War against the Pirates, 185.
\end{itemize}
bore a “mortal grudge” against the Whigs. It was time for the Tories to build a solid case around the fact that the Whigs had supposedly supported piracy. The case of Kidd was only growing—just like the problem of piracy for the EIC. When Captain Kidd was finally captured, the Tories demanded that the stolen goods in his possession be given back to the merchants in India. They also met to declare the original purpose of the voyage illegal. It was this atmosphere that Kidd had to defend himself in, and this sort of negative publicity that the Whigs did everything to deflect.\(^{32}\)

In South Carolina, the Lord’s Proprietors were losing power to the colonists, who eventually ousted the men for not protecting them better during the Indian attacks. The wealthy men of the colony were too focused on piracy, and not turning their attention to the outskirts of town, where the people were being threatened. The people’s dissatisfaction with the Lord’s Proprietors led to the support of the pirates. Further evidence to support that the colonies did not completely abhor the pirates is the fact that Stede Bonnet escaped from his prison before the trial came about and the notion that many people protested the capture of the pirates throughout the town. One of Judge Trott’s concerns was the apparent support that Bonnet had received. He declared that he was “sorry to hear some expressions drop from private persons, (I hope there is none of them upon the jury), in favour of the Pirates, and particularly of Bonnet; that he is a Gentleman, a Man of Honour, a Man of Fortune, and one that has had a liberal Education.”\(^{33}\) To these claims, Trott contended that Bonnet’s crimes were even more reprehensible for those very reasons. Having an education and prosperous background, he had no reason to turn to piracy and make himself an enemy of the law. Bonnet’s piracy

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\(^{32}\) Ritchie, *Captain Kidd and the War against the Pirates*, 185.

\(^{33}\) *Stede Bonnet Trial*, 9.
was considered worse because “he was under no temptation of taking up that wicked course of Life.” The attorney general believed that his escape was dangerous because of the threat it posed to the merchants of Charleston and also because it was evident to the judge that “Bonnet has had some assistance in making his escape.” He made it clear that the perpetrators will be brought to justice, “if not by mere sake of conscious [conscience], perhaps by the reward of seven hundred pounds.”

The substance of both cases rested on the fact of whether or not the acts committed by the men were piratical and also a sense of vengeance on the part of the merchants of Charleston. To resolve this issue, the men sailing on the ship with the captains testified, as well as the captains of captured vessels, in the case of Bonnet. Bonnet claimed to have had a change of heart and turned away from the life of piracy and had plans to sail for the sake of England. The trial started with the solemn reminiscence of the insults that the pirates laid upon Charleston in the spring of 1718 and the further embarrassments that the people suffered at the hands of the pirates because the offenders were not punished. The notion of Charleston receiving insults at the hands of the pirates was a point that was pressed throughout the trial. Also pushed was the fact that the men who lost their lives in pursuit of the pirates demanded justice, that the innocent shedding of their blood must be met with another sacrifice, perhaps the taking of the pirates’ lives. These facts show that the government of Charleston wanted to prove that Charleston would no longer allow the treatment that it had endured under the pirates and that they were growing in prestige.

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34 Ibid.
36 Ibid., 4, 8, 9.
37 Ibid., 5.
When the Grand Jury met the first time, the bill of indictment was read, and the pirates were charged with commandeering Capt. Peter Manwareing’s ship, *Francis*, and taking the provisions that it carried. The men were accused of taking all sorts of valuables, the most expensive items being rum, at a total value of two hundred and sixty three pounds, as well as molasses. The less expensive items aboard the ship included smaller amounts of sugar, indigo, pistols, and jewelry.

The evidence against Bonnet was substantial; almost thirty ships were apprehended by him when he was in his alliance with the notorious Blackbeard—and yet the townspeople still found sympathy for him. Various authors disagree on the next point, but the fact of the matter is that Bonnet had friends in the town which led to his escape from confinement. Hughson believed it to be a shame that there were people who sympathized with the pirate in the town, after such a destructive blow that was dealt to the city. However, he acknowledges that certain disturbances did occur, although there are no records to explain exactly what transpired. Weir notes that it is possible that some citizens in South Carolina believed that he had “been treated unfairly” and perhaps he was “perceived as some kind of Robin Hood.” Recent historians have noted that “one sometimes encounters a kind of banditry in which outlaws express popular frustration and are in turn supported by the people.” Bonnet did have allies, and those people sought to use their money in order to secure a release for the pirate leader. Trott also mentions that Captain Partridge, who was housing Bonnet, was suspiciously relieved of his duties.

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38 Ibid., 6.
39 Ibid., 7.
41 Ravenel, *Charleston The Place and The People*, 86.
42 Ibid.
within several days.\textsuperscript{43} Means aside, Bonnet escaped, disguised in woman’s clothing, with David Herriot on October 24 or 25. Some feared that Bonnet would seek his revenge upon the town. A reward of seven hundred pounds was offered in return for Bonnet. Bonnet was captured and was taken back to Charleston on the sixth of November.\textsuperscript{44}

In addition to the townspeople, Captain Manwareing, the captain of one of the ships Bonnet plundered, testified at his trial, in sympathy for Bonnet. He shared with the court his recollection of the events, but made it a point to tell the jury that “indeed the gentleman was very civil to me.”\textsuperscript{45} When Bonnet asked Manwareing if he saw him share the plunder, he replied that he did in fact see Bonnet handle the goods and gave them to one of his men to put in a chest. Bonnet made a fateful mistake when he asked the captain if he ever saw him order goods from the Francis. Manwareing’s reply was a bit surprising for someone standing trial against a pirate. He seemed disappointed to have to say, “Major Bonnet, I am sorry you should ask me the questions, for you know you did: which was my all that I had in the world. So that I do not know but my wife and children are now perishing for want of bread in New England. Had it been only myself, I had not mattered it so much; but my poor family grieves me.”\textsuperscript{46} Manwareing declared that “they were very civil to me, very civil: But they were all very brisk and merry; and had all things plentiful, and were a-making punch, and drinking.”\textsuperscript{47} Mr. Hepworth, one of the men aboard Manwareing’s ship, also found the pirates to be in a cheerful mood. He recalled that the men came into the cabin and took the pineapples that were stored there

\textsuperscript{43}Hughson, \textit{The Carolina Pirates and Colonial Commerce}, 101.
\textsuperscript{44}Defoe, \textit{A General History of the Pyrates}, 102; Butler, \textit{Pirates, Privateers, and Rebel Raiders of the Carolina Coast}, 67; Rankin, \textit{The Golden Age of Piracy}, 101.
\textsuperscript{45}\textit{Stede Bonnet Trial}, 39.
\textsuperscript{46}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{47}Ibid., 13.
and “asked me, why I looked so melancholy? I told them I looked as well as I could; they asked me what liquor I had on board? I told them some rum and sugar. So they made Bowls of Punch, and went to drinking of the pretender’s health, and hoped to see him king of the English nation: Then sung a song or two. Drinking to the pretender’s health was one of the most anti-authoritarian things they could have done, since it showed the desire for the current king to be ousted.

The pressure that both judges put on the juries was similar. The judge said that Kidd had “woefully transgressed the business of his commission, and acted contrary to the end and design of his being sent out.” He stated that “if you believe these witnesses, that Captain Kidd has taken these ships in a piratical manner, and that the other persons assisted him in it, and had their shares of the money and goods, which is an evidence of their consenting to, and spontaneous acting, I believe you will think fit to find them guilty; but I leave it to you.” Kidd had to defend himself and therefore needed important documents. He lacked several things—his original commissions, articles between himself and Lord Bellomont, his bond, Bellomont’s sailing orders, and most importantly, the two French passes that he claimed would prove his innocence. Before the trial started, Kidd wrote a letter claiming that he took no ships that were not legally his to take. Kidd claimed that Lord Bellomont, “having sold his share in my ship, and in ye Adventure, thought it in his interest to make me a pirate, whereby he could claim a share of my cargo and in order to take it, strip me of my French passes.”

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48 Ibid.
49 The Trial of Captain Kidd, 161.
50 Ritchie, Captain Kidd and the War Against the Pirates, 209-10. In actuality, Bellomont did all that he could to help Kidd.
was responsible for frightening his men into misrepresenting Kidd’s character and actions. However, without the papers, Kidd did not have a fighting chance.\textsuperscript{51}

Ultimately, it was not piracy that brought the men to their end, but rather the issue of murder. In both Bonnet and Kidd’s case, they had killed without authority to do so. In just three days Stede Bonnet was ready to hear his verdict, although nothing was able to prepare him for the speech that Judge Trott was to deliver. When he was brought before the court, he stood silent when asked why he should avoid execution.\textsuperscript{52} Once again, Trott told Bonnet that he was guilty of stealing, and of the greater sin of murder. Trott could not reckon how many men Bonnet killed before in his early days of piracy, but he knew that eighteen men were killed in his fight against Colonel Rhett. He remarked that even if Bonnet thought it was justifiable to kill men in a fair fight, “the power of the sword not being committed into your hands by any lawful authority,” made it wrong. He stated that their “blood now cries out for vengeance and justice against you.”\textsuperscript{53} It seemed Stede Bonnet was guilty in going wayward from his class status and neglecting his duties as a privileged man. Drawing a distinction between his men and himself, the judge acknowledged that Bonnet had a better lot in life. He stated that

\begin{quote}
you being a gentleman that have had the advantage of a liberal education, and being generally esteemed a man of letters, I believe it will be needless for me to explain to you the nature of repentance and faith in Christ, they being so fully and so often mentioned in the scriptures. And therefore, perhaps, for that reason it might be thought by some improper for me to have said so much to you, as I have already upon this occasion; neither should I have done it, but that considering the course of your life and actions, I have just reason to fear that the principles of religion that had been instilled into you by your education, have been at least corrupted, if not entirely defaced, by the skepticism and infidelity of this wicked age; and that what time you allowed for study was rather applied to the polite
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 208-9.
\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Stede Bonnet Trial}, 41.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 42.
literature, and the vain philosophy of the times, than a ferocious search after the law and will of God.\textsuperscript{54}

Bonnet, for all of his great professions of innocence, did not succeed in convincing the jury. While he originally pleaded not guilty to the charge, he later changed his mind and withdrew and changed his plea to guilty, possibly to gain the sympathy of the jurors.\textsuperscript{55}

Likewise, Kidd, regardless of whether or not he was a pirate, was guilty of murdering his gunner, William Moore. Kidd claimed that he killed Moore because there was the threat of a mutiny. One of Kidd’s men told the court that Kidd did not care so much about the death because he knew “he could have his friends take care of it.” To this charge, Kidd defended himself by saying that “it was not designedly done, but in my passion, for which I am heartily sorry.”\textsuperscript{56}

The litmus test for a true pirate in Charleston, South Carolina, during the trial of Bonnet and his men centered on whether they were coerced. Judge Trott seemed to use choice as a way to determine their true guilt. After hearing the testimony of Captain Read, Judge Trott told the prisoners that it was apparent to him that they had taken up “this wicked course of life out of choice,” and asked them to defend themselves.

Prisoner after prisoner in the Bonnet case testified that they were coerced into piracy. Their excuses toward the end of the trial were that they were not aboard Manwareing’s ship, or that Thatch had not consulted them when he plundered other vessels, that they were waiting for a good opportunity to leave, or even to say that Bonnet told the men that

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 42.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 41.
\textsuperscript{56} Ritchie, \textit{Captain Kidd and the War against the Pirates}, 214.
if they chose not to fight, “he would blow their brains out.”57 To these excuses, Judge Trott replied that the men knew that Thatch and Bonnet were pirates and that they had their shares and were guilty of fighting Rhett’s men and taking several lives. Two men, Rowland Sharpe of Bath-Town, North Carolina, and Jonathan Clarke from Charleston, were able to convince the men of the jury and the judge that they were innocent. Clarke was able to leave Bonnet’s ship, but later returned due to hunger. When he returned, Clarke was forced to work with the “Negroes” aboard the ship and claimed that if he did not do as he was told, Bonnet “would make him Governor of the first island he came to.”58 Sharp claimed that he was able to travel on the shores, living in the woods for a few days without food or drink and trying in vain to find a plantation.59 Thomas Gerrard, of Antegoa, also testified that “one of the men came asked if I would join with them? I told him no. He said, I was but like a Negro, and they made slaves of all of that colour, if I did not join. So I did it with a design to get clear of them the first opportunity.”60 Pell also testified that he did not share the plunder and was threatened to be forced into slavery if he did not comply.61 The statement that Bonnet treated them as slaves is important. Charleston was a heavily dependent on slavery and the fact that Bonnet is shown as treating white men the same as black men must have shown him to be extra cruel in the officials’ eyes.

It is interesting that Kidd blamed the government. Kidd stated that he was being killed in order to secure trade and pacify the moguls. In pointing to the failures of the

57 Stede Bonnet Trial, 19.
58 Ibid., 30.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid., 31.
government, he brought to light valid arguments about the ever shifting legal line of piracy. However, instead of attacking the government, Bonnet tried to appeal to the religious atmosphere of the day. In his letter, Bonnet attempted to soften the governor’s heart with the tears from his “most sorrowful soul.”

He believed that he was being executed because some men were filled with envy and rage and wished to spill his blood. Bonnet did not understand how the men who gave his sentence could believe that he would finish out his days like he lived most of his life, in illegal acts. In an effort to show his new sense of repentance and faith, he told the governor that he would remove all of his limbs, “only reserving the use of my tongue, to call continually on, and pray to the Lord, my God, and mourn all my days in sackcloth and ashes.”

He declared that the governor could send him away and he would be a servant to the government and that his friends would continually be at the service of the governor. Bonnet asked him for mercy from one Christian to another, for Bonnet believed that he was too new in his faith and not far enough removed from his old habits, that he would not be welcomed into the arms of “my blessed Jesus.” He reminded the governor that not only would his pardon help Bonnet, but it would also benefit Governor Johnson, for he would acknowledge his mercy before God and would cause him to constantly pray “that our heavenly Father will also forgive your trespasses,” reminding the governor that the outlaws convicted by the law were not the only ones to break God’s commandments.

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63 Ibid.
64 Ibid., 113.
ones to be put to death for it, however. He signed the letter “your honour’s most miserable and afflicted servant, Stede Bonnet.”

According to Ritchie, Kidd’s men all claimed the same defense. They had signed on with Kidd for “no purchase, no pay.” He states that they simply followed the “obey or death” rule of the privateers. (This meant that if no goods were captured, the crew received no compensation for their journey, and they also followed the wishes of the captain or faced harsh consequences.)

As recorded in *A General History of the Pyrates*, Bonnet became such a pious person while facing his execution, and the people of Charleston were greatly troubled for him (especially the women). People petitioned to Governor Johnson on behalf of Bonnet, so that perhaps some effort might be made to save his life. The fact that he managed to escape from his prison when first arriving to Charleston did not help his case. Eventually, Johnson decided that it might be possible to send Bonnet to England for a re-trial (for he was a major in the Barbadian militia), and even Colonel Rhett offered to accompany him, but it was decided that the cost would be too much and that England would not have much sympathy for the man. Governor Johnson did not want to see Bonnet go free. He wanted to see the colonies protected. It appears that Johnson only offered the retrial because the townspeople felt such sympathy for Bonnet. Johnson had refused to acknowledge Rhett’s promise to Bonnet, which was mercy if he surrendered while fighting Rhett and his men. Because of this, Rhett refused to help Johnson capture

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65 Ibid.
66 Ritchie, *Captain Kidd and the War against the Pirates*, 207.
the next pirate that made his way into Charleston’s waters.\(^{68}\) The governor did not choose mercy, or perhaps he felt that it would be worse to let a guilty man go, as the judge often reminded the men. Stede Bonnet was executed a month after his trial, on December 10, 1718, at White-Point.

Trott stated in the trial that piracy was “an offense against all nations and punishable by all; and pirates may be pursued in any country where they may be found without regard to the question on whom or where the piratical offense has been committed.” As Hughson stated, “[Trott’s] annotations show a familiarity with both ancient and modern authorities rarely to be found even among jurists of acknowledged learning and ability.”\(^{69}\) The importance of stating that piracy could be dealt with anywhere, no matter where the offense was committed, allowed for a greater condemnation of pirates and therefore, more executions. Stating that the colonials had authority to take care of the pirates gave them greater freedoms in controlling their waters.

Ritchie writes in his book that the capture or conquest of Blackbeard and Stede Bonnet show the change from tolerance of pirates to absolute need for destruction. He states that the colonists became the “chief hunters” of those who used to be considered friends.\(^{70}\) Ritchie also points out the drastic change in the number of men executed for piracy at a given time. As is evident in the Stede Bonnet case, crews of thirty or more men were being killed along with their captain, in what Ritchie describes as “an

\(^{68}\) Ibid., 111-12.


\(^{70}\) Ritchie, *Captain Kidd and the War against the Pirates*, 236.
extermination campaign." While Bonnet’s destiny was most undoubtedly settled before he set foot in the courtroom, it is interesting that his last-minute conversion and his status as a gentleman (and possibly as a man who was not in his right mind) had enough sway to at least cause people to pause and rethink their decision. Such examples do not show a colony hell-bent on wholeheartedly destroying the pirates. Or perhaps they show a colony not in complete agreement about Carolina society.

Executing Stede Bonnet sent a message to other pirates. Here was a man of learning, who owned a plantation and served as a major in the militia. If the government would not even spare such a man involved in piracy, what chance would other offenders void of such titles and prestige have of escaping the noose? In a way, there could be no alternative for Bonnet. The stakes were too high. If Johnson freed a man who had humiliated his town and government, he could have been accused of being in league with the man and those like him. After all, Charleston had had its fair share of pirate-friendly accusations. In the environment that was brewing, leniency could not be allowed. It must have been conflicting, though, at least a little bit, for merchant men to execute a man who had owned land and a plantation. If pirates were “the scum of the earth,” how could one of their own make the journey from “honorable man” to dastardly pirate?

In England and the colonies, the definition of piracy was ambiguous. In the colonies, so was the line between friend and foe. The sympathy toward Bonnet in contrast to Kidd is worth examining. Even the man who captured him as well as the captain of the ship he plundered admitted that he was civil, and both expressed sadness at his fate. Kidd experienced very little hope in terms of being released. He appealed to the greed of those

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71 Ibid., 236.
in the government. In Bonnet’s case, he pleaded for repentance and mercy—and almost got away with it. For various reasons, the colonists were still not quite ready to agree with England that pirates were all evil. Perhaps those of the lower classes saw the men as heroes, and while Nicholas Trott asserts that they always had a choice, perhaps those in poverty related to their lack of options. The citizens seemed to be willing to show mercy to Bonnet after he became an “exemplary” Christian. In terms of race, Bonnet did not play by the racial guidelines. This may have horrified the plantation owners and merchants. Because of these varying factors in the social structure and the shifting nature of Charleston, it is easy to understand the conflict the colony faced with the issue of piracy.
Conclusion

“What else is to be concluded from this but that you first make thieves and then punish them?”

-Sir Thomas More, *Utopia*

Ultimately, the English government created its own thieves and then punished them. By setting up sailors to be legal one day and not the next, it gave them no choice. Also, by securing the colonies’ trade with the Navigation Acts, it gave colonists incentive to trade with the pirates. While England and the colonial government of South Carolina legally defined piracy and declared that William Kidd and Stede Bonnet were pirates, it appeared that the definition was still too ambiguous, as both trials used murder as a way to secure a guilty verdict. If the evidence showed Kidd was a privateer, the outcome of his trial showed that it did not matter. If it interfered with the trade of England—then the government had to put it to an end. The officials of South Carolina (the Proprietors, the Governor, even Judge Trott himself) were facing turbulent times in Charleston. For several months before the capture of Stede Bonnet and his crew in October 1718, petitions were sent to England asking for help. The colony was suffering from lack of protection on its borders and high debts, recently incurred from the pirate chasings. As the Proprietors refused to assist the colonists, the colony openly revolted in December
1719, declaring themselves under the authority of the royal government.\(^1\) It is possible that killing the pirates was a last-ditch effort by the government to try to endear themselves to the English government, since Charleston’s prominence as rice growers and traders was of concern to England’s economic welfare. It was not enough to endear the government of South Carolina to its people. Like England, South Carolina was undergoing changes. Yet how Bonnet was treated offers a contrast to the William Kidd case. The factors that did not exist in the Kidd case were the demographics of South Carolina—racial, economic, and religious divisions.

There have been many groups that have been shifted between legal and illegal by their governments, but the plight of the pirates is unique. While the pirates were exterminated because of the growing need for a stable empire, they were also disliked because of what they symbolized (non-nation, anti-authoritarian entities). The pirates’ changing status, as those who had “waged war on the world entire,” gave cause for concern. The British Empire no longer was able to use them in its battles against other countries, as pirates’ rebellion against the motherland grew stronger. By the end of the 1720s, most of the pirates were driven from the seas. Even so, they have been memorialized as bandits—as men who have lived life on their terms and died trying. The images of their last moments and postmortem punishments have remained. Drawings of William Kidd’s lifeless body hanging in chains to dangle as a warning to others created a frightful image that has not faded in the three hundred years since his death. Likewise, the image of Stede Bonnet swaying after his hanging, clutching a bouquet, has also been

popularly circulated. In this way, the myths of the pirates are more successful than either man was during his time as a pirate.

During the nineteenth century, authors of American fiction such as Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe, and James Fenimore Cooper would adopt the pirates as mythical figures. Ritchie noted that the new nation did not have such a mythic past like Britain, with King Arthur and the like, so the United States used buccaneers and frontiersmen. “The exploits of the pirates also provided a middle-class audience with stories of adventure that took place in exotic locations outside the possibilities of their own lives.”

Kidd lived on through art. There are two ballads about his life and death, “Captain Kidd’s Farewell to the Sea” and “The Dying Words of Captain Robert William Kidd (1701).” In these ballads, Kidd avoided death until he arrived in New York City, where he met his end in the Hudson River Valley. In subsequent years many investors flocked to the valley to find the ship and treasure. One of the most appealing features of Captain Kidd is the notion of buried treasure. This idea was proposed by Robert Livingstone, who stated that a forty pound bag of gold was buried between Boston and New York. Kidd himself perpetuated this idea of a hidden treasure in order to secure a boat for himself in order to go to the West Indies and retrieve goods left from the *Quedah*.

The situation of pirates and piracy in the colonies is unique and deserves more academic attention. For example, a comparison between American and British fictional literature on piracy in the nineteenth century could be instructive. How American literature recorded the mythical figures of the pirates could contrast to how Britain

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3 Ibid., 237-38.
4 Ibid., 231-232.
displayed pirates. Understanding the governmental and popular response to the pirates could help clarify colonial relations to England and early notions of independence. As Douglas Burgess stated regarding colonial America, “the issue of pirate patronage also has crucial implications for our understanding of law and statecraft in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. How can we speak of English ‘law’ in the colonies, if the colonial governors are openly and persistently harboring criminals?”5 Further study that compares the South Carolina situation to that of New England and Virginia is needed. Another avenue of study might connect the widespread smuggling in the colonies with the official and unofficial attitudes toward piracy. In this way, the examination of these issues can put the stories of William Kidd and Stede Bonnet in an even larger context.

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