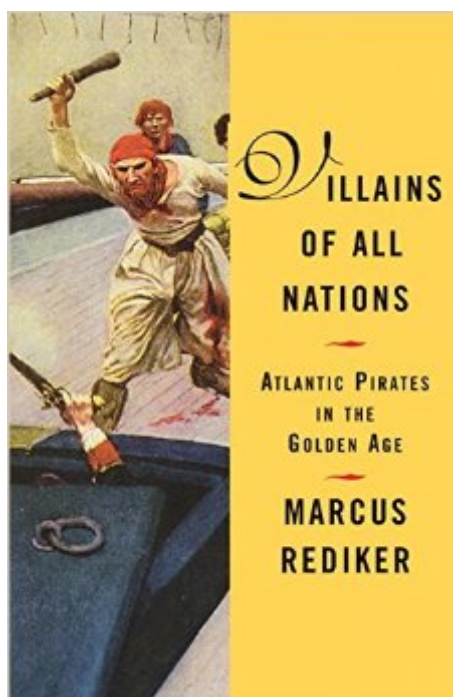


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Villains Of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates In The Golden Age



Synopsis

Villains of All Nations explores the 'Golden Age' of Atlantic piracy (1716-1726) and the infamous generation whose images underlie our modern, romanticized view of pirates. Rediker introduces us to the dreaded black flag, the Jolly Roger; swashbuckling figures such as Edward Teach, better known as Blackbeard; and the unnamed, unlimbed pirate who was likely Robert Louis Stevenson's model for Long John Silver in *Treasure Island*. This history shows from the bottom up how sailors emerged from deadly working conditions on merchant and naval ships, turned pirate, and created a starkly different reality aboard their own ships, electing their officers, dividing their booty equitably, and maintaining a multinational social order. The real lives of this motley crew—which included cross-dressing women, people of color, and the 'outcasts of all nations'—are far more compelling than contemporary myth. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

"Villains of All Nations" by Marcus Rediker is an outstanding historical analysis of the Golden Age of piracy (1716 to 1726). Mr. Rediker presents his well-researched narrative in an accessible writing style that should appeal to a wide audience. The reader gains insight into the turbulent economic and social conditions of the 18th century Atlantic that gave rise to popular resistance and to the state-sponsored violent repression that all but eliminated piracy as a threat to continued capitalist accumulation. The author's vivid and intelligent text succeeds in helping us recognize that piracy

was a far more complex and interesting phenomenon when one compares the reality with the simplistic and manufactured images that are often presented by the purveyors of popular culture. Mr. Rediker does an excellent job of engaging the reader by using individual case studies to illustrate key points. For example, the author introduces us to Walter Kennedy who was one of thousands of poor, young and unmarried men who fled the brutal labor conditions onboard navy and merchant ships. As a pirate, Kennedy embraced a culture that was antithetical to the extreme privilege, hierarchy and discipline of the nation state; rather, Kennedy reveled in a multinational and egalitarian social order that sought unrestrained gratification as compensation for a lifetime of privation and misery. And like most, his taste of freedom as a pirate was short-lived but not regretted. Mr. Rediker discusses the famous women pirates Anne Bonny and Mary Read, who became legendary for their courageous displays of independence, sexual freedom and class consciousness.

Marcus Rediker, in *Villains of all Nations*, has attempted to paint a picture of the unpleasantness of life as a sailor in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Atlantic World. Rediker shows rather convincingly that the wider public regarded sailors as inept, immature, and childlike, needing to be constantly looked after and controlled. Rediker likens the treatment of sailors to enslavement, giving ample examples of laws created in the Atlantic colonies to control sailors by limiting their rights and their mobility. In Rediker's argument, the sailor's natural inclination was to take up piracy, as it provided the only means of rebellion against the very world that had seemingly arrayed itself against him. Rediker attempts to unite these disparate groups of outlaws together by means of a common ideology opposed to inherited authority, founded upon meritocracy. Rediker argues that pirates were thus organized in an egalitarian fashion, with plunder being divided in a much more equitable way, important decisions being put to a vote in which all men had equal voting power, and plenty of food and liquor to be had. Standing in stark contrast to the rigid discipline of the merchant world and navy, pirates set out to define their own world by making war against the existing one. Rediker does a great thing in his works by pointing out the horrid working conditions that many seamen faced in the eighteenth century. Rediker's emphasis upon this is effective to his argument, and one is inevitably led to the conclusion that piracy was the natural reaction to a life of oppressed service onboard a merchant or naval vessel. However, Rediker's strong emphasis upon the divide between authority figures and the proletariat smacks of a Marxist apologetic superimposition.

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