Swashbuckling Politicians

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Swashbuckling Politicians
Organized crime has taken many different forms over the past millennium, and through the development of watercraft and maritime technology, the gangs of rebellious sailors known as pirates were able to thrive. Piracy has been fantasized about in popular movies, the most famous being the recent Pirates of the Caribbean series, which portrays piracy as careless, selfish, and valiant. But this false reality takes away from the importance of piracy and its impact, especially as a major catalyst for political change, chaos, and maritime law. Their pillaging, alliances, and influence had an immediate impact on their political climate. Pirate crews became private nations and possessed power, conducted by a strong leader at the top of a social hierarchy, whose individual interests were to be aligned with those of his crew. Like any land nation, pirates relied on a leader to organize the hierarchy, create laws, make definitive decisions, command war, and distribute wages. Captains took on this role, and while their voyages were driven by human greed and the quest for wealth outside of the traditional model of “work,” they ruled with the same mindset as traditional kings, queens, and presidents. Captains used their communication and relationships with governments to gain respect, power, allies, and safety. However, this power was more tied to malicious intent, as piracy was based around crime, and many serious government companies, provinces, and even intergovernmental relationships were affected by the actions of pirates. Crews exercised their interests within their
own beliefs and defied those of governmental law on land. Captains acted on their desires and supported their crew, influencing the world around them due to their political decisions and notoriety.

Background

Piracy is defined as any sort of robbery or violent action for private ends committed outside the space outside any state authority (Jenkins). A pirate, as an individual, is one who engages in these actions, usually with a crew. These men were usually considered opportunists and varied by race and nationality. Between 1672 and 1726, the Golden Age of Piracy, sea bandits rose to numbers above two thousand, and many of these crews originated from the establishment of colonies by European powers of the era. This staggering number even outnumbered the quantity of British and Spanish Navy crews in the Caribbean. These bands of outlaws plundered merchant ships, coastal towns, and even other pirates.

Due to their illegal actions, pirates were portrayed as uncivilized criminals who only responded to power and strength. While these groups were certainly criminals, it is hard to call them uncivilized. Of course, the concepts of strength, brutality, and power were still relevant, as they tend to be in congregations of aggressive men, but the purpose behind their systematic order of power is often overlooked due to their criminal offenses. Most crewmembers derived from merchant and privateer ships, giving up on their lives as commissioned sailors in favor of being part of a freelancing crew with little regulation by the governments that ruled on land. As a result, due to their history as law-abiding citizens, they brought with them their auto-
cratic hierarchical government to their new life from these backgrounds.

The truth is that these groups were very organized. Pirate ships, described by Patrick Pringle in his book *Jolly Roger* as “sea-going stock companies” (106), often elected a captain, crafted rules for day-to-day conduct, equally divided spoil, and appointed certain tasks to a “quartermaster” to ensure the captain did not have overwhelming power. Elected captains treated their vessels like an established state, creating relationships with other pirates and keeping peace in pirate-friendly areas. For example, early European settlements, specifically English ones which were loosely supported by their navy, were subject to repeated plunder and became hub for crime and piracy. This was the case for the British settlement of what is now known as Jamaica. None of the crew and vessels of the thirty-ship naval fleet that was used to conquer the island remained, and the defense of the land and its resources was left up to “independent men-of war” (Hanna 102). These men of war were specifically under instruction by the acting Jamaican governor Sir Thomas Lynch. Known for being harsh on pirates following his personal conviction and execution of Dutch pirate Peter Johnson, Lynch surprisingly decided to hire pirates to protect the area (Royal Collection Trust, 2024). This allowed selected Caribbean pirates a haven for trade and away from harsh legislation, while also acting as mercenaries and supplying the valuable resource of deterrence that the British Navy could not offer. This friendliness towards pirates, especially in the colonies, was an example of privateering. During war, monarchies would “sponsor” pirates, known as privateers, to plunder enemy vessels. It is this practice that was the origin of so many notorious pirates.
Captain Henry Every

In a debate on who is the greatest pirate ever, the man who was labeled “King of Pirates” would be an obvious choice. Henry Every, the famous Red Sea pirate, did not begin his career in the colonies like most pirates of this period. A bloodless mutiny overtook the English naval vessel the *Charles* after eight months of unsuccessful voyaging, and Every was elected captain by his peers. After a brief stint in the East Indies, Every sailed his crew and ship, renamed the *Fancy*, to Madagascar. After taking two ships near Madagascar and joining forces with other English buccaneers like Thomas Tew and his ship the *Amity*, Every now commanded a pirate fleet that began ruthlessly pillaging ships, specifically those of the Great Mughal of India, Emperor Aurangzeb (Burgess). The Mughal and his regime were very active in the world of trade, as India was a very important area for desired resources in Europe. Every, who knew the wealth that was on these ships, strategically created a net to catch Indian vessels, which would lead to one of the most notorious robberies in the history of piracy.

On September 7, 1695, Captain Every and his fleet raided a group of the Mughal’s ships, capturing two in a bloody, two-hour-long battle. There were extensive casualties on both sides, with one of the most notable being Tew, but Every seized the *Fateh Mohammed* and the *Gang-I-Sawai* and the goods they carried. The riches of these ships were incomprehensible to pirates at the time, as Every amassed over £155,000 (over £18.5 million today) from both vessels. Yet the real prize was the importance of the people on board the *Gang-I-Sawai*: the Indian accounts that discuss the encounter claim that an elderly member of the Mughal’s family was on board, while
British folklore of Every’s story claims that it was Mughal’s granddaughter that Every took and peacefully married. However, the more accurate representation is that the pirates killed almost all the men and raped all the woman on board, regardless of status. It can be inferred that Every understood the severity of this moment, as it was the most heinous sea crime to date, and this action would lead to a significant economic and political fallout between the British and the Mughal (Hanna 189).

When the *Gang-I-Sawai* reached port in Surat, India after the raid, the entire town was outraged, and some of this outrage was directed at the British East India Company (EIC). Riots began throughout the city, and the EIC’s headquarters was one of the flashpoints. The mob threw stones, rammed doors, attempting to break in and claim the heads of the English. The riots were only quieted by the governor of Surat, who dispersed the crowds and arrested the forty workers in the office building, awaiting direction from the Mughal. The incarcerated men wrote a fervent plea to Sir John Gayer, the local representative of the EIC and governor of the English colony of Bombay (now Mumbai). Gayer made a plea to the Lords of Trade, an administrative body created by Charles II to manage ties between Britain and its colonies. It was through this that the British first learned of Every’s treachery. In the meantime, Emperor Aurangzeb ordered a raid on Bombay, cursing the English, including his business partners, as “criminals and infidels” (Burgess 891). The attack was only halted due to an extremely generous contract produced by the British, where the EIC would fully compensate the Mughals for their losses, as well as providing English escorts for all Indian ships commissioned by the Mughal from that point on. The
British could not risk losing their highly profitable colony in India, so such a serious contract was deemed necessary. But the most important clause in the deal was the promise of revenge, which was the only way to salvage the English economy and profits generated from their Indian colonies. This was because though the Mughal agreed to spare the Englishmen of Bombay and Surat, he made it clear that all trade between the British and the Indians was to be frozen until Henry Every was hanging from the gallows. To save the intercontinental trade between the nations, the Board of Trade, which replaced the Lords of Trade in 1696, placed a bounty of £500 (approximately £92,200 today) on Every’s head. Thus began the first ever global manhunt. Networks of global military forces, local law enforcement, governors, merchants, and amateur bounty hunters all had their eyes out for the man and his crew (Johnson 178).

Captain Every disappeared from the seas shortly after this proclamation, yet more damage to English imperial policy followed. His whereabouts were rumored to be somewhere in Ireland, but were not known until ten years ago, when an Arabic coin, printed in modern day Yemen, and determined to be part of the loot of the Gang-I-Sawai that Every plundered, was found in Middletown, Rhode Island. Archaeologists have found twenty-three similar coins in New England, and not even one can be dated after the ship was sacked in 1695 (Coins Found). This meant that Every had made it back to the American colonies, and was able to avoid arrest, unlike some of his crew. John Dann and Philip Middleton, as well as four other members of Every’s crew, were caught in Ireland. The trial was to have large political and economic consequences, for if the pirates were acquitted, the wrath of
the Mughal would stifle trade relations with England. But the men were extremely smart and spent their time further incriminating their former captain and Nicholas Trott, the governor of Providence who, known to be pirate friendly, allegedly was paid off by Every and his men in return for safe haven. After the jury heard the evidence, they decided to acquit the men on all counts. This decision was a crippling blow to the British, who were attempting to bring closure to the issue, as well as a blow to the EIC, whose trade with India would continue to suffer (Burgess). To save face, the pirates were again tried on different charges related to mutiny, found guilty, and hanged on November 25, 1696.

This trial had a primary goal of removing England’s label as a “nation of pirates,” but it did not quite achieve this goal. The testimony of Dann and Middleton raised more questions than answers, specifically bringing to light the friendliness of the colonies towards pirates, possibly foreshadowing the alliances between pirates and revolutionists that would occur half a century later. The Ballad that was created in 1693 that might have predicted the voyage of Every’s career, A Copy of Verses, Composed by Henry Every, *Lately Gone to Sea to Seek His Fortune*, (which may have not been written by Every himself) claimed that his crew would not harm the British or their goals, as they were Brits themselves. But this verse was updated by one of the crewmembers during the trial, who said, “No nation did we spare” (Hanna 242). This was true due to the massive intergovernmental impact that their actions had, especially against the English. Every’s legacy would live on, with only one pirate that would reach his level of infamy.
Captain William Kidd

Captain William Kidd met the fate that awaited most pirates in May of 1701. The noose hung at the edge of the River Thames at the Execution Dock in London, in the district now known as Wapping. Prior to his hanging, he could sense the looming end of Golden Age of piracy, as before he hung, he issued a warning to all captains. Kidd’s last words condemned piracy, claiming that he was reaching his own demise due to disregarding the Bible and ignoring God. “Take warning now by me, and shun bad company,” Kid said on that day, “lest you come to hell with me” (Bonner 372). His journey ends this way, yet his story as a pirate was legendary, which is evident as a ballad was made and popularized in his name. Printed in 1701 in Britain shortly following his death, the ballad made its way to the colonies swiftly, and would go on to outlive Kidd through oral tradition. Kidd himself died at the age of forty-seven, but only spent a short stint of that as a pirate.

Captain Kidd was a little-known Scotsman, straddling the line between pirating and privateering. This situation was extremely common, as with the frequent warring of European nations over expansion and territory, privateers became extremely useful, and Kidd profited from this opportunity. The commencement of King William’s War in 1689 between the newly established North American colonies of New France and New England was a major catalyst in the development of Kidd’s spell as a pirate. Kidd traveled to New York City on a ship sponsored by Leeward Islands’ Governor Christopher Codrington, where Kidd would go on to live and play a major
part in stifling rebellion in New York City until 1696. Kidd worked as a politician in the colonies. But the common theme about politicians in the Americas (at the time) was that they were only as powerful as their British backers. So, when members of the Whig political party approached him, he left this life behind (Hanna 230).

The Whigs rose to power in 1693, and desired to reshape the political economy of England, prioritizing trade and manufacturing. They believed that to positively restructure the industry, the monopoly that was the East India Trading Company (EIC) needed to be reformed. One major roadblock to their goals was the existence of an outpost on St. Mary’s Island, Madagascar that harbored illegal trade and was especially pirate friendly, so much so that Thomas Tew and a French pirate James Misson were able to create an anarchist pirate Utopia named Libertatia on the island (Wilson 3, Pringle 136). This friendliness towards pirates and unregulated trade within the Indian Ocean frustrated the Whigs, and they determined that the pirates in the area must be eradicated. A group of five powerful Whig politicians devised a plan in 1696 to dispatch Kidd to take care of these pirates.

Kidd was trusted and respected by the people of England, and his hand-picked crew set out after notorious pirates that originated from the colonies, such as Thomas Tew, John Ireland, Thomas Wake, William Mayes, and of course, Henry Every (Hanna 230). Despite the trust that the Whigs had in Kidd, he would leave these pirates alone and, whether by the peer pressure of his crew or his own desire, turn to piracy himself. Rather than prey on these pirates, he would instead prey on other privateers bringing riches back to England. Directly violating his instruction by the London
Whigs, Kidd would end up costing them substantial amounts of money, as his estimated value of contraband and booty reached over £100,000 (over £10.5 million today) (Bonner 363). In so doing, Kidd became a major figure in the disagreement about British economic policy between two major British political parties: the Whigs and the Tories.

Kidd captured at least four major ships along the coast of Africa, the most impactful being the *Quedagh Merchant*, a large ship en route to the English factory in Surat, India. The taking of this heavily loaded ship and its escort codified Kidd as an enemy and an infamous figure, as the taking of this ship followed in Henry Every’s footsteps. After this event, the Mughals once again suspended trade with the British (Wilson 8). This was because the *Quedagh Merchant* was heavily invested in by powerful men in England and especially desired by the Mughal. Kidd’s voyage was devastating to the Whigs. A new attempt by the English Crown was made to limit piracy on December 8, 1698, claiming that all pirates would be permitted a pardon if they gave themselves up, save for two: Henry Every and William Kidd. This notion made Kidd fully aware that he had been declared a pirate, even one as notorious as “The King of Pirates” himself (Wilson 8).

Kidd eventually did turn himself in. After stashing some of his riches away in Boston, he cautiously wrote the first Earl of Bellemont, Richard Coote, a Whig who had been a member of the original committee that authorized Kidd’s voyage. Kidd believed that this letter, as well as the French passes that he obtained from the *Quedagh Merchant* and another ship he took called the *Maiden*, would help him prove his innocence. Regardless, he was arrested and shipped back to England in chains in 1699 (Pringle
When he returned, the political climate was in a completely different shape than when he left. The Whigs were rapidly losing power to the Tories, who knew that the issue of William Kidd’s failed voyage would destroy the limited power the Whigs had left (Wilson 9). The topic of Kidd came up in December 1699, when the Tories, supported by the EIC, attacked the Whigs with two main arguments, the first being that Kidd plundered with a commission of the Broad Seal of the Whigs in his pocket, and that Kidd was even encouraged to commit piracies by the Whigs. (Kidd’s initial trial and documents turned out to be something of a disappointment for the Tories, as rather than incriminating the Whigs, he persisted in claiming his innocence, not providing the Tories with any extra evidence against the Whigs [Pringle 153]). Kidd was sent to Newgate Prison until his next trial two years later, where he pleaded guilty to four charges, including murder and piracy, and was condemned to death. And it was at this point where the final blow against the Whigs was dealt, as the Tories then claimed complete control of the Parliament shortly following this trial. Kidd fell victim to being on the forefront of a political economic catastrophe, and his personal decisions ultimately diminished the power of an entire political party. While he was unable to disappear like Henry Every, his impact on the political world was similar to the King of the Pirates’.

**Captain Edward Teach, also known as Blackbeard**

While both pirates mentioned came to be extremely infamous, they did so through their actions on the sea. Those who told their story tell of true events, while stretching the truth slightly based on their attitude, opin-
ion, or other reasons. But the basic truth of their actions is not disputable. Blackbeard suffered a different fate, for his biographer, Captain Johnson, altered Blackbeard’s legacy in a manner that completely misrepresented his entire contribution to the Golden Age of Piracy.

Johnson claims that Blackbeard, also known as Edward Teach, transitioned from privateering to outright piracy during the War of the Spanish Succession, but not even that can be proven due to a three-year gap between Blackbeard’s first voyage as a part of Benjamin Hornigold’s crew in 1716 and the end of the war in 1713 (Pringle 190). It is certain that Blackbeard was in command of his own ship by 1717, when Hornigold intercepted and captured the French slave ship La Concorde on its way to the Caribbean Island of Martinique. Blackbeard would rename this vessel the Queen Anne’s Revenge and begin his reign over the British, French, and Spanish colonies in the Caribbean and North America (Cartwright). The Queen Anne’s Revenge sported three masts, over forty cannons, and three to four hundred crew members. However, this is where Johnson’s depiction of Blackbeard undermined his character and story as a captain. Blackbeard was not a brutal man. He hardly ever used violence; in fact, it is not clear he ever killed anyone (Pringle 192). Nevertheless, his reign as a Captain is highlighted by the fear factor of his name. Using the strength of his crew and the growing number of vessels he overtook to build his own fleet, he often prevailed in capturing ships with minimal resistance. Blackbeard conquered and recruited pirates such as Stede Bonnet, a successful small-scale pirate in his own right. But Blackbeard’s major claim to fame was his interactions with local governments in the colonies, specifically the Carolinas.
Blackbeard’s economic and political power allowed him to keep headquarters in two different places, the Bahamas and North Carolina. North Carolina had become a sort of hub for pirates, as many colonial governors were not above collusion with pirate crews and their captains. This was usually either due to their personal involvement with piracy, or their willingness to exploit illicit trade, as pirates would sell their stolen wares under the market value (Fox 165). Nearly all pirates engaged in these practices. One colonial governor, Nicholas Trott, mainly known for trying Stede Bonnet, saw his authority in the Bahamas collapse due to accusations that he had permitted Henry Every and his men to live and trade in the islands in exchange for a substantial bribe. Trott’s defense was based on the facts that he was unable to confirm the men’s status as pirates and, moreover, lacked the resources necessary to stop the pirates from landing (164).

By January 1718, Blackbeard had amassed many riches in his voyages and was able to trade some of his plunder for a pardon by the North Carolina governor Charles Eden, with the condition that he give up piracy. Blackbeard distributed his riches among his followers and invested in the town of Bath, North Carolina. He lived in the countryside, married, but did not follow through on the condition; the attractiveness of merchant ships that continued to show up off the coast of the Carolinas led Blackbeard back to sea. In May 1718, Blackbeard sailed The Queen Anne’s Revenge to the mouth of the Charles Town harbor (modern day Charleston, South Carolina) with two small sloops and a larger vessel, the Adventure. Blackbeard’s ships paced the mouth of the harbor, capturing eight ships, the last heading for England, in which Blackbeard obtained over £6000 of coin (£700,000
today) (Pringle 194). Among the notable Charlestonians on board one of the vessels that Blackbeard took in the harbor entrance was Samuel Wragg, member of the Governor’s council. Wragg and other crew members were held captive by Blackbeard, who demanded an unusual item as ransom. Rather than a large sum of money, Blackbeard requested a chest of medicines. To negotiate this deal, he dispatched an envoy ashore. After a while, the medications were delivered, and Blackbeard freed the captives, still uninjured, but without any clothes (Ullian).

After an accidental running aground that resulted in the wreck of The Queen Anne’s Revenge, Blackbeard took refuge back in North Carolina, hoping for a pardon. The governor obliged, but Blackbeard and his followers again gave into piracy and hijacked a French sloop near Ocracoke, an island off the North Carolina coast (Woodard 2014). The Lieutenant Governor of Virginia, who had been monitoring the situation, set out to finish the issue of Blackbeard. He sent a land and sea force to take Blackbeard, wherever he resided. This encounter would lead to the beheading of Blackbeard by Lieutenant Robert Maynard, who returned with Blackbeard’s head as a trophy. While this event ended Blackbeard’s adventures, his political influence was felt during his time as captain. He was able to strike fear into colonial and European governments, organize his fleet as a military force capable of handcuffing an entire state, and invest his spoils into the economies of the colonies through illicit trade. Blackbeard’s voyages were among the last of the Golden Age of Piracy.
Captain George Cusack

Cusack’s story was told in three main publications, the first being a pamphlet entitled *News from Sea or, The Taking of the Cruel Pirate*, which appeared shortly after Cusack’s arrest in the spring of 1674. The second was the trial report, *An Exact Narrative of the Tryals of the Pirates*, which detailed his trial and charges. The last, more impartial, is *The Grand Pyrate: or, the Life and Death of Capt. George Cusack the Great Sea-Robber* (Baer 67).

As these works were released, the narrative around Cusack changed multiple times. The first author describes Cusack as a wicked man, “the barbarous pirate” (*News from Sea* 1) and takes pride in the idea that the high admirals were able to remove such a force of evil from the seas. This article was designed for the British people, which is clear with the author’s emphasis that “his Sacred Majesties foreseeing in his princely wisdome” (*News From Sea* 7) would not respect a traitor who committed the crimes that Cusack would be charged with. This portrayal of Cusack was influential, but only in terms of demonizing piracy, as was the duty of all those who printed in coalition with the Crown or the East India Trading Company. This was easy to do, as it can be easy to paint a devilish image of a pirate who committed numerous land and sea crimes such as robbery and murder. It was not until the publication of Cusack’s biography that the European and colonial world was able to fully understand his story. The biographer records Cusack’s actions at sea but includes pivotal events in Cusack’s development as an orator, quoting his words from major historical events at sea, such as when he seizes his first ship and when he is captured by the governor of Anguilla (Frohock 264). The author describes Cusack in a fashion that iden-
tifies him as different from the “organized marauders,” or privateers at the
time. While most pirates of Cusack’s generation began their journey with
a note of sponsorship from a government and would pirate against other
nations (eventually turning on their own country), Cusack fit better into
the category of an anarchist marauder, who did favor the English, but did
not rely on the sponsor of any particular government to begin his journey
(Frohock 266).

Cusack was a known troublemaker in his early years, which would
continue to evolve into a life filled with thievery as a pirate. When he was a
teenager, Cusack robbed his neighbor, Mr. Benedict Arthur, of sixty Brit-
ish pounds. Arthur caught him and struck a deal that he would serve on
Arthur’s merchant ship as punishment. The author of The Grand Pyrate
provides the context that Cusack went through with this crime because of
his attitude of “not agreeing with Religious Life” (4). This concept would
continue into his years as a captain, yet before he was able to be a cap-
tain, he was forced to spend time serving under merchants as a deckhand.
Throughout the years at sea as a part of different crews, Cusack attempted
mutiny four times on four different ships. He managed to escape after three
failed attempts but was eventually sent to the notorious prison known as
Marshalsea, just south of the Thames River in London (Frohock 268). This
prison time did not have the intended effect. Once freed, the radicalized
Cusack, now further inspired to escape the constraints of current society on
land, again left for the sea. It was at this time that he finally succeeded in a
mutiny. With help from the crew, he overthrew Captain Lambert and the
leaders of the Hopewell, renaming the vessel The Valient Prince (The Grand
Though the process of commandeering the ship was violent, Cusack was merciful and kept Sir Thomas Power, a merchant, and the supercargo (the representative of the ship’s owner on board a merchant ship, responsible for overseeing the cargo and its sale) of the vessel. The merchant offered to help Cusack by creating an account of all cargo on board for Cusack’s benefit, which he accepted. Shortly after this ordeal, Cusack divided Captain Lambert’s goods and money in equal proportion to everyone on board the vessel, excluding Power, and declared the crew’s intent of “running away with the Ships and Cargo, and of taking or sinking all Ships or Vessels they should meet with belonging to any Nation, English only excepted” (*The Grand Pyrate* 6).

With this declaration, Cusack made a promise to all who joined him that all cargo from ships they would take would be equally divided between the crew in a similar fashion, with a slight extra portion for himself. This concept would be followed by other captains like William Kidd, who took forty pieces of eight of the booty compared to his crew’s twenty pieces each (Pringle 158). This “law” that Cusack swore to abide by was the first example of the way Cusack would organize his men. He abandoned all previous policies and went as far as throwing the ship’s logs and documents (save for a couple documents that Power was hiding and would later use to try and incriminate Cusack in England) including a large bible over the side of the boat shortly after the mutiny. *The Grand Pyrate* recounts this action as a major point of contention. Many of the crew began to protest and attempt to persuade Cusack to save the bible, to which Cusack famously said: “You Cowards, what do you think to go to Heaven and do such Actions
as these? No, I will make you Officers in Hell under me! Go thou thy way Divinity, what have we to do with thee” (The Grand Pyrate 8). Discounting religion was a foreign concept in the mid-1600s, as it was still the main reason behind countless wars being fought between European states. Cusack showed no regret for the crimes he had committed up to this point, and by tossing away such an important text, decided that piracy and Christianity were incompatible. Since all government at the time was still validated by monarchs who professed divine sanction, this action further enforced the idea of Cusack being an anarchist, waging war on society.

Establishing a new hierarchy required that Cusack implement a new set of rules to fill the void of the former civil and biblical order (Frohock 268). Pirate articles of law were not common during this time, and most were oral obligations between a captain and his crew. George Cusack was the first pirate to record his pirate articles, which he likely drew up with his lieutenant, and were subscribed to by the rest of the crew (Fox 57). Some of the men turned pirate without acknowledging the consequences and ramifications of this process, but Cusack’s biographer recorded the “daily song” that the drunken sailors would sing, which exemplifies most crew members’ acceptance of the spiritual path their souls were set to follow:

HANG sorrow, let’s cast away care,  
the World is bound to find us:  
Thou and I, and all must die,  
And leave this World behind us.  
The Bell shall ring, the Clark shall sing,  
The Good old Wife shall wind us.  
The Sexton shall lay our Bodies in Clay  
Where the Devil in Hell shall find us.  
(The Grand Pyrate 8-9)
According to the biographer, the “Merry Crew” sang this song without “any apprehension” of the actual damnation of their souls that followed their adoption of a pirate’s way of life.

In addition to the radical idea of rejecting Christianity, Cusack challenged convention in other ways. His ‘laws’ were based on maritime tradition, and drawn up by pirates, not another, “more civilized,” body (Fox 62). Cusack’s *Obligation* was based on the “Laws of Oleron,” (as referenced in *The Grand Pyrate* as the Lawes of Pleron) a conduct policy from the late 1400s that established various rights and responsibilities for mariners and masters, including the division of spoil (Fox 307). Cusack’s *Obligation* was no doubt what he became most famous for, as his document was the first of many codes that pirates would implement to encourage respectable treatment and governance on sovereign pirate vessels.

However, Captain Cusack would eventually break his own set of laws. After most of his crew decided to take a short shore leave with their share of the plunder, the greedy Captain decided to throw out the rules and abandon most of his crew. He took with him seven of his crew and unleashed a new phase of lawlessness on the high seas, committing more robberies until he was finally arrested off the coast of New England with his small crew for engaging in illicit trade of illegally obtained goods (Frohock 274). Sentenced to death by hanging with his accomplices, Cusack even argued against the legitimacy of the trial, claiming that the jury was unfit to make decisions as citizens, and that a fair trial would involve “being tried by men of our own trade” (Hanna 122). Though futile, this attempt may have
had some validity to it, as many coastal men may have been more friendly to a pirate compared to a citizen, which has been a constant in the stories of the pirates discussed in this article.

Conclusion

After his execution, George Cusack’s story began to fade. A life spent fighting authority with his actions and his rhetoric ended in disgrace in execution by hanging. While a political impact was felt in the short term by piracy, constituted government is bound to outlast the rebels. And though they may not have respected the government they ran from, it would catch up to them in the end, through either death in the case of Kidd, Blackbeard, and Cusack, or forced disappearance like Henry Every.
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