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The Buccaneers of the Golden Age of Piracy

The image of pirates brings many pictures to mind. For some, it brings to mind bloody seafaring terrorists that want nothing but more gold, wine, and women, and yet for others, it conjures up the images of complete and total freedom, liberty and rebellion against the corrupt. This paper will discuss the history and lives of the many pirates occupying the Caribbean sea and the atlantic coast in the early 18th century, and it will specifically focus on four of the most famous pirates which are Edward Teach, Bartholomew Roberts, Benjamin Hornigold, and Olivier Levasseur. Piracy is viewed as a crime by all governments nowadays, but most European countries of the time of the Golden Age of Piracy employed Privateers which is basically someone who pirates for their government. Whether you are a pirate fan, pirate movie watcher, or are a lover of history such as myself, the stories of the men and women buccaneers always seem to capture the hearts of us all.

So who were these pirates and why were they so important? The pirates of the early 18th century established a sort of loose government in Nassau, on New Providence Island in the Bahama archipelago. They literally declared war on all forms of government and then went on a rampage all up and down the Americas, the Caribbean, and even to Africa and Asia. These pirates came from all backgrounds, many of the captains were at one time rich merchants or had worked with the navy of their government as privateers, some were nobodies and some used to

be slaves. The pirates believed that all men should be free and detested slavery in every aspect and even created a code consisting of how the men onboard should act and how they should elect their officials. For many pirates, they had left home to be seamen and had found the life to have little pay and as Cordingly puts it, “A whole generation of young men abandoned other trades and professions and became adept at seamanship and shiphandling” (8).

Our first famous pirate is the man that all the others owe their successes to, and that man is Benjamin Hornigold. Hornigold was a wealthy English privateer in the Royal Navy until the War of the Spanish Succession was over and he was out of a job so he naturally turned to what he knew best; piracy. Benjamin was known to be a kind man, even to the prisoners and is noted to have been far more kind than the other pirates of his time, and Age of Pirates states that Benjamin Hornigold was known as the "nice pirate of the West Indies" (AgeofPirates.com). Captain Hornigold was a very experienced seaman and had a way of bring people together and in 1713 he established the Republic of Pirates in Nassau, Bahamas. Benjamin eventually became a pirate hunter for the Royal Navy but during his time as a pirate, he influenced and befriended one of the most well known and feared pirates of all time; Edward “Blackbeard” Teach whom Hornigold was said to hold in high esteem.

Edward Teach, better known as Blackbeard because of his massive mass of facial hair that he would put burning wicks into, was the most feared pirate of his time, and for good reason. Blackbeard’s accomplishments include holding the entire town of Charleston, South Carolina for ransom by blockading the bay and taking some “prominent citizens hostage” (OuterBanks.com) and sold his goods along the North Carolina coast right under the governor's nose and possibly to the governor’s advantage. After pillaging up and down the coast Atlantic coast, he settled down

for a while after he was pardoned and lived a rich life, though his money eventually ran out and he then went back to piracy though this time he would not evade the iron hand of Great Britain. On 22 of november 1718, Lieutenant Robert Maynard chased Blackbeard's ship, *Queen Anne's Revenge* onto a sandbar off the shores of Ocracoke Island in North Carolina and a fierce battle ensued. It is said that Blackbeard and Maynard fought hand-to-hand in which Blackbeard was killed. Blackbeard was beheaded by Maynard and "suspended from the bowsprit of one of Maynard's two armed vessels" (NCPedia.org) as a reminder to other pirates who would dare challenge the power of the British government.

Bartholomew Roberts or Black Bart was a Welsh pirate and as one historical research website put it, "If Blackbeard (Edward Teach) was the most famous of pirates, Bartholomew Roberts was the most successful and menacing" (ThePirateKing.com). Roberts became the successor of his captain, Howel Davis after the crew elected him because he was the most worthy among them. He captured more than 400 ships in his time as a pirate up and down the Americas, the Caribbean, and West Africa as well as almost completely halting the shipping to and from the Spanish Main. Roberts crew took so much loot that "each pirate began amassing a small fortune" (LatinAmericanHistory.About.com) during their time along the coast of West Africa, but this was not to last for much longer. On February 10, 1722, Captain Challoner Ogle found Roberts and then a battle ensued, but Roberts was killed in the first broadside by grapeshot from a cannon blast. Roberts crew was were tried and executed for many counts of piracy and the last of the Golden Age of Piracy had come to an end in the death of Roberts.

Olivier Levasseur, also known as La Buse (The Buzzard), was a french pirate at the end of the Golden Age of pirates. He was most famous for "speed and efficiency with which he

attack enemies and captured ships” (Golden-Age-of-Piracy.com) and is also famous for having left behind a cryptic message that supposedly leads to his treasure. La Buse and a pirate known as John Taylor captured a Portuguese ship known as the Nostra Senora Della Cabo and the treasure captured that day was approximately \$142,825,000 in today's money. La Buse left an encryption in what seems to be Knights Templar alphabet cipher but it is still yet to be translated into something that makes sense. Whether or not this leads to the Buzzard's treasure, we still do not know, but if it does, it could be the biggest treasure trove discovered in this century. La Buse retired eventually and “went to Sainte-Marie Island near Madagascar's coast” (Pirates-Privateers.com) to live out the rest of his life, but was captured by the French and hung on July 17th, 1730 at 5:30 pm in Saint-Denis.

The pirates of the early 1700s were a bunch of misfits but at the same time freedom lovers and liberty activists in a shrinking world that is now totally extinct. The piracy that goes on nowadays is for the most part criminal and has nothing to do with rebelling against tyranny or defending your way of life and is definitely not at the same scale that it was in the 18th century. Pirates will live on in movies, novels and legends that we will hear for generations to come because when it comes down to it, we would all like to believe that we would give up our lives to live carefree and with total abandon. In conclusion, I hope this paper explained the history of some of the great pirates of the Golden Age of Piracy and the life and deeds of these famous buccaneers. Pirates, good or bad have shaped our imagination and history and will always be in our hearts.

Works Cited

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