

Course Syllabus: PIRACY IN THE AMERICAS, 1500-1750 (HISL 4840, fall 2016)
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klanel@tulane.edu ☒☺☼☾☿☽☾☺!

This course treats the history of piracy in the Americas from European contact to the mid-eighteenth century, a period some historians call the “early modern.” The early modern period was marked by new ideas in science, medicine, and religion, and by advances in shipbuilding, mining, and artillery manufacture. It was also a time of endemic (often religious) strife, expansive empires, desperate searches for raw materials, and refractory fiefdoms. This may sound a bit like the world today, but as a reminder of how different this time was from our own, among Europeans and many others capital punishment was crude, gruesome, and vengeful. (Well, okay, not so much has changed.)

In terms of overseas trade and conquest, Spain and Portugal were at the forefront throughout much of this period, and their material successes in the Americas and elsewhere led their northern neighbors, particularly the French, English, and Dutch (but also, as we shall see, certain native groups and renegades) to cast covetous eyes upon slow-moving treasure ships. Gaining a more global understanding of the significance--both social and economic--of these predators is the primary objective of this course. For comparison we will be turning to select examples from other regions.

Piracy is firmly rooted in popular culture as well, and this important aspect of the subject will also be treated, particularly in the final third of the course. The pirate’s strange career was an early inspiration for European novelists and playwrights, and the theme has proved resilient, especially in the realms of film and children’s fiction. With this transition in mind, we will examine Captain Charles Johnson’s classic 1724 prosopography, *A General History of the Pyrates* (sometimes attributed to Daniel Defoe), then Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Treasure Island*, to be read in conjunction with film versions of the same tale. Such texts shed light on the topic of piracy from different angles, and should help us to understand why pirates remain such fascinating subjects.

Learning Outcomes: You will not be trained in piracy, as this would require a separate laboratory section and considerable fieldwork, not to mention a pile of liability forms plus a series of humiliating initiation rituals, but you will leave this course able to identify the main features of pirate history in its so-called Golden Age; to calculate the costs and benefits of piracy for its victims and perpetrators; to compare and contrast the several waves of pirate activity that lashed American shores between 1500 and 1750; to analyze the various forms piracy took according to J.L. Anderson’s and other scholars’ rubrics; to differentiate between piracy, privateering, and copyright infringement; to write clearly and succinctly about pirate history and myth, and to read critically several types of texts – including films – relating to or borrowing from the story of early modern piracy. These outcomes will be assessed through written assignments, including response papers, reviews, and a research essay, along with a ‘treasure map.’ They will also be assessed by in-class discussions each week.

WORD to ye WISE: Any hint of plagiarism will result in an instant "F" for the course, followed by the usual Honor Council procedures. You will also be handed the black spot.

Coursework includes three c.1,000-word readings response papers (10% each, total 30%), a c.1,000-word film review (10%), a map exercise (5%), and a research paper on a topic of your choice (c.12pp., 50%). A further 5% of your grade will be based on classroom participation and quizzes. On-time assignments will be graded quickly and fairly; late work will be mulched.

Required Readings (available at the bookstore):

- ☒ Defoe, Daniel (or Charles Johnson), *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pyrates*. New York: Dover, 1999 [1724].
- ☒ Esquemelin, Alexander. *The Buccaneers of America*. New York: Dover, 2000 [1684].
- ☒ Lane, Kris. *Pillaging the Empire: Global Piracy on the High Seas, 1500-1750*. NY: Routledge, 2015.
- ☒ Pennell, C.R. *Bandits at Sea: A Pirates Reader*. New York: NYU Press, 2001.
- ☒ Rediker, Marcus. *Villains of All Nations*. Boston: Beacon, 2004.
- ☒ Stevenson, Robert Louis. *Treasure Island*. New York: Signet Classics, 2002 [1882].
- ☒ You will also be asked to read short primary documents posted weekly.

Scheduled Discussion Topics, Readings, Films, & Assignments:

Weeks I-II (29 Aug.- 9 Sept.): What is Piracy?

Readings: Lane introduction + chapter 1, Pennell introduction + chapters 2 & 5; Defoe/Johnson introduction

Film #1: “The Black Pirate” (1926)

First reading response paper due: 9 Sept.

Weeks III-IV (12-23 Sept.): What Were the Pirates After?

Readings: Lane chapters 2-3, Pennell chapters 3, 6, & 7

Film #2: “The Sea Hawk” (1940)

Film review due: 16 Sept.

Weeks V-VI (26 Sept.- 7 Oct.): Who Were the Pirates? (part I)

Readings: Lane ch. 4, Pennell chapters 8-10, Rediker to p.102, Esquemelin part 1

Second reading response paper due: 7 Oct.

Weeks VII-IX (10 Oct. - 28 Oct.): Who Were the Pirates? (part II)

Readings: Lane chapter 5, Pennell chapters 11-16, Esquemelin parts 2 & 3, Defoe/Johnson to “Captain Roberts”

Film #3: “Captain Blood” (1935)

Third reading response paper due: 28 Oct.

Weeks X-XII (31 Oct.-18 Nov.): What Happened to the Pirates?

Readings: finish Lane, Rediker, Defoe/Johnson, begin Stevenson

Film #4: “Pirates” (1986)

Paper prospectus + bibliography due, 16 Nov.

Weeks XII-XIV (21 Nov.- 9 Dec.): Why do Pirates Continue to Fascinate?

Readings: finish Stevenson

Film #5: “Treasure Island” (1950 vs. 1994)

Final Paper + map exercise due: 9 Dec. (NO FINAL EXAM)

Be prepared to discuss the main findings of your paper for our last class meeting.

Film #6 (for fun): “Pirates of the Caribbean I vs. II” (2003/2006)