

## English Privateers and the Transatlantic Slave Trade

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It has long been acknowledged that from the first establishment of transatlantic trade piracy ran rampant in the Caribbean and parts of the Atlantic. Privateers such as Drake and Hawkins have gone down as both heroes and as plundering villains in the recounting of their exploits across the Atlantic, while those who followed them have often been grudgingly acknowledged as playing some role in the creation of England's overseas empire. Historians of maritime activities and transatlantic trade, of colonialism and imperialism have acknowledged the impact these pirates had on the formation of transatlantic history; yet there is one field of transatlantic history which seems to have neglected this important aspect of its history. Historians of the transatlantic slave trade have been lax in evaluating the impact of piracy on the transatlantic slave trade during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, relegating the phenomena of piracy to a side note in many of their texts. However, even a cursory look at the historiography of English privateers and pirates shows that by marginalizing the role of privateers and pirates in the transatlantic slave trade, historians of the slave trade have missed a vital part of their field, a segment which could lead to many interesting studies in the future.

During the period being discussed (roughly the 1560s through the 1600s), privateers and pirates often crossed the line between legal and illegal trade. For some, their letters of writ expired while they were in open waters, or became null and void due to treaties and regime changes. Others acted as pirates during times of peace and privateers during times of war. In many cases these men are seen as pirates or privateers based on which source material is being used. For instance, Hawkins had letters of reprisal on his last voyage to Africa and was thus a privateer, but is referred to as a pirate by the Portuguese and Spanish. As Alejandro De La Fuente has pointed out, "The Spanish labeled "pirate" any foreign ship conducting illegal business in the Caribbean waters, although many of those ships were in fact privateers operating with licenses from their governments or simply interlopers conducting contraband trade."<sup>1</sup> The Spanish were not the only ones to use these terms interchangeably. The Portuguese, English, French and Dutch also used these terms interchangeably and often treated the terms pirate, privateer, buccaneer and freebooter as synonymous.<sup>2</sup> Because of this inconsistency of term usage in the source material this paper will, for the most part, use the terms interchangeably, for the sake of simplicity.

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<sup>1</sup> Alejandro De La Fuente, *Havana and the Atlantic in the Sixteenth Century*, University of North Carolina Press, 2008, 71. This is further discussed by P.E.H. Hair who states that, "in the Spanish view the English were pirates not so much because of acts of violence... as because their very presence in that zone of the world confirmed to Spanish endeavor by papal bulls, without license from the crown, itself constituted marine illegality." P.E.H. Hair, "Protestants as Pirates, Slavers, and Proto-Missionaries: Sierra Leone 1568 and 1582" *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 21, (1970) pp. 203-24, 204-5.

<sup>2</sup> Guy Chet, *The Ocean is a Wilderness: Atlantic Piracy and the Limits of State Authority, 1688-1856*, University of Massachusetts Press, 2014, 35. Hair argues that the Portuguese took the same attitude to illegal traders in Africa as Spain did in the Americas. 205.

For the most part, historians of the transatlantic slave trade have barely given the role pirates played in the trade a second glance. Many of the seminal works on the transatlantic slave trade, such as David Davis' *Inhuman Bondage*, and Hugh Thomas' *The Slave Trade*, allude to the active presence of pirates in the slave trade but do not elaborate on this activity.<sup>3</sup> Thomas discusses pirates as a nuisance to the slave trade, stating that slave ships had to be more heavily armed and staffed as the Caribbean and the Gulf of Guinea saw a rise in piracy during the 1600s.<sup>4</sup> However, if one were to only read Thomas' account of the slave trade, then one would be left with the impression that the piratical activities in the Atlantic were nothing more than a nuisance which raised the cost of outfitting a slave ship. David Davis mentions pirates in a few places in his book, which sets out to summarize the rise and fall of slavery in the New World, in a manner which suggests that it was completely normal for a ship to encounter a pirate vessel in the Caribbean, stating that, despite Spain's efforts to monopolize and control the supply of slave labor to the Americas, "privateers and interlopers from various European countries continued to break any meaningful monopoly." Yet, other than one brief paragraph summarizing the exploits of Hawkins and Drake, Davis does not elaborate on the issue of piracy.<sup>5</sup> The reader is left to assume that piracy was a significant enough event in the slave trade that encounters with pirates were not viewed as abnormal, but that it was not significant enough to warrant further investigation.

In a similar manner, Eric Williams briefly mentions Hawkins' first slave trading voyage, but does not elaborate on his impact on the slave trade nor does he explore the impact privateering acts might have had on the establishment of the slave trade.<sup>6</sup> In a similar manner, he briefly mentions that captains of slave ships often owned or captained privateering vessels as well. However, he does not expand on this, and does not discuss the influence that captains who doubled as slave traders and privateers might have had on the slave trade.<sup>7</sup> This omission of details regarding privateers is particularly surprising in this work as it came just after the height of imperial histories and the histories of Drake and Hawkins. As Williams is building a case to demonstrate that slavery rose and fell due to capitalism, it is surprising that he would not elaborate more on the involvement of privateers in the establishment of English presence in the transatlantic slave trade. Many of the historians who wrote on Tudor privateers during the latter half of the nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth century argued that these men were examples of the capitalist spirit and that they opened the Atlantic to British trade through, among several avenues, the slave trade. Williams seems to be unfamiliar with this literature as he gives brief credit to Hawkins as the first English slave trader and then moves on to discuss the creation of the Royal African Co. In a collaborated work celebrating the impact Eric Williams has had on the study of the transatlantic slave trade, *British Capitalism and Caribbean Slavery: The Legacy*

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<sup>3</sup> Many works on the transatlantic slave trade do not even mention privateers or pirates in their studies. Patrick Manning, *Slave Trades, 1500-1800: Globalization of Forced Labour*, "An expanding World: The European Impact on World History 1450-1800" vol. 15, Valiorum, 1996. James A. Rawley, Stephen D. Behrendt, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade*, (revised ed.) University of Nebraska Press, 2005. Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census*, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1969. Herbert S. Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, Cambridge University Press, 1999. These are just a few of the works which attempt to cover the transatlantic slave trade in its entirety that do not discuss Hawkins or the impact of pirates on the trade.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Hugh, *The Slave Trade: The History of the Atlantic Slave Trade 1440-1870*, Phoenix: 2006. 309.

<sup>5</sup> David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World*, Oxford University Press: 2006. 90. Davis' single paragraph on Hawkins and Drake, 110.

<sup>6</sup> Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, University of North Carolina Press: 1944, 39.

<sup>7</sup> Eric Williams, 99.

of Eric Williams, the focus remains on British activity in the slave trade after the establishment of the Royal African Co. while the activities of privateers, and Hawkins' role in opening the trade to Englishmen, is not included.<sup>8</sup>

While these historians have neglected Hawkins' participation in the early years of the slave trade, there are some historians of the transatlantic slave trade who have acknowledged Hawkins' role as the first Englishman to participate in the transatlantic slave trade. However, these historians often marginalize his participation or present it as an isolated event. Kenneth Morgan describes Hawkins' voyages as "an isolated venture by the British to West Africa for slaves," arguing that the English did not attempt to establish trade in Africa until the Guinea Company was established in 1618.<sup>9</sup> Don Taylor and E.D. Morel both credit Hawkins with being the first Englishman to venture into the transatlantic slave trade, however, this is only done in passing and both authors very quickly move on to the activities of the Royal African Company in the latter part of the seventeenth century.<sup>10</sup> Neither of these authors evaluates the impact Hawkins had on English involvement in the slave trade or on the slave trade in Africa, nor do they elaborate on his activities beyond simply acknowledging that he had the first successful voyage. George Francis Dow, who does offer a detailed account of Hawkins' voyage, does so in the same manner that historians of privateers have, and only offers a biographical account of events without offering an analysis of how these events impacted the history of the transatlantic slave trade.<sup>11</sup>

In his pivotal work, *The Rise of African Slavery*, David Eltis offers one example of the capture of a slave ship by pirates. However, the focus of this example is to illustrate the tensions among Europeans between class and nationality.<sup>12</sup> This is the only reference to piracy in his book, yet this single illustration is important, for it alludes to the reality that European nations used privateering vessels to inflict financial loss on their opponents in their struggle to enter into and monopolize the transatlantic trade. This example also alludes to the struggle between class and nationality, as this was a time when nation states were just beginning to form, and many who plied the Atlantic for trade, either illicit or legal, found themselves caught between their own class desires for upward mobility, which was obtained through the acquisition of wealth, and loyally adhering to the treaties signed and laws enacted by their nations of origin. But none of these issues are explored by Eltis. Instead, piracy is mentioned just once, in this one short illustration, and then forgotten as he moves on to discuss the transatlantic trade and the middle passage.

Engel Sluiter, in his article "New Light on the "20. And odd Negroes" Arriving in Virginia, August 1619" does seem to acknowledge the role of privateers in the transatlantic slave trade, but only to a limited scale. In his article, he makes the argument that the Dutch ship which brought the first African slaves to Jamestown was actually an English privateering vessel flying under Dutch colors.<sup>13</sup> This was not an odd occurrence, as James I had forbidden privateering

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<sup>8</sup> Barbara L. Solow, Stanley L. Engerman eds. *British Capitalism and Caribbean Slavery: The Legacy of Eric Williams*, Cambridge University Press, 1987.

<sup>9</sup> Kenneth Morgan, *Slavery and the British Empire: From Africa to America*, Oxford University press, 2007, 56.

<sup>10</sup> Don Taylor *The British in Africa*, Robert Hale Limited, 1962, 20. E.D. Morel *The Black Man's Burden: The White Man in Africa from the Fifteenth Century to World War I*, (Originally published in 1920) Monthly Review Press, 1969, 16-17.

<sup>11</sup> George Francis Dow, *Slave Ships and Slaving*, Cornell Maritime Press Inc., 1968. Chapter 1 is dedicated to Hawkins' life and transatlantic voyages.

<sup>12</sup> David Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas*, Cambridge University Press: 2000. 225.

<sup>13</sup> Engel Sluiter, "New Light on the "20. And odd Negroes" Arriving in Virginia, August 1619" *The William*

ventures, leaving English privateers in need of new patrons. While Sluiter does focus on the fact that the ship was most likely an English privateering vessel, he all but ignores the significance of the fact that this means that privateers were not only active enough in the slave trade to be able to bring a group of slaves to Jamestown, but that it also means that English privateers delivered the first slaves to the English colonies in the Americas. This significance is also missed in Thornton's article on the subject, which focuses instead on the fact that this knowledge allows historians to trace these slaves, who were the "founders of African America" back to Angola.<sup>14</sup> Thornton's very article demonstrates an important aspect of the slave trade that historians have been slow to explore. If slaves were smuggled into colonies on pirate vessels, or traded openly by pirates, then their origins might be more significant than a cursory glance would suggest. By tracing these ships backwards and finding out where the privateers first acquired the slaves, a new understanding of the slaves and their culture might be grasped. But while Thornton demonstrates with his article that it is important for historians to understand where these slaves came from, he does not give any indication, at this point, that this line of inquiry can be applied to any other group of slaves. It would not be until his team-up with Linda Heywood that the potential of this concept for the study of the slave trade would be grasped, a discussion which will be addressed later in this paper.

As has already been mentioned, historians of piracy and privateering in the Atlantic have long recognized the significance piracy had on the slave trade. The most obvious example of this is the way historians have viewed the activities of Sir John Hawkins and Sir Francis Drake over the past one hundred years. Nearly all historians who have written on Hawkins have credited him with being the first English transatlantic slave trader, and most agree that he can be credited with opening up transatlantic trade to England, thus laying the framework for the English slave trade. Julian S. Corbett, whose work has long been recognized as being pivotal to the study of English privateering and maritime history, argues that Hawkins not only opened up the Atlantic for English trade, but that he also led the way for many other Elizabethan privateers who would try several different methods of breaking into the Portuguese monopoly on African trade and Spain's monopoly in the transatlantic slave trade.<sup>15</sup>

Corbett argues that Hawkins not only led the way into the transatlantic slave trade, but that he was also responsible for forming the first joint-stock ventures into transatlantic trade, forming companies of merchant adventurers who were interested in the slave trade. This claim is backed up by the historian James Anthony Froude, who argued that the early English expeditions into the slave trade were not meant to be one time affairs, and that Hawkins formed an African Company with leading citizens in London to support his voyages.<sup>16</sup> Froude is also quick to point out that Hawkins was not alone in his ventures, and that there are numerous accounts of small

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*and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 54, No. 2 (Apr., 1997), pp. 395-398.

<sup>14</sup> John Thornton, "The African Experience of the "20. And Odd Negroes" Arriving in Virginia in 1619" *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 55, No. 3 (Jul., 1998), pp. 421-434.

<sup>15</sup> Julian S. Corbett, *Drake and the Tudor Navy: With a History of the Rise of England as a Maritime Power*, vol. 1, Burt Franklin: Research and Source Works Series #88, (Originally published in 1899). This argument is also made by John C. Appleby in his book, *Under the Bloody Flag*, in which Appleby stresses the fact that the true importance of Hawkins' slaving voyages is that they opened transatlantic trade to England and laid the ground work for the English slave trade. John C. Appleby, *Under the Bloody Flag: Pirates of the Tudor Age* The History Press: 2009, 105-8.

<sup>16</sup> James Anthony Froude, *English Seamen in the Sixteenth Century: Lectures Delivered at Oxford Easter Terms 1893-4*, Green and Co.: 1928.

scale slave trading voyages during the Elizabethan era.<sup>17</sup> However, as many of these historians are more interested in writing a biography of Hawkins or Drake, they do not offer much information on who these other privateers turned slave traders were.

Over the past one hundred years, historians of privateers have also been quick to credit Hawkins with the creation of the English triangle trade, which has been firmly ingrained in the discussion of the slave trade. Derek Wilson goes into great detail to establish the fact that Hawkins was the first to participate in, and thus established, the English triangle trade. He argues that it was this triangle trade which made Hawkins' voyages so successful and whetted the English appetite for the slave trade.<sup>18</sup> Neville Williams not only argues that Hawkins founded the English tradition of triangular trade through his slave trading ventures, he also argues that the first London Syndicate and the African Company, which formed to back Hawkins' voyages, formed as a result of the profits the triangle trade could bring.<sup>19</sup> The concept of the triangle trade is central to many of the discussions on the transatlantic slave trade, so it is surprising that, if the majority of historians of English privateering give credit to Hawkins for establishing this practice, historians of the slave trade have not elaborated on Hawkins' activities. This oversight might be due to the unfounded belief that Hawkins did not truly participate in the slave trade, that his participation was limited to plundering a few ships, and that his activities had no measurable impact on the slave trade. However, historians of privateers are quick to prove otherwise.

In presenting their discussion of why Hawkins embarked on his slave trading voyages and why they were so successful, historians of privateers offer a careful analysis of Spain's slave trading policy in the colonies during the mid-sixteenth century. Corbett and Andrews both give a detailed discussion of Spain's policies, including the number of licenses issued by Spain for slave traders during the 1560s and the number of recorded slaves imported to the colonies where Hawkins sold his slaves. This discussion is then used to establish the rising demand in the colonies for affordable slaves. Froude also gives a detailed analysis of the Spanish slave trade at the time, establishing the fact that the colonists at Burboroota were so desperate for fresh slaves that they were willing to defy the royal edict which prohibited the Spanish colonies from purchasing slaves from foreigners. These discussions demonstrate that Hawkins helped fill a significant labor shortage in the colonies, which would have had a measurable impact on the cities which received his slaves. While these historians have demonstrated the almost desperate demand for slaves in the colonies, they have been more interested in the market opportunities

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<sup>17</sup> Froude, This point is also emphasized by Susan Ronald in *The Pirate Queen*, in which she discusses the ventures of Lovell and others. See chapter 10 of her book. Susan Ronald, *The Pirate Queen: Queen Elizabeth I, Her Pirate Adventurers and the Dawn of Empire*, Harper Collins Publishers 2007. Kenneth Andrews also makes this argument in *Trade, Plunder and Settlement*, when he argues that Hawkins was most likely not the first to try and break into Spain's transatlantic slave trade and that many others were already smuggling slaves into the colonies. However, Andrews does not elaborate on who these others were or if they were Englishmen. Kenneth Andrews, *Trade, Plunder and Settlement: Maritime Enterprises and the Genesis of the British Empire 1480-1630*, Cambridge University Press: 1984, 117. P.E.H. Hair points to Fenton's expedition of 1582 as an example of another English expedition into the transatlantic slave trade, 223.

<sup>18</sup> Derek Wilson, *The World Encompassed: Francis Drake and His Great Voyage* Harper & Row Publishers: 1977, 16. The idea that Hawkins established the triangle trade is also put forth by Nick Hazlewood as he argues that Hawkins was the first to benefit from the "triangular trade." Nick Hazlewood, *The Queen's Slave Trader: John Hawkyns, Elizabeth I, and the Trafficking in Human Souls* William Marrow 2004, 312.

<sup>19</sup> Neville Williams, *The Sea Dogs: Privateers, Plunder and Piracy in the Elizabethan Age*, Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.: 1975, 32-6,



this presented the English and have not investigated how the illegal importation of slaves impacted the individual cities.

Building on this discussion, Hazlewood establishes the fact, through a careful analysis of licenses issued by Spain to slave traders during the 1560s, that Spain only allowed 4,000 African slaves into her Caribbean colonies during the years which Hawkins conducted his slaving voyages. Hazlewood then goes on to show that Hawkins sold between 1500 and 2000 slaves to Spain's Caribbean colonies, a number roughly equaling half the number of slaves legally admitted to the colonies.<sup>20</sup> This is no small feat, and demonstrates that Hawkins had a profound impact on the slave trade in the Spanish colonies. When one considers the fact that Hawkins was not the only Englishman smuggling slaves into Spain's colonies, it becomes abundantly clear that sixteenth century privateers had a profound impact on the early slave trade. Such a significant contribution to the slave trade needs to be considered by historians of the slave trade when studying the trade in the Spanish colonies.

Hawkins' voyages are not only significant to the study of the slave trade due to the number of slaves brought to the colonies, but also due to the manner in which Hawkins acquired his slaves. While it is true that Hawkins did acquire some of his slaves through acts of piracy, this is not how he acquired the majority of his slaves. Most historians who have studied Hawkins' voyages maintain that he was first and foremost a merchant who saw a new market for his business.<sup>21</sup> These historians have demonstrated that, in an attempt to establish a true trade network, Hawkins worked to establish trade relations with local African kingdoms in Guinea. On Hawkins' second voyage he procured 400 slaves after having helped a chief who was at war with a neighboring tribe. William Neville points out that Hawkins went to Sierra Leone on his third voyage because he received a request from the King of Sierra Leone asking for his assistance in attacking a town of some 8,000 inhabitants. Hawkins was to be compensated for his help with slaves. He states that Hawkins was able to acquire 260 slaves this way. Others point out that Hawkins gathered some of his slaves by raiding villages along the coasts, and while Corbett points out that this caused some difficulties, as the native gold-dust traders objected to his slave catching operations as they disturbed the trade networks set up by the Portuguese and alienated chiefs friendly to the Portuguese trade, the vast majority of privateer historians only carry the discussion this far. They do not think, or have no desire, to investigate how Hawkins' activities, and the activities of others such as Windham and Towerson, who were also raiding the local villages, influenced the Portuguese slave trade along the Guinea coast.<sup>22</sup>

Hugh Thomas, in his book on the slave trade, hints at the significance of this phenomenon when he states that Hawkins' second voyage caused great consternation for the Portuguese as they were trying to establish peaceful trade relations in the area. However, he does not elaborate on this or truly investigate the ramifications of Hawkins' activities. By negotiating with African chiefs, and by angering others who were friendly to the Portuguese, Hawkins was upsetting the balance of power on the Guinea coast.

Christopher Ebert argues that "one of the chief problems with many of the existing scholarly interpretations of sixteenth century 'Portuguese' Africa is that they fail to understand Europe's

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<sup>20</sup> Hazlewood, 312.

<sup>21</sup> Harry Kelsey has argued against this, in both his book on Hawkins and his work on Drake, arguing that Hawkins was nothing more than a pirate who saw a way of making money at other people's expense. He argues that no one who participated in the slave trade should be viewed as simply a merchant trying to make a profit and points to the fact that the Portuguese repeatedly refer to Hawkins as a pirate in their reports, not a merchant.

<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of these voyages see Andrews, *Trade, Plunder and Settlement*, 101-116.

trade with Africa in terms of commodity chains.”<sup>23</sup> As he points out, “African traders could not be concerned to differentiate too greatly between different groups of Europeans if it did not serve their interests.”<sup>24</sup> Hawkins and his fellow English privateers are a perfect example of this. They established trade networks with African chiefs, and in doing so, influenced the relationship between these chiefs and the Portuguese. If a true understanding of the Portuguese slave trade, or even just sixteenth century Portuguese African relations, is to be grasped, then historians of the slave trade need to consider the impact these privateers had in Africa. And if privateering historians wish to truly understand the full ramifications of Hawkins’ actions, then they need to consider the full extent of his actions in Africa and how they would have affected not only Portugal’s trade relations, but also how this would have affected international diplomacy.<sup>25</sup>

Another area of study that could produce an interesting discussion of the English slave trade is Drake’s attempt to fortify Roanoke through slaves. Several historians who have written about Drake and his voyage to the West Indies in 1585-6 mention the fact that he went out of his way to try to help the Roanoke colony, and that after his raid on Cartagena Drake had with him close to 250 Africans, some whom he had “liberated” during the raid, others who were runaway slaves who had joined his forces against the Spanish. After departing from Cartagena Drake made his way along the eastern sea-board to Roanoke where he intended to drop off supplies and, more likely than not, leave his passengers to help strengthen the work force.<sup>26</sup> Whether or not these Africans were brought as slaves or as freemen who would work along-side the colonists is still debated. Upon Drake’s arrival at Roanoke, he found the colony too far gone to sustain itself and the colonists unwilling to remain. It is known that Drake brought the colonists and a handful of the Africans back to England with him. What is unknown is what happened to the rest of the Africans Drake brought to Roanoke. While this is a small avenue of inquiry, it does present some interesting points for discussion. If Drake brought the Africans as slaves to Roanoke, then the case can be made that Roanoke is the first English colony which considered using slave labor.<sup>27</sup> If David Quinn is correct in his assertion that Drake viewed these Africans as freedmen, then it presents an interesting case in which Africans would have worked alongside English colonists as freemen.<sup>28</sup> In addition, the question of what actually happened to these Africans when the colonists abandoned the settlement has never been addressed. But as has been stated, this is just one of many small areas where interesting inquiries can be made into the English slave trade.

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<sup>23</sup> Christopher Ebert, “European Competition and Cooperation in Pre-Modern Globalization: “Portuguese” West and Central Africa, 1500-1600” *African Economic History*, No. 36 (2008), pp. 53-78. 55.

<sup>24</sup> Ebert, 65.

<sup>25</sup> Paul Hammer, in his book *Elizabeth’s Wars*, makes the brief argument that Hawkins’ transatlantic slave trade is important because it crossed the “hazy distinction between war and peace” between England and Spain, however, he does not consider the added pressure of Portugal’s grievances. Hammer, Paul E. J. *Elizabeth’s Wars*, Palgrave Macmillan: 2003. 80-81.

<sup>26</sup> J. Leitch Wright, Jr. “Sixteenth Century English-Spanish Rivalry in La Florida” *The Florida Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (Apr., 1960) pp. 265-279. Kenneth Andrews has stated that the Africans, some of whom were women, “must have been destined for Virginia, as reinforcements for the colony.” *Trade, Plunder and Settlement*, 210.

<sup>27</sup> Heywood and Thornton state that “Roanoke was the first place that plans for employing African slaves captured by privateers would be attempted by the English.” Linda M. Heywood, John K. Thornton, *Central Africans, Atlantic Creoles, and the Foundation of the Americas 1585-1660*, Cambridge University Press: 2007, 21.

<sup>28</sup> David B. Quinn, “Turks, Moors, Blacks and Others in Drake’s West Indian Voyage” *Terrae Incognitae* Vo. 14 (1982) pp. 97-104.

English privateers did not cease their involvement in the transatlantic slave trade with the death of Elizabeth I and the ascension of James I and his subsequent ban on privateering acts in violation of Spain's Atlantic Empire. In fact, the participation of English privateers in the transatlantic slave trade increased throughout the sixteenth century. Kris Lane, in his book *Pillaging The Empire*, makes the interesting argument that English pirates were so successful at smuggling slaves into the Caribbean during the 1600s that they provided the majority of the slaves to English and Dutch colonies in the New World. In fact, Lane argues, before the creation of the Royal African Co. the English government actually encouraged privateers in their attempt to open up the Spanish markets and to bring slaves to their colonies.<sup>29</sup> Lane states that this became such a successful venture that the practice of smuggling slaves became known as the "Port Royal Specialty."<sup>30</sup> These privateering exploits increased to the point that some pirates would find it necessary at times to build their own slave pens to process their cargo.<sup>31</sup> Lane gives several illustrations of the involvement of privateers in the slave trade, including one raid in 1665 in which 900 slaves were taken as booty and then smuggled into the Spanish colonies. With pirates supplying a successful and large black-market in slaves, and acting as the only real slave traders for the English and Dutch colonies before the breakdown of Spain's monopoly on the slave trade, it is surprising that the activities of Atlantic pirates in the transatlantic slave trade has not received more attention. Marcus Rediker argues that pirates would not have wanted to take large quantities of slaves as booty, because they would have been too hard to dispose of and turn a profit.<sup>32</sup> However, as Lane demonstrates, and as is seen through the illustrations of several historians of pirates who focus on the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, pirates were more than willing to trade in slaves and played an important role in the slave trade.

Historians of the transatlantic slave trade tend to marginalize or ignore the role of the English, and therefore English privateers and pirates, in the slave trade until the establishment of the Royal African Company, yet even then the role of pirates is left out of many works on the transatlantic trade. One of the most prominent examples of this is the impact piracy had on the Royal African Company during the first part of the 1700s. Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker argue that English and Dutch pirates had such a profound toll on the Royal African Company that the company lost control of its monopoly.<sup>33</sup> After the War of Spanish Succession in 1713, the Atlantic was flooded with pirates who not only participated in the slave trade through smuggling activities, but who also inflicted upon the company an irrecoverable amount of damage.<sup>34</sup> If these two prominent maritime historians are correct in their assertion that pirate

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<sup>29</sup> This fact is also backed up in Heywood and Thornton,<sup>30</sup>. They state that the company in charge of establishing a colony on Providence Island recommended purchasing slaves from privateers in 1633. Jon Latimer in his work, *Buccaneers of the Caribbean: How Piracy Forged an Empire* Harvard University Press: 2009, demonstrates that Providence Island was a hotbed for privateers during the time when its slave population grew from a few hundred slaves in 1641 to 5,680 slaves in 1645, however, he makes no mention of the possibility that these slaves were brought in on pirate vessels.

<sup>30</sup> Kris E. Lane, *Pillaging the Empire: Piracy in the Americas 1500-1750* M.E. Sharpe, Inc.: 1998. 124.

<sup>31</sup> Konstam, 81.

<sup>32</sup> This argument is insinuated in several places in his book *Villains of All Nations*.

<sup>33</sup> Peter Linebaugh, Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* Beacon Press: 2000. This argument is further explored in Marcus Rediker's *Villains of all Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age* Beacon Press: 2004.

<sup>34</sup> Angus Konstam argues that pirates would often target Royal African Co. ships as they were easily converted into pirate ships and their holds were particularly well suited for storing pirated plunder. Konstam, Angus *Blackbeard: America's Most Notorious Pirate* John Wiley & Sons, Inc.: 2006, 81.



activities had a direct hand in the downfall of the Royal African Co., then why are these activities not further explored in histories of the transatlantic slave trade?

The only historians of the slave trade who seem to have recognized the value of the historiography of pirates and privateers in relation to the study of the slave trade in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are Linda Heywood and John Thornton, who dedicate the first chapter of their book, *Central Africans, Atlantic Creoles, and the Foundation of the Americas 1585-1660*, to summarizing the involvement of privateers in the slave trade. In this chapter they summarize nearly one hundred years of piracy history, demonstrating the importance that different aspects of the involvement of privateers in the slave trade can have on the understanding of the slave trade. However, their focus in this chapter is to lay the groundwork for their study of central Africans and the foundation of slavery in the Americas, and they are unable to go into much detail regarding the implications of many of their findings regarding the application of the study of pirates to the study of slavery. For example, they demonstrate that for the first half of the 1600s the vast majority of English and Dutch slave trade in the Caribbean was conducted by privateers, as the two nations did not have their first official slave trading voyages until the mid-1600s. This is a significant fact. In 1610 the governor of Jamaica reported that more than 1,540 slaves had been smuggled onto his island.<sup>35</sup> Barbados, which had received its first slaves from the privateer John Powell, had only a few hundred slaves in 1641, by 1645 that number had grown to 5,680 slaves.<sup>36</sup> In addition to Barbados, Tortuga also received its first slaves through privateers in 1635.<sup>37</sup> Even though Thornton and Heywood's discussion is brief, it clearly illustrates the valuable new insights and understanding of the transatlantic slave trade that can be gained when the historiography of privateers and pirates is applied.

The historiography of privateers and pirates offers a wealth of information on the early transatlantic slave trade and the involvement of privateers and pirates in the slave trade. There are numerous ways in which the study of pirates can add to the study of the transatlantic slave trade, far too many to mention in this brief discussion. However, historians of the transatlantic slave trade seem to have ignored the influence of piracy on the early slave trade seeing this influence as being marginal, at best a side note to a greater story. Historians of privateers and pirates, while recognizing the significant role the slave trade played in the study of their subjects, have been more interested in writing biographies or in focusing on the activities of the pirate vessels, and have missed the true significance of many of the slave trading exploits undertaken by their subjects. While the total number of slaves smuggled into American colonies by privateers and pirates does not appear great when compared to the total number of slaves sold to the Americas, the impact of pirates and privateers during the sixteenth and early seventeenth century, when England was attempting to enter the transatlantic trade and establish colonies, should not be underestimated. By combining the two studies and recognizing the impact they had on each other, a far greater understanding of both fields will emerge.

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<sup>35</sup> Heywood, 26.

<sup>36</sup> Heywood, 30. For the number of slaves in Barbados see Latimer, 94-5.

<sup>37</sup> Heywood, 31.