

READINGS ON LATIN AMERICA AND ITS PEOPLE

Volume 1

To 1830

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PIRATES AND CONTRABAND: LIFE ON THE COASTS

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The Spanish discovery of rich silver deposits in Mexico and Peru in the 1540s had a profound impact on the subsequent history of Latin America, and not only in the places where the precious metals were mined. Treasure-laden Spanish ships offered tempting targets for predators—variously called privateers, corsairs, buccaneers, or pirates—of all nations, and the fortification of major ports and other defensive measures failed to halt their attacks. Some pirates received the tacit or explicit support of foreign rulers intent on breaking the monopoly of the new world's riches that Spain and Portugal had claimed for themselves immediately following Columbus's landfall. These men often returned to their homes in England, France, and the Netherlands as rich and respected citizens. Others acted on their own, retreating with their loot to sparsely settled places in the Americas. The western portion of the island of Hispaniola—now the nation of Haiti—was a particularly notable redoubt for pirates known as buccaneers.

In addition to plundering the silver fleets, pirates assaulted coastal settlements, terrorizing residents and seizing whatever booty they could find. Remote locations that lacked the heavy fortifications of such ports as Havana and Veracruz proved especially vulnerable, but pivotal points of overseas commerce came under heavy attack as well. In particular, the isthmus of Panama figured prominently on many pirates' "To Do" lists. Ships bearing Peruvian silver, and gold and emeralds from present-day Ecuador and Colombia, docked on the Pacific side. There mule trains stood ready to transport the precious cargo across the isthmus to ships waiting to carry it to Europe. In the opposite direction went European merchandise destined for the lucrative markets of western South America.

For some coastal residents, the appearance of an English, French, or Dutch ship might provide an opportunity to obtain African slaves and a variety of merchandise not available to them legally. In an attempt to keep the wealth of the Indies within the bounds of its own empire, Spain enacted strict mercantile regulations that forbade foreigners to trade directly with its colonies and required that all commerce pass through a few selected ports. These restrictions severely limited the range of goods that customers could obtain, especially in out of the way locations. Some coastal people, therefore, carried on a brisk clandestine trade with foreign interlopers, often with the unspoken approval or open participation of local Spanish officials. After England gained control of Jamaica in the mid-seventeenth century, that island became a favored base of operations for illegal trade with the Spanish empire. As we saw in Chapter 7, communities of runaway slaves had other reasons to welcome intruders. Some indigenous groups likewise found that aiding and abetting pirates gave them sufficient leverage to maintain themselves beyond the reach of Spanish authorities.



The Caribbean Map. The Caribbean and adjacent territories, showing present-day national boundaries.

JOHN HAWKINS AT RÍO DE LA HACHA, COLOMBIA!

Queen Elizabeth I, who assumed the throne of England in 1558 and ruled until 1603, mounted a vigorous challenge to Spanish control of the Americas that was driven not only by profit and political ambition but by religious reasons as well. The Protestant daughter of King Henry VIII and an avowed enemy of Catholicism in England and abroad, Elizabeth offered substantial financial backing to English merchants willing to venture to Spain's American colonies. John Hawkins (1532-1595) was a wealthy merchant from Plymouth who began trading in the Spanish Caribbean in 1563 and went on to make a fortune by selling slaves and seizing whatever plunder he could find. Back in England in the 1570s, he was knighted by Queen Elizabeth and became a member of Parliament and treasurer of the Royal Navy. The following selection is taken from the report that a local Spanish official in the town of Río de la Hacha (today known as Riohacha), on the Caribbean coast of modern-day Colombia, addressed to King Philip II in Spain. He describes Hawkins' raid on the town.

John Hawkins, English corsair, arrived off the port of this city. He came in command of ten very handsome ships, which he said belonged to the queen of England. . . . As soon as he had arrived off this port he sent me a letter in which he offered me great gifts, if I would permit him to trade; and if I would not, he made great threats.

I answered him what your majesty has ordered and provided in your majesty's royal orders and provisions, and that I would by no means yield a single point from the tenor of those commands.

In view of my determination, after much argument, he landed his forces three-quarters of a league down the coast, beyond all my defenses and bulwarks, and out of range of the artillery that in your majesty's service I have placed here. . . . [I] nas-much as the enemy's number was so overwhelming and we were so few, it seemed to me to be madness to attempt to oppose the attack of such superior forces. . . . We were unable to prevent him from taking the fort, for . . . he played so many guns on the fort, not a man dared to remain in any part of it. When he had taken the fort, he also took the town. . . .

When he had taken the town the Englishman again sent word to permit trade, saying that unless I did so he would burn and destroy the town and invade the interior and capture and steal whatever he could find. I answered him to do as he pleased, since I preferred to lose my worldly goods rather than to yield a jot of your majesty's commands. Immediately . . . he began to fire the town and that day he burned about half of it.

The next day in the morning he set out with as many as 400 men and his field artillery, to invade the land. I opposed him with the few men I had. Wherever he turned I preceded him, doing what damage I could to his men, and burning and destroying the fields and food crops and farmhouses belonging to the people of the town. Seeing that their very owners were destroying their own houses and estates, the Englishman returned to the town in very desperate humor and burned the government house and another large portion of the town. Excepting only certain houses he needed to shelter his men, he left no others standing. He spared about one-third of the town and burned two-thirds of it.

That night a negro and mulatto, slaves of mine, deserted to the enemy and told him they would lead him to the place, seven leagues from this city, where I had buried your majesty's royal treasure-chest, and that night they fell on a tent where I had all my goods, and where some poor and sick people and some women were in hiding. They seized these and . . . stole everything I had and threatened them that unless they were ransomed they would be killed. They released a prisoner that he might come to tell me the pitiable lamentations of the rest. In order that such grievous cruelty might not be carried out, for 4000 pesos gold I redeemed them and what remained to be burned of the town, including its holy church, on condition that they deliver to me the mulatto and the negro aforesaid.

I paid over the 4000 pesos and the enemy released the prisoners. Although they promised to restore the property that had been taken from them, they did not fulfill this promise. On the contrary, they stole it and carried it off. They reembarked and delivered to me the mulatto and the negro and I handed them over to your majesty's royal law that they might be punished and made an example to all the rest on this coast, and so the mulatto was hung and the negro quartered.

Before they cleared, after this ransom had been arranged, because they were unable to feed them, the English set a certain number of blacks ashore rather than throw them overboard. Some were children not over six years old, and some were old males and old females (over a hundred years). Although the Englishman left them in recompense for the damage he did the town, acting with the royal officials

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I took possession of them all for your majesty and delivered them to a certain person to feed them for two or three months and so put them into condition that they might be worth something. We are now selling them off little by little, despite the fact that the townspeople demand them, alleging that the Englishman left them to pay for the damage done the town. I assure your Majesty that had he left as many again it would not cover the damage he did here.

FRANCIS DRAKE BEING KNIGHTED BY QUEEN ELIZABETH I, 1581²

Francis Drake (1542–1596) was John Hawkins' cousin and his companion in many exploits, and he also led a famous raid of his own on the Isthmus of Panama. From 1577 to 1580, he headed—with generous financial support from Queen Elizabeth—the first English voyage to circumnavigate the globe, an endeavor that yielded enough profit to pay off the national debt. That journey took him along much of the Pacific Coast of Spanish America, from Chile to California. He later served as Vice-Admiral of the English fleet that defeated the Spanish Armada's intended attack on the British Isles in 1588. Here he is shown on board his ship, the Golden Hind, being knighted by the queen.





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JOHN ESQUEMELING'S ACCOUNT OF THE PIRATE NICKNAMED "EL BRASILIANO"³

Pirates and Contraband: Life on the Coasts

By the mid-seventeenth century, freelance individuals of many nations came to dominate piracy activity in the Americas. Alexander Olivier Esquemelin (also known as John Esquemeling) belonged to this cohort. He was born in France about 1645, although many scholars have claimed he was Dutch. As a young boy, he ventured to the West Indies, where he worked as an apprentice to a barber-surgeon. Later he joined the Englishman Henry Morgan's band of buccaneers, serving as their surgeon and keeping a journal. He evidently garnered a substantial share of booty from the many expeditions in which he participated, including Morgan's raid on Portobelo in Panama in 1668. After his return to Europe in the late 1670s, he wrote an extensive history of piracy in the Americas, based in part on his own recollections but also drawing on records kept by other participants and witnesses. Published first in Dutch in 1678, his book soon appeared in English, Spanish, and other European languages.

Here Esquemelin describes the exploits of a pirate known as Brasiliano ("The Brazilian"), who was in fact Dutch by birth. He gained his nickname after living many years in Brazil, during the Dutch occupation of that territory in the mid-seventeenth century.

To the Spaniards, he always showed himself very barbarous and cruel, only out of an inveterate hatred he had against that nation. Of these he commanded several to be roasted alive upon wooden spits, for no other crime than that they would not show him the places where he might steal swine. After many of these cruelties, it happened as he was cruising upon the coasts of Campeche,⁴ that a dismal tempest suddenly surprised him. This proved to be so violent that at last his ship was wrecked, the mariners only escaping with their muskets and some few bullets and powder. . . . They got on shore in a canoe, and marching along the coast [they proceeded to] a place where the pirates commonly used to repair and refresh themselves. . . . They were pursued by some Spaniards, a whole troop of 100 horsemen. The pirates were no more than 30 in number, who, seeing their brave commander oppose himself with courage to the enemy, resolved to do the like. They faced the Spaniards, and discharged their muskets against them with such dexterity that they killed one horseman with almost every shot. . . . At last the Spaniards were put to flight. They stripped the dead, and took from them what they thought most convenient for their use. But such as were not already dead, they helped to quit the miseries of life with the ends of their muskets. Having vanquished the enemy, they all mounted on several horses they found in the field, and continued the journey. Brasiliano having lost but two of his companions, and two others wounded. As they [proceeded] before they came to the port, they spied a boat from Campeche, well manned, that rode at anchor, protecting a small number of canoes that were lading wood. . . . The next morning they possessed themselves of the canoes . . . and with no great difficulty took also the boat. . . . They wanted only provisions, which they found but very small aboard these vessels. But this defect was supplied by the horses, which they instantly killed and salted with salt which by good fortune the wood-cutters had brought with them. . . .

³John Esquemeling, *The Buccaneers of America* (New York: Dover, 1967), pp. 70–73. Originally published in English in 1684.
⁴The east coast of Mexico's Yucatan peninsula.

These very same pirates took also another ship that was going from New Spain⁵ to Maracaibo,⁶ laden with diverse sorts of merchandise, and a very considerable number of pieces of eight, which were designed to buy cacao-nuts for their lading home. All these prizes they carried into Jamaica, where they safely arrived, and, according to their custom, wasted in a few days in taverns all they had gained, by giving themselves to all manner of debauchery. Some pirates will spend two or three thousand pieces of eight in one night, not leaving themselves a good shirt to wear on their backs in the morning. My own master would buy, on like occasions, a whole pipe of wine, and, placing it on the street, would force everyone that passed by to drink with him, threatening to pistol them if they would not. At other times he would do the same with barrels of ale or beer. And very often he would throw these liquors about the streets, and wet the clothes of those who walked by, without regarding whether he spoiled their apparel or whether they were men or women.

Among themselves, these pirates are extremely liberal and free. If any one of them has lost all his goods, which often happens in their manner of life, they freely give him what they have. In taverns and ale-houses they always have great credit, but in such houses at Jamaica they ought not to run very deep in debt, as the inhabitants of that island easily sell one another for debt. Thus it happened to my master, to be sold for a debt of a tavern, where he had spent the greatest part of his money. . . .

Brasilliano, having spent all that he had robbed, was constrained to go to sea again, to seek his fortune once more. He set forth toward the coast of Campeche, his common place of rendezvous. Fifteen days after his arrival there, he put himself into a canoe, with intent to spy on the port of that city, and see if he could rob any Spanish vessel. But his fortune was so bad, that both he and all his men were taken prisoners, and carried into the presence of the governor, who immediately cast them into a dungeon, with full intention to hang them all. And doubtless he would have performed his intent, were it not for a stratagem that Brasilliano used. He wrote a letter to the governor, making him believe it came from other pirates that were abroad at sea, telling him that "he should be careful how he treated those persons he had in his custody, for if he caused him any harm, they would never give quarter to any person of the Spanish nation that should fall into their hands."

Because these pirates had been many times at Campeche, and in many other towns and villages of the West Indies belonging to the Spanish dominions, the governor began to fear what mischief they might cause by means of their companions abroad. Hereupon he released them, exacting only an oath that they would leave their exercise of piracy forever. And he sent them as common mariners, or passengers in the galleons to Spain, where they tarried not long after their arrival. But providing themselves with some few necessities, they all returned to Jamaica within a little while. From there they set forth again to sea, committing greater robberies and cruelties than ever before, but more especially abusing the poor Spaniards that happened to fall into their hands, with all sorts of cruelty imaginable.

⁵Mexico.

⁶On the coast of Venezuela (see map).

WILLIAM DAMPIER'S ACCOUNT OF THE DISRUPTION OF SPANISH COMMERCE AT PANAMA, 1685⁷

This passage from A New Voyage Round the World, by the Englishman William Dampier (1652-1715), describes pirates' efforts to disrupt Spanish commerce on the Isthmus of Panama in 1685. Like Exquemelin, Dampier wrote extensively on his own exploits and those of other pirates. In addition to his activities in the Americas, Dampier explored the South Pacific and produced numerous maps detailing the coasts of Australia and New Guinea. Dampier is also credited with rescuing Alexander Selkirk—the Englishman who provided the inspiration for Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe—from Juan Fernandez Island, several hundred miles off the coast of Chile. Less than two decades before the events recounted here, Henry Morgan had conducted devastating raids on Portobelo and Panama City. In the course of fighting between Morgan's men and its Spanish defenders, the city of Panama caught fire and burned to the ground. By the time of Dampier's voyage, a new and supposedly better fortified city had been built a few miles west of the former town.

The first day of January 1685 . . . one of our canoes took a packet-boat (a small boat for carrying mail) that was sent from Panama to Lima. The Spaniards threw the packet of letters aboard with a line and a buoy to it, but our men seeing it took it up and brought the letters, and all the prisoners aboard our ships, that were then at anchor at Gallo. Here we stayed till the 6th day, reading the letters, by which we understood that the Armada from Old Spain had come to Portobelo, and that the [Spanish governor] of Panama had sent this packet on purpose to hasten the silver fleet thither from Lima.

We were very joyful of this news. . . . We now concluded to land our ships as speedily as we could, that we might be ready to intercept this fleet. The properest place . . . for doing it was among the King's Islands or Pearl-Keys, because they are near Panama, and all ships bound to Panama from the coast of Lima pass by them, so that being there we could not possibly miss the fleet. . . .

The 8th day . . . we spotted a sail to the west . . . we chased her, and before noon took her. She was a ship of about 90 tons laden with flour; she came from Trujillo [on the Pacific coast of Peru], and was bound to Panama. This ship came very opportunely to us, for flour began to grow scarce. . . .

The 9th day we anchored at the island of Gorgonia . . . [where] we rummaged our prize, and found a few boxes of marmalade and three or four jars of brandy. . . . Afterward we turned ashore a great many prisoners. . . .

The King's Islands . . . are from Panama about 12 leagues. . . . Some of these islands are planted with plantains and bananas, and there are fields of rice on others. . . . The gentlemen of Panama, to whom they belong, keep blacks there to plant, weed, and cultivate the plantations. Many of [the islands] . . . are wholly untilled, yet very good fat land, full of large trees. These unplanted islands shelter many runaway blacks, who abscond in the woods all day, and in the night boldly pillage the plantation-walks. . . .

From Voyage Round the World in 1683-1691 by William Dampier. Originally published in 1811.

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The 15th day [of February] we went out from among the islands, and anchored in the channel between them and the mainland. . . . The silver fleet was not yet arrived; therefore we intended to cruise before the city of Panama. . . .

When we came abreast of Old Panama and sent our canoe ashore with our prisoner Don Diego de Pinas, with a letter to the governor, to treat about an exchange for our man they had spirited away. . . . Don Diego was desirous to go on this errand. . . . but by some accident he was killed before he got ashore. . . .

Old Panama was formerly a famous place, but was taken by Sir Henry Morgan about the year 1673, and at that time a great part of it was burned to ashes, and it was never re-edified since.

New Panama is a very fair city, standing close by the sea, about four miles from the ruins of the old town. . . . The city is all compassed with a high stone wall; the houses are said to be of brick. Their roofs appear higher than the top of the city wall. It is beautified with a great many fair churches and religious houses. . . . There are a great many guns on her walls. . . . clear around. This is a flourishing city [because] it is a thoroughfare for all imported or exported goods and treasure, to and from all parts of Peru and Chile. . . . their storehouses are never empty. . . . Once in three years, when the Spanish fleet comes to Portobelo, then the silver fleet also from Lima comes here with the King's treasure, and abundance of merchant ships full of goods and silver; at that time the city is full of merchants and gentlemen; the seamen are busy in landing the treasure and goods, and the caravan masters employed in carrying it over land on mules (in vast droves every day) to Portobelo and bringing back European goods. . . . During this heat of business there is no hiring of an ordinary

slave under a piece of eight a day; houses, also rooms, beds and food are then extraordinarily expensive. . . .

The fleet from Old Spain comes every three years into the Indies. Its first arrival is at Cartagena,⁸ from whence. . . . an express is immediately sent over land to Lima, through the southern continent, and another by sea to Portobelo, with two packets of letters, one for the viceroy of Lima, the other for the viceroy of Mexico. I know not which way that of Mexico goes after its arrival at Portobelo. . . . but I believe by sea to Veracruz. That for Lima is sent by land to Panama, and then by sea to Lima. . . .

Upon mention of these packets I shall digress. . . . and acquaint my reader that before my first going over into the South Sea, I being on board with Captain Coxon, in company with three or four more privateers, about four leagues to the east of Portobelo we took the packets bound there from Cartagena. We opened a great quantity of the merchants' letters, and found the contents of many of them to be very surprising, the merchants of Old Spain informing their correspondents of Panama and elsewhere, of a certain prophecy that went about Spain that year. . . . that there would be English privateers that year in the West Indies, who would make such great discoveries, as to open a door into the South Sea. . . . and the letter were full of cautions to their friends to be very watchful of their coasts.

This door they spoke of we all concluded must be the passage over land through the country of the Indians of Darien [at the eastern end of the Isthmus of Panama],

⁸On the Caribbean coast of present-day Colombia; see map.

who a little before this were becoming our friends, and had lately fallen out with the Spaniards, breaking off the trade which for some time they had with them. . . . But to return to the account of the progress of the fleet which we left at Cartagena. . . . The viceroy of Lima, on notice of the fleet's arrival at Cartagena, immediately sends the King's treasure to Panama, where it is landed, and lies ready to be sent to Portobelo upon the first news of the fleet's arrival there. This is the reason of their sending expresses so early to Lima, that upon the fleet's first coming to Portobelo, the treasure and goods may lie ready at Panama, to be sent away on the mules. . . . The King's treasure is said to amount commonly to about 24 million pieces of eight, besides abundance of merchants' money. All this treasure is carried on mules and there are large stables at both places to lodge them. . . . When the fleet departs from Portobelo, it returns again to Cartagena. . . . [then] to Havana in Cuba, to meet there the fleet which is a small number of those that go to Veracruz and there take in the effects of the city and country of Mexico, and what is brought there in the ship that comes every year from the Philippine Islands. . . . and the whole armada sets sail for Spain through the Gulf of Florida.

WILLIAM DAMPIER ON THE MISKITO INDIANS, 1681⁹

This selection from Dampier's work describes the Miskito Indians, natives of the Caribbean coasts of Honduras and Nicaragua, who resisted Spanish domination and befriended English corsairs. Their communities often incorporated runaway slaves.

They are tall, well-made, raw-boned, lusty, strong, and nimble of foot, long-visaged, lank black hair. . . . and of a dark copper-color complexion. They are but a small nation or family, and not 100 men of them in number, inhabiting. . . . near Cape Grata Dios, between Cape Honduras and Nicaragua. They are very ingenious at throwing the lance, fishing [instrument used for spearing fish], harpoon, or any manner of dart, being bred to it from their infancy; for the children imitating their parents, never go abroad without a lance in their hands, which they throw at any object, till use hath made them masters of the art. . . . They have extraordinary good eyes, and will spy a sail at sea farther, and see any thing better than we. Their cheapest employment in their own country is to strike fish, turtle, or manatee. . . . For this they are esteemed and covered by all privateers; for one or two of them in a ship, will maintain 100 men: So that when we stop to repair our ships, we choose commonly such places where there is plenty of turtle or manatee for these Miskito men to strike; and it is very rare to find privateers destitute of one or more of them, when the commander, or most of the men are English; but [the Miskitos] do not love the French, and the Spaniards they hate mortally. When they come among privateers, they get the use of guns, and prove very good marksmen: they behave themselves very bold in fight, and never seem to flinch nor hang back; for they think that the white men with whom they are, know better than they do when it is best to fight, and

⁹From *Voyage Round the World in 1683-1691* by William Dampier. Originally published in 1811.

let the disadvantage of their party be never so great, they will never yield nor give back while any of their party stand. I could never perceive any religion nor any ceremonies, or superstitious observations among them, being ready to imitate us in whatsoever they saw us do at any time. Only they seem to fear the Devil, whom they call Walllesaw; and they say he often appears to some among them, whom our men commonly call their priests, when they desire to speak with him on urgent business; but the rest know not any thing of him, nor how he appears, otherwise than as these priests tell them. Yet they all say they must not anger him, for then he will beat them, and then sometimes he carries away these their priests. Thus much I have heard from some of them who speak good English. . . .

After the man hath cleared a spot of land, and hath planted it, he seldom minds it afterwards, but leaves the managing of it to his wife, and he goes out striking. Sometimes he seeks only for fish, at other times for turtle, or manatee, and whatever he gets he brings home to his wife, and never stirs out to seek for more till it is all eaten. When hunger begins to bite, he either takes his canoe and seeks for more game at sea, or walks out into the woods and hunts about for peccary or deer; and seldom returns empty-handed, nor seeks for any more so long as any of it lasts. Their farms are so small, that they cannot subsist with what they produce; for their largest farms have not above 20 or 30 plantain trees, a bed of yams and potatoes, a bush of Indian pepper, and a small spot of pineapples; which last fruit is a main thing they delight in; for with these they make a sort of drink, much esteemed by these Miskitos, and to what they invite each other to be merry, providing fish and meat also. Whoever of them makes of this liquor treats his neighbors . . . enough to make them all drunk. . . . Yet before they are warmed with drink, they never speak word of their grievances; and the women, who commonly know their husbands' designs, prevent them from doing any injury to each other, by hiding their lances, harpoons, bows and arrows, or any other weapon that they have.

The Miskitos are in general very civil and kind to the English, of whom they receive a great deal of respect, both when they are aboard their ships, and also ashore, either in Jamaica, or elsewhere, whither they often come with the seamen. We always humour them, letting them go any whither as they will, and return to their country in any vessel bound that way, if they please. They will have the management of themselves in their striking, and will go in their own little canoe, which our men could not go in without danger of oversteering; nor will they then let any white man come in their canoe, but will go in it just as they please: all which we allow them. For should we cross them, though they should see shoals of fish, or turtle, or the like, they will purposely strike their harpoons and turtle-irons aside, or so glance them as to kill nothing. They have no form of government among them, but acknowledge the King of England for their sovereign. They learn our language, and take the governor of Jamaica to be one of the greatest princes in the world.

While they are among the English they wear good clothes, and take delight to be neat and tight; but when they return again to their own country they put away all their clothes, and go after their own country fashion, wearing only a small piece of linen tied about their waists, hanging down to their knees.

JOHN CAMPBELL'S 18TH-CENTURY ACCOUNT OF SMUGGLING IN THE SPANISH EMPIRE¹⁰

John Campbell (1708-1775) was a Scotchman who wrote extensively on history and political affairs of his time. He was particularly interested in the rise of the British empire. Here he describes the willingness of Spanish subjects to do business with foreign traders in violation of laws prohibiting smuggling. His writings attracted a large audience in Britain, reflecting his countrymen's growing interest in the markets of Latin America during the eighteenth century, as the early Industrial Revolution rapidly transformed the British economy.

The inhabitants of Spanish America consider gold and silver as commodities, which they have, and would willingly barter for some other commodities, which they have not, and which would be more useful to them than large heaps of either of these metals. . . .

When folks are in such a situation, there need be no wonder at their endeavouring to carry on a clandestine trade. . . . Sometimes governors have winked at this, not from a principle of avarice only, that they might share in the resulting profits, but also from a sense of the necessity of dispensing with laws so ill executed as to deserve no respect. . . . Before the Treaty of Utrecht¹¹ the English at Jamaica furnished the Spaniards at Portobelo with blacks, with the knowledge at least, if not the permission of the governors. The inhabitants of Peru never could be without slaves. The government of Old Spain never could, indeed never attempted to supply them, but permitted sometimes the Genoese, sometimes the French to carry on this trade; and when they did not do it effectually, the deficiency was made good by such a commerce with the English, though without any formal license, but by a connivance, the less criminal for its being absolutely necessary.

The situation of the island of Jamaica, together with the conveniences of building and freighting sloops from thence, engaged the inhabitants in this, and in other branches of traffic. Such as settle themselves in these distant parts of the world, do it generally from a spirit of getting and therefore the grand point with them is always how to get most. They therefore for a long time supplied the Spaniards at Cartagena, Portobelo, Rio de la Hacha, and other places with European commodities of all sorts, notwithstanding the mighty hazard they ran in the management of so dangerous a business, their own lives, and those of their customers, being alike exposed, and frequently forfeited to what the Spaniards call justice. They likewise carried on a trade with the Indians of Darien, to their great profit, but with equal risk, for the Spaniards were wont to show no mercy either to English or Indians that fell into their hands. . . . The gains by this commerce tempted so many persons to be concerned in it, and the ships made use of were so well manned, and of such force, that the Spaniards grew less timorous; so that at last the commerce by the [Spanish] galleons was greatly affected; for, knowing where to buy goods cheaper, the merchants would not give the prices usually demanded at the fairs of Cartagena and Portobelo. . . .

¹⁰From *The Spanish Empire in America* by John Campbell. Originally published in 1747.
¹¹The Treaty of Utrecht, signed by the British and Spanish governments in 1713, gave British merchants legal permission to send a single ship, with a limited number of slaves and other merchandise, to the Spanish colonies each year. The British routinely exceeded the limits stipulated in the treaty.

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The little island of St. Thomas, about fourteen leagues off Puerto Rico, is the sole colony possessed by the Danes in the West Indies; nor would it be worth the keeping, but as it serves to maintain an illicit trade with the Spanish islands in its neighborhood. . . . We may easily discern how hard up the Spaniards are for the necessities, or at least the conveniences of life, when we find them trading to a place which is a free port to privateers and pirates of all nations. . . . Of late other nations have taken advantage of this free port, and keep warehouses there of all sorts of commodities, for the service of such customers. . . .

The Portuguese at Rio de Janeiro entertain also a very beneficial correspondence with their Spanish neighbors. The goods with which they supply them are sugar, indigo, tobacco, wine, brandies, and rums, with some European goods, and sometimes slaves. The inhabitants of this colony [southern Brazil] are far more industrious than the rest of the Brazil planters; and this gives them an opportunity of gaining considerably from the inhabitants of Buenos Aires and other places on the Rio de la Plata. . . .

Besides these methods of trading, there is another common to all nations. Ships frequently approach the Spanish coasts under pretense of wanting water, wood, provisions, or more commonly, in order to stop a leak. The first thing that is done in such a case, is to inform the governor of their great distress, and, as if in full proof thereof, to send a very considerable present. By this means leave is obtained to come on shore, to erect a warehouse, and to unlade the ship, but then all this is performed under the eye of the [Spanish] king's officers, and the goods are regularly entered in a register as they are brought into the warehouse, which when full is shut, and the doors sealed. All these precautions taken, the business is effectually carried on at night by a back door, and the European goods being taken out, indigo, cochineal, wines, tobacco, and above all bars of silver and pieces of eight are very exactly packed in the same cases, and placed as they stood before. . . . But then, so that those who have bought these goods may be able to sell them publicly, a new scheme takes place. A petition is presented to the governor, setting forth the foreigner's lack of money to pay for provisions, building the warehouse, timber for repairing the ship. . . . in consideration of all of which, permission is desired to dispose of some small part of their cargo, in order to discharge their debts. This being obtained in the usual manner, something of each sort of goods which had been privately sold, is now publicly brought to market, and purchased by those who had already larger quantities in their warehouses. Thus the whole of this scene of iniquity is transacted with all the formal solemnity which could attend an act of justice and compassion.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Given the widespread evasion of trade regulations and the depredations caused by pirates, would it have been more advantageous to Spain to allow its colonies to trade openly with whomever they wanted? Why or why not?
2. Did Spanish officials do all they could to protect the crown's interests? In what ways did they serve the needs of the local population? How did these officials serve their own interests?

3. How do the pirates who appear in these readings resemble the fictional pirates depicted in popular media of our own time? In what ways are they different?
4. Did any motives other than self-enrichment drive the pirates shown in these readings?
5. Given the ever-present threat of pirate attacks, why would people continue living in these coastal areas? How did they support themselves? Which groups benefited from the presence of pirates, and how?
6. Did pirates observe any kind of moral code among themselves? If so, what were some of their rules?
7. Does Exquemelin admire "el Brasiliano"? Why or why not?
8. What do these readings tell us about trade in commodities other than gold and silver?
9. How did the Miskito Indians adapt to the presence of Europeans?
10. What impressions do we get of life in Jamaica in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries?

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