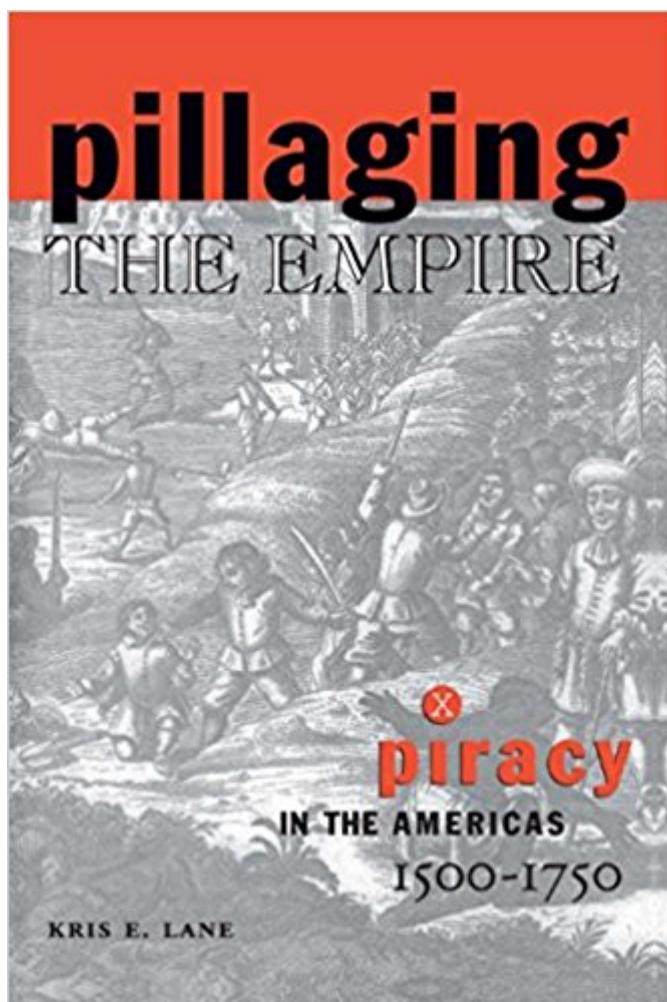


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Pillaging The Empire: Piracy In The Americas, 1500-1750 (Latin American Realities)



Synopsis

This introductory survey to maritime predation in the Americas from the age of Columbus to the reign of the Spanish king Philip V includes piracy, privateering (state-sponsored sea-robbery), and genuine warfare carried out by professional navies.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Pirates followed Columbus to the New World. At first, the French, English, and Dutch governments dispatched pirates and privateers to plunder Spanish ships and settlements. Soon pirates became "independent agents" and plundered on their own, with Spanish shipping from the New World to Europe making easy pickings. Lane (history, William and Mary Coll.) has written widely on the histories of piracy and witchcraft and has carefully studied the pirates' effect on the Spanish carrying trade. These were not the pirates of Treasure Island but murdering, pitiless buccaneers. Lane tells the stories without the myths, discussing such well-known pirates as Francis Drake, Henry Morgan, Piet Heyn, and Ann Bonn plus several lesser-known brigands, and he includes helpful discussions of shipbuilding, food, navigation, and more. This is a well-written and important scholarly examination of an often romanticized subject and the first of its kind in English. Recommended for all maritime history collections. Stanley Itkin, Hillside P.L., New Hyde Park, NY Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.

paper 0-7656-0257-1 Lane (History/Coll. of William & Mary) offers an overview of the history behind

the romances of piracy on the ``Spanish Main.'' Lanes thesis regarding piracy in American waters (his focus here) is that by and large piracy in the Caribbean (and, significantly, in the Pacific as well) had its roots in the response of the rest of Europe to Spanish and Portuguese imperial designs on the New World. The first Caribbean pirates were, in fact, French Huguenots, English ``privateers'' (the latter ostensibly acting on behalf of Queen Elizabeth), and Dutch sea-rovers, staunch Protestants all, who were particularly ill-disposed toward the Catholicism of the Iberian thrones. The best known of these the Englishmen John Hawkins and Francis Drake have earned inflated reputations as scourges of the Spaniards, but the Dutch may have inflicted even more damage on Spanish interests in the New World, as Lane points out in detail. Yet our highly colored picture of the pirates and their crews derived more from the final and briefest cycle of piracy in the New World; in the aftermath of the War of the Spanish Succession, just prior to the beginning of the 18th century, a new breed of buccaneer emerged, anarchic, owing allegiance to no flag but his (and, in isolated cases, her) own, and robbing from Spanish, English, French, or anyone else's shipping without discrimination. The most valuable contribution of this book is to put these most famous marauders into a larger historical context and to point out how brief their reign of seagoing terror really was. How disappointing, then, to discover that our fabled swashbucklers were little more than waterborne bandits who practiced a particularly ruthless form of political expediency. Lane recounts his tale in an amiable if somewhat dry voice, and the resulting book is more interesting than stirring. A useful corrective to the mythology of the pirate, but one wishes it were a little more hearty. (illustrations, maps, not seen) -- Copyright ©1998, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

also a good factual book for history buffs

This is a good book for researching about pirates or for anyone whose curious to learn the non-Hollywood version of piracy.

This book was clearly written by someone who loves pirates and knows a lot about them. Unfortunately it's packed so full of names, dates and places that there's no real room for narrative. As a reader I was so worried about which name went with which ship in what part of the world and under whose flag that I was often burned out on the subject after half a chapter. It includes maps which are very good and essential, and there are 'boxes' at the end of each chapter containing anecdotal information (such as chapter 2's "Elizabethan Era Navigation") that are more charming

and easy to digest than the main text. I quite honestly wanted to like this book, even while I was reading it, but the author never fully developed the narrative thread that would have made this sweeping look at 250 years of piracy read like anything other than a textbook.

Incorrect information and bias

Kris Lane apparently grew up with the same wide-eyed awe of pirates that most of us grew up with. His "Pillaging the Empire" does its best to reshape our opinions of pirates as a fun-loving bunch of misfits and saucy rogues, but like many recent works on the subject of piracy, he doesn't quite do it. One can't help but retain a skewed view of pirates, despite the unpleasant tales of how dirty ships were, how rotten the food was, how murderous the population was, etc. Like David Cordingly's excellent "Under the Black Flag", the pirate myth is largely debunked, the truth is revealed to be stranger than fiction, but you can still tell that at the end Lane (like Cordingly before him) still gets a kick out of recalling the pirate lifestyle. The book itself tells the story of American piracy in a fun manner, but everything is presented scholarly; sources are cited and there are enough annotated footnotes to keep dorks like me happy. The sidebar pieces are handy, and cover related topics like gambling in the 17th century, a typical pirate's diet, etc. Interesting stuff for the curious and a good awakening to those who think pirates are all guff-talking, one-eyed parrot owners with scurvy and gangrene.

This book is made mostly from second sources such as already printed books, but uses very few primary ones. In fact, it is missing key authors such as Hakluyt, he uses only the 1724 edition of Captain Johnson book (neglecting the 1726 which is the most complete), and it seems he used only a resumed version in one volume of Labat's massive work of more than 6 volumes, among other shortcomings. Then he puts in his bibliography the Don Quixote, but this novel has nothing to do with piracy in the Americas. I bought this book because it was advertised as being composed of many Spanish sources. But sadly, it has very, very few. In fact he only uses one primary Spanish source (Alsedo), and about two or three books written by Spaniards of our time. His "select bibliography" is very short (68 books in all), and I doubt he read any more. In general terms, the information he provides is okay, and he is careful not to make mistakes. Problem is, it is not an original book, nor it keeps up to what it promises. Readers that expect to find in it a rich quantity of Spanish references, archives, chroniclers, etceteras, do not be misled.

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