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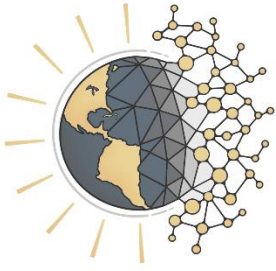
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Piracy in a Contested Periphery:
Incorporation and the Emergence of the Modern World-System in the Colonial Atlantic Frontier[1]

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Abstract

This article uses world-systems analysis to examine the role that pirates and privateers played in the competition between European core states in the Atlantic and Caribbean frontier during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Piracy was an integral part of core-periphery interaction, as a force that nations could use against one another in the form of privateers, and as a reaction against increasing constraints on freedom of action by those same states, thus forming a semiperiphery. Although modern portrayals of pirates and privateers paint a distinct line between the two groups, historical records indicate that their actual status was rather fluid, with particular people moving back and forth between the two. As a result, the individuals were on a margin between legality and treason, often crossing from one to the other. In this study we discuss how pirates and privateers fit into the margins of society in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, also known as the Golden Age of Piracy, specifically using the example of Edward Teach, aka Blackbeard. The present analysis can contribute to our understanding not only of piracy, but also of the structure of peripheries and semiperipheries that in some ways reflect resistance to incorporation.

Keywords: piracy, Atlantic frontier, contested periphery

The emergence of the modern world-system in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries followed a variety of economic and political contours. While the outlines of core-periphery interactions were rather clear in many cases, other facets were somewhat nebulous. We argue that piracy was one such activity that existed in the interstices of the nascent world-system, and as such serves as an example of the fluidity of its boundaries. Just as systems can pulse, so too can individuals oscillate in status when boundaries are not yet formalized. The intense competition among the European core states in the New World arena provided ill-defined limits that certain individuals exploited. The use of a world-systems approach to study piracy in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries demonstrates the dynamic nature of contested peripheries and semiperipheries (Allen 1996; Cline 2000) in this region, and perhaps elsewhere. The present analysis can contribute to our understanding of piracy as a historical phenomenon. Despite the vast literature on piracy (e.g., Baer 2007; Butler 2000; Equemelin 1972; Gosse 1946; Kuhn 2010; Land 2007; Latimer 2009; Pringle 2001; Rediker 2004), scholars often treat it as a romantic anomaly rather than an expected effect of core state competition. In addition, the presence of pirates reflects the lack of control that cores may wish to exert, but were unable to implement fully in the early stages of European expansion.

Conventional modern conceptions of pirates often focus on the character of individuals who are frequently depicted as lower class, cruel, dishonest and greedy men plundering any ship or harbor they come upon. These perceptions ignore the fact that many of these individuals were sponsored and encouraged by national policy and local political figures who provided a safe haven in return for a portion of the profits. Pirates were not always from the lowest social class; they often began as respected members of national navies. Pirates also were highly dependent on local economies and shipping industries, as they had to familiarize themselves with the trade routes, merchants, and harbors of many areas in order to maximize profit from their ventures. In various ways, pirates juggled national, local, and personal agendas.

In order to study the pirate's place in politics, commerce, and the economy, we examine the career of Edward Teach using world-systems analysis (WSA). His actions as a pirate and privateer provide a window for the examination of the Carolina coastal frontier. We also analyze Teach's actions in the larger world-systems framework to note how piracy and privateering were integrated into imperial commerce and politics at a time when the modern world-system was forming. Furthermore, the emphasis on Teach addresses a common critique of WSA, that it is a top-down approach that ignores individual nuance (Stein 1999). We contend that individuals do matter, but that the larger social structures within which they operate at any given point in time provide both opportunities and constraints that define personal action. Finally, a study of piracy illuminates some factors in the process of incorporation, including the development of peripheries and semiperipheries that WSA has not fully explored previously. We see our work as an example

of the type of world-system biography described by Harris and McQuade (2015) and developed by a variety of authors in a recent issue of this journal. As they note, the problem has been how to explicate the role of the individual in large-scale social structures: "Individuals and their constitutive environment are interpenetrated social phenomena. It is necessary to confront both in order to seriously reckon with either" (Harris and McQuade 2015: 278). Teach and others were products of their time who simultaneously took advantage of the conditions they confronted.

Defining Piracy

Literary allusions to piracy appeared as early as the Bronze Age in the Mediterranean, but more complete descriptions date to later periods (Heller-Roazen 2009:31-3; Rubin 1988:5). Heller-Roazen (2009:11) provides a particularly apt description, highlighting the ambiguous nature of the individuals involved:

> …piracy brings about the confusion and, in the most extreme cases, the collapse of the distinction between criminal and political categories. Acting outside regions of ordinary jurisdiction and conceived as not opponents of one but as "enemies of all," pirates cannot be considered common criminals, whose place may be defined in the terms of a single civil code. But they also cannot be represented as lawful enemies, for by virtue of their enmity with respect to a general collectivity they fail to constitute an association with which there might be peace as well as war.

The unclear boundaries on the colonial frontier in North America and the Caribbean, where competition among the Dutch, English, Spanish, and French facilitated the shifting nature of allegiances and motives, marked the evolution of the periphery. While the core states had established recognizable and at least somewhat stable national boundaries in Europe by the mid-seventeenth century, the logistical problems associated with the great distance to the New World attenuated the initial efforts to project power there in a clearly defined manner. In this as yet unsettled situation, the conditions existed for piracy to flourish.

The numerous terms used to refer to piracy in the early modern period reflect the state of flux that characterized the enterprise. Privateers were "seaborne mercenary forces" who served as extensions of European governments that sanctioned the actions through letters of marque (Kuhn 2010:9), while pirates operated independently without government approval. Thomson (1994:54) notes, "Privateering reflected state rulers' efforts to build state power; piracy reflected some people's efforts to resist that project." This statement encapsulates well the tension in the contested periphery along the Atlantic coast and in the Caribbean where the relationship between pirates and their respective crowns was ambivalent (Chet 2014:5-6; Heller-Roazen 2009:88). Immanuel

Wallerstein (1980: 158-59) argues such actions were part of the mercantilist system in that they enhanced the balance of trade and helped establish trade monopolies by depriving their Spanish rivals of key resources and establishing colonies that were both sources of raw materials and exclusive markets for finished goods. Furthermore, Wallerstein (1980: 188) suggests that privateering was an effort by the French and English "to destroy each other's trade networks" as part of the mercantilist enterprise.

The variety of words suggests, at least in part, the variable status of pirates, who often operated outside the rules that European core states attempted to promulgate in an effort to impose order on the explosive and somewhat chaotic growth of the modern world-system. The resulting interactions reflect Hall's (1986, 1989) description of peripheries as sets of relationships. For example, as "the naval vanguard of the Ottoman Turks" (Jamieson 2012:14), the Barbary Corsairs played an important role in the clash of world-systems that was in part responsible for European efforts to seek new connections to East Asia; one effect was European contact with the Americas, which in turn became another setting for core rivalry.

Piracy accompanied the development of the trans-Atlantic commercial and colonial efforts of European states as they increasingly turned their attention to the west. The French were the first to attack Spanish ships in the mid-sixteenth century, followed by the English several decades later, and the Dutch in the seventeenth century. A number of scholars date the so-called Golden Age of Piracy, the time of Edward Teach (Blackbeard), Bartholomew Roberts (Black Bart), and William Kidd, between c. 1690 and 1730 (Kuhn 2010:10-21). While the gold and silver that the Spanish acquired in Mexico and elsewhere certainly attracted raids by their European imperial rivals, pirates in the New World also realized profits from the capture and sale of food and other commodities, such as sugar, rice, and wine. Pirates often acted as smugglers, providing such goods to residents in coastal communities and islands at lower cost because they evaded tax payments (Chet 2014: 24). We would like to make it clear that the differences between pirates and privateers can be discussed and understood as individual histories within a world-system perspective.

Privateering on the Carolina Coast

The Carolina Coast provides a good example of the early modern world-system in action. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, the region was a frontier where English colonists confronted native cultures. In such border areas social relations are in a state of flux (Hall, Kardulias, and Chase-Dunn 2011: 257). In this instance, frontier is equivalent to periphery, the zone from which a core state extracts resources, and in so doing pulls the region into its economic orbit through the process of incorporation. In the early stages of incorporation, the links between core and periphery are negotiable to some extent; there is space for indigenous people to shift allegiance between core states that contend for control of a periphery. The periphery can also act

as a zone to escape control by disaffected or disenfranchised citizens of the core. The Atlantic frontier offered such an outlet for Europeans, including pirates. Rediker (2001:155) states the case eloquently:

> Here we can see how a sizable group of Anglo-Americans—poor men in canvas jackets and tarred breeches—constructed a social world where they had "the choice in themselves."…Pirates constructed a culture of masterless men… Beyond the church, beyond the family, beyond disciplinary labor, and using the sea to distance themselves from the powers of the state, they carried out a strange experiment.

While Rediker's point is well taken, placing his statement in the world-systems perspective provides a more comprehensive way of thinking about pirates by positioning them within the framework of resistance to institutional consolidation. In this sense, piracy was not "a strange experiment", but one of many attempts by both indigenous people and many occupants of core nations to maintain or reestablish control of their lives during the process of incorporation. Linebaugh and Rediker (2000:162-63) argue that pirates formed a democratic subculture with an egalitarian ethos, limiting the power of a ship's captain to punish the crew and distributing rewards more equitably than was the norm on merchant and naval vessels. Rediker (2004: 5-18) argues that the violence perpetrated by pirates was in reaction to the actions of the "nation-state, as terrorist" (2004: 10) by which European powers exploited sailors (among others) in the service of capitalist profit.

One of the problems in distinguishing pirates from privateers is that various seamen, untethered from the ambitions of nationalist elites, held no particular allegiance to states since those entities limited their freedom of action, and thus could move in and out of links to formal governments. In their dual, switchable roles, pirates/privateers could at times serve the imperialist goals of European powers, or their own parochial interests. They also reflect a period of intense hegemonic rivalry among the various European powers (Chase-Dunn and Lerro 2014:24). In either capacity, they had a significant impact on the regional economy of the coastal Carolinas. A comparison of the Carolinas to other colonies during King George's War (1744-1748) and the War of Jenkin's Ear (1739-1743) in terms of the number of private vessels, prize data, enemy prize actions, and enemy cruising areas as they relate to the regional economy, of Charleston in particular, illustrates this point.

When the War of Jenkin's Ear began, South Carolina was a wealthy colony due to rice production, which began in the 1690s. The amount of rice that was exported was great, especially when compared to the population of Charleston itself (Swanson 1997). During King George's War, Spanish and French privateers had a significant impact on the port cities of the English

colonies. The Carolina coast was particularly vulnerable, especially between St. Simons Island and the Cape Fear River (Figure 1); Okracoke Island and Cape Lookout were protected rendezvous points for Spanish and French privateers, whose ships were men-of-war owned by private individuals rather than the respective governments. These vessels were able to provide resources to Spanish and French colonies and the individual crews without depleting the treasuries of the home countries or the colonies themselves. The Carolina coast was such a tempting target for these enemy privateers that the threat of being attacked in Charleston harbor was constant, especially during the later years of the war. It is estimated that enemy privateers captured at least 21 ships that made port in the harbor and took material worth nearly £150,000 sterling (Swanson 1997). Because of frequent attacks, Carolina rice exports fell dramatically during the war, as did its imports from Britain which were often captured before they reached the colonies. Prices also dropped, with a great negative impact on Carolina's economy.

While privateering was profitable for the Spanish and the French, it was less so for the English of coastal Carolina. Carolina's harbors were pivotal in colonial trade, but were not equipped with a large military fleet to protect them from foreign privateers. Robert Dinwiddie, the surveyor general of customs in 1740, informed the Board of Trade that Carolina residents owned fewer than 25 ships, and on multiple occasions Robert Pringle noted the scarcity of mariners in the area. Even help from the Royal Navy could not prevent raids within Charleston harbor. The lack of ships and the likelihood of enemy attack impacted the local economy as well, via dramatically increased shipping rates (Swanson 1997). Colonial Carolina was what we may call a weakly-held periphery—the core state that held jurisdiction over it did not project enough military force to protect it properly.

This dearth of key resources prevented the Carolinas from becoming a major hub for British privateering, unlike the thriving colonial harbors of Newport, New York, and Philadelphia. The situation affected the revenue that Charleston received from captured prizes as well. During the course of King George's War, 51 prizes were captured by English predators and brought into Charleston harbor. However, only 14 were taken by Carolinians compared to the 23 prizes taken by privateers from Massachusetts, New York, and Rhode Island. As a result, Carolina ports did not receive much, if any, of the wealth from captured ships. Colonial policy did allow Charleston to realize a minimal financial gain from the seized vessels, as court and admiralty fees and taxes were applied to all documents, loading, unloading, storing of cargo, and selling of goods (Swanson 1997). However, British mercantilism imposed restrictions on the export of Carolina's products, creating "extreme economic dependency" (Smith 1987: 7) for Charleston and the whole region. Smith (1987: 18) notes "World-system position sets the parameters for more local processes which ultimately are the proximate causes of urban growth or decline." The southern colonies basically served as an extractive zone (Kardulias 2012), with shipping and finances largely controlled from

Britain, thus keeping the Carolina coast in a peripheral status. Piracy was in part an effort to loosen this tight hold on the frontier economy.

Figure 1. Map of the Coastal Carolina region.
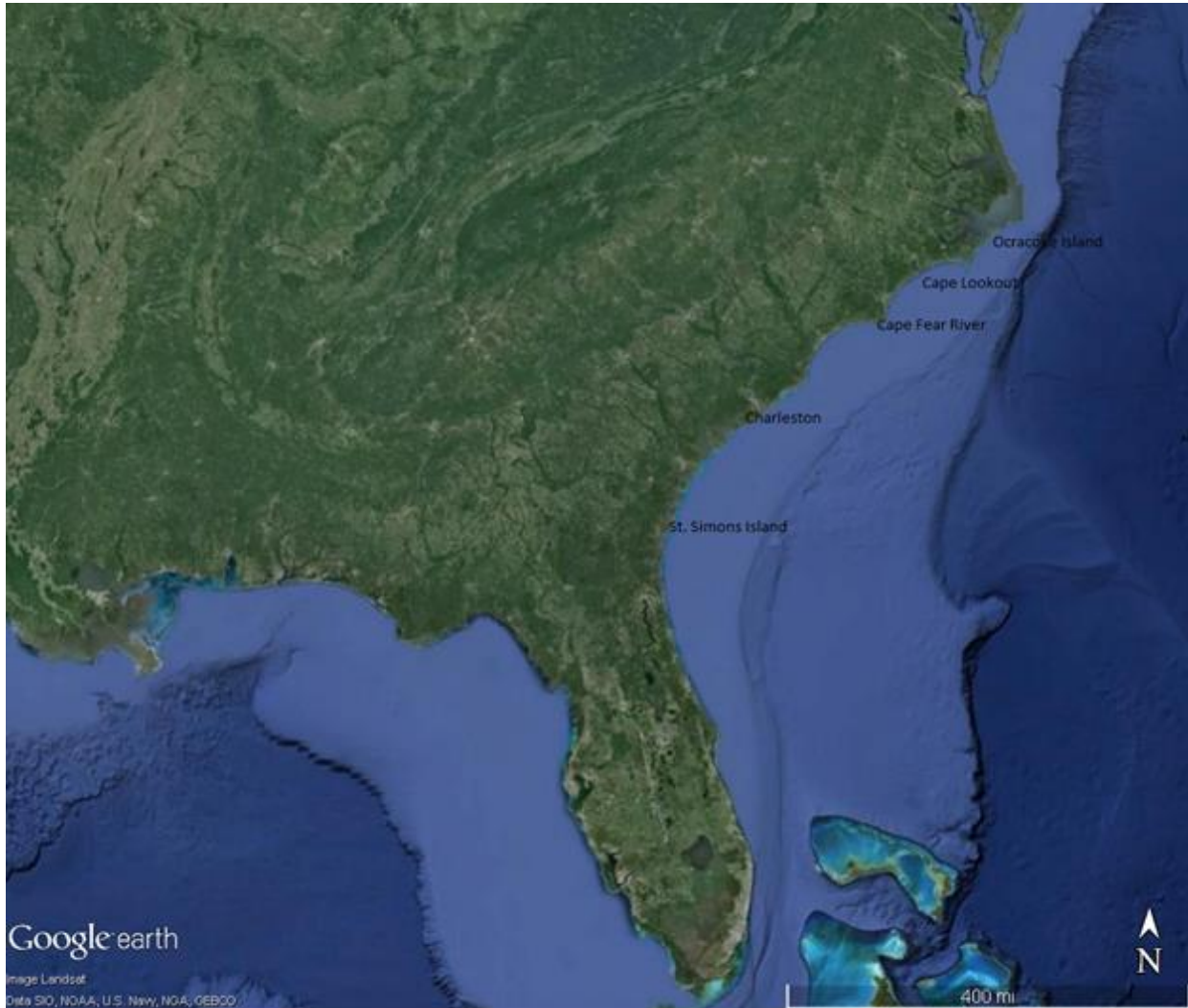
Source**:** Google earth. http://www.earth.google.com (September 4, 2015)

This evidence reflects the status of the coastal Carolinas as in the moderate range of Chase-Dunn and Hall's (1997: 63-64) continuum of incorporation. In this stage, the core has moved beyond taking plunder from an indigenous society, and has begun the process of producing or extracting commodities for the world market. The Carolinas produced an important food (rice) that was exported for consumption elsewhere. Pirates played an important role in that they plundered the agricultural product of the colonists and threw a wrench into the commodity chains the cores sought to establish; this practice became widespread, as witnessed by the number of privateers

from other colonies who preyed on ships in the Carolinas and all along the Atlantic frontier. Pirates/privateers further disrupted the commodity chains by selling their contraband to people in the Atlantic frontier. Edward Teach serves as a good example of how an individual could operate in this period, providing an impediment to full incorporation of a periphery by core states, and in fact interposing himself as part of a semiperiphery that could pivot quickly to take advantage of the fluid conditions in marginal arenas.

Blackbeard

The career of Edward Teach, more commonly known as Blackbeard, is a case study of how piracy and privateering operated in the Atlantic frontier and affected the local and global economies. Teach was born in Bristol, England c. 1680. It is believed that he fought in Queen Anne's War (1702-1713; also called the War of the Spanish Succession), although there are no records to document his activities as a privateer. Shortly after the war, Teach turned to piracy, moving his base from Jamaica to New Providence Island in the Bahamas, which was a known hub for freebooters. In 1717, he and Captain Benjamin Hornigold captured *La Concorde,* a French guineaman that contained a wealthy cargo of gold dust, coins, jewelry, slaves, and other merchandise. Teach requested command of the ship, and renamed the vessel *Queen Anne's Revenge* (Lee 2000; Moore 1997).[2]

In January 1718, Teach established his base at Ocracoke near Bath Towne, NC. From there, he pillaged a number of vessels entering and leaving the harbor (Konstam 2007). Shortly after, King George I of England declared that all pirates who surrendered could keep their treasures. Teach complied and likely left *Queen Anne's Revenge* grounded in Ocracoke Inlet before traveling to Bath to receive a pardon from the Governor, Charles Eden, who placed him in service as one of the few privateers on the Colonial coast (Lee 2000).

This move to the Crown's service was short-lived, as Teach eventually left Bath and returned to the *Queen Anne's Revenge*. He sailed to Honduras to procure a crew in order to take the harbor of Charleston, South Carolina. These actions forced Charleston to stop all inbound and outbound vessels, although nine ships were taken in six days. Teach took hostages from the ships and demanded that the government of South Carolina supply his crew with medicine (Ellms 1993:337). When this request was denied, Teach moved his fleet deeper into the harbor to attack, and the governor finally submitted to the pirate's demands (Lee 2000). According to court depositions (Headlam 1930), Teach then deliberately grounded the *Queen Anne's Revenge* on a

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[2] Rediker (2001:146-7) argues that the common use of "revenge" in the naming of pirate ships reflected the desire to exact vengeance against those who had wronged them, primarily merchant captains. In world-systems terms, the merchant captains were key players in the exploitation of the peripheries and labor in general during incorporation, and so pirates were resisting the encroachment and loss of rights.

sandbar in Beaufort Inlet, fled with 40 crewmen and as much treasure as they could carry on foot (Moore 2001), leaving behind others to fend for themselves (Lee 2000; Ellms 1993:337).

In 1718, Teach and his men were put on trial in the Vice Admiralty Courts for taking a French vessel bound for Martinique. The pirates claimed that they had found the vessel abandoned. Governor Charles Eden awarded the vessel to Teach and his crew. Problems then arose over distribution of the cargo. According to North Carolina salvage laws, a portion of all retrieved cargo was to be paid to the Crown or the local authorities. The ship had been carrying a cargo of sugar and other items, and 60 barrels of sugar had been delivered to Governor Eden's plantation house in Bath, NC for this payment. It was also rumored that 20 hogsheads were delivered to the home of Tobias Knight, Governor Eden's secretary and the collector of customs (Konstam 2006; Ellms 1993). Governor Alexander Spotswood of Virginia claimed that the sugar was a payoff to Knight for assisting the pirates (Konstam 2006; Ellms 1993). The evidence suggests that Eden and Teach had struck a bargain, an arrangement that was not unusual at the time (Ellms 1993).

The Admiralty in London had dispatched several officers to Virginia to protect against pirates and they agreed to aid Spotswood, who commissioned two civilian vessels, and designated First Lieutenant Robert Maynard to command the attack (Konstam 2006; Ellms 1993). In the battle that ensued at Okracoke on November 22, 1718, Maynard's force overwhelmed the pirates, killed and beheaded Teach, and suspended the severed head from the bowsprit as a warning to other pirates. Maynard's men found a number of letters and papers that showed the pirate's interactions with Governor Eden. The remaining crew members were then tried and all but two were hanged (Konstam 2006; Ellms 1993).

The Structure of Pirate Crews

In addition to pirate captains like Blackbeard, it is also important to consider the individuals aboard a vessel when examining how pirates operated within the larger world-system. Particular skillsets were more appropriate to piratical endeavors, as is reflected in depositions of colonial officials that examine which crew members were forced to join the pirates and who went willingly after a ship was captured. Such documentary evidence demonstrates the active, although at times constrained, role of persons in world-systems and addresses the criticism that WSA is strictly a top-down approach that ignores individual agency. For example, Chase-Dunn and Lerro (2014) make a strong case for the role of individuals in their complex model of long-term social change.

Muster rolls from *La Concorde* indicate that between 70 and 80 individuals were aboard the vessel in March 1717 (Moore and Daniel 2001: 22-23, Table 1). These men were assigned to a number of tasks on the ship, with positions that included captains, mariner officers, skilled craftsmen, seamen, surgeons, and clergy, each paid according to their rank. Monthly pay ranged

from 5 to 100 livres, with the cabin boys receiving the least and the captain garnering the most pay.

Of the individuals aboard *La Concorde*, a large majority were allowed to return to Nantes, their home port, following capture. These included the captains, the chaplain, the quartermaster, the steward, nearly half of the seamen, the purser, and the volunteers. The chief surgeon and the second (or assistant) surgeon, the first pilot, the caulker, the second cook, and two gunsmiths were forced to join the pirates. However, according to the muster roll, a number of crewmen joined the pirates voluntarily. These included at least two seamen and two cabin boys (Moore and Daniel 2001:22-3, Table 1).

Teach only retained the most experienced members of the crew who would most benefit his own operation. Carpenters and caulkers were needed to repair the ship, and surgeons were critical to aid ill or wounded crewmen. A few of the highest paid (and perhaps most experienced) seamen were also forced into piracy, as was the first pilot, who likely knew the waters quite well. A few individuals also made the choice to join the pirates voluntarily. These were primarily low-paid cabin boys, who likely saw piracy as a way to gain a better wage. In world-systems terms, these people attempted to evade the poor labor conditions of European core states by exercising a degree of autonomy. On naval and merchant vessels, discipline was brutal, food and pay often scarce (Rediker 2001), and piracy provided an important outlet within an increasingly restrictive world-system.

Piracy and the Broader World-System

Wallerstein's (1974; 1980) initial formulation of the world-systems approach, with its emphasis on the development of the capitalist world-economy in the context of European expansion, provides an important way to analyze the role of piracy. One issue that the original version of WSA did not address fully was the structure of the system at the contact points between cores and peripheries, in those areas furthest from Europe. How exactly would a core state project economic, political, judicial, and military power in the distant colonies? The semiperiphery is needed between these areas to aid in transporting goods, mobilize local capital, and house lesser forms of manufacturing (McCormick 1990:126), fostering the development of globalization (Hall 1999). The fact that the European states could focus on only certain portions of the vast areas they claimed as imperial domains gave individuals the flexibility to establish semi-autonomous havens and to shift allegiance between their own personal agendas and those of the state. We argue that piracy flourished in this period because of the underdeveloped nature of the European world-system in the New World. In his later work, Wallerstein (1989:129-30) describes the process by which a core engulfs a region in a world-economy as occurring in "three successive moments for a zone—being in the external arena, being incorporated, and being peripheralized. None of these moments is

static; all of them involve processes." Carlson (2012:20) elaborates on this issue: "Incorporation may be viewed as the continued broadening of the world-system, while peripheralization is the deepening of the world-system." The complex of different networks described by Chase-Dunn and Hall (1997) also has a bearing on this matter.

One can view the Atlantic coast of North America and the Caribbean as undergoing this development. We argue that this region was in the process of incorporation, but not fully peripheralized in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. It was in this intervening period that piracy witnessed its heyday (the so-called Golden Age of Piracy) for good reason—the mechanisms of state control were not fully implemented, leaving space for freebooters to act. The relationship of pirates and privateers to states can also be viewed in world-system terms. Privateers were deemed good (or at least acceptable) because their actions contributed to capital accumulation by the state they served since a major portion of the booty they gained went to the Crown. Pirates, on the other hand, in their efforts to keep loot for themselves, denied that capital to the state.

Another aspect is the role of preciosities. The exchange of luxury goods between elites helped to bind together some aspects of the world-system. Reciprocal gifts of rare items created stronger ties between high status individuals in different societies. However, there was also intense competition over the sources of such materials, as well as objects in various stages of production (e.g., gold and silver ingots, coins, and decorative items). Pirates and privateers placed great emphasis on such materials because they had very high value compared to bulk, and could provide ready access to a wide variety of other resources. These materials formed an important part of a prestige goods network (PGN; Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997: 52-55; see also Chase-Dunn and Lerro 2014: 20-21) on which privateers and pirates preyed; the difference in their actions is that the former enhanced the fortunes of their client core state, while the latter used the loot to support themselves outside the context of state and imperial designs.

In his discussion of the process of incorporation, Carlson (2012: 23-7) notes that in the early stages, activity on a frontier is guided by a limited amount of information, and the edges are not clearly set. These conditions often encourage high risk/high return behavior on the part of various individuals. This seems to be an apt way to think about the role of pirates in the Atlantic coastal region and Caribbean. During the long period when the Atlantic frontier was being incorporated into the capitalist world-economy, there was sufficient uncertainty about precise boundaries between the nascent colonies of the English, French, Spanish, and Dutch that individual Europeans could undertake commercial and military expeditions either with or without government sanction. Wallerstein (1980: 159-161) points out that piracy served as a form of primitive accumulation within the competition among European states in the New World. In the Caribbean during the seventeenth century, pirates who raided Spanish ships found ready markets for their booty among the islands controlled by the Dutch, French, and English. Smuggled

contraband thus became a key element of the commercial network in the Caribbean; the dual effect was to benefit the northern European powers while undermining the Spanish economy in the region. Wallerstein also notes how the practices changed as the periphery became more fully incorporated: "The buccaneers had *plundered.* The English (and the French) were now ready to settle for *illegitimate trade*, since it involved the same transfer of surplus, but at the same time guaranteed continued production, which the plundering of the buccaneers did not" (1980: 161; italics in original).

As states tried to institute more controls, certain players still had sufficient leeway to play within or outside the rules; those who took the latter path could be subject to severe punishment, but there was also the opportunity for substantial reward. While pirates often walked a thin line between legal and illegal actions—actions that were defined by states to protect their own interests—they also facilitated the process of incorporation by pulling various parties into their economic transactions, legal and illicit. In fact, one can argue that pirates seeking safe refuges became intimately familiar with coastal and island topography and thus aided in reducing what Carlson (2001) calls the zone of ignorance.

In the standard model, economic benefits accrue to a core through its control of peripheral zones. However, the periphery is not totally passive in this relationship (Hall 1986). Hall, Kardulias, and Chase-Dunn (2011) discuss the concepts of negotiated and contested peripheries as mechanisms in a more balanced process. Kardulias (2007: 55) provides a definition of negotiated peripherality as "the willingness and ability of individuals in peripheries to determine the conditions under which they will engage in trade, ceremonial exchange, intermarriage, adoption of outside religious and political ideologies, etc. with representatives of expanding states." This process involves the amount of control the periphery maintains in determining conditions for interacting with the core. Individuals are responsible for this negotiation, and it is largely on their terms that agents of the core are allowed to remain on their land, at least initially (Hall et al. 2011). Kardulias (1990) discusses this in greater detail as it applies to the Native American fur trade. Because agents of the core are bargaining for the periphery's resources, there must be an agreement that best encompasses the needs and wishes of both parties involved. This agreement cannot be static, however, as the situation and circumstances surrounding the terms may change at any moment.

We expand this concept by noting that negotiation extends to the interactions between elements of the core in how they adjust to the conditions they confront on the frontier. Since state control is often tenuous along the edges of the world-system, individuals have the opportunity to adjust their relationship to nascent institutional structures in these zones. People are often free to modify, manipulate, and even ignore the dictates of state representatives. Social and political identity was thus fluid in those areas where states could not easily project their power. The lack of

complete regulation provided individuals with substantial latitude in deciding the nature of their engagement with the emerging world-system, especially in the marginal areas that constituted the zone of incorporation. In fact, one can argue that the communities that pirates created on land and at sea were attempts to defy the efforts of core states to create institutional structures that restricted individual action as part of the nation-building program. In this sense, pirates created a semiperiphery to provide some autonomy. This situation created the space within which Teach and other pirates operated.

In addition to the negotiated periphery, there is also the potential for a contested periphery (Allen 1996; Cline 2000). In this case, multiple cores compete for control of the periphery with the ultimate goal being the procurement of key resources offered by the periphery. Contested peripheries may also be situated in areas between cores, although this is not always the case (Hall et al. 2011). Many times they have less power to name their own terms than a negotiated periphery and are merely pawns of the core states vying for full control of the resources.

This competition can be carried out directly or indirectly (Figure 2). When a core state placed its agents in the periphery, especially individuals capable of enacting regulations on peripheral activities, it gained the ability to limit contact and trade negotiations with other core states as part of the struggle for hegemony (Leitner 2013:265). This allowed one core to procure a greater number of resources for its own use, but it also created greater hostilities with the other core states. Many times, this led to declared warfare between competing states. During periods of war, states with a strong naval force would employ individuals to become agents of the core. These individuals were privateers, and were legally able to attack enemy merchant and warships without fear of consequences from core administration. Privateers were given official orders from the administration of the core and were only allowed to attack their given targets. Once the target had been taken or eliminated, privateers were allowed to keep only a small portion of the spoils, except in rare cases when a core state allowed its agents to keep the entirety of what was taken. In this respect, core states used privateers to bolster or extend their political-military networks (PMNs; Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997: 52-55).

Privateers were not always able to take the richest ships of another core state, as they were only to attack the vessels which were assigned as targets. In many cases, the benefits for the individuals were not enough to offset the risks involved in the attack, as the largest percentage was to be returned to the government that issued the letter of marque. It was likely these reasons that caused privateers to illegally take other vessels once their assigned targets had been eliminated. If these other vessels belonged to a competing state, the actions of the privateers were overlooked and often praised, as in the case of Sir Francis Drake. However, if the ships belonged to allies of a particular state, or even the state itself, the actions were immediately considered illegal and the

privateer was labeled a pirate. The status proved flexible in these and other situations along the New World periphery.

Privateers and other men in the Royal Navies also may have turned to piracy willingly at the conclusion of a war. The men were experienced seamen, and piracy was generally more profitable than legal ventures (Rediker 2001:153). They were able to assess the benefits of attacking certain ships, and make choices concerning what targets to pursue while trying to offset the risk of punishment by the state.

With this relationship, the line between privateering and piracy is largely blurred, placing these individuals in a liminal position in regards to the legality of their actions. Inversely, the opposite was true as well, allowing pirates to become privateers. In a number of cases, core states employed pirates who had committed crimes against them and offered the seamen letters of pardon if they attacked certain competitors. This process allowed individuals a means of escaping punishment, as well as offering a legal way of making a profit. In many cases, however, the gains were considerably less than what could be acquired from piracy.

The actions of pirates and privateers reveal the incomplete control exerted by European states on the edges of the emerging world-system in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In his description of the "Atlantic frontier,"Chet (2014:22) presents support for this argument:

> The persistence of piracy in the early modern era was indicative of commonly held beliefs about maritime commerce. Both metropolitan and colonial observers in the eighteenth century viewed the Atlantic as a region "beyond the line," where Britons were free to engage in forms of violence that were unacceptable in Britain and Europe's law-bound state system. Similarly, trade in the Straits of Malacca was described in 1800 as armed commerce. In 1700, Jamaica's royal governor, Sir William Beeston, informed the Board of Trade that he could not rely on officers of the Royal Navy to tackle the scourge of piracy, since they themselves engaged in armed commerce…Indeed, Atlantic commerce took place in a constant war zone. During the "long eighteenth century," trade was mostly conducted against a backdrop of globalized European wars. But even in peacetime, the Atlantic was a place of chronic violence, where no single power could expect others to accept its jurisdiction, its territorial claims, and its understanding of the law.

As Hall (2009) points out, frontiers are places where individuals can express their agency and individual motivations. These are also the arenas of ethnogenesis.[3] The actions of pirates exemplify the role of agency, as they shifted loyalties in concert with their individual needs and desires. Buccaneers would switch allegiance at various times, raid Spanish posts, but also conduct trade with coastal communities (Wolf 2010: 155). The formation of a pirate subculture made up of such individuals is an example of willful creation of social rules and structure. Generally, pirates elected their captains, invested quartermasters with the authority to distribute necessary items fairly, and governed their affairs through a council and written articles compiled by a ship's crew, all in direct contrast to the naval command structure (Rediker 2001: 142-43). This can also be viewed as an effort to evade the social circumscription that accompanied the development of the modern world-system (Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997: 237). Hall (2013) also points out the problem of setting boundaries, in particular in areas where the movement of people is relatively unimpeded. In addition, the Atlantic colonial frontier can be viewed as a semiperiphery, a region "*likely to generate new institutional forms that transform system structures and modes of accumulation*" (Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997: 79; italics in original).

The actions of various pirates reflect a logic of individual choice. These people acted on the basis of perceived benefit after weighing the costs, and thus straddled a line separating legal and illegal activity. Pirates were offered letters of marque when the existing navies and privateers proved unable to eliminate a specified target. Because piracy was illegal and placed under municipal criminal law and the Admiralty courts, a number of individuals faced the threat of hanging if the Crown was able to capture them, and these letters offered amnesty for previous crimes (Rubin 1988). A pirate would then weigh the costs (such as losing a percentage of their profit to the Crown and not being able to choose the richest targets at will) against the benefits (their record wiped clean and no fear of hanging, allowing them to later resume their illegal practices if they so wished) to determine if his best interest was to support the government. Occasionally, a pirate would be offered a choice between accepting a letter of marque or being hanged for treason. In this case, it was prudent for the pirate to become a privateer.

In addition to this direct conversion from piracy to privateering, these individuals also were overlooked if they attacked a target from certain core states. Orders against pirates were only issued if they attacked vessels from their own state.[4] If this was the case, pirates had to take extra precautions in their assessment of the risks and benefits of continuing to attack vessels of their

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[3] Rediker (2004: 31) notes that pirates who settled in Madagascar interbred with the natives to form "a new ethnicity."

[4] In fact, there were some pirates (e.g., Benjamin Hornigold) who refused to attack ships of a certain Crown (Rediker 2004: 36).

native country. Occasionally, marginal areas would be used as bases for pirates, allowing them to evade capture and punishment by gaining the protection of the rulers of these locations.

Overall, piracy can be viewed as either a legal or illegal practice, depending on what state the actions are against, as is shown in Figure 2. At times, pirates ignored or manipulated these distinctions in order to retain their freedom of action, and in so doing created an additional layer (semiperiphery) that often thwarted the imperial ambitions of core states.

By placing piracy in a larger world-system context, one is better able to understand the actions and motives involved as part of the systemic competition. Because these individuals operated on the periphery, they were able to greatly profit from legal and illegal actions. These actions constituted choices that allowed the individuals to maximize their gains depending on which status was more beneficial at a particular time. Most importantly, the options also provided a means of determining how to negotiate with the cores to gain the most desirable benefits.

While privateers enjoyed the safety provided to them by colonial governments, those who resorted to piracy were closely watched by the same authorities, as evidenced by formal core-periphery interactions. Colonial governors sent depositions to the Council of Trade and Plantations in London to outline piratical activity and provide warnings to officials in their respective areas. Linebaugh and Rediker (2000: 167-173) argue that pirates threatened the lucrative Atlantic trade (especially in African slaves) in the 1710s and 1720s, leading to the systematic English effort to eliminate them.

Benefitting from a Contested Periphery

The fine border between piracy and privateering provides an example of how individuals were able to benefit from a contested periphery (see Figure 2). The competition between the European states was established by direct and indirect means in terms of declared warfare and individual actions, respectively. In these conditions, the economic benefit of piracy and privateering was tremendous. These individuals could have chosen to become legal agents of the core as privateers or could have operated independently as pirates. Privateers added to state coffers by taking actions against enemy vessels. Pirates may have also attacked these enemy vessels. In this case, their actions were typically condoned, as they eliminated a threat to the royal economy. However, if the pirates took a vessel from their own country of origin, the Crown immediately considered them to be criminals because the attack negatively affected its profits. Pirates were clearly liminal; their actions were seen as evidence of privateering when it was a colonial vessel operating against a designated enemy of the state, and piracy when it was an action against colonial harbors or ships of particular states. Furthermore, businessmen saw privateering as both an opportunity to earn capital for themselves, while simultaneously protecting the colony's commodities, which also allowed them to make a profit (Leeson 2009).

Figure 2. The status of piracy and privateering in a contested periphery.
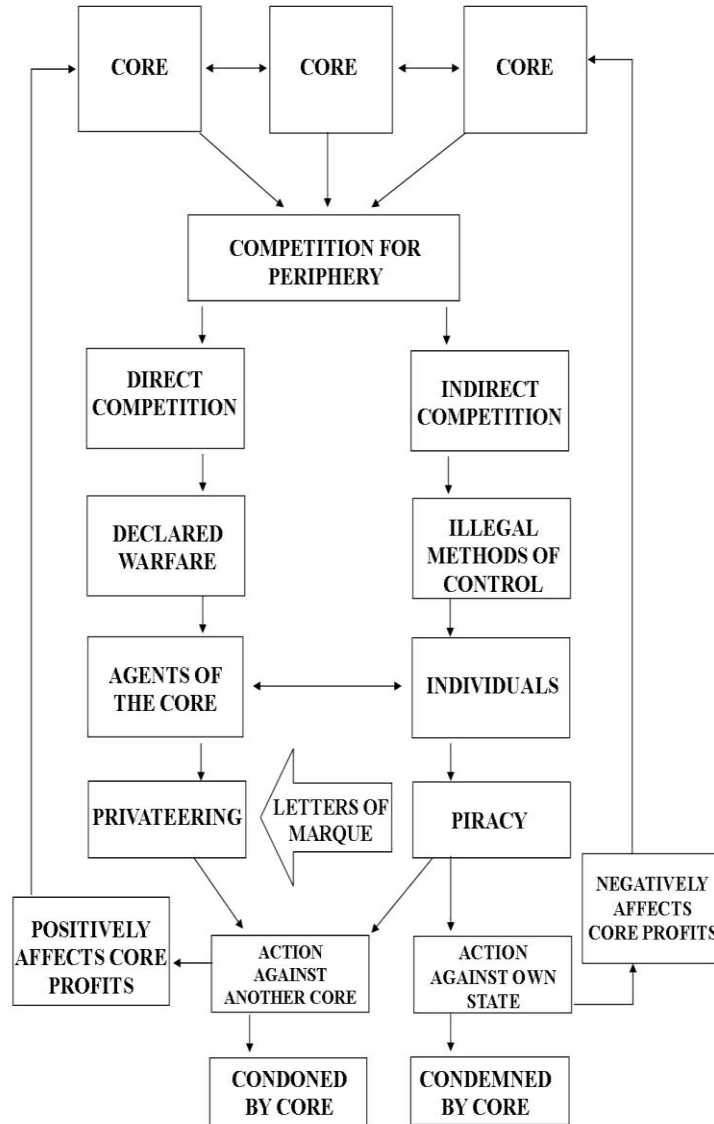
Individuals may have also crossed the line between privateering and piracy a number of times during their nautical careers. The seamen were able to weigh the costs and risks associated with each of their actions before making the decisions that would place them in one group or the other. For example, a privateer assigned to attack a specific target instead of a wealthier vessel within range may have decided to risk retribution from the Crown and take the ship with a higher

value in order to make a profit for himself. However, if it appeared that the wealthier vessel would be more difficult to attack successfully, he might have kept to his orders, letting the other pass unharmed. In the same way, a pirate who feared capture could have negotiated with the Crown to obtain letters of marque that legalized his actions and ensured some degree of safety for himself and his crew. Others might instead have chosen to continue their piratical actions in favor of a hefty profit. Clearly, in these instances, people like Teach tried to negotiate the best possible situation for themselves; this was in part made possible by the fact that pirates and privateers operated in the crevices of the emerging world-system in which state-subject relations were often in flux.

These choices also influenced which individuals joined a pirate crew and which were returned to shore after a vessel was captured. It was beneficial for the pirates to force experienced seamen and specialized individuals (such as the surgeons, carpenters, and pilots) into piracy in order to maintain their own vessels and crew. In the same way, a life of piracy appeared advantageous to certain individuals on the captured ship. In many cases, cabin boys and lower-paid seamen could maximize their own gains by turning to piracy, despite the risk of punishment from the government.

The conversion of the French slave ship *La Concorde* into the famed *Queen Anne's Revenge,* and its captain, Edward Teach, provide specific examples of how piracy fits into the broader world-system. During the eighteenth century, piracy held a fluid status in the contested periphery in regards to the targets being attacked and the economy that was being affected by these actions. As a result, these individuals made choices within the system in order to maximize their gains and offset the associated risks, while at the same time moving between legal (or condoned) and illegal actions. The career of Blackbeard presents one case study that demonstrates how piracy operated in a contested frontier.

Conclusion

The image of pirates has been highly fictionalized since the time of Edward Teach into some combination of a cunning rogue and a lying, cheating villain (Babits 2001; Marshall 2011; Lee 2000). Depictions of Blackbeard as a fearsome pirate have been in circulation since Captain Charles Johnson published *The General History of the Pyrates* in 1724. This treatment obscures the complex reality of Teach and others like him as players in the emerging modern world-system. WSA is particularly well suited to examine the role of piracy as an integral aspect of European competition on the Atlantic frontier. Pirates/privateers at times facilitated the process of incorporation and other times frustrated it with their independent actions. One can say that they

alternately acted as agents of the European core, and also took advantage of its loose control in peripheral zones. These individuals in some ways mark the transition from a tributary to capitalist mode of production during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. When they plundered ships and settlements in the Atlantic frontier, pirates were appendages of the Spanish, French, English, and Dutch imperialists who seized key resources from native peoples; the difference is that pirates preyed on members of the core states. One can perhaps also refer to the Golden Age of Pirates as the period of the pirate semiperiphery, since they interposed themselves between core and periphery in certain ways.

Teach, Drake, and others exhibit the liminality of persons in ill-defined social positions. These individuals moved back and forth between piracy and privateering at various points in their careers, gaining and losing the favor of their respective Crowns in turn. The decision to change status often was dependent on the costs and benefits of a particular action. Because the Crown would approve of certain actions on a case-by-case basis, the seamen were able to change status and maintain a level of fluidity within the larger world-system.

Furthermore, these actions largely benefitted a state's economy. Privateers and merchants brought a great deal of wealth into their colonial harbors, but the prosperity was uneven. While the other colonies benefited from having a large number of prizes brought into their harbors, Charleston only profited from minimal tariff fees and a small number of ships captured by Carolina privateers. Blackbeard's ability to barricade Charleston harbor also demonstrates the great impact pirates could have on the local economy, and the weakness of the British government in the periphery that was nominally under its control.

Contemporary piracy has important similarities to and differences with past manifestations. In the Horn of Africa, in the Straits of Malacca, the Niger River delta, and elsewhere, pirates exist as a result, in part, of the globalization that has contributed to the "development of underdevelopment" (Frank 1966) in various parts of the modern world-system. The unequal distribution of key resources created by incorporation is challenged wherever the fabric of that system frays. Individuals seek to gain some of the wealth that world trade offers, but which is beyond their standard economic wherewithal to obtain. Just as Teach and others rebelled against the strictures of their time, modern pirates operate outside the realm of national and international law. A key difference with the past situation is the lack of privateers or their equivalent. This is because in the Golden Age piracy/privateering was part of the internecine struggle among core states for hegemony and thus in some ways contributed to the incorporation of peripheries. In the modern world, pirates at times reflect a clash between the periphery and the core states in the form of attacks on multinational corporations that extract raw materials (e.g., oil and copper) or transport finished products.

Overall, this study examines world-systems at a localized scale. The events and characters along the Carolina coast provide much information about the fluid nature of piracy and privateering within the competition among European core states that greatly affected local, national, and international economies.

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