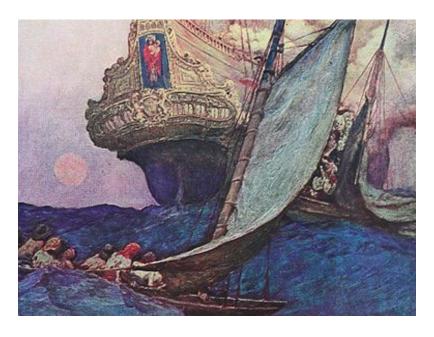
Primary Sources:

Frethorne, Esquemeling, Morgan, and Samuel



Introduction

The seventeenth century saw continued upheaval in the Atlantic as colonial competition intensified, mass movements of people continued, and imperial powers began increasingly to see piracy as a threat. The first primary source in this collection is a letter from an indentured servant named Richard Frethorne to his parents, illustrating the experiences of poor white workers in the Americas. While Frethorne resided in Virginia, his conditions illustrate those of the kinds of people who might be inclined to join the buccaneers, whose acts and code of conduct are described by John Esquemeling in the second source. The third source, a letter authored by Henry Morgan (a raider-turned-anti-pirate persecutor) shows how imperial authorities began a shift against piracy in Jamaica in the 1670s, while the final source is a letter from a formerly enslaved "pirate king" who made his way from the Caribbean to Madagascar in the 1690s.

Together, these four sources ask us to think about pirate organization, the opportunities and constraints that the pirate life offered to people of different backgrounds, and the relationship of piracy to imperial power and harsh colonial realities.

Primary Sources

Introduction

Richard Frethorne

John Esquemeling

Henry Morgan

Abraham Samuel

1

Primary Source 1: Indentured Servant Richard Frethorne's Letter to his Mother and Father, 1623



An example of an indenture contract, Middlesex County, January 1683-May 1684 During much of the seventeenth century, poor Englishmen like Richard Frethorne made their way to the English colonies in the Americas by agreeing to work as indentured servants in exchange for their passage. Frethorne arrived in Virginia in 1623 and began his term of indenture at Martin's Hundred, a tobacco settlement on outside of Jamestown. This document is one of the three letters that he wrote to his parents recounting his difficult life in the settlement and asking them to free him from his indenture.

As you are reading, consider the following questions:

- What might have Richard Frethorne done if he'd had the chance to join a pirate crew? How would you explain his motivations?
- Practice being a critical reader and analyst of historical documents: how might Richard have chosen to write his letter in a particular way to increase his chances of getting his parents to do what he wanted them to do (i.e.: "redeem" him from his indenture)?
- What glimpses of Atlantic commodity trades does Frethorne's letter offer? Think about the importance of goods—especially, perhaps, food—to people's sense of identity and "home." What does Frethrone wish for?

Source: Major Problems in the History of American Workers, eds. Eileen Boris and Nelson Lichtenstein (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath, 1991), 34-36.

LOVING AND KIND FATHER AND MOTHER:

My most humble duty remembered to you, hoping in god of your good health, as I myself am at the making hereof. This is to let you understand that I you child am in a most heavy case by reason of the country, [which] is such that it causeth much sickness, [such] as the scurvy and the bloody flux and diverse other diseases, which maketh the body very poor and weak. And when we are sick there is nothing to comfort us; for since I came out of the ship I never ate anything but peas, and loblollie (that is, water gruel). As for deer or venison I never saw any since I came into this land. There is indeed some fowl, but we are not allowed to go and get it, but must work hard both early and late for a mess of water gruel and a mouthful of bread and beef. A mouthful of bread for a penny loaf must serve for four men which is most pitiful.

[You would be grieved] if you did know as much as I [do], when people cry out day and night--Oh! That they were in England without their limbs and would not care to lose any limb to be in England again, yea, though they beg from door to door. For we live in fear of the enemy every hour, yet we have had a combat with them...and we took two alive and made slaves of them. But it was by policy, for we are in great danger; for our plantation is very weak by reason of the death and sickness of our company. For we came but twenty for the merchants, and they are half dead just; and we look every hour when two more should go.

Yet there came some four other men yet to live with us, of which there is but one alive; and our Lieutenant is dead, and [also] his father and his brother.

And there was some five or six of the last year's twenty, of which there is but three left, so that we are fain to get other men to plant with us; and yet we are but 32 to fight against 3000 if they should come. And the nighest help that we have is ten mile of us, and when the



Map of Virginia and the Chesapeake, 1630

rogues overcame this place [the] last [time] they slew 80 persons. How then shall we do, for we lie even in their teeth? They may easily take us, but [for the fact] that God is merciful and can save with few as well as with many, as he showed to Gilead. And like Gilead's soldiers, if they lapped water, we drink water which is but weak.

And I have nothing to comfort me, nor is there nothing to be gotten here but sickness and death, except [in the event] that one had money to lay out in some things for profit. But I have nothing at all no, not a shirt to my back but two rags (2), nor clothes but one poor suit, nor but one pair of shoes, but one pair of stockings, but one cap, [and] but two bands [collars]. My cloak is stolen by one of my fellows, and to his dying hour [he] would not tell me what he did with it; but some of my fellows saw him have butter and beef out of a ship, which my cloak, I doubt [not], paid for. So that I have not a penny, nor a penny worth, to help me too either spice or sugar or strong waters, without the which one cannot live here. For as strong beer in England doth fatten and strengthen them, so water here doth wash and weaken these here [and] only keeps [their] life and soul together. But I am not half [of] a quarter so strong as I was in England, and all is for want of victuals; for I do protest unto you that I have eaten more in [one] day at home than I have allowed me here for a week. You have given more than my day's allowance to a beggar at the door; and if Mr. Jackson had not relieved me, I should be in a poor case. But he like a father and she like a loving mother doth still help me.

For when we go to Jamestown (that is 10 miles of us) there lie all the ships that come to land, and there they must deliver their goods. And when we went up to town [we would go], as it may be, on Monday at noon, and come there by night, [and] then load the next day by noon, and go home in the afternoon, and unload, and then away again in the night, and [we would] be up about midnight. Then if it rained or blowed never so hard, we must lie in the boat on the water and have nothing but a little bread. For when we go into the boat we [would] have a loaf allowed to two men, and it is all [we would get] if we stayed there two days, which is hard; and [we] must lie all that while in the boat. But that Goodman Jackson pitied me and made me a cabin to lie in always when I [would] come up, and he would give me some poor jacks [fish] [to take] home with me, which comforted me more than peas or water gruel. Oh, they be very godly folks, and love me very well, and will do anything for me. And he much marvelled that you would send me a servant to the Company; he saith I had been better knocked on the head. And indeed so I find it

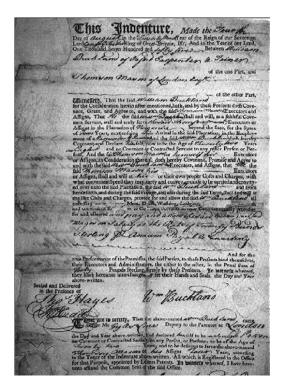
now, to my great grief and misery; and [I] saith that if you love me you will redeem me suddenly, for which I do entreat and beg. And if you cannot get the merchants to redeem me for some little money, then for God's sake get a gathering or entreat some good folks to lay out some little sum of money in meal and cheese and butter and beef.

Any eating meat will yield great profit. Oil and vinegar is very good; but, father, there is great loss in leaking. But for God's sake



Map of colonial Virginia, where Frethorne was indentured

send beef and cheese and butter, or the more of one sort and none of another. But if you send cheese, it must be very old cheese; and at the cheesemonger's you may buy very food cheese for twopence farthing or halfpenny, that will be liked very well. But if you send cheese, you must have a care how you pack it in barrels; and you must put cooper's chips between every cheese, or else the heat of the hold will rot them.



Example of an indenture contract for William Buckland, eighteenth century

And look whatsoever you send me be in never so much look, what[ever] I make of it, I will deal truly with you. I will send it over and beg the profit to redeem me; and if I die before it come, I have entreated Goodman Jackson to send you the worth of it, who hath promised he will. If you send, you must direct your letters to Goodman Jackson, at Jamestown, a gunsmith. (You must set down his freight, because there be more of his name there.) Good father, do not forget me, but have mercy and pity my miserable case. I know if you did but see me, you would weep to see me; for I have but one suit. (But [though] it is a strange one, it is very well guarded.) Wherefore, for God's sake, pity me. I pray you to remember my love to all my friends and kindred. I hope all my brothers and sisters are in good health, and as for my part I have set down my resolution that certainly will be; that is, that the answer of

this letter will be life or death to me. Therefore, good father, send as soon as you can; and if you send me any thing let this be the mark.

ROT

RICHARD FRETHORNE, MARTIN'S HUNDRED

Primary Source 2: Selection from John Esquemeling (aka, Alexander Oliver Exquemelin), 1678



Romanticized depiction of a buccaneer

Pierre le Grand was a seventeenth-century French Buccaneer who cruised off the coast of Hispaniola with a group of twenty-eight men seeking a prize. After weeks of failure, they discovered and captured a straggler of the Spanish silver fleet.

This account of his story comes from John Esquemeling's (aka, Alexander Oliver Exquemelin) famous seventeenth-century text, Buccaneers of America or the Pirates of Panama, which was published in 1678.

As you are reading, consider the following questions:

- Given what you know about colonial societies in the Caribbean at the time, how does this document suggest that the buccaneers were different? In what ways were they similar?
- Given what you have read and discussed in earlier lessons about the importance of the natural world in shaping colonial societies, how do you see this reflected in this document? How did the geography and ecology of the Caribbean enable the buccaneers' lifestyle? Offer precise examples from the text.
- In what ways are the pirate articles both egalitarian and hierarchical?
- No women are mentioned in this text—how do you think women might have nonetheless become involved in buccaneers' raids and survival?

Source: Buccaneers of America or the Pirates of Panama: A True Account of the Famous Adventurers and Daring Deeds of Sir Henry Morgan and Other Notorious Freebooters of the Spanish Main, in James E. Wadsworth, Global Piracy: A Documentary History of Seaborne Banditry (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 107–110.

'The boat,' says he, wherein Pierre le Grand was with his companions, had been at sea a long time without finding any prize worth his taking; and their provisions beginning to fail, they were in danger of starving. Being almost reduced to despair, the spied a great ship of the Spanish flota, separated from the rest; this vessel they resolved to take, or die in the attempt. Hereupon, they sailed towards her, to view her strength. And though they judged the vessel to be superior to theirs, yet their covetousness, and the extremity they were reduced to, made them venture. Being come so near that they could not possibly escape, they made an oath to their captain, Pierre le Grand, to stand by him to the last. 'Tis true, the pirates did believe they should find the ship unprovided to fight, and thereby the sooner master her. It was in the dusk of the evening they began to attack; but before they engaged, they ordered the surgeon of the boat to bore a hole in the sides of it, that their own vessel sinking under them, they might be compelled to attack more vigorously, and endeavor more hastily to board the ship. This was done accordingly, and without any other arms than a pistol in one hand and a sword in the other, they immediately climbed up the sides of the ship, and ran altogether into the great cabin, where they found the captain, with several of his companions, playing at cards. Here they set a pistol to his breast, commanding him to deliver the ship. The Spaniards, surprised to see the pirates on board their ship, cried Jesus bless us! Are these deveils, or what are they?' Meanwhile some of them took possession of the gunroom, and seized the arms, killing as many as made any opposition; whereupon the Spaniards presently surrendered.

That very day the captain of the ship had been told by some of the seamen that the boat which was in view,



17th century drawing of the island of Tortuga

cruising, was a boat of pirates; whom the captain slightly answered, 'What then, must I be afraid of such a pitiful thing as that is? No, though she were a ship as big and as strong as mine is.' As soon as Pierre le Grand had taken this rich prize, he detained in his service as many of the common seamen as he had need of, setting the rest ashore, and then set sail for France, where he continued, without ever returning to America again.

The planters and hunters of Tortuga had no sooner heard of the rich prize those pirates had taken, but they resolved to follow their example. Hereupon, many of them left their employments, and endeavored to get some small boats, wherein to exercise piracy; but not being able to purchase, or build them at Tortuga, they resolved to set forth in their canoes, and seek them elsewhere. With these, they cruised first upon Cape de Alvarez, where the Spaniards used to trade from one city to another in small vessels, in which they carry hides, tobacco, and other commodities, to the Havana, and to which the Spaniards from Europe do frequently resort.

Here it was that those pirates at first took a great many boats laden with the aforesaid commodities; these they used to carry to Tortuga and sell the whole purchase to the ships that waited for their return, or accidentally happened to be there. With the gains of these prizes they provided themselves with necessaries, wherewith to undertake other voyages, some of which were made to Campeche, and others toward New Spain; in which the Spaniards drove a great trade. Upon those coasts they found a number of trading vessels, and often ships of great burden. Two of the biggest of these vessels, and two great ships which the Spaniards had laden with plate¹ in the port of Campeche, to go to the Caracas, they took in less than a month's time, and carried to Tortuga; where the people of the whole island, encouraged by their success, especially seeing in two years the riches of the country so much increased, they augmented the number of pirates so fast, that in a little time there were, in that small island and port, about twenty ships of this sort of people. Hereupon the Spaniards, not being able to bear their robberies any longer, equipped two large men-of-war, both for the defense of their own coasts, and to cruise upon the enemies.



Buccaneers raiding a city

How the pirates arm their vessels, and regulate their voyages:

"Before the pirates go to sea, they give notice to all concerned, of the day on which they are to embark; obliging each man to bring so many pounds of powder and ball as they think necessary. Being all come aboard, they consider where to get provisions, especially flesh², seeing they scarce eat anything else; and of this the most common sort is pork; the next food is tortoises, which they salt a little. Sometimes they rob such or such hog yards, where the Spaniards often have a thousand head of swine together. They come to those places in the night, and having best the keeper's lodge, they force him to rise, and give them as many heads as they desire, threatening to kill him if he refuses, or makes any noise; and these menaces are oftentimes executed on the miserable swine keepers, or any other person that endeavors to hinder their robberies.

Having got flesh sufficient for their voyage, they return to their ship: here they allow, twice a day, every one as much as he can eat, without weight or measure; nor does the steward of the vessel give any more flesh, or anything else, to the captain, than to the meanest mariner. The ship being well-victualled³, they deliberate whither they shall go to seek their desperate fortunes, and likewise agree upon certain articles, which are put in writing, which everyone is bound to observe; and all of them, or the chiefest part, do set their hands to it. Here they set down distinctly what sums of money each particular person ought to have for that voyage, the fund for all the payments being what is gotten by the whole expedition; for otherwise it is the same law among these people as with other pirates. No prey, no pay. First, therefore, they mention how much the captain is to have for his ship; next, the salary of the carpenter, or shipwright,

^{2. &}quot;Flesh" meaning animal flesh; i.e., meat in this context

^{3. &}quot;Well-victualled meaning "well supplied with food".

who careened⁴, mended, and rigged the vessel: this commonly amounts to one hundred or one hundred and fifty pieces of eight⁵, according to the agreement. Afterwards, for provisions and victualling, they draw out of the same common stock about two hundred pieces of eight; also a salary for the surgeon, and his chest of medicaments, which usually is rated at two hundred or two hundred and fifty pieces of eight. Lastly they agree what rate each one ought to have that is wounded or maimed in his body, suffering the loss of any limb; as, for the loss of a right arm, six hundred pieces of eight, or six slaves; for the left arm, five hundred pieces of eight, or five slaves; for the left leg, four hundred pieces of eight, or four slaves; for an eye, one hundred pieces of eight, or one slave; for a finger, the same as for an eye.

All which sums are taken out of the common stock of what is gotten by their piracy, and a very exact and equal dividend is made of the remainder. They have also regard to qualities and places: thus the captain or chief, is allotted five or six portions, to what the ordinary seamen have: the master's mate only two, and other officers proportionately to their employ: after which, they draw equal parts from the highest to the lowest mariner, the boys not being omitted, who draw half a share; because when they take a better vessel than their own, it is in the boys' duty to fire their formal vessel, and then retire to the prize.

They observe among themselves very good orders; for in the prizes which they take, it is severely prohibited, to everyone, to take anything to themselves: hence all they take is equally divided, as hath been said before: yea, they take a solemn oath to each other, not to conceal the least thing they find among the prizes; and if anyone is found false to the said oath, he is immediately turned out of the society. They are very civil and charitable to each other; so that if anyone wants what another has, with great willingness they give it to one another. As soon as these pirates have taken a prize, they immediately set ashore the prisoners, detaining only some few, for their own help and service: whom, also, they release, after two or three years. They refresh themselves at one island or another, but especially at those on the south of Cuba; there they careen their vessels, while some hunt, and others cruise in canoes for prizes."

^{4.} To careen a vessel meant to clean the hull of the ship by tilting it on its side.

^{5. &}quot;Pieces of eight" referred to the Spanish silver dollar, equivalent to 8 reales (another Spanish currency), hence the term.

Primary Source 3: Henry Morgan Joins the War on Freelance Raiders, 1677

Henry Morgan was a Welsh privateer in the Caribbean. Based in the English territory of Port Royal, Jamaica, he led attacks on settlements and ports on the Spanish mainland, while the English often celebrated privateer attacks on imperial rivals, in 1670 a peace treaty between England and Spain aimed to reduce conflict. In 1671, Morgan was arrested and sent to London for attacking Panama City. However, he was never tried in court and popularly celebrated as a hero. In 1675, Morgan's political connections allowed him to return to Jamaica where he became a Deputy Governor. While in his post, Morgan maintained his ties to the raiding community, but also faced pressure from England and Jamaican planters put an end to marauding. In April 1677 James Browne, a Scotsman with a French privateering commission, seized a Dutch slave vessel and brought it and the people on it to Jamaica. In this case, as in many others, raiders often obtained privateering commissions from other countries, which made it impossible to prosecute their attacks on English territory. In response to the incident, Morgan implemented the first law against excessive raiding. The document below is a letter to secretary of state in England, Sir Henry Coventry, explaining the policy, followed by the Act itself.

As you are reading, consider the following questions:

- How do you think Henry Morgan's new status as an anti-pirate persecutor was viewed by people who knew him (and even raided alongside him) in earlier years? What does his change of attitude suggest about the nature of imperial politics?
- How does this document (the letter from Morgan and the Act itself) offer a glimpse of the relationship between piracy and the trade in enslaved Africans?
- Think about the unnamed English subjects referenced in this document as signing up to sail and raid under "foreign princes". What do you think "empire" meant to these "pirates"?
- What does this document suggest about the limitations of imperial authority in the late seventeenth-century Caribbean?
- Think about this lesson's reading: how do you see Jamaica's transition away from being an infamous pirates' lair to being a wealthy plantation colony reflect-

Source: Kris Lane and Arne Bialuschewksi, eds., Piracy in the Early Modern Era: An Anthology of Sources (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2019), 93–96.

St. Jago de la Vega, June 26, 1677

Most honored Sir,

In my last, I gave your honor an account of the Assembly being sitting, which have done little more than passing twelve acts that only concern this place and likewise this act which I herewith send your honor. We hope it will answer our expectations in recalling his Majesty's subjects from the service of foreign princes, which if it should not, there will be no way left but to repel them by force.



Portrait of Henry Morgan, 1681

I hope likewise that this will so far satisfy the Spanish ambassador that he will have no occasion to think that they are any ways countenanced by anybody here, but that everyone will do their best to repel them. For my own part, if they should not come in the obedience of His Majesty, I think they deserve no favour. And if His Majesty in his prudence shall think fit to send two small frigates to repel them and be pleased to lay his commands upon me, I will follow them from place to place till I either bring them in or destroy them.



Map of the Caribbean

I give your Honor an account by my last of a hundred and odd negroes that were punctually taken from the Dutch. They will remain in the custody of the provost marshall, and likewise those that took them. How His Excellency will proceed in it, I know not, but when it's over, I shall not fail to give your honor an account of it. I wish you increase of honor and felicity and assure you that my ambition is to demonstrate to you that I am with much zeal and sincerity,

Most honored sir, Your most obliged, humble and faithful servant, Henry Morgan

AN ACT DECLARING IT FELONY WITHOUT BENEFIT OF CLERGY⁶ FOR ANY PERSON TO SERVE UNDER ANY FOREIGN PRINCE OR STATE

Whereas nothing can contribute more to His sacred Majesty's honor in all the treaties of peace than that such articles there concluded and agreed on should by all His Majesty's subjects, according to their duty, be most inviolably preserved and kept in and over all His Majesty's dominions and territories.

And whereas not only against such treaties made by His Majesty with his allies, but also contrary to His Sacred Majesty's royal proclamation, several of His subjects have and do continually go off this His Majesty's island into foreign princes' services and sail under their commissions, it being contrary to their duty and good allegiance.

And whereas by fair means they cannot be restrained from so doing.

Be it enacted by the Governor, Council and Represenatives of the Commons of this island assembled, and it is hereby enacted by authority of the same:

That, from and after the publication hereof, it shall be felony for any person which now does or hereafter shall inhabit or belong to this island to serve in an hostile manner under any foreign prince, state or potentate, or any employed under any of them, without special license for so doing under the hand and seal of



Painting of a battle with French privateering ship

the Governor or Commander in Chief of this island for the time being.

And that all and every such offender and offenders, contrary to the true intent of this act, being thereof duly convicted in His Majesty's Supreme Court of Judicature within this island, shall suffer pains of death as a felon without benefit of clergy.

Provided nevertheless that this act or anything herein contained shall not extend to any person or persons now in the service or employment of any foreign prince or state whatever that shall come to this island and leave or desert such service or employment within twelve months after the publication hereof, but that all such shall be fully indemnified for anything they have acted or done, and shall be free

Cap/Hen. Morgan before Panama Which he book from the Juaniards.

Depiction of Henry Morgan, during his earlier attack on Panama in 1671

in their persons and estates from any debts they not owe within this island, until the full end and time of five years from their so coming in as aforesaid be expired.

And that nothing in this act be construed to extend to any inhabitant of this island who shall help wood, water, pilot or assist any allies of His Majesty in such like necessity anything herein contained to the contrary notwithstanding.

Primary Source 4: Letter from the Pirate King Abraham Samuel/ Tolinor Rex, 1699

In 1696, Abraham Samuel (aka 'Tolinor Rex') escaped enslavement on Martinique and joined a pirate crew in New York in 1696. In 1697, he was shipwrecked at Taolagnaro, Madagascar where he and others took shelter in an abandoned French fort. Samuel was identified by an elderly Tanosi princess as her lost son, who had been captured by French slavers, and he established a kingdom around the region. The letter below was written to Captain George Revelly, and illustrates how Tolinor Rex engaged in trade with European pirates and slave traders to maintain power, and gain an upper hand over rival regional leaders. The letter is written in a idiolect that indicates he spoke Caribbean English, with some Dutch words and French spelling.

As you are reading, consider the following questions:

- How do you see the Atlantic transformations discussed in this lesson's content reading reflected in this primary source?
- What does this letter suggest about Tolinor Rex's understanding of global politics? How does this challenge our stereotypical ideas about pirates?
- Is there evidence of expertise (of any kind) in this letter? Where? Explain your answer.
- How do we capture a glimpse of women's roles in sustaining piracy in this primary source?

Source: Rex, The UK National Archives in England, HCA 1/98, fo. 174, courtesy of Oliver Finnegan, Record Specialist at the National Archives (UK).

Capt George Reevelly,

Sr I have Received by my boy yor Letter, I am very glade you are seafe arrived in this port [Taolagnaro]. This tew are tree days I have news was a ship in seat of the Land I could not Expected her a brigandine the Mock [Mocha] Freagatt. Samll Burges, & Capn Baldrigge them are the veasells. I don Expected, the Bearer his one my lift [left?] the sd will delivered you one good hoekson [ox] to Refresch yor Compagny, I am Sensible the place from whence you came you Can guett provisions very plenty in this place you me have every things whatt the Countrey could afford. The last ship was hear Capt Shelly of new york Commander of the ship the nassaw. I hope with the healp of god al-



Letter from Abraham Samuel, signed "Tolinor Rex"

meathy I will be downe with you tomarow or the neack day, the with [white] men wil goe downe to the port they informe you to mowre yor brigadin in seafe this his all att present Remember my Kinde Love to all the friends & yor self I Remend from your to command.

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