

Post Spanish Succession Period



Background

The Post Spanish Succession Period was the major period of piracy during the [Golden Age of Piracy](#) following the [Buccaneering Era](#) and the [First Pirate Round](#) and was followed quickly by the [Second Pirate Round](#). It is the most commonly thought of period when people think of pirates such as [Edward 'Blackbeard' Teach](#), [Charles Vane](#), ['Calico' Jack Rackham](#), [Anne Bonny](#), [Mary Read](#) and the rest of the [Flying Gang](#). Overall it is one of the most represented periods of piracy in [popular culture](#) and one of the most heavily romanticized.

The Post Spanish Succession Period is unique from the previous [Buccaneering](#) and [Privateering](#) eras in that it follows the arc of legal, semi-legal and then fully illegal piracy. While the early [privateers](#) carried [letter of marque](#) signed by their respective leaders, the buccaneers helped the European powers really colonize the [West Indies](#) through stealth and semi-legal authorization during the many [European wars](#) during the period. However, the Post Spanish Succession Period occurred during a time of relative peace and stability in the world which made these pirates outlaws, and their stories famous which were compiled through the great work of the mysterious [Captain Charles Johnson](#) known as [A General History of Roberries and Murders of the Most Notorious Pirates](#).

Following the conclusion of the Post Spanish Succession Period there would be a brief continuance of piracy in the [Indian Ocean](#) known as the [Pirate Round](#) by both new pirates and previous West Indies pirates called the [pirate rounders](#) which targeted the [East Indies](#). But overall the end of this period would spell the end for the concept of pirates sailing in wooden ships and the high seas. Coming soon to Europe and the rest of the world was [industrialization](#) which would forever change the way the world works, especially with boats and ships.

Origins

Sailors in the eighteenth century had a choice: they could join the navy, work on a merchant ship, or become a pirate or privateer. This meant that the employers could force down wages, and worsen on-board conditions to unbearable levels, in the drive for greater profits. Life aboard was never easy and a navy ship was no place for the weak, but the sailors could remember that life had never been as bad as it was now. However, these sailors had grew up hearing two generations of stories of great [privateers](#) and [buccaneers](#) and wanted their turn at gold, glory and immortality.



The brutality of the slave ships was not only visited on the 'cargo' - with the crew facing mortality rates of 30% or higher in a voyage. The master's treatment of the crew reflected that every slave lost was a loss of potential profit, whilst every sailor lost was a saving in wages. As well as the constant threat of drowning, sailors faced disease, made worse by malnutrition and non-existent sanitation, and the constant threat of violence at the whim of the ships' masters, who ruled their ships as god, judge, jury and often executioner. A sailor's life was nasty, brutal, short and miserable.

Merchant shippers used the surplus of sailors' labor to drive wages down, cutting corners to maximize their profits, and creating unsavory conditions aboard their vessels. Merchant sailors suffered from mortality rates as high or higher than the slaves being transported (Rediker, 2004). Living conditions were so poor that many sailors began to prefer a freer existence as a [pirate](#). The increased volume of shipping traffic also could sustain a large body of brigands preying upon it.

"In an honest service there is thin commons, low wages, and hard labor; in this, plenty and satiety, pleasure and ease, liberty and power; and who would not balance creditor on this side, when all the hazard that is run for it, at worst, is only a sour look or two at choking. No, a merry life and a short one, shall be my motto."

- [Bartholemew Roberts](#), *A General History of Pyrates* (1724)

These conditions were what led many to find the alternative of rising in mutiny and becoming pirates an attractive option. For men who faced the threat of death and mutilation on a daily basis, the certainty of an eventual date with the hangman's noose was no deterrent. The pirate laughed in the face of Death and proclaimed a short life and a merry one!

The sailors who became pirates did not do so only because of their suffering - of the tens of thousands of sailors employed on the Atlantic trade, only a minority (no more than 4,000) ever became pirates - but also because of the vision of freedom that becoming a pirate provided. Each mutiny followed a similar pattern: once the ship's officers and any loyalist seamen were overpowered, the rebels organized a meeting involving the entire crew. At this, 'articles', the rules of the ship, were drawn up, and officers elected. The articles followed certain common rules:

[War of the Spanish Succession](#)

Many pirates were often previous sailors who learned their skills and know-how through the Royal Navy and often went head to head with their previous employer in the quest of riches. Many of these sailors served in the [War of the Spanish Succession](#) also known as Queen Anne's War (where [Blackbeard's](#) name for his ship the [Queen Anne's Revenge](#) likely comes from), and when this war was ended by treaty in 1713-14, many of these sailors were relieved of duty and left unemployed in the trade rich Caribbean. This left a large number of skilled and enthusiastic sailors as a labor pool for the pirates to draw recruits from.

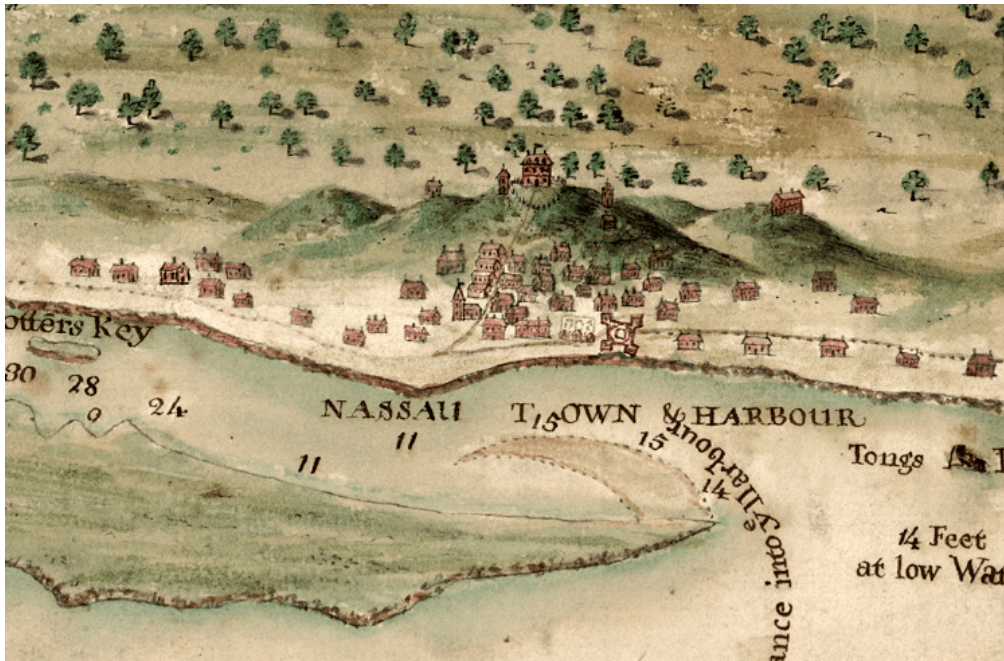
As part of the war's settlement, Britain obtained the [asiento](#), a Spanish government contract, to supply slaves to Spain's new world colonies, providing British traders and smugglers more access to the traditionally closed Spanish markets in America. This arrangement also contributed heavily to the spread of piracy across the western Atlantic at this time. Shipping to the colonies boomed simultaneously with the flood of skilled mariners after the war.

[1715 Spanish Treasure Fleet](#)

The first major pirate attack of the post Spanish Succession era occurred in 1715 when a group of Spanish were diving on a sunken treasure galleon off the coast of Florida. The pirates including [Charles Vane](#), Henry Jennings and [Samuel Bellamy](#) launched a successive raid came away with a lucrative treasure. However, the governor of Jamaica banned these pirates from spending their gold in [Kingston](#), and with the destruction of [Port Royal](#) by the [1692 Port Royal Earthquake](#), these pirates were forced to find somewhere else to live and establish a town suitable for their lifestyle.

[Nassau](#)

This led them to establish the settlement of [Nassau](#) on the island of [New Providence](#) in the [Bahamas](#). The area was completely depopulated because the native [Lucayans](#) were wiped out due to disease and 16th century Spanish slavery. The Bahamas would attempt to be settled by the British throughout the late 17th century but constant warfare with the [French Empire](#) and the [Spanish Empire](#) would see these attempts fail. This along with the massive shallow bay and its location to the many inlets and islands of the Bahamas made it perfect for a [pirate haven](#).



Nassau Map (18th Century)

Much as the solution was for early British Jamaica with the buccaneers however, the early Governors of the Bahamas were very willing to trade pirate security for the use of their island. Previous Governor [Nicholas Trott](#) had allowed the notorious [Henry Every](#) to stay in the Bahamas to help protect against a perceived upcoming French invasion. However, the wealth that the newly formed [Flying Gang](#) pulled out of the sunken [1715 Spanish Treasure Fleet](#) allowed them to do more than just that and they soon took control over the entire island. The Governor was but a puppet in political or any sort of power.

[Republic of Pirates](#)

In 1713, pirates [Benjamin Hornigold](#) established the [Republic of Pirates](#) on the island of [Nassau](#) in the Bahamas. For five years the Republic of Pirates allowed the development of the Bahamas to occur and kept the territory firmly in British hands. One of the main reasons this Republic developed was the lack of real imperial naval presence in the [West Indies](#) during this period due to the constant European wars forcing them elsewhere.

[Flying Gang](#)

The Flying Gang including pirates like [Edward 'Blackbeard' Teach](#), [Charles Vane](#), ['Calico' Jack Rackham](#), [Anne Bonny](#), [Mary Read](#) took advantage of this and preyed on British, Spanish, French and any shipping or civilian or military ship that they felt like. This practice was acceptable at first because with all the constant wars going on, pirates could be privateers one month and a treaty could be signed halfway across the world and they do not hear about it for months cause they are at sea. The pirates are given a lot of flak but the colonial authorities had no idea what they were doing either. These people handed out [letters of marque](#) like candy when it suited them and hung pirates in cages when it did not.

However, eventually the Republic of Pirates began to seriously hinder the [Trans-Atlantic Triangular Trade](#), especially the slave trade which prompted a swift colonial response. This pirate republic would thrive until the King of England sent governor [Woodes Rogers](#) in 1718 to deliver an ultimatum to the pirates; accept the [Kings Pardon](#), or accept death.

[Decline of Piracy](#)

By the early 18th century tolerance for privateers was wearing thin by all nations. After the [Treaty of Utrecht](#) was signed, the excess of trained sailors without employment was both a blessing and a curse for all pirates. Initially the surplus of men had caused the number of pirates to multiply significantly. This inevitably led to the pillaging of more ships, which put a greater strain on trade for all European nations. In response to the increasing power of the pirates in the West Indies the various [European empires](#) bolstered their own navies to offer greater protection for merchants and to hunt down pirates. The excess of skilled sailors meant there was a large pool of sailors that could be recruited into national navies and this increased the number available to become [pirate hunters](#).

Piracy was clearly on a strong decline by 1720. The events of the latter half of 1718 represent a turning point in the history of piracy in the New World. Without a safe base and in the growing pressure from naval forces, the rovers lost their momentum. The lure of the Spanish treasures had faded, and the hunters gradually became the hunted. By early 1719, the remaining pirates were on the run. Most of them headed for West Africa, seizing poorly defended slavers. From here pirates known as the [pirate rounders](#) start up the [Second Pirate Round](#) this was a brief period of piracy in the [East Indies](#) and the [Golden Age of Piracy](#) didn't last the decade.

Source: <http://www.goldenageofpiracy.org/golden-age-of-piracy/post-spanish-succession-period.php>