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# For Country, Liberty, and Money: Privateering and the Ideologies of the American Revolution

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The College of Wooster

For Country, Liberty, and Money:  
Privateering and the Ideologies of the American Revolution

by

Scott D. Wagner

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements of Senior Independent Study

Supervised by  
Christina Welsch  
Department of History

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## Abstract

Along with service in the Continental Army and Navy and the various state militias, American patriots during the Revolutionary War had the option of sailing aboard privateers, private ships authorized to attack British commerce during the war. Where studies analyzing other military forces during the Revolution have been more nuanced, scholars that have looked at privateering have either focused on its strategic effectiveness during the conflict or merely written it off as a profit-driven phenomenon of maritime plunder. Privateering played a role in the course of the Revolution to a degree, but more importantly the practice was influenced by the ideological considerations that framed the Revolution itself—considerations that are ignored when privateering is seen through the eyes of the profit-narrative. While in part motivated by profit, privateering during the American War for Independence can only be fully understood when placed in the context of contemporary debates over liberty, republicanism, and identity. These debates stretched across the range of actors involved in privateering, from the sailors crewing privateer vessels to the merchants investing in privateer expeditions. This thesis will draw upon existing literature on privateering, Revolutionary ideology, and original analysis of primary source information including correspondence, government documents, and individual narratives to place privateering within the broader framework of the Revolutionary period. In doing so, it will add a more complex and multilayered approach to privateering to place that scholarship alongside other studies of military phenomena during the American Revolution.

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## A NOTE ON PRIMARY SOURCE QUOTATIONS

This thesis quotes extensively from sources and documents written in the eighteenth century. Conventions on spelling and grammar were not standardized at that time. For this thesis, all spelling and punctuation has been preserved as written. When the meaning of the original writing is unclear, I have included the meaning in brackets.

# INTRODUCTION

It was the spring of 1772, and Lieutenant William Dudingston was one of the most hated men in the colony of Rhode Island. The British Admiralty had given Dudingston command of the schooner *Gaspee*, and charged him to prevent Rhode Islanders from importing contraband into any of the ports in Narragansett Bay. That contraband included French molasses and sugar, items that helped Rhode Islanders grow their burgeoning distilleries. Dudingston stopped every vessel he encountered in the bay, demanding to search their holds for contraband. His actions put a drain on imports into the primary towns of Newport and Providence and were a slap in the face to Rhode Islanders who resented any form of authority. Colonists complained that his commission was “more of a fiction than anything else,” and even issued a warrant for his arrest.<sup>1</sup>

By summer, the colonists were itching to get their hands on Dudingston. On June 9, they got their chance. While pursuing a packet boat owned by Captain Lindsey, Dudingston ran the *Gaspee* aground.<sup>2</sup> The tide was receding, leaving Dudingston stranded until the early hours of the morning. Providence merchant and patriot John Brown wasted little time in mobilizing the colonists, calling all interested participants to gather at James Sabin’s house to prepare an assault on the beached British vessel. A strange assortment of grizzled sea captains, roguish former privateersmen, raw wharf hands and sailors, and well-to-do merchants infuriated with Dudingston’s activities

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<sup>1</sup> Deputy governor Darius Session to Governor Joseph Wanton, March 21 1772, in William R. Staples, *The Documentary History of the Destruction of the Gaspee* (Providence: Knowles, Vose & Anthony, 1845), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Some sources claim the owner of the packet was a Thomas Lindsey; see James B. Hedges, *The Browns of Providence Plantation*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), 209. Other sources provide the name of the owner as Benjamin Lindsey; see Charles Rappleye, *Sons of Providence: The Brown Brothers, the Slave Trade, and the American Revolution* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 107.



arrived to take part in the excursion. Such was the excitement that Ephraim Bowen claims men were “casting bullets in the kitchen.”<sup>3</sup>

That night a crowd of between sixty to eighty armed and angry colonists led by Brown and former privateer captain Abraham Whipple rowed out to the stranded *Gaspee*. As the colonists approached the ship Whipple called out, “I am the Sheriff of the county of Kent, I am come for the commander of this vessel, and have him I will, dead or alive.”<sup>4</sup> While the two sides exchanged words Joseph Bucklin fired on the *Gaspee*, striking Dudingston in the groin.<sup>5</sup> The raiders stormed the vessel, and the distraught crew surrendered. Brown ordered that nothing be taken from the vessel; he did not want the authorities to trace anything back to the perpetrators.<sup>6</sup> After ensuring that everyone was off the vessel, the colonists set the ship aflame. They dropped the British sailors off on shore and returned to their homes, leaving the *Gaspee* naught but a blackened hull burned to the waterline.

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<sup>3</sup> Account of Ephraim Bowen, in Staples, *Documentary History*, 8-9.

<sup>4</sup> Account of John Mawney, in *ibid.* 9-10. Bowen claims Whipple said, “I am the sheriff of the county of Kent, God damn you. I have got a warrant to apprehend you, God damn you; so surrender, God damn you”; see Account of Ephraim Bowen, in *ibid.* 8. Sources disagree as to whether Abraham Whipple was actually the sheriff of Kent, or frankly a sheriff of anywhere.

<sup>5</sup> Account of Ephraim Bowen, in *ibid.* 8. In his account Bowen states that Bucklin, who was sitting next to him, asked him, “Ephe, reach me your gun. I can kill that fellow [Dudingston].”

<sup>6</sup> Most of the raiders followed Brown’s orders; however, one man was sighted in Newport the next day “parading himself with Lieutenant Dudingston’s gold laced beaver on his head.” Quoted in Robert H. Patton, *Patriot Pirates: The Privateer War for Freedom and Fortune in the American Revolution* (New York: Random House, 2008), 8.

The *Gaspee* affair demonstrates the complex interplay between profit-based and ideological motivations for conflict during the American Revolution. Was the attack on the *Gaspee* motivated by profit? In a sense it was. Dudingston was halting the free flow of trade in Narragansett Bay, stopping merchant ships and seizing cargo whenever he thought something was amiss. The threat of capture may have encouraged some merchants to shy away from dealing in contraband while Dudingston was present. But if Dudingston was removed, trade could flow freely, and so could the profits.

But while there was personal gain to be had in removing Dudingston, particularly for the merchants of Rhode Island, to say that the attack on the *Gaspee* was a purely profit-driven affair is to ignore the place of the profit motive within the political, social, and economic context of Anglo-American relations at the time. After the French and Indian War the British imposed a series of new taxes on the American colonists, largely taxing those in the mercantile sphere. Pamphlets throughout the colonies started to rail against what they saw as British tyranny, and American colonists began to chafe under Parliamentary rule. Isolated cases of violence had already broken out between the two sides – in Narragansett Bay alone, colonists had fired on the British tender *St. John* in 1764, and had burned British longboats in 1765 and 1769. By the 1770s resentment of British rule in the American colonies was at full boil.

Profit was a key component of the American Revolution. At one level, continued existence under British rule was proving unprofitable to mercantile-minded colonists. But that profit narrative was indelibly tied to wider ideological issues at play in the Revolution. Cries of “taxation without representation” pointed both to the exasperating increase in tax enforcement and the perceived injustice of Parliamentary rule without

American colonial input. An increased British military presence both in the port cities and along the coasts brought more restrictions on the (occasionally illicit) activities of maritime merchants and the cherished civil liberties of American colonists. Resistance in the commercial sphere from both the moneyed and working classes challenged Britain's commercial dominance of the colonies and, in turn, its political authority. The fact that early resistance to British rule came from the profit-making spheres like maritime commerce does not mean that the Revolution itself was profit-driven; rather, it suggests an important connection between the acquisition of profit, the British commercial-political system, and the American colonists' place within that system.

The importance of profit, commerce, politics, and identity in the Revolution can best be seen in the widespread activity of privateers during that war. A privateer was a private ship of war authorized with a letter of marque or commission by a legitimate governing body to seize and plunder enemy vessels at sea. Privateers, in combination with the new Continental Navy, made up the bulk of American forces at sea during the War of Independence. It was a popular activity; some two thousand privateer vessels sailed during the Revolutionary War.<sup>7</sup> Their attacks on British commerce did contribute to the overall war effort, though the extent of that contribution is still hotly debated.<sup>8</sup>

Privateering during the Revolution was a multilayered activity as well, with involvement

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<sup>7</sup> This figure comes from Henry Steele Commager and Richard B. Morris, eds., *The Spirit of 'Seventy-Six: The Story of the American Revolution as Told by Participants* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 964; and Gardner Weld Allen, *Massachusetts Privateers of the Revolution* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1927), 13. Edgar Stanton Maclay puts the number of privateers at 792, though he offers no sources for this number; see Edgar Stanton Maclay, *A History of American Privateers* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1899), viii. The Naval Records puts the figure at 1,697, though this does not include privateers from individual colonies; see Michael Scott Casey, *Rebel Privateers: The Winners of American Independence* (master's thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1990), 59.

<sup>8</sup> A good synthesis of the arguments can be found in Michael J. Crawford, "The Privateering Debate in Revolutionary America," *The Northern Mariner* 21 (2011), 1035-39.

from lower-class sailors and deckhands and upper-class merchants and investors. Some of the most recognizable figures of the Revolution invested in privateering; names like George Washington, John Adams, Robert Morris, Nathanael Greene, and John Hancock grace the pages of privateer commissions.

Despite the fact that privateering was a prominent piece of the Revolutionary War at sea, privateering has never been a popular topic for scholars of the Revolution. It was admittedly an auxiliary facet of the war from a strategic perspective; the Battles of Saratoga and Yorktown arguably contributed more to the overall American victory than the actions of privateers. More than that, the typical conception of a privateer does not fit the mythos of the American Revolution. The War of Independence is seen as a virtuous war, one where noble American militiamen and colonists fought to secure their rights and liberty in the face of tyranny. The picture of the roguish, quasi-legitimate sea plunderer supposedly motivated by the pursuit of profit does not fit easily into this idealized notion of the Revolution.

As a result, few scholars have attempted to place privateering into that Revolutionary narrative. Instead, they gloss over the motivations for privateering—usually mentioning some component of the profit-motive narrative—then focus on the strategic impact of privateering on the outcome of the war. In one of the earliest works on privateering, Edgar Stanton Maclay briefly mentions that the growth of privateering was tied to “the profits from prizes,” but spends the bulk of his work arguing that privateers themselves were the primary party responsible for America’s victory in the war due to their devastating attacks on British commerce.<sup>9</sup> William Bell Clark’s investigation of

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<sup>9</sup> For the brief discussion of the profit motive, see Maclay, *History of American Privateers*, 114. For a clear statement of Maclay’s argument on privateering’s importance to the war, see *ibid.* xi.

Benjamin Franklin's privateers argues that Franklin's investment was remarkable in that it was not primarily driven by profit. However, Clark then paints the privateersmen themselves as Irish smugglers and rogues who had little interest in anything but profit and plunder.<sup>10</sup> Michael Scott Casey's thesis ignores the motivations for privateering entirely; he makes a strategic argument to demonstrate that privateers were more effective in the war than the Continental Navy, an argument he supports with numerous mathematical and statistical models.<sup>11</sup> Scholars analyzing Revolutionary privateering usually ignore the motivations for the practice, and those that do consider them write off privateering as a primarily profit-driven phenomenon with the occasional secondary motive of stealing from the British.

Scholarship on privateering before the Revolutionary War, however, has done a far better job analyzing privateering's motivations and placing it in a framework beyond that of military strategy. Marcus Rediker is one of the primary scholars in this field. He has written at length on eighteenth-century privateering from the perspective of the sailor, arguing that privateers and the "motley crew" that made up the sailing industry can be seen as an early proletariat formed in opposition to both the dangerous natural world of the sea and the often-authoritarian jurisdiction of the sea captain and the merchant shipowner.<sup>12</sup> Other scholars have turned their efforts towards analyzing privateering

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<sup>10</sup> William Bell Clark, *Ben Franklin's Privateers; a Naval Epic of the American Revolution* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1956).

<sup>11</sup> Casey, *Rebel Privateers*, 84.

<sup>12</sup> See Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000). <https://goo.gl/jQmP6j>; see also Marcus Rediker, "The Seaman as Pirate: Plunder and Social Banditry at Sea," in C.R. Pennell, ed. *Bandits at Sea: A Pirates Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 139-168.

within the context of the Elizabethan Age,<sup>13</sup> the Dutch Golden Age,<sup>14</sup> and maritime bureaucracy of the eighteenth century.<sup>15</sup> Such scholarship has moved privateering away from a solely military practice and considered it through economic, social, and structural perspectives.

Some scholars have started to move these discussions on privateering and its motivations and frameworks into the Revolution; Jesse Lemisch looked at the motivations of American sailors in his groundbreaking article “Jack Tar in the Streets,” arguing that sailors in the Revolution were motivated by a sense of the fight for liberty and not just their own personal gain.<sup>16</sup> A second generation of historians has built off of Lemisch’s argument; Paul Gilje has attempted to refute many of Lemisch’s claims in his work,<sup>17</sup> while Christopher Magra largely seeks to support Lemisch’s findings regarding sailors and liberty.<sup>18</sup> Despite their strong work Lemisch, Gilje, and Magra all fall short of the mark as they focus on sailors as a whole, and not the more specific phenomenon of privateering.

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<sup>13</sup> Kenneth R. Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering; English Privateering during the Spanish War, 1585-1603* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964).

<sup>14</sup> Virginia West Lunsford, *Piracy and Privateering in the Golden Age Netherlands* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). <https://goo.gl/3198HW>.

<sup>15</sup> David J. Starkey, “The Origins and Regulations of Eighteenth-Century British Privateering,” in Pennell, *Bandits at Sea*, 69-81.

<sup>16</sup> Jesse Lemisch, “Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of Revolutionary America,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (July 1968), 371-407. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1921773>.

<sup>17</sup> Paul A. Gilje, “Loyalty and Liberty: The Ambiguous Patriotism of Jack Tar in the American Revolution,” *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 67, no. 2 (April 2000), 165-93. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27774256>. Gilje extrapolates on these ideas in a later publication; see Paul A. Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront: American Maritime Culture in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

<sup>18</sup> See Christopher P. Magra, “Anti-Impressment Riots and the Origins of the Age of Revolution,” *International Review of Social History* 58, no. S21 (2013), 131-51. <http://rave.ohiolink.edu/ejournals/article/312651041>; see also Christopher P. Magra, “The New England Cod Fishing Industry and Maritime Dimensions of the American Revolution,” *Enterprise & Society* 8, no. 4 (December 2007), 799-806. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23700768>; see also Christopher P. Magra, “‘Soldiers...Bred to the Sea’: Maritime Marblehead, Massachusetts, and the Origins and Progress of the American Revolution,” *The New England Quarterly* 77, no. 4 (December 2004), 531-62. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1559726>.

The scholarly conception of Revolutionary privateering as primarily profit-motivated has fed the popular conception that privateering was naught but legalized piracy. The privateering-piracy comparison is flawed, but there is some truth to the profit-narrative. Sailors gravitated towards privateer vessels as they offered higher wages, less restrictive enlistment agreements, and a greater prospect for seizing lucrative prizes than other lines of work aboard ship. Investors saw in privateering an easy way to make a quick fortune. Such investments were risky, but privateers needed only one lucrative capture to pay off the initial investment tenfold. Privateering, when successful, could provide an enormous payday to everyone involved, from the lowest deckhand to the wealthiest investor. But while profit was a motivating factor, it was rarely the sole factor providing the impetus for privateering. Those additional motivations serve as the focus of this thesis.

When the role of privateering during the Revolutionary War is traced in conjunction with various ideological considerations present during that conflict, a more complex practice emerges, one that places the profit-narrative alongside wider ideological frameworks. In this I define ideology as the conceptions and frameworks through which individuals view the world around them. Before the war, privateering was used by early modern European states as a tool to expand their influence into the Atlantic world. It provided a key convergence point between the states, the wealthy mercantile community, and the sailors on the front lines. That expansion of influence came to a clattering halt with the political uprisings of the American Revolution; along with it, privateering's role underwent a marked shift, slotting itself into the new framework of the American cause. For sailors, privateering acted as an outgrowth of pre-war methods of

resistance. The tars and deck hands that had rioted against the press and resisted the British Navigation Acts before the war turned their efforts towards privateering, an avenue they saw as a continuation of their own form of resistance to British rule. For investors, privateering complicated the notions of republicanism. The practice seemed to promote the private interest by neglecting and denigrating service to the public good—one of the great hallmarks of republican virtue. Privateer investors, though, saw their actions as a contribution to the American war effort, thus supporting the cherished public good. To a broader audience, American privateers heralded a shift from the colonial British identity to something new altogether. Privateers targeted the ideological underpinnings of the British Empire itself, working to tear the American colonies from the British ideology in order to begin constructing their own national framework.

Chapter One serves as a foundational chapter, introducing the reader to a number of key privateering concepts and tracing the practice from its earlier forms in the sixteenth century through the mid-eighteenth century. In this chapter I will delineate the difference between privateering and piracy; the two phenomena may have appeared similar in practice, but their origins and motivations stand in stark contrast. Where piracy represented an attempt to break away from the growing influence of the state, privateering was an inseparable part of that expansion into the Atlantic world. Its connections to the merchant community, the state apparatus, and the common sailor indelibly tied it to a range of actors, motivations, and ideological frameworks present in the early modern period.

Chapters Two and Three build upon the foundation of the previous chapter by taking privateering into the Revolutionary War. I have divided my analysis of the practice



and its motivations into two groups: the sailors and the investors. The former is the focus of Chapter Two; I analyze how sailors were in part encouraged to take up privateering as a means of profit and livelihood. That drive for profit occasionally turned into a drive for plunder. Beyond the profit-motive, though, sailors also used privateering as a means to fight back against British authority; in that sense in particular, the practice built off of acts of resistance that colored Anglo-American relations before the Revolution, like the aforementioned burning of the *Gaspee* in Narragansett Bay. Chapter Three moves from the ship's deck to the drawing room, where investors and elites planned their privateer expeditions. Here too was a drive for profit, but one that had to be tempered within the confines of the ideological debate on republicanism. Privateering did not sit easily with the republican virtues of disinterestedness and sacrifice to the public commonwealth; privateer enthusiasts had to walk a careful line between their investments and their devotion to the causes of country and republic.

Chapter Four takes a broader perspective, looking at privateering's place in the ideological context of the war as a whole. The Revolutionary War marked America's separation from a properly British identity and a step towards the creation of a new one. Privateering played a role in this movement too. Privateers attacked the foundations of the British Empire, terrifying British citizens at home and infuriating the British Navy at sea. They targeted Britain's mercantile networks, its commercial dominance, and the Royal Navy, which served as both the glue that held the colonial system together and an immense source of pride and freedom for the British people. While the privateers targeted key ideological components of British identity, it was not out of spite at the entire

ideological construction. It was rather a clear avenue for the American colonists to push back against the presence of British authority and create a clean break with that authority.

As privateers closely relate to so many facets of the early modern and revolutionary periods, this thesis will inevitably touch on elements of naval strategy, state structure, economic principles, and class structure. My principle argument, though, is an ideological one. The study of privateers is not only an example of profit-driven plunder, but also a unique phenomenon in the ideological framework of the American Revolution, a war that was positively saturated with ideology. Privateers were influenced by that ideology to a large degree and, in some cases, helped drive that ideology forward during the War for Independence.

## CHAPTER ONE: PRIVATEERING AND THE FOLLY OF “LEGALIZED PIRACY”

Your true privateer was a sort of half-horse, half-alligator, with a streak of lightning in his composition—something like a man-of-war’s man, but much more like a pirate—generally with a super-abundance of whiskey, as if he held with Sampson that his strength was in the quantity of his hair.<sup>1</sup>

Gomer Williams’ fanciful definition of privateering from his 1898 work *History of the Liverpool Privateers* feels absurd to the modern scholar. No longer do we equate privateers with horses or alligators, and Sampson has no part to play in any privateering narrative. Yet one of Williams’ statements has persisted the test of time: that of equating privateering with piracy. Both in scholarship and in popular conceptions, privateers have long been reduced to “legalized pirates.” Recent works have insisted that “the difference between the privateer and pirate is no wider than the letter of marque,” and that “piracy and privateering differed only in that the latter activity was officially sanctioned by a monarch.”<sup>2</sup> Some scholars have gone further, calling privateering piracy’s “legal alter ego” and even suggesting that privateering “was not unlike acts of state sponsored terrorism in the modern world.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gomer Williams, *History of the Liverpool Privateers and Letters of Marque: With an Account of the Liverpool Slave Trade, 1744-1812* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004), 5. <https://goo.gl/Kjc7hF>.

<sup>2</sup> George Shelvocke, *A Privateer’s Voyage round the World*, ed. Vincent McInerney (Barnsley: Seaforth Publishing, 2010), 12-15. <https://goo.gl/DYdIJM>; Kris E. Lane, *Blood & Silver: A History of Piracy in the Caribbean and Central America* (Oxford: Signal, 1999), 38.

<sup>3</sup> Robert C. Ritchie, “Piracy,” in *Oxford Encyclopedia of Maritime History*, ed. John B. Hattendorf (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). <https://goo.gl/n53uZE>; Todd Sandler and John A.C. Conybeare, “State-Sponsored Violence as a Tragedy of the Commons: England’s Privateering Wars with France and Spain, 1625-1630,” *Public Choice* 77, no. 4 (1993), 880-82. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30027194>.

Privateers and pirates both took part in maritime robbery and plunder, but to equate the two as nearly identical in all but name and legality severely misses the nuances in each practice. In this chapter I will provide detailed descriptions of both privateering and piracy in the early modern era (1500-1750) to show the marked differences between the two phenomena. Where privateering was a heavily regulated activity that was indelibly connected to the mercantile community and the growing state, pirates sought to break away from that society and form their own egalitarian community. The second half of the chapter goes on to analyze the importance of privateering's relationship with the state, its role in the interplay between the merchant community and the lower-class sailor, and its unique position in the emerging ideologies of national identity. The breadth and complexity of those relationships demonstrate that privateering cannot be written off as merely a profit-driven practice. By clearly defining privateering in opposition to piracy and placing privateering within the infrastructure of the state, commerce, and ideology, this chapter will foreshadow privateering's roles within the context of the American Revolutionary War.

### **The Cog and the Missing Piece: Privateering and Piracy**

In differentiating between privateering and piracy, the best place to start is in their respective definitions. Privateering is the practice by which legitimate sovereign governments authorized private citizens to outfit ships in an effort to seize enemy vessels during wartime, with those seizures subject to the jurisdiction of that sovereign. While privateering refers to a specific form of maritime plunder, piracy encompasses a greater number of incidents. Piracy is the unlawful or illegitimate seizure of property at sea by a

captain or ship officially unaffiliated with any governing body.<sup>4</sup> The definition is intentionally broad. Piracy has been practiced in every corner of the world's oceans since ancient times, and the variations between instances of piracy are considerable. To make the comparison of privateering and piracy more feasible, I will restrict my study of piracy to the same geographic locale and time frame as I do for privateering: the early modern Atlantic world.

The definitions provided above offer a distinction between privateering and piracy on the basis of legitimacy, but the differences between the two run deeper than that. By tracing the origins of privateering and the way it operated within the expanding Atlantic world, I will demonstrate the ways in which privateering was not "legalized piracy." Privateering was intricately connected to the state that sanctioned it and the merchants that funded it. Piracy, though, was not an integral part of that system, and indeed sought to fight back against the encroachment of European states upon their ways of life. Separating privateering from piracy is the first step away from a narrow-minded focus on the profit motive for privateering. Only once privateering is understood as a separate phenomenon from piracy can its important position within the expanding Atlantic state and commercial system be understood.

It is difficult, and in many ways fruitless, to trace the exact origins of privateering. The term "privateer" did not come into wide use until sometime in the seventeenth century, but the practice of outfitting private ships of war dates back to at least the

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Ritchie defines piracy as "theft at sea;" see Ritchie, "Piracy," in *Oxford Encyclopedia of Maritime History*. I consider this definition far too broad, and have provided my own, more specific definition of the practice.

Middle Ages.<sup>5</sup> The legal and moral basis of the practice was rooted in the right of reprisal, whereby “individuals could seek the authority of their state to redress, by force if necessary, losses inflicted by foreign seafarers.”<sup>6</sup> Privateering was, in its simplest form, a means of payback for losses at sea. One of the earliest examples of privateering occurred in 1585, after a group of armed Spanish ships captured a number of English merchant vessels anchored off the Iberian coast. In response to the attacks, the English Lord Admiral issued “letters of reprisal to those who proved their losses to his satisfaction.”<sup>7</sup> The central figure to privateering from the start then was the merchant trader; it was their property that ships of reprisal sought to recover. Early private ships of reprisal quickly combined property reacquisition with the search for profit and plunder. Those latter factors came to characterize privateering of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, but the practice never entirely broke from its origins in reprisal. Captain Woodes Rogers stated that he and his men embarked on a privateer voyage in 1708 “to retrieve the Losses we had sustained by the Enemy.”<sup>8</sup> Throughout the eighteenth century merchants who suffered losses in wartime shifted their investments to privateer expeditions in an effort to replace the lost capital with commercial plunder.

Before sailing privateers had to apply to their government for a commission or a letter of marque. Such commissions would only be granted during wartime, and could

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<sup>5</sup> Kenneth R. Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering; English Privateering during the Spanish War, 1585-1603* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), 5. In the Elizabethan era, these ships were simply referred to as ships of reprisal or private men-of-war.

<sup>6</sup> David J. Starkey, “Privateering,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Maritime History*, ed. John B. Hattendorf (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). <https://goo.gl/n53uZE>.

<sup>7</sup> Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering*, 3.

<sup>8</sup> Tim Beattie, *British Privateering Voyages of the Early Eighteenth Century* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2015), 190. <http://0-www.jstor.org.dewey2.library.denison.edu/stable/10.7722/j.ctt12879hk>.

only be issued by legitimate governing authorities.<sup>9</sup> The act of commissioning vessels dates back to early forms of privateering in the Elizabethan Age. The information included in these bond applications varied little over time and were relatively consistent from country to country. Applicants detailed the principal investors in the expedition; the ship's name, type, and tonnage; the number of crew; and the armament of the vessel. If the application was successful, the owners of the privateer would pay a bond as insurance that the ship and her crew would act according to the law. That bond could be confiscated if the privateer exceeded the stipulations of its commission. Having privateers fill out applications shifted the responsibility to the government for any illegal activity on the part of the privateers. Theoretically governments could deny privateer commissions to regulate the number of privateers at sea at any given time, but evidence suggests that applications were accepted far more often than they were denied.<sup>10</sup>

The English privateering regulations—and later, the British and American regulations—did not require much more on the part of the privateer. Dutch privateers during the seventeenth century, though, had a number of other responsibilities mandated

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<sup>9</sup> This was often a point of contention regarding privateering, as states targeted by privateers might claim that the governing authority issuing the commission was illegitimate. During the Eighty Years' War between Spain and the United Provinces, Spain routinely claimed that Dutch letters of marque were illegitimate because the Spanish saw the Dutch as rebels and not a sovereign authority in their own right; see Virginia West Lunsford, *Piracy and Privateering in the Golden Age Netherlands* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 10. <https://goo.gl/3198HW>. A similar situation happened during the American Revolutionary War. Members of Congress and colonial governments were unsure whether they could legally commission privateers. Massachusetts statesman Elbridge Gerry stated that he found the legitimacy for privateering in “the royal charter of the province, which authorized us to levy war against the common enemy of both countries [Britain and Massachusetts]. Such we considered the British nation...and we, accordingly, as loyal subjects, used all the power given us by the charter to capture and destroy them.” See Gardner Weld Allen, *Massachusetts Privateers of the Revolution* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1927), 25.

<sup>10</sup> In the American Revolution, the only reoccurring reason for denying privateer commissions came with privateer embargoes. Congress stipulated that a port could not commission privateers until it had met a quota for men serving in the Continental Army or Navy. Some privateer commissions were thus denied if the quota had not been met. The embargoes on privateering were largely ineffective, and were repealed after four months. For more see Robert H. Patton, *Patriot Pirates: The Privateer War for Freedom and Fortune in the American Revolution* (New York: Random House, 2008), 124-26.

by the States-General and the various Admiralties. Dutch privateer captains were to keep a journal of their voyage and submit that journal to the Admiralty and the owners upon the conclusion of the cruise. They were to treat their men “decently and properly.”<sup>11</sup> They had to lead their crews in prayer twice a day, and could not take the Lord’s name in vain. Such strict regulations on a governmental level are unique to the Dutch system of privateering; most other nations satisfied themselves with more relaxed guarantees that privateers would follow basic laws of seizure and plunder.

There is an important distinction between a privateer and a letter of marque. Letter of marque is an oft-misused term; it applies both to the document authorizing the vessel and the vessel itself. The matter is further complicated by primary news sources that interchangeably used the terms “privateer,” “letter of marque,” and “pirate,” suggesting that contemporary observers saw little need to distinguish one form of sea plunder from another. A privateer received a commission to attack an enemy’s trade; it was exclusively a private ship-of-war with the sole intention of attacking enemy commerce. A letter of marque was a merchant ship intending to embark on trading missions, but with authorization to attack enemy vessels should it come across them. Letters of marque allowed merchant investors to maximize profits by combining their peaceful merchant trade with the potential for wartime prizes. However, letters of marque also spent more time cruising for prizes, leading to a delay in the delivery of mercantile goods.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> For an extended discussion on Dutch privateering regulations see Lunsford, *Piracy and Privateering*, 12-13.

<sup>12</sup> For more on the distinction between privateers and letters of marque, see Starkey, “Privateering,” *Oxford Encyclopedia of Maritime History*.



As privateering became more institutionalized within state regulations the role of prize courts within the practice increased. Privateers could not merely seize plunder and take it for themselves; the prize had to be adjudicated by an Admiralty court.<sup>13</sup> Prize rulings often proved a lengthy and complicated process. First, the prize had to be legitimated; if it was not a legal capture, no prize money could be granted. If any other friendly ships were in the area of the capture, they could claim a cut of the prize money. Recaptures could be especially fraught with difficulty; if the prize had not been in enemy hands for a certain period of time, it was not an eligible prize.<sup>14</sup> If the prize was deemed legitimate and good, prize agents then went about selling the ship and its cargo to local merchants and entrepreneurs, a process that could take months depending on the size of the port and the tenacity of the prize agents. The settlement of prizes from privateer voyages was immensely complex, with each new prize providing its own wrinkles and subtleties. It was not uncommon for prize agents to find themselves hopelessly behind on their work. Prize courts brought a degree of legality and legitimacy to sea plunder, and though they often proved to be a complex, bureaucratic nightmare, they offered an effective means to regulate the captures of privateers.<sup>15</sup>

Privateering was nominally regulated by the state at every step of the process; however, in practice state control was more often a fallacy than a reality. Privateering

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<sup>13</sup> Richard J. Hill, "Prizes," in *Oxford Encyclopedia of Maritime History*, ed. John B. Hattendorf (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). <https://goo.gl/n53uZE>.

<sup>14</sup> One prize capture during the Revolutionary War directly involved Thomas Jefferson, Robert Morris, and James Madison. Morris and a host of other merchants (including Samuel Nightingale) had a stake in the privateer *La Committee*. She was captured by two British privateers in 1780, but within a week was recaptured by a Virginia ship and sent back to Virginia as a prize. Morris and the investors had to petition Jefferson, then Governor of Virginia, to recover their ship. See Nightingale-Jenckes Papers, Folder 5, Box 2, MSS 588, Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence; hereafter RIHS. See also *ibid.* Folder 11, Box 2.

<sup>15</sup> For a detailed look at prize courts and their operation, see Hill, "Prizes," in *Oxford Encyclopedia of Maritime History*.

emerged in the Elizabethan era, a period of history not known for tight state control of maritime affairs. Kenneth Andrews described how “the regulation of privateering provides a striking example of late Elizabethan administration at its worst—feeble and corrupt.”<sup>16</sup> Even as the state bureaucracy grew in power, colonies and ports far from European waters remained almost uncontrollable. In the Caribbean, Henry Morgan served for a number of years as deputy governor of Jamaica despite his close ties to the unscrupulous buccaneering community. During his tenure the interests of colonial Jamaica unsurprisingly fell in line with the interests of Caribbean buccaneers.<sup>17</sup> About the same time, English colonial Governor Thomas Modyford tried to begin the practice of “peace time privateering,” which truly would have been legalized piracy.<sup>18</sup> Even if the state had been more eager and able to control privateering, state regulations often meant little in the vast, ungovernable realm of the world’s oceans. Many captains who set sail as privateers, including Claas Compaen, William Kidd, and George Shelvocke, committed acts of piracy during their cruises.<sup>19</sup> In the search for plunder on the high seas, weakly enforced state regulations meant little, and the line between privateer and pirate became difficult to discern.

The ambiguities between privateering and piracy are further complicated by the fact that legitimacy was a question of perspective rather than empiricism. There were no agreed-upon international laws defining acts of piracy and privateering; the judgement

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<sup>16</sup> Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering*, 22.

<sup>17</sup> Lane, *Blood & Silver*, 123-27.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 111.

<sup>19</sup> For Compaen, see Lunsford, *Piracy and Privateering*, 161-66. For Kidd, see Lane, *Blood & Silver*, 181-82. For Shelvocke see Shelvocke, *Privateer’s Voyage*, 40. Shelvocke’s case is emblematic of the ambiguity between privateering and piracy. His voyage circumnavigated the globe in search of Spanish prizes, but ran out of food of the coast of what is now Chile. Facing starvation and a mutinous crew, Shelvocke stretched the limits of his commission. Shelvocke’s narrative serves as a reminder that greed was not always the motivation for turning to piracy.

fell to individual states and kingdoms. In this context, one man's pirate could be another's national hero. To Spain, nearly every ship seized from their holdings in the Caribbean was the result of piracy, but to Spain's rivals (at varying times the English, French, and Dutch) they were legitimate acts of privateering.<sup>20</sup> The perspective of contemporary observers on the legitimacy and legality of a capture makes it difficult for historians to clearly delineate who was a privateer and who was a pirate in all cases.

There is however a key difference in practice between the operations of privateers and pirates: the hierarchy of the vessel. On a privateer, the captain was the sole commander of the vessel. His word, and the word of his officers, was the law. While privateers had fewer regulations regarding punishment of sailors than state navies, life on board a privateer could still be harsh. On a cruise during the Revolutionary War, privateersman Joshua Davis relates an incident where "Capt. [John] MANLY struck [the boatswain] with the cutlass on the cheek, with such force that his teeth were to be seen from the upper part of his jaw to the lower part of his chin."<sup>21</sup> Additionally, privateer captains and their officers received a much larger share of prize money than average sailors; a typical ratio would have been about twelve shares to the captain for every one share to the common sailor.<sup>22</sup> Privateers operated under a strict linear hierarchy, running

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<sup>20</sup> As Kris E. Lane states, in the seventeenth century Spain's rivals "were following a double course: on the one hand they claimed to be actively suppressing the buccaneers, and on the other they encouraged the illegal activities of at least some of them." Lane, *Blood & Silver*, 124. See also John L. Anderson's argument that "in the Caribbean, piracy originated in and was fueled by Old World rivalries;" John L. Anderson, "Piracy and World History: An Economic Perspective on Maritime Predation, in C.R. Pennell, ed. *Bandits at Sea: A Pirates Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 83.

<sup>21</sup> Joshua Davis, "Narrative of Joshua Davis," *Naval History and Heritage Command*, April 09, 2015. <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/n/narrative-joshua-davis-american-citizen-1811.html>.

<sup>22</sup> David J. Starkey, "The Origins and Regulations of Eighteenth-Century British Privateering," in Pennell, *Bandits at Sea*, 73.

from the common sailor through the captain and up to the merchant owner of the expedition.

Atlantic pirates in the early modern era refrained from such a hierarchical system, utilizing a proto-democratic system of governance on board their ships. Sailors would elect a captain to lead the ship, but the most important decisions were made by a council, which Marcus Rediker describes as “the highest authority on the pirate ship.”<sup>23</sup> Captains would at most receive two shares of prize money for every single share to the common sailor, and punishments were decided by the crew, not the captain. The sovereign of the ship was its crew; there was no linear hierarchy aboard pirate vessels.

That operational difference points to a larger and more important distinction between privateering and piracy. Whereas privateers were indivisibly tied to the state and the merchants that sanctioned and operated them, pirates were beholden only to themselves, and indeed sought to break away from the encroaching hand of state and merchant control. Privateering emerged from the right of reprisal among the merchant community and, as I shall demonstrate later in this chapter, was only possible through investment from that community. States used—and occasionally relied on—privateers to wage *guerre de course* against their foes. In the relationship between maritime commerce, the mercantile community, and interstate warfare, privateering was an important lynchpin, and by definition could not be removed from that system.

Pirates, on the other hand, operated entirely outside that system. Buccaneers in Jamaica and Dominica lived in self-sustaining communities, often with nebulous leadership structures. “In their enterprises,” J.S. Bromley states, “they practiced notions

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<sup>23</sup> Marcus Rediker, “The Seaman as Pirate: Plunder and Social Banditry at Sea,” in Pennell, *Bandits at Sea*, 143.

of liberty and equality, even of fraternity,” and operated in a remarkably egalitarian fashion.<sup>24</sup> But breaking away from the merchant- and state-driven system was not enough; pirates in the Caribbean fought the encroachment of the modern state upon their way of life. Rediker writes that “the foremost target of vengeance was the merchant captain,” and describes how pirates would punish and harass captains who had ill-treated their crews.<sup>25</sup> The motivations of both privateers and pirates, at least in part, was plunder; however, the root source of that motivation varies between the two. Where privateers were driven by the state and merchant investors, pirates were driven by a desire to avoid the influence of the state and the merchant.

Privateers were a cog in the machine of early modern commercial expansion. They were recruited, outfitted, and funded by the mercantile community who sought to recover lost commerce (and indeed gain new profit) during wartime, and were beholden to the legal regulations of the state. The parts of this machine did not always work in unison; the state at times condoned what was more akin to piracy than privateering, and privateers often pushed the limits of their commissions, particularly in regions far away from the centers of power. It could indeed be a greasy, ineffective machine; but while privateering was a part of the machine, piracy wanted no place in it. Pirates sought to break away from the trappings of the early modern state. They formed egalitarian communities of their own, and frequently targeted merchant vessels that represented the world they had left behind. That key difference—the role in the system of state and commercial Atlantic expansion—separates the privateer from the pirate.

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<sup>24</sup> J.S. Bromley, “Outlaws at Sea, 1660-1720: Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity among the Caribbean Freebooters,” in Pennell, *Bandits at Sea*, 180.

<sup>25</sup> Rediker, “Seaman as Pirate,” in Pennell, *Bandits at Sea*, 146.

## **States, Commerce, and Ideology: The Complexities of Privateering**

In order to expand their influence into the wider Atlantic world during the early modern era, European leaders increasingly relied on the growing power of the state, the boundless ambition of the commercial classes, and a burgeoning sense of national pride among their people. Privateering was an integral part of all three. As a state-sanctioned activity privateering played a role in maritime strategy, and could create both complications and opportunities in the field of diplomacy. Privateering was driven by the moneyed mercantile classes, who saw the practice as a way to advance their own interests and profit from the frequent wars of the early modern period. It offered a unique arena where lower-class sailors and middle- to upper-class elites could work together towards a common goal of making money from wartime sea plunder. As a large swath of social classes took part in privateering, it should come as no surprise that privateers became unique symbols of national identity, particularly for the Dutch and English peoples and, later, for British colonists in the Americas. Privateering's role in state, commercial, and ideological expansion during the early modern period would come to foreshadow their actions during the American Revolutionary War, and is thus an important foundation for my later analysis of privateering during that conflict.

### *Privateering and the State*

As I demonstrated in the first part of this chapter, privateering was by definition a state-sanctioned activity. It first emerged in the sixteenth century, at a time when states lacked the necessary infrastructure to raise and maintain large standing armies and navies. Instead, they relied on private ships of war and private mercenaries to make up the bulk of their forces. The earliest privateer expeditions were mounted by states with

little-to-no significant naval fighting force. During the Elizabethan Age, the limited number of royal ships were deployed in defensive measures; their duties, in the words of Kenneth Andrews, were “to protect English shores, to maintain communications and supply lines between the allies, and to deny Spain the use of western European waters.”<sup>26</sup> That strategy left little room for offensive action; to that end, Queen Elizabeth called on England’s aggressive and ambitious mercantile elite to provide privateers to attack Spanish commercial shipping lanes. Andrews accurately surmises that privateering during the Elizabethan Age was “the product of the coexistence of ambitious traders and predatory gentry.”<sup>27</sup> Private ships of war could be used defensively as well; in the early part of the Eighty Years’ War between the United Provinces and Spain, the Dutch relied on the *Watergeuzen* (Sea Beggars) to defend coasts and rivers from Spanish attack. The Sea Beggars were instrumental in relieving the Dutch city of Leiden from a Spanish siege in 1574.<sup>28</sup> Privateers could offer states with less-developed naval forces both an offensive and defensive maritime component to their grand strategy, albeit an often unruly and ill-disciplined one.

As states improved their infrastructures, the need for privatized violence in turn diminished. On land states began using standing armies of their own recruits, all but eradicating the role of the mercenary soldier. At sea, the role of the privateers was not eliminated; rather, it took on a new task in the broader scheme of maritime strategy. As David Starkey states, privateering gradually “became less of a substitute for, and more of a supplement to, the naval forces of states.”<sup>29</sup> The Dutch Sea Beggars gradually

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<sup>26</sup> Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering*, 10.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 235.

<sup>28</sup> Lunsford, *Piracy and Privateering*, 90-91.

<sup>29</sup> Starkey, “Privateering,” in *Oxford Encyclopedia of Maritime History*.

transitioned from the main maritime arm of the Dutch forces into a group that shared primacy with the official Dutch navy. They began participating in more *guerre de course* activities than defensive measures. Privateers were also increasingly employed by major Dutch trading companies to attack enemy commerce and line the pockets of Dutch merchants.<sup>30</sup> Privateers became the auxiliary force to the official navy, rather than the primary naval force of the state.

As the privateers' central role in state security decreased, their main theatre of operations shifted to the peripheries of conflicts to target enemy trade. While the English navy made defense of the homeland its primary objective, English privateers had a free hand to ravage Spanish treasure ships in the Caribbean. The activity of privateers in the West Indies, Andrews argues, helped break the Spanish monopoly of the region and open the Caribbean for Dutch, French, and English trading expeditions.<sup>31</sup> Privateers also attacked Spanish commerce in the Pacific, though as Tim Beattie explains these long voyages often brought more misery than profit.<sup>32</sup> For much of the early modern era, privateers offered states an opportunity to either establish a maritime component to their fighting forces or augment the maritime forces already in place.

While privateering could offer strategic benefits, it could also create diplomatic tensions between states. Privateers were often a difficult lot to control, and did not take kindly to being forced to cease their plundering activities. In the late 1640s, the Dutch were seeking to establish peace with Portugal. Dutch privateers, though, continued to raid Portuguese shipping even as the Dutch made peace overtures. One pamphlet called the

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<sup>30</sup> These privately-owned, privately-regulated ships of war created substantial disagreements between the Dutch Admiralties and the trading companies; see Lunsford, *Piracy and Privateering*, 18-20.

<sup>31</sup> See Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering*, 159-86.

<sup>32</sup> Beattie, *British Privateering Voyages*, 139; 195.



privateers “pernicious, scandalous, ungodly, and unchristian” for their actions in preventing the peace.<sup>33</sup> The port of Dunkirk was a notorious haven for French and Dutch privateers during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The attacks of those privateers incensed the British. The British solved the matter in the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, which stipulated that the fortifications in Dunkirk would be demolished and a British observer posted in the city to prevent privateers from ever sailing from that port again.<sup>34</sup>

The privateers’ activities at the edges of legitimacy meant they frequently posed diplomatic quandaries for states; conversely, though, creative statesmen could use privateers to push the boundaries of diplomatic legitimacy. The Americans used privateers to that effect during the Revolutionary War. It was nominally illegal for privateers to sell prizes in a neutral port. That law posed complications to American privateers sailing in European waters; it was far from efficient to send prizes across the Atlantic for jurisdiction. Continental Navy captains like Lambert Wickes started to make overtures to the French regarding the possible sale of American prizes in French ports. Tensions were further escalated when American Captain Gustavus Conyngham sailed out of Dunkirk and began attacking British shipping, a blatant violation of French neutrality.<sup>35</sup> The British were furious. British Ambassador to France Lord Stormont wrote

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<sup>33</sup> Lunsford *Piracy and Privateering*, 33.

<sup>34</sup> E. Gordon Bowen-Hassell, Dennis M. Conrad, and Mark L. Hayes, *Sea Raiders of the American Revolution: The Continental Navy in European Waters* (Washington, DC: Naval Historical Center, Dept. of the Navy, 2003), 23.

<sup>35</sup> The French themselves were tricked by Conyngham and the American agents. French Foreign Minister Comte de Vergennes had ordered that Conyngham and his ship the *Greyhound* remain in port for fear of them attacking British shipping. William Hodge, the primary owner of the ship, then “sold” the *Greyhound* to a British captain named Richard Allen. With nothing seemingly preventing the ship from sailing, the *Greyhound* left Dunkirk in July of 1777. Upon leaving port, the ship’s name was changed to *Revenge* and Conyngham took command of his vessel. For his trickery Hodge was thrown in prison; he was released only two months later. For more see Bowen-Hassell, Conrad, and Hayes, *Sea Raiders of the American Revolution*, 20-32, and Patton, *Patriot Pirates*, 176-78.

to his superior Lord Weymouth, “Your Lordship can want no further Proofs of the Constant Duplicity and insidious Policy of [the French] Court,” and suggested that Britain “have a great Fleet ready to act instantly so that if the Necessity should arise we may be able to strike at once a decisive Blow [against the French] which might end the War the Moment it began.”<sup>36</sup> By using privateers to test the bounds of French neutrality, the Americans helped push the French closer to a possible alliance with the colonists and into the war against Britain. While privateers often proved problematic in the fields of diplomacy, they could be used as effective tools of coercion by creative statesmen.

#### *Privateering, Commerce, and the Investor-Sailor Relationship*

Privateering played a key role in state expansion and maritime strategy, first serving as the primary naval force of a country then taking on a supplemental role following infrastructure expansion. But while the state sanctioned privateers, the impetus for the practice came from the moneyed commercial classes. These wealthy investors provided the ships and the guns; they recruited sailors and hired captains for the expeditions; they purchased foodstuffs for the cruise; and their names graced the commission applications. At the same time, while investors funded the expeditions, sailors were the ones manning the vessels. The investors and sailors were diametrically opposed socio-economic classes, yet in privateering they found themselves working towards a common goal. More often than not, that goal was profit.

In his survey of privateering during the Elizabethan Age, Kenneth Andrews closely analyzes the various groups that invested in privateers. He describes how

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<sup>36</sup> Lord Stormont to Lord Weymouth, June 19 1777, in William Bell Clark et. al, eds. *Naval Documents of the American Revolution* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1964--), vol. 9, 411-13; hereafter abbreviated as NDAR.

“English maritime ambition,” of which privateering was an indelible part, was characterized by “the drive of the merchants to extend trade, and the drive of the gentry for plunder.”<sup>37</sup> He describes three categories of privateer investors: amateurs, professionals, and great merchants. Amateurs were usually young noblemen, driven by fantasies of glory and prestige. They gambled on privateer expeditions, and they gambled big. Usually, they lost big too; Andrews states that “the adventurers were not likely to see their money again unless some unusual slice of luck befell the ships.”<sup>38</sup> A “professional,” for Andrews, was a “captain, shipowner, official or simply ‘man of war’ [who] understood the business.”<sup>39</sup> This group consisted of captains who owned and sailed their own ships on privateer cruises, usually on short-term cruises along the coast rather than long ocean voyages.<sup>40</sup>

The most important group of investors is the third and final group: the “great merchants.”<sup>41</sup> The infrastructure was already in place for merchants to succeed in privateering. They could recycle their trading vessels as private men of war. While some ships were specially constructed as privateers, the vast majority were converted merchantmen.<sup>42</sup> Their prior trading expeditions would have put them in contact with captains and sailors to crew their vessels, and merchants would have typically had enough funds to pay those sailors.<sup>43</sup> Merchant investors were able to use their preexisting

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<sup>37</sup> Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering*, 11.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 69. For more on amateur privateer investments see Ibid. 61-80.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 81.

<sup>40</sup> For more on professionals, see Ibid. 81-99.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 100.

<sup>42</sup> Carl E. Swanson, “American Privateering and Imperial Warfare, 1739-1748,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (July 1985), 365. <http://0-www.jstor.org.dewey2.library.denison.edu/stable/1918932>. These ships naturally varied in size; some were small ships built only for coasting and short voyages; others were massive Indiamen built for lengthy ocean cruises. See also Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering*, 34-35.

<sup>43</sup> Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering*, 40. Privateers were typically well-manned; a large complement of sailors made capturing vessels much easier. It also, however, was more expensive for investors. See also

trading networks to arm their vessels and, more importantly, to purchase food for the crew. On long ocean voyages food was a costly investment, and a lack of food could completely derail an expedition.<sup>44</sup> The merchants were the lynchpin of the privateering phenomenon; they worked with other amateur and professional investors, they outfitted their own vessels, and they drove the impetus for privateering at the state level. As the role of the gentry in privateering dissipated through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the merchants who already played a critical role in the practice came to dominate privateering investments. By the mid-eighteenth century in the American colonies, “the overwhelming majority of privateer investors listed their profession as ‘merchant’ when they applied for letters of marque.”<sup>45</sup>

If merchants were the lynchpin of privateering, the sailors were its backbone. Privateering was a popular venture for sailors and landsmen alike. It was typical for a privateer to sail with a considerable complement of landsmen on board; one privateer sailed from Liverpool in 1779 with eighteen landsmen, comprising about twenty percent of the crew.<sup>46</sup> It was not uncommon to find state navies struggling to maintain full crews due to the allure of privateering. Virginia Lunsford cites an example from the Netherlands where a warship’s entire crew deserted the navy to sign aboard a privateer.<sup>47</sup>

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David J. Starkey, “‘To Excite the Whole Company to Courage and Bravery’: The Incentivisation of British Privateering Crews, 1702-1815,” in *Naval Leadership and Management: 1650-1950; Essays in Honour of Michael Duffy*, ed. Richard Harding and Helen Doe (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012), 130. <http://0-www.jstor.org.dewey2.library.denison.edu/stable/10.7722/j.ctt81r96.15>.

<sup>44</sup> Beattie, *Privateering Voyages*, 139. In his narrative describing the three-year privateer voyage, Shelvocke’s ship wrecked and lost the majority of its food stores. After they rebuilt the ship and set sail, Shelvocke commented that the expedition was “threatened with almost certain perdition if means were not fallen upon to avoid a state of absolute famine;” Shelvocke, *Privateer’s Voyage*, 138.

<sup>45</sup> Swanson, “American Privateering and Imperial Warfare,” 365.

<sup>46</sup> Williams, *History of Liverpool Privateers*, 18. Such a large component of landsmen was not uncommon during wartime, particularly among British privateers.

<sup>47</sup> Lunsford, *Piracy and Privateering*, 23-24.

Between the options of service in the state navy and sailing with a privateer, many sailors and landsmen preferred the latter option.

Privateering's popularity among sailors can be attributed in large part to its promise of financial gain. In *Robinson Crusoe*, Daniel Defoe stated that privateering was “for men of desperate fortunes on the one hand, or of aspiring, superior fortunes on the other.”<sup>48</sup> Nathaniel Boteler commented that “there is nothing that more bewitcheth [the privateers], nor anything wherein they promise to themselves so loudly nor delight in more mainly [as] the business of pillage.”<sup>49</sup> Privateers provided sailors a larger share of prize money, and as they almost exclusively targeted commercial vessels, the potential for larger prize shares could be limitless. Broadships advertising privateer cruises routinely emphasized the potential for profit, like this one from Liverpool in 1756:

All gentlemen, seamen, and able-bodied landmen that are willing to fight the French and make their fortunes, may meet with suitable encouragement by entering on board the *The Grand Buck Privateer*, Captain John Coppell, Commander.<sup>50</sup>

In much the same way that privateering was a business investment for the merchants, it was an investment for the sailors. Their goal, by and large, was to profit from prizes and plunder.

Privateering was a unique phenomenon of the early modern world in that it brought together the wealthiest of investors and the lowest of paupers in common pursuit of profit. Commonality did not lead to any semblance of equality or brotherhood; investors maintained rigid control of the expedition. They provided their captains with strict instructions stipulating how the voyage should proceed. A privateer who failed to

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<sup>48</sup> Quoted in Beattie, *Privateering Voyages*, 14.

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering*, 41.

<sup>50</sup> Quoted in Williams, *History of Liverpool Privateers*, 104.

follow the owner's instructions would likely be fired and struggle to find work again as a captain. The instructions were remarkably detailed and left little room for freelancing on the part of the privateer captain, as in this set of instructions given to Captain James Haslam in 1779:

[You] are by the first opportunity to sail from hence and make the best of your way to sea by the North or South Channel, as the wind may offer most favourable, but we prefer the former if to be effected without any extraordinary Risque...In this case don't keep too near the coast of Ireland, and be sure to gain the longitude of 20 West from London before you go to the southward of the latitude of 53...when the westing is gain'd you are to cross the latitudes under an easy sail to the Island of St. Mary's, then to cruise about five degrees to the westward of it, now and then stretching half a degree to the southward...<sup>51</sup>

Haslam's instructions continue on for another four pages, and account for nearly every possible eventuality in the cruise. His instructions also gave explicit orders on how to treat prisoners and crew, and even how to proceed in the event of Captain Haslam's death. Of course there was no guarantee that a privateer captain would actually follow these instructions; once a privateer left port, there was no way to regulate their actions. Some investors, particularly on long transoceanic privateer voyages, attempted to curb this problem by sending agents along with the expedition. George Shelvocke describes a "Mr. Godfrey, the owners' agent-general," aboard the lead ship in his expedition.<sup>52</sup> By micromanaging the actions of their privateers the merchants sought to prevent their investments from committing costly transgressions that could bring international embarrassment for the state and financial losses for the investors.

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<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Williams, *History of Liverpool Privateers*, 21. An example of instructions from an owner to a privateer captain from the American Revolution is included in the Appendix.

<sup>52</sup> Shelvocke, *Privateer's Voyage*, 135.

There was some pushback from privateersmen regarding the investors' micromanagement of expeditions. Unforeseen happenings were common at sea in the early modern period, incidents which no amount of instructional detail or foresight could take into account. Even agents might not be able to prevent transgressions; Shelvocke's expedition had two agents on board, but the crew still "drew up a paper of articles respecting a new division of any plunder."<sup>53</sup> Privateers were focused solely on seizing prizes, increasing the likelihood that the crew would mutiny over the distribution of prize money.<sup>54</sup> As a result of ill-discipline regarding prize shares, the British Admiralty mandated articles of agreement for privateering in 1729. David Starkey defines these articles as "contracts prepared by the promoters of the venture, and signed by members of the ship's company as they enlisted, their purpose being to establish the object of the business, the obligations of the various parties to the agreement and the distribution of rewards between these parties."<sup>55</sup> The articles served as a binding contract between the two sides, ideally ensuring a fair balance of the profits and a certain degree of cooperation between sailors and owners. As states increased in strength and more regulations went into effect, both from the state and from the owners, mutinies regarding prize money became less commonplace, though tensions remained.

Privateering was in many ways an outgrowth of the mercantile community of the early modern era. Ambitious merchants used privateers to make a profit during wartime by preying on enemy commerce. They had the funds, expertise, and connections needed to engage in privateering and ensure a higher rate of success in their investment. While

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 42.

<sup>54</sup> Beattie, *Privateering Voyages*, 19-20.

<sup>55</sup> Starkey, "To Excite the Whole Company," 132. Disagreements between elites and commoners were present across the range of British military branches in the eighteenth century.

merchants footed the bill, sailors did the heavy lifting, joining privateer ventures in the hopes of making their own fortunes. Despite some occasional disagreements regarding prize money and the operation of the vessel, the two disparate groups worked in relative unison towards the pursuit of profit through privateering.

### *Privateering and National Ideology*

Privateering developed through encouragement from the state, investment from the mercantile classes, and participation from the sailors. With its close ties to the expanding state and lower- and upper-class segments of society, the role of privateering in early modern nationalist narratives and ideologies should not come as a surprise. Privateers were not representative of the power of the state, but rather the power of the people working towards both the advancement of self and the advancement of state. In doing so they became national heroes and cultural symbols to their people, serving as far more than sea-rovers and plunderers but rather icons whose achievements and actions contributed to the constructions of national and cultural identity.

Virginia Lunsford addresses the intersection of privateering and national identity directly in her work *Piracy and Privateering in the Golden Age Netherlands*, suggesting that Dutch privateers, Sea Beggars, and even pirates exemplified elements of a Dutch national consciousness. The Dutch national identity was built in opposition to Spanish control of the region; where the Spanish were autocratic, the Dutch sought to be more republican. The spirit of republicanism was embodied in the freebooting lifestyle of privateers. The Dutch also connected with the sea as both a destructive force, which could wash away their lives, and a provider of boundless wealth from shipping and



fishing.<sup>56</sup> The privateers served as an occasional destructive force to the Dutch people, but more often provided wealth and prosperity to Dutch sailors and investors. The trades of merchants and privateers were not capricious and materialistic avenues for wealth but rather patriotic representations of Dutch glory. Dutch privateers were sea-based, non-autocratic, commercially-focused citizens seeking to line their own pockets and defend the Dutch nation. In doing so, Dutch privateers both took from and contributed to elements of Dutch cultural identity during the seventeenth century.<sup>57</sup>

English (and later British) privateers had a similar relationship with conceptions of their own cultures and national identities. The Elizabethan Age was seen as a crowning period of English maritime prowess, with Sea Dog privateers Francis Drake and John Hawkins projecting an English presence across the oceans of the world at the expense of the Spanish. Andrews states that privateering and plunder during the Elizabethan Age “increasingly identified itself with Protestantism and patriotism.”<sup>58</sup> He later suggests that privateering was “a special vehicle of national feeling” that brought together disparate parts of English society like “court and country gentlemen, merchant magnates and local traders, captains and masters...and the mob of sailors, old hands [and] raw recruits.”<sup>59</sup> The age was later looked back upon as a foundation for England’s maritime emphasis. Gomer Williams calls it “the golden age of privateering,” when “the profession was carried on by men cast in the heroic mould.”<sup>60</sup> Tim Beattie has also asserted that the long-

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<sup>56</sup> Lunsford, *Piracy and Privateering*, 70.

<sup>57</sup> For a succinct description of Dutch national identity and the place of privateers within that identity, see *ibid.* 99.

<sup>58</sup> Andrews, *Elizabethan Privateering*, 15.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* 233-34.

<sup>60</sup> Williams, *History of Liverpool Privateers*, 32. An avenue of further research could investigate whether the role of aristocrats and gentry – Andrews’ “amateurs” – influenced the heroic conception of privateering during the Elizabethan Era.

distance voyages of Britain's privateers built upon a narrative and mythos of semi-professional, private sailors contributing to the defense and glory of the nation, despite the voyages' eventual failures.<sup>61</sup> The growth of the English (and later British) maritime empire necessitated the creation of maritime symbols of prestige and greatness. Along with the Royal Navy, privateers represented the English peoples' initiative, seamanship, and ambition in projecting their empire throughout the world's oceans.

The British Empire of course included colonies in the Americas, which increasingly sent out privateers during Britain's various wars of the eighteenth century. They too hearkened back to the privateers of the Elizabethan Age. Privateering was a popular phenomenon in the colonies; Alexander Hamilton (a Maryland physician, not the Founding Father) commented on the spectacle of "flags and ensigns" that greeted him as he entered Philadelphia, the colorful displays of a port prepared to send out privateers in search of plunder.<sup>62</sup> Carl Swanson studied the attitudes of Americans toward their privateers during the 1740s, and concluded that "it is impossible to miss the sense of pride that equated America's privateers with Drake and Hawkins."<sup>63</sup>

For maritime-minded empires, privateering offered a symbolic demonstration of the power of the people and the maritime destiny of the nation. As such the practice became embroiled in the national ideologies of the Dutch, English, and American peoples. Privateering was an indelible part of Atlantic expansion in the early modern period. It provided states with more flexibility in crafting naval strategy. It channeled the ambition of both sailors and merchants towards plundering the nation's enemies.

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<sup>61</sup> Beattie, *Privateering Voyages*, 196-97.

<sup>62</sup> Swanson, "American Privateering and Imperial Warfare," 357.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. 370.

Privateering's significance in that expansion is demonstrated in its place in nationalist ideologies emphasizing maritime glory. Privateering was not a phenomenon in isolation; it existed at the crossroads between the state, the merchant community, and the sailor, and was underpinned by varying degrees of a nationalist ideology.

## **Conclusion**

Privateers were a unique and at times crucial cog in the early modern Atlantic world, an arena that saw the rise of colonialism and the modern state and unprecedented levels of transatlantic commerce. Their position was far beyond that of "legalized piracy;" privateers were a part of the system, the lower portion of the sailor-merchant-state hierarchy, while pirates operated outside of and against the state- and merchant-driven system of Atlantic expansion. Within the Atlantic world privateers aided the state by providing early options for naval deployment, and later acting as supplements to imperially-minded state navies. Privateering necessitated involvement from both the merchant investor and the sailor, groups that were both interested in profiting from the practice. Due to the variety of socio-economic involvement in privateering the practice became a cultural symbol for maritime-minded empires like the Dutch Empire and the English, and later British, Empire. Privateering was a unique phenomenon in the early modern world, one that deserves far more careful and complex analysis than that offered by the profit-motive narrative.

Privateers that operated out of American ports fit into the expanding Atlantic world, but after the Seven Years' War the political climate hinted at the coming seismic shift as Americans began to distance themselves from their former staunch identity with the British Empire. Victory in the French and Indian War brought with it more restrictive

enforcement of taxes as a result of the immense debt accrued by the British government. Americans increasingly resented what they saw as “taxation without representation.” Further acts of civil disobedience and outright resistance led to the outbreak of the Revolutionary War in 1775, a conflict that would lead to the foundation of the new American republic. While the colonies went through political separation from Britain, the practice of privateering underwent a marked transformation as well. It still needed involvement from the state and the mercantile community, but in a revolution rife with ideologies of liberty, republicanism, and identity, the ideological component of privateering took on a greater role than it had ever done before. The remaining three chapters analyze that ideological component of privateering in the American Revolution, looking first at the considerations of the sailors, then the merchants, and finally the British and American nations.

## CHAPTER TWO: PRIVATEERSMEN, PLUNDER, AND THE IDEOLOGIES OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL LIBERTY

On June 2, 1775, Boston merchant Ichabod Jones arrived in the port of Machias in upstate Maine (then a part of the Massachusetts colony) with his ships *Unity* and *Polly*, accompanied by the British tender *Margaretta* commanded by Captain James Moore. Jones was the primary merchant operating along the route from Machias to Boston, trading vital provisions to the Machians in exchange for lumber that could be used by the British soldiers in Boston. Jones hoped that the Machians had not yet received news of the Battles of Lexington and Concord, and the coming war between the colonists and Britain. He was to be disappointed. As Jones and the British sailed into port they were greeted by the site of a Liberty Pole in the town commons. Some of the townspeople told Jones they would not sell him any wood, knowing the lumber would be used by their British enemies.

The response from Jones and Moore was heavy-handed. Jones withheld the vital supplies from the Machians and requested that Moore sail the *Margaretta* closer to the town so that “her Guns would reach the Houses.”<sup>1</sup> In response the Machians attacked Moore and Jones when they came ashore. Jones fled into the woods, while Moore managed to return to his ship. Led by Jeremiah O’Brien and Benjamin Foster, the townspeople seized Jones’ ship *Unity* and another vessel in port, the *Falmouth Packet*, to pursue Moore and the *Margaretta*. Moore, unable to outpace the colonists, turned to

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<sup>1</sup> James Lyons, Chairman of the Machias Committee, to the Massachusetts Provincial Congress, June 14 1775, in William Bell Clark et. al, eds. *Naval Documents of the American Revolution* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1964--), vol. 1, 676. Hereafter abbreviated as *NDAR*.

fight. He perished in the ensuing battle, which saw the Americans capture the *Margaretta* and its weaponry along with a number of British prisoners. When asked why he did not surrender to the Americans, Moore exclaimed that “he preferred Death before yielding to such a sett of Villains.”<sup>2</sup>

The Battle of Machias is often considered to be the first naval battle of the American Revolution, and it demonstrates some of the difficulties in investigating motivations behind private enterprise in maritime conflict. On one hand, the Machians who attacked Jones and Moore would have described their actions as defensive, undertaken both for self-preservation and the ideals of liberty. Indeed, a month later O’Brien and Foster fitted out the captured *Unity* (now renamed *Machias Liberty*) as a “Privateer for the Defence of the Place [Machias and its surrounding ports].”<sup>3</sup> On the other side, the Battle of Machias could be seen as an aggressive attack on British commerce, one that was used by the American colonists as a means to profit from the war. Vice Admiral Samuel Graves in Boston accused the Machians of outfitting their captured ships as “pirate Vessels and...cruizing about Mechias in the Bay of Fundy.”<sup>4</sup> Foster and O’Brien even feared that they would be “treated as Pirates” if captured.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Pilot Nathaniel Godfrey’s Report of Action between the Schooner *Margueritta* and the Rebels at Machias, June 11 1775, in *NDAR* vol. 1, 655-56. For a British account of the battle see *ibid.* For an American account see James Lyons to the Massachusetts Provincial Congress, June 14 1775, in *ibid.* 676-677. See also Deposition of Thomas Flinn, Master of the *Falmouth Packet*, July 10 1775, in *ibid.* 848-49. For a secondary source account of the battle focused on the exploits of Jeremiah O’Brien, see Andrew M. Sherman, *Life of Captain Jeremiah O’Brien, Machias, Maine: Commander of the First American Naval Flying Squadron of the War of the Revolution* (Morristown: G.W. Sherman, 1902), 28-81.

<sup>3</sup> Petition of Benjamin Foster and Jeremiah O’Brien to the Massachusetts General Court, July 19 1775, in *NDAR* vol. 1, 924.

<sup>4</sup> Vice Admiral Samuel Graves to Lieutenant John Graves, His Majesty’s Schooner *St. Lawrence*, July 18 1775, in *ibid.* 913.

<sup>5</sup> Petition of Benjamin Foster, July 19 1775, in *ibid.* 924.

The people of Machias were not commissioned privateers when they engaged Captain Moore and the *Margaretta*, but the nature of the battle, in which private citizens with varied degrees of maritime experience attacked British ships engaged in commercial activities, closely resembles the practice of privateering as well as the driving forces behind the phenomenon. Most scholars have emphasized that, for the common sailor, profit was the primary motivation for joining a privateer. I do not disagree that profit was an ever-present motivation; however, it was not the sole impetus behind privateering. For American sailors and tars, privateering represented a means to resist British authority in the commercial-maritime sphere, an industry where so many sailors made their livelihoods. Privateering closely resembled other forms of resistance both before and during the war in Revolutionary America, including tax riots, impressment riots, and prison breaks. While privateersmen saw their actions as forms of resistance to British authority, this should not be mistaken as a unified fight for liberty; more often than not privateers were fighting *against* British intervention in their lives rather than *for* a vague conception of American ideals and liberty. This chapter will analyze privateering from the sailor's perspective in two parts. First, I will show that privateering was in part driven by profit, which occasionally turned into a greedy drive for plunder. Second, I will add another dimension to the motivations for privateering by examining the practice as a fight for individual economic and social liberties, one that borrowed from other examples of sailor collective action during the Revolutionary Period. In doing so I hope to demonstrate that the profit motive is not the only explanation for privateering's popularity among sailors during the War for Independence.

While there is a plethora of sources on privateering from the investor's perspective, there are relatively few primary source documents produced by privateersmen. A number of helpful sources can be found in the *Naval Documents of the American Revolution* series, which I have used judiciously throughout this chapter. The best firsthand accounts of privateering come from narratives written by former sailors and deck hands. In this chapter I will draw on the accounts of Joshua Davis, Dr. Solomon Drowne, Gideon Olmsted, Christopher Prince, Andrew Sherburne, and Christopher Vail. These sources are admittedly far from perfect. Many were written and published after the war, and fall victim to the distortion of historical memory. Drowne's journal was not even published for widespread consumption until 1872. Some of the authors, like Prince and Sherburne, took part in religious revival movements following the war; their newfound piety may have affected the portrayal of their younger selves. Many of the narratives were influenced by their audience; the authors no doubt lionized some of their accomplishments during the war to make themselves appear heroic or to garner sympathy from the reader. The stories presented in the privateer narratives likely include some degree of fiction and misrepresentation, but despite their flaws these still provide meaningful insight into the sailors' perception of privateering during the war.

### **A Revolutionary Gold Rush: Privateersmen and the Drive for Plunder**

In October of 1780 British Admiral George Rodney wrote a letter to the Admiralty detailing his campaigns against the American privateers. He spared no insult in describing his adversaries:

The wretches with which their privateers are manned have no principal whatever; they live by piracy and the plunder of their fellow subjects; when they have been released out of humanity to return to their families



and live by honest industry, they forget the mercy that has been shown them, and instantly return to renew their acts of piracy.<sup>6</sup>

While Rodney's description of the privateer sailors is certainly a biased exaggeration, he does accurately describe one of the primary motivators for privateers: plunder. As discussed in the previous chapter profit was an ever-present motivator for privateersmen during the early modern era. Privateers during the American Revolution offered higher wages than the Continental Navy, a greater chance of taking lucrative prizes, and a higher share of whatever prize money came from the cruise.<sup>7</sup> Colonists from all walks of life would sign up for privateer cruises driven in part by the allure of financial gain; in some cases, this quest for plunder obstructed everything else.

The growth in privateering's popularity is the direct result of its perceived profitability; it was the gold rush of the American Revolution. Seaport towns were abuzz over the profits to be had in attacking British commerce. One privateer would return to port laden with prizes, prompting other Americans to take up the practice as well in the hopes of making their fortunes.<sup>8</sup> A British officer imprisoned in Boston in 1777 attested that "privateersmen come on shore here full of money and enjoy themselves..."<sup>9</sup>

Massachusetts statesman Elbridge Gerry commented that the news of privateer successes had "animated the Inhabitants of the Seaports who were unable to command much property, to write in Companies of twenty or thirty Men & go out in Boats of 8 or 10

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<sup>6</sup> Henry Steele Commager and Richard B. Morris, eds. *The Spirit of 'Seventy-Six: The Story of the American Revolution as Told by Participants* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 969.

<sup>7</sup> Gardner Weld Allen, *Massachusetts Privateers of the Revolution* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1927), 14.

<sup>8</sup> The role of conversation was crucial to the gold rush mentality. Potential for profit was not enough; news of that enterprise had to reach a large swath of people in order to drive a mad rush the likes of which were seen in Revolutionary privateering and later in the California gold rushes of the mid-nineteenth century. For more on the socializations of gold rushes see James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 309-10.

<sup>9</sup> Allen, *Massachusetts Privateers*, 17.

Tons Burthen which they call ‘Spider Catchers’...”<sup>10</sup> Songs were sung in taverns and meeting houses heralding the accomplishments of privateers.<sup>11</sup> The popularity of privateering depleted the maritime labor market in the colonies; by 1780, many privateers sailed with more landsmen on board than seamen.<sup>12</sup> James Warren stated it best when, in a letter to John Adams, he wrote that “the Success of those that have before Engaged in that business has been sufficient to make a whole Country privateering mad.”<sup>13</sup>

The first-hand privateer narratives support the idea that the practice exhibited tendencies of a gold rush phenomenon, with major surges of participants joining once the potential gains became apparent. Of the memoirs intensively studied for this essay none of the authors began their Revolutionary War careers as privateers. Christopher Vail and Gideon Olmsted both joined regiments of militia upon the outbreak of war.<sup>14</sup> Solomon Drowne was trained as a surgeon, and supported the American army in that capacity during the Siege of New York in 1776 and later at the Rhode Island Hospital.<sup>15</sup> Prince and Sherburne were sailors by trade before joining privateers. Prince actually began the war in British custody, fighting under duress for the British in the St. Lawrence River in

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<sup>10</sup> Elbridge Gerry to John Adams, December 4 1775, in *NDAR* vol. 2, 1261-63.

<sup>11</sup> “O all ye gallant Sailor Lads, don’t never be dismay’d/Nor let your Foes in Battle ne’er think you are afraid/Those dastard Sons shall tremble when our Cannon they do roar/We’ll take, or sink, or burn them all, or them we’ll drive on Shore/And a Privateering we will go, my Boys, my Boys/And a Privateering we will go.” Woodcut of Captain John Manley, 1776, in *NDAR* vol. 3, 47.

<sup>12</sup> On board the *Hope*, which set sail in 1780, Solomon Drowne claims “there was only one long practiced seaman on board.” Solomon Drowne, *Journal of a Cruise in the Fall of 1780, in the Sloop-of-War, Hope, of Providence, R.I.* ed. Henry T. Drowne (New York: C.L. Moreau, 1872), 4. <https://archive.org/details/journalofcruisei00drow>.

<sup>13</sup> James Warren to Samuel Adams, August 15 1776, in *NDAR* vol. 6, 191.

<sup>14</sup> Vail says that he “enlisted as a soldier in Capt. John Hulberts company, it being the 3<sup>d</sup> company and 3<sup>d</sup> regiment of Continental soldiers” in July of 1775; Christopher Vail, “Christopher Vail’s Journal,” *AmericanRevolution.org*. Accessed September 25, 2016. <http://www.americanrevolution.org/vail.php>. Olmsted fought at the Siege of Boston in a militia regiment under the command of Colonel Joseph Spencer; Gideon Olmsted, *The Journal of Gideon Olmsted: Adventures of a Sea Captain during the American Revolution*, ed. Gerald W. Gawalt (Washington: Library of Congress, 1978), xi.

<sup>15</sup> Drowne, *Journal of a Cruise*, 19.

1775, while Sherburne saw his first service aboard the Continental warship *Ranger* in 1779.<sup>16</sup> It is likely, then, that some of the authors may have been enticed away from other lines of work by the financial opportunities offered by privateers. The introduction to Olmsted's journal written by Gerard W. Gawalt even states that "in April 1776 young Olmsted mustered out of the army, eager for the spoils of privateering."<sup>17</sup>

Recruiting tactics by privateers emphasized the financial windfall that could result from joining a cruise. An advertisement from the town of Wethersfield sought to recruit "All Gentlemen *Volunteers* who are desirous [*sic*] of making their fortunes in eight weeks."<sup>18</sup> Another offered signing bonuses of nearly \$100 dollars to new recruits—\$60 more than the Continental Navy would pay.<sup>19</sup> These advertisements were often posted in taverns to attract sailors. One even asked interested participants to come to the wharf where they would be "treated with that excellent Liquor called GROG, which is allowed by all true seamen, to be the LIQUOR OF LIFE."<sup>20</sup>

Andrew Sherburne's account gives a valuable description of how he was recruited into privateering. In December of 1780 Sherburne found himself in Portsmouth and planned to ship out with the Continental ship *Alexander*. However, as he describes it:

I was walking the street one day, and being in a seaman's garb, was readily recognised as a sailor and was overtaken by a jolly tar, who accosted me in the following manner. "Ha, shipmate, don't you wish to take a short cruise in a fine schooner and make your fortune?" I replied

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<sup>16</sup> Christopher Prince, *Autobiography of a Yankee Mariner: Christopher Prince and the American Revolution*, ed. Michael J. Crawford (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 2002), 34-6; Andrew Sherburne, *Memoirs of Andrew Sherburne: A Pensioner of the Navy of the Revolution* (Providence: H.H. Brown, 1831), 19-21. <https://archive.org/details/sherburnememoirs00sherrich>.

<sup>17</sup> Olmsted, *Journal of Gideon Olmsted*, xi.

<sup>18</sup> Helen Augur, *The Secret War for Independence* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1955), 95. Emphasis in original.

<sup>19</sup> Robert H. Patton, *Patriot Pirates: The Privateer War for Freedom and Fortune in the American Revolution* (New York: Random House, 2008), 114.

<sup>20</sup> Augur, *Secret War for Independence*, 96.

that I expected to sail in the *Alexander*. “O we shall get back,” said he, “before the *Alexander* will get ready to sail.”<sup>21</sup>

Convinced by the “jolly tar’s” encouragement, Sherburne joined with the privateer *Greyhound*, Captain Jacob Wilds. The ship, however, was still undermanned, so the *Greyhound* docked at York in an effort to recruit more sailors. Upon arriving, Captain Wilds “laid a plan to get up a frolic at the public house, and suitable persons were employed to invite the lads and lasses for a country dance.” With the liquor flowing and the sailors dancing, Sherburne states that “every art and insinuation was employed by the officers to obtain recruits.”<sup>22</sup>

Most of the proceeds from privateer expeditions came from the sale of prizes and their cargoes, which had to be legitimated by the decision of a prize court. Privateers had to deal with prize courts throughout the early modern period, as discussed in Chapter One. In the Revolution, though, the process was more complicated; prize courts were not in place before the war. After creating his fleet of schooners George Washington learned that he was responsible for judging prize cases of ships captured by the fleet. He begged Congress to establish legal prize courts for the captures, “as we are rather groping in the dark till this happens.”<sup>23</sup> Washington’s prize agents too struggled to satisfy the privateers, who expected quick returns on their captures.<sup>24</sup> Prize courts were a frequent nuisance to privateers as they delayed the acquisition of profit from a successful cruise.

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<sup>21</sup> Sherburne, *Memoirs of Andrew Sherburne*, 35.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 36. Despite their best efforts, they only enticed two new recruits to join at York.

<sup>23</sup> George Washington to Richard Henry Lee, November 8 1775, in *NDAR* vol. 2, 931.

<sup>24</sup> In November of 1775, prize agent William Bartlett wrote to George Washington, “As I am Willing and Desirus to Live in peace with all men Should be Extreemly Glad if your Excellency woud Give me Some Perticular Direction with regard to Such Vessels, for if I have no Power to make such Demands I make my Self appear Rediculas to the Eye of world, which is farr from being my Desire—“ See William Bartlett to George Washington, November 9 1775, in *NDAR* vol. 2, 944.

Prize courts were set up by both individual colonies and Congress from 1775 onward, but with the haphazard nature of their establishment and the immense number of prizes sent to them for adjudication, they fell hopelessly behind on their work.<sup>25</sup> It was not uncommon for prize cases to be officially decided long after the conclusion of the war. Captain Gustavus Conyngham was forced to sell his ship after his prize cases stalled upon his return to America in 1779. Eighteen years later, he was still seeking back pay and prizes from Congress.<sup>26</sup> Gideon Olmsted's case was not resolved until thirty years after the capture of the ship in question.<sup>27</sup> The immense amount of activity among the prize courts during the war, as well as the frequent disagreements over prize money distribution, illustrate the high importance privateers placed on profiting from their cruises.

The perception of privateering's profitability was supported by success stories from the practice. Though some privateers ended up imprisoned, impressed, or destitute by the end of the war, others made their fortunes. Christopher Prince had a remarkably successful career as a privateer sailing out of Connecticut ports. His first cruise aboard the sloop *American Revenue* resulted in the capture of the British ship *Lovely Lass*. The sale of the *Lovely Lass* and her cargo netted the crew \$200,000, of which Prince's share was an even two thousand. Upon hearing how much money his son made Prince's father

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<sup>25</sup> For more on prize courts at the beginning of the war, see James L. Nelson, *George Washington's Secret Navy: How the American Revolution Went to Sea* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 184.

<sup>26</sup> Patton, *Patriot Pirates*, 183. For the petition of Conyngham to Congress in 1797, see Robert Wilden Neeser, *Letters and Papers Relating to the Cruises of Gustavus Conyngham, a Captain of the Continental Navy, 1777-1779* (New York: De Vinne Press, 1915), 214-15. Some of the challenges with Conyngham's case were due to the unique nature of his cruises. It is unclear exactly whether Conyngham was a commissioned captain of the Continental Navy or a privateer. Even Conyngham was confused about the matter; he wrote a letter to the commissioners in Paris asking them to "write me [and] let me know who is the Owners of this Vessell or if she is publick...it Appears a Mystery to me." See Captain Gustavus Conyngham, Continental Navy, to Silas Deane, April 3 1778, in *NDAR* vol. 12, 525-26.

<sup>27</sup> For more on this see Olmsted, *Journal of Gideon Olmsted*.

exclaimed, “Why, there is not ten men in Massachusetts can spare as much money to their country as you.”<sup>28</sup> Prince continued to sail in privateers throughout the rest of the war, and through his earnings was able to purchase property for himself and his wife outside of New London. The property was estimated to be worth around 30,000 dollars.<sup>29</sup>

In some cases it only took one good cruise to make a successful privateer. Christopher Vail had a modest if unspectacular career as a privateer for much of the war, gaining prize money from a few captures and spending time as a prisoner in Antigua. Near the end of the war Vail found himself on board a privateer scouring the coasts of Rhode Island and Connecticut for prizes. His privateer stopped a British vessel claiming its cargo as “flour, flax, and iron.” When Vail and his crewmates inspected closer, however, “by some means or other the flour had turned into inkstands.”<sup>30</sup> The total cargo was worth 4,000 pounds sterling; Vail had become a rich man.<sup>31</sup> The success stories of privateering demonstrate the potential for amassing one’s fortune through the practice.

The thirst for wealth that helped to bolster privateering ventures in the war, though, also had its flipside. At times, the drive for profit obstructed all other motivations and logic. Washington dealt with profit-hungry privateers firsthand. In October 1775, President John Hancock ordered Washington to send ships to intercept two ordnance vessels that were said to be on their way to Quebec with “Arms and Powder.”<sup>32</sup> Washington turned to his fleet of schooners for the job, sending the *Hancock*, Captain Nicholson Broughton, and the *Franklin*, Captain John Selman, to hunt down the British

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<sup>28</sup> Prince, *Autobiography of a Yankee Mariner*, 146.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 188. The figure comes from insurance rolls submitted by Prince after his home was razed during Benedict Arnold’s raid on New London.

<sup>30</sup> Vail, “Vail’s journal.” <http://www.americanrevolution.org/vail.php>.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Journal of the Continental Congress, October 5 1775, in *NDAR* vol. 2, 307-09; for Hancock’s orders to Washington see John Hancock to George Washington, October 5 1775, in *ibid.* 311-12.

ships. Washington gave Broughton specific instructions to “make all possible Dispatch for the River St. Lawrence” in order to intercept the ships. Additionally, should they have to deal with any Canadians, they were to “treat [them] with all Kindness and by no Means suffer them to be injured or molested.”<sup>33</sup>

Broughton spectacularly failed to follow any of Washington’s instructions. While he and Selman sailed northward, they captured multiple prizes of dubious legitimacy.<sup>34</sup> Instead of sailing into the St. Lawrence, Broughton and Selman set sail for Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. The privateers, eager for the spoils of war, plundered the town and captured the town leaders including acting-Governor Phillip Callbeck. In a letter to Lord Dartmouth, court clerk John Budd claimed the American privateersmen “stript Mr. Callbeck...and me of every thing we were possessed of in the world.”<sup>35</sup> Callbeck was led to believe that Broughton and Selman were not privateers, but pirates – “and by their Conduct,” he wrote, “they were actually such.” He went on to describe the “Wanton & flagrant outrages” committed by the privateersmen, including the seizure of all of Callbeck’s assets.<sup>36</sup> The direct disobedience of his captains infuriated Washington; upon their return, Broughton and Selman were heavily censured, and their newfound fortunes confiscated.

Privateering’s popularity during the war is not in question. It was a gold rush phenomenon, a way for Americans in the seaport towns and in the countryside to make a

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<sup>33</sup> Additional Instructions from George Washington to Captain Nicholson Broughton, October 16 1775, in *ibid.* 474.

<sup>34</sup> One particular account worth mentioning is the capture of the *Warren*. Broughton convinced himself that the ship’s crew were Loyalists by tricking them into using the terms “Yankeys & Punkings [pumpkins]” – common derogatory terms for the colonists at the time. See Captain Nicholson Broughton and John Selman to George Washington, November 6 1775, in *ibid.* 899-900.

<sup>35</sup> John Budd to Lord Dartmouth, November 25 1775, in *ibid.* 1125-27.

<sup>36</sup> Phillip Callbeck to Lord Dartmouth, January 5 1776, in *NDAR* vol. 3, 625-30.

profit during the war against the British. Recruiters emphasized the potential fortunes, and prize courts struggled to keep up with the constant influx of new prizes. For some, the allure of wealth obstructed everything else about privateering. The profit motive for privateering does effectively describe some of the factors driving the phenomenon during the American Revolution, and thus deserves a place in any investigation of privateering.

Yet while privateering was clearly influenced by the allure of profit, it was not solely an economically driven activity. An example from the sacking of Charlottetown described earlier illustrates some of the deeper motivations. During the plundering, the American sailors took the time to look in particular for Mrs. Callbeck “for the purpose...of cutting her throat, because she is the Daughter of a Mr. Coffin at Boston, who is remarkable for his attachment to Government.”<sup>37</sup> Why did the American privateersmen put their plundering on hold to look for an innocent woman, just because she had a second-degree attachment to someone involved in the British government in Boston? There was clearly a great deal of anger involved, anger directed at Britain and its symbols of power. Privateering offered not only a means to profit; it offered beleaguered sailors in the colonies the chance to strike a blow against what they perceived as the unjust imposition of British rule upon their livelihoods.

### **A Revolutionary Resistance: Privateering and Liberties**

In March of 1765, Parliament passed the Stamp Act, which placed a tax on all paper products used in the colonies. The tax was part of Parliament’s plan to recoup the debt accrued in fighting the Seven Years’ War. It was not well received in the colonies, particularly in Boston, where British General Thomas Gage complained of an

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid. Mrs. Callbeck was in the country that day, and thus came to no harm during the raid.



“Insurrection...composed of great numbers of Sailors headed by Captains of Privateers, and other ships.”<sup>38</sup> Boston was not unique; up and down the American coast, sailors and dock workers took the lead in resisting British authority during the 1760s and 1770s. Nearly every major case of riotous resistance to the British in an American seaport city involved sailors, wharf hands, and dock workers.<sup>39</sup>

Many of the individuals involved in port riots before the war joined privateering crews during the Revolution, evidence of a clear connection between pre-war forms of resistance and the practice of privateering. This section will analyze those connections in two ways. First, both pre-war rioters and wartime privateers were driven by anger over Britain’s imposition in the economic affairs of American colonists. Second, both pre-war rioters and wartime privateers fought back against the policy of impressment and imprisonment of American sailors. Privateering was then an outgrowth of previous

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<sup>38</sup> Thomas Gage, *The Correspondence of General Thomas Gage*, ed. Clarence Edwin Carter, vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1931), 71.

<sup>39</sup> Jesse Lemisch was one of the first to investigate the sailors’ role, contending that they were politically motivated acts of riotous resistance; see Jesse Lemisch, “Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of Revolutionary America,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (July 1968), 371-407. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1921773>. Marcus Rediker built off of Lemisch’s work, arguing that sailors and the “motley crew” were the driving forces behind the American Revolution and drove upper-class elites to go along with their rebellious acts; see Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 211-47. <https://goo.gl/jQmP6j>. Christopher Magra supports Rediker and Linebaugh, focusing his work specifically on the seaport town of Marblehead and looking at the impact the Fisheries Bill had on sailor resistance; see Christopher P. Magra, “Anti-Impressment Riots and the Origins of the Age of Revolution,” *International Review of Social History* 58, no. S21 (2013), 131-51. <http://rave.ohiolink.edu/ejournals/article/312651041>; see also Christopher P. Magra, “The New England Cod Fishing Industry and Maritime Dimensions of the American Revolution,” *Enterprise & Society* 8, no. 4 (December 2007), 799-806. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23700768>; see also Christopher P. Magra, “‘Soldiers...Bred to the Sea’: Maritime Marblehead, Massachusetts, and the Origins and Progress of the American Revolution,” *The New England Quarterly* 77, no. 4 (December 2004), 531-62. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1559726>. In his work Paul Gilje pushes back against Lemisch, Rediker, and Magra, stating that any “class consciousness” assigned to sailors “needs to be carefully qualified.” He believes that sailors were influenced more by opportunities for their own personal economic gain than a fight for a broader sense of national liberty. See Paul A. Gilje, “Loyalty and Liberty: The Ambiguous Patriotism of Jack Tar in the American Revolution,” *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 67, no. 2 (April 2000), 165-93. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27774256>; see also Paul A. Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront: American Maritime Culture in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

instances of collective action and resistance to British authority, and not an isolated, solely profit-driven phenomenon. While American rioters and privateers displayed elements of collective action, it should be noted that their actions are not a sign of a coalescence of American identity; they had a stronger conception of what they were fighting against—perceived unjust imposition of British imperial authority—than what they were fighting for.

### *Economic Resistance*

After the French and Indian War, Parliament passed a series of new taxes on the American colonies in an effort to pay off the debt accrued in that conflict, and increased their enforcement of those tariffs. These policies had their greatest effect on the merchant sphere, and as a result impacted the sailors that worked merchant shipping routes. Sailors responded with collective violence targeting British commercial property to demonstrate their ire for the new laws. Privateers were the natural outgrowth of these forms of collective violence, taking their attacks against British commercial property to sea.

One of the first Parliamentary laws levied against the American colonists was the Stamp Act of 1765. Sailors responded with collective vehemence. As previously cited, General Thomas Gage spoke of the mob of sailors that accumulated in Boston to resist the act. To respond to the increasing unrest Gage requested “a legal Pretence to collect all the Force I could, into one Body; which might Check in some Measure the Audacious Threats of taking Arms...”<sup>40</sup> In Newport, Rhode Island, resistance among seamen was also pronounced. The port was a haven for smugglers, sailors, and former privateersmen, and as a result the Newport colonists took particular offense to the stricter enforcement of

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<sup>40</sup> Gage, *Correspondence of Thomas Gage*, vol. 1, 82.

customs laws. In 1764, colonists seized a battery on Goat Island to fire upon the British ship *Squirrel*. That same year, sailors from Newport seized a longboat from the British ship *Maidstone* and burned it on the town commons.<sup>41</sup> Stamp Act resistance occurred in the southern colonies as well; Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh cite an incident in Charleston, South Carolina, where “a mob of sailors wearing black face and masks” stormed the home of merchant Henry Laurens to destroy stamped paper rumored to be in his possession.<sup>42</sup> Sailor protests like these were in direct response to British imposition upon American commercial trade, and were a form of resistance to British economic authority over the colonies.

The mobs and riots organized as a resistance to British economic authority were not random acts of violence, but were directed attacks against British property and commerce. Some of the main targets of these groups were British customs officials and sympathizers. In a riot that occurred in New York City in 1765, sailors and privateers assembled to resist the Stamp Act. The riot began in the center of town, an area Jesse Lemisch describes as “rich for plunder.”<sup>43</sup> Rather than seize property from that area, the mob of sailors travelled clear across the city to raid the home of an English major.<sup>44</sup> In Boston, Thomas Gage claims that “a Ship...with Ten Boxes of Stamp Papers on Board...was boarded in the Night by a Number of Armed Men, who took away the

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<sup>41</sup> Edgar Stanton Maclay, *A History of American Privateers* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1899), 43-44.

<sup>42</sup> Rediker and Linebaugh, *Many-Headed Hydra*, 211. The paper was not in fact in Lauren’s possession, so the mob dispersed. The detail that the sailors wore black face is notable; as Rediker and Linebaugh demonstrate, it suggests a parallel between sailor rebellions and slave revolts of the same time period. If that parallel does exist, it was not heavily utilized by privateers. More research needs to be done on the racial disposition of the “motley crew” compared with the makeup of crews on board privateer vessels.

<sup>43</sup> Lemisch, “Jack Tar in the Streets,” 396.

<sup>44</sup> Lemisch, “Jack Tar in the Streets,” 396.

Boxes, and burned them on the Shore.”<sup>45</sup> The Boston Massacre of 1770 began just outside the town’s Customs House. Perhaps the most famous example of pre-war resistance was the Boston Tea Party, where sailors and members of the Sons of Liberty destroyed British property, throwing boxes of tea into the harbor in resistance to the new taxes on tea. The actions of sailors before the war were not motivated by plunder; they were acts of resistance targeting British restrictions on American commercial activity.

With the outbreak of war in 1775 attacks on British commercial property took on a new form: privateering. American privateers almost exclusively targeted British maritime property, making them enticing options for American tars to strike a blow at British commercial dominance. There were admittedly numerous practical reasons for privateers’ focus on merchant vessels. Merchant ships were often weakly defended—or at least, had less firepower than ships of the Royal Navy—and had more valuable cargoes. But while merchant vessels offered more opportunities for prize money, they also served as representations of the British Empire’s commercial might. The hated economic policies placed on the American colonies were enacted to protect British ships. It only made sense, then, that these were the ships targeted by American sailors. Privateering was an outgrowth of pre-revolution resistance to British economic practices, an escalation of economic resistance by American seamen. It was popular not just for the prospects of financial gain, but also the promise of striking back against Britain in the very areas that caused much of the antagonism between the two sides in the first place.

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<sup>45</sup> Gage, *Correspondence of Thomas Gage*, vol. 1, 82.

## *Social Resistance and Impressment*

Impressment was a constant bogeyman in the life of the eighteenth-century Atlantic sailor. It was used by the Royal Navy to crew warships; they would seize sailors from merchant ships or seaports belonging to the Empire and force them to serve aboard His Majesty's vessels.<sup>46</sup> American colonists perceived the practice as an unjust imposition of British authority upon their personal liberties. It was cited as a major grievance between the colonies and Britain in Thomas Paine's influential pamphlet *Common Sense*, as well as the Declaration of Independence.<sup>47</sup> The most vociferous group fighting against the policy of impressment, though, were the sailors targeted by the practice. Before the war, they used riots and other smaller-scale forms of collective violence to push back against a practice they believed robbed them of their personal liberties. While privateering in and of itself was not a form of resistance to impressment, Revolutionary sailors took part in privateering to express their personal liberties and fought ardently against the British authorities when their liberties were taken away, either through impressment or imprisonment.

Sailors did not jump at the chance to serve in the Royal Navy. One sailor serving aboard a warship commented, "I was surprised to see so few who, like myself, had

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<sup>46</sup> For an extended discussion on manning ships of the Royal Navy and the use of impressment, see N.A.M. Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (London: Collins, 1986), 145-205.

<sup>47</sup> Thomas Paine wrote: "And Samuel told all the words of the Lord unto the people, that asked of him a king. And he said, This shall be the manner of the king that shall reign over you; he will take your sons and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen, and some shall run before his chariots (this description agrees with the present mode of impressing men)..." See Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, in Gordon S. Wood, ed. *The American Revolution: Writings from the Pamphlet Debate, 1764-1776* (New York: Library of America, 2015), vol. 2, 661. In the Declaration of Independence Thomas Jefferson wrote: "[King George III] has constrained our fellow Citizens taken Captive on the high Seas to bear Arms against their Country, to become the executioners of their friends and Brethren, or to fall themselves by their Hands." See "Declaration of Independence: A Transcription," *National Archives and Records Administration*. <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>.

chosen [naval service] for the love of that line of life.”<sup>48</sup> Enlistments were long at best and ambiguous at worst. A sailor in the Royal Navy could spend multiple years aboard a ship with little-to-no time off-vessel and no clear idea when his service would conclude.<sup>49</sup> Discipline in the Royal Navy was harsh, with minor offenses receiving a whipping and major offenses like desertion punishable by death. Sailors in the Navy faced a greater risk of death in battle and a lower chance of profiting from their time aboard ship.<sup>50</sup> With few incentives to serve in the Royal Navy, it is unsurprising that finding willing volunteers to man warships was a challenge. Despite the hatred of the practice, there is little doubt that impressment was legal; the Admiralty was even willing to take the matter to court to prove its legitimacy.<sup>51</sup> With no recourse to legal challenge against the practice, American sailors looking to defend their personal liberty took up more aggressive tactics to stave off impressment.

Resistance to impressment was more haphazard than that against British economic influence; it could take the form of a large-scale riot or a small-scale but targeted act of violence. The most striking example of the former occurred in Boston in 1747, and came to be known as the Knowles Affair. After a number of sailors deserted his ship British Commodore Knowles resorted to the press to man his vessel, picking up forty-six sailors. In response a mob of “three hundred Seamen and Strangers” seized four officers from Knowles’ ship as hostages. By end of the day, the mob had grown to some four thousand members of the town who destroyed the windows of the Town House and

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<sup>48</sup> Magra, “Anti Impressment Riots,” 134-5.

<sup>49</sup> Roland G. Usher, Jr., “Royal Navy Impressment during the American Revolution,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 37, no. 4 (March 1951), 686. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1889363>.

<sup>50</sup> Magra, “Anti Impressment Riots,” 137.

<sup>51</sup> Usher, “Royal Navy Impressment,” 679.

burned a barge that was in the harbor.<sup>52</sup> Massachusetts Governor William Shirley was able to defuse the situation and regain control of the city from the mob three days later, but the Knowles Riots would remain the largest public uprising in Boston until the Stamp Act. If the figure of four thousand is accurate, nearly a quarter of Boston's population took part in the Knowles Affair. The event also sparked a young Boston patriot named Samuel Adams to write the *Independent Advertiser*, where he connected the sailors' resistance to impressment with notions of republican virtues.<sup>53</sup>

The Knowles Affair was an outstanding event; more often, resistance to impressment was exhibited in smaller confrontations between impressed sailors and British officers. A notable example of this took place in 1769, when a press gang from the *Rose*, Captain Benjamin Caldwell, attempted to impress four Marblehead sailors from the *Pitt Packet* as they returned to their home port. The sailors resisted, and during the ensuing struggle one of the sailors, Michael Corbet, killed British Lieutenant Henry Panton with a harpoon.<sup>54</sup> According to John Adams, who tried Corbet's case, Corbet perceived that the press gang was coming to "deprive me of my liberty."<sup>55</sup> Many American sailors would have agreed with Corbet that impressment was a violation of their own personal liberties and an egregious imposition on the part of British authorities.

During the Revolutionary War many American privateersmen faced the tyranny of impressment. Like their fellow sailors before the war, they resisted service aboard vessels of the Royal Navy, though they were often unsuccessful in doing so. Andrew

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<sup>52</sup> The barge was believed to have belonged to the British, but in fact likely belonged to a Scotsman who may have even taken part in the riot. See Russell Bourne, *Cradle of Violence: How Boston's Waterfront Mobs Ignited the American Revolution* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2006), 67.

<sup>53</sup> For more on the Knowles Affair see Bourne, *Cradle of Violence*, 64-70.

<sup>54</sup> For more on this incident see Magra, "Anti Impressment Riots," 131-2.

<sup>55</sup> Lemisch "Jack Tar in the Streets," 390.

Sherburne was impressed on board the British sloop-of-war *Fairy* and ordered to serve on the foretop, a service Sherburne refused. Though he managed to avoid service up top, he grimly took up service in the waist after “very hard words and several threats.”<sup>56</sup> Christopher Vail was impressed aboard the 74-gun *Suffolk*, and like Sherburne refused to man quarters during combat. The captain threatened to “flog any man to the gangway” who would not fight, but never carried out these threats.<sup>57</sup> When Vail was transferred to the *Action* and again refused to fight, the captain was less inclined to mercy; one American was whipped so much he was “cut into a jelly.”<sup>58</sup> Joshua Davis was impressed into British service on six different occasions. He tried to avoid impressment by claiming to be a prisoner of war, at which point a British lieutenant called him “a d—d yankee rascal,” and threatened to “tie [Davis] up to the gangway and give [him] a dozen of lashes.”<sup>59</sup> Though many privateers wound up doing service in the British Royal Navy during the war, their efforts to resist the practice demonstrate their similarities and sympathies with pre-war acts of collective action against impressment.

Beyond impressment, many American privateersmen were also imprisoned during the war. Again perceiving such imprisonment as a violation of their social liberties, privateersmen worked to escape from prison and get back to sea. In his journal Christopher Vail describes five different escape plans he and the other American sailors attempted during their captivity at Antigua.<sup>60</sup> Sherburne cites an event when a full dozen

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<sup>56</sup> Sherburne, *Memoirs of Andrew Sherburne*, 71.

<sup>57</sup> Vail, “Vail’s journal,” <http://www.americanrevolution.org/vail.php>.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Joshua Davis, “Narrative of Joshua Davis,” *Naval History and Heritage Command*. <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/n/narrative-joshua-davis-american-citizen-1811.html>.

<sup>60</sup> Vail, “Vail’s journal,” <http://www.americanrevolution.org/vail.php>.



prisoners escaped from Old Mill prison during his internment there.<sup>61</sup> In some cases, American prisoners would make arrangements with British guards to escape for a few days, then return to prison.<sup>62</sup> Imprisonment, like impressment, was perceived by American privateersmen as an unfair restriction on their social liberty. While the practice of privateering itself was not wholly driven by the fight against impressment, the actions of privateersmen throughout the war demonstrate a strong streak of resistance, a desire to fight for their own liberties, and a familiarity with pre-war forms of protest like the impressment riot.

### *Privateering and National Identity?*

I have demonstrated in this chapter that American privateersmen saw privateering as a means to resist British authority. They attacked British commercial property at sea in resistance to Britain's imposition of tariffs and taxes before the war. They struggled against restrictions upon their social liberty by refusing to serve in the Royal Navy and attempting to escape from British prisons. In their acts of resistance to British authority, were privateersmen motivated by a fight for the greater good of their country? Did they develop a sense of "American-ness" in their wartime actions? Privateersmen certainly knew what they were fighting *against*; they were fighting the imposition of British authority upon their own lives. But in terms of what they were fighting *for*, the motivation of privateersmen is more ambiguous.

Primary source evidence from Revolutionary privateersmen abounds with anti-British sentiment. During his time impressed aboard a British warship Christopher Vail

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<sup>61</sup> Sherburne, *Memoirs of Andrew Sherburne*, 89.

<sup>62</sup> Gilje, "Loyalty and Liberty," 179. This was often an option only available to wealthier prisoners. While both found ways to resist, it was far easier for wealthy Americans to either make their stay in prison more comfortable or to escape; see Gilje, "Loyalty and Liberty," 177-8.

complained about the arrogance and haughtiness of the sailors, and mocked them when they were defeated by a French vessel.<sup>63</sup> Andrew Sherburne stated that serving “his Britannic Majesty” was something that he had “detested from [his] infancy.”<sup>64</sup> Christopher Prince’s memoir in particular is invaluable in investigating the ways American privateersmen perceived the British, for in his narrative we can see his attitude toward the British change over time. His Uncle Job had close connections to many of the British officers stationed in Boston, and Prince himself knew many of the navy sailors. However, after witnessing a riot put down by the British, he stated that he “began to have some unfavorable feelings and sentiments towards the proceedings of the English...”<sup>65</sup> When Prince informs his reader of the conflict at Lexington and Concord, he states that “sixty five were killed, and many wounded,” and that “fifty of *our countrymen* were killed and wounded.”<sup>66</sup> After sailing to Canada Prince was forced to serve aboard a British vessel. He acquiesced but adamantly maintained that he “could not consent to lift a finger against [his] country.”<sup>67</sup> Prince’s narrative demonstrates that during the Revolutionary War American privateersmen perceived their opponents in a negative light, and even began to see themselves as distinctly different from the British.

Though privateersmen had strong anti-British sentiments, the extension of that idea—that privateers had a distinctly American identity and fought for the cause of the Revolution—is dubious. Though some of the privateer memoirs mention “the cause of

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<sup>63</sup> Vail, “Vail’s journal,” <http://www.americanrevolution.org/vail.php>.

<sup>64</sup> Sherburne, *Memoirs of Andrew Sherburne*, 70.

<sup>65</sup> Prince, *Autobiography of a Yankee Mariner*, 33. The specifics Prince offers from the riot are a bit confused; editor Michael Crawford suggests that Prince may be confusing the incident he witnessed with two other incidents: the shooting of Christian Seider and the Boston Massacre. For Crawford’s explanation see *ibid.* 25.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* 34. Emphasis my own.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* 42-3.

freedom” when discussing their motivations, those works were written well after the conclusion of the Revolution, after America was an established nation with a national identity of its own.<sup>68</sup> During the Revolution proper, there was little clarity over exactly what it meant to be “American” anywhere in the colonies. Many patriots identified more with their colony rather than a greater American nation. In his analysis of national motivations and sailors of the Revolution Paul Gilje surmises that “loyalty to hometowns often transcended nation or state.”<sup>69</sup> The self-identification of privateers is a difficult argument to defend one way or the other. However, what is clear is that while the privateers may not have had a clear sense of American-ness, they did position themselves against what they perceived as British tyranny. There was a clear sense of “us versus them” in privateering, even if there was some ambiguity on exactly who “us” was.

Though privateers may not have been motivated by a devotion to the ideals of an American nation, they were driven by anger at British rule. They chafed under British authority over their economic and social liberties, resisting through tax riots and impressment. Analyzing the actions of American privateersmen during the Revolution in conjunction with examples of collective resistance by sailors before the conflict demonstrates that the two practices were motivated by similar factors. Privateering offered American colonists the chance to strike back at British authority and, in doing so, fight for their own economic and personal liberties, if not the liberty of their country.

## **Conclusion**

Christopher Prince may have described a privateer’s motivation best when he stated that “Through the whole course of the war I have had two motives in view, one

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 58.

<sup>69</sup> Gilje, “Loyalty and Liberty,” 170.

was the freedom of my country, and the other was the luxuries of life.”<sup>70</sup> Privateer sailors were in part motivated by the allure of profits and the promises of financial gain to be had from privateering. In a way, it was America’s first gold rush. The profit narrative for privateering is not entirely inaccurate; however, it does not tell the whole story behind the motivation for the practice. Sailors saw Revolutionary War privateering as an outgrowth of pre-war forms of resistance, as a means to fight back against British restrictions on the American sailors’ economic and social liberty. The motivation for privateering is closely related to that of the tax riot and the fight against impressment. It was a fight for liberty—not the liberty of a whole country, but the liberty of an individual against the tyranny of an unjust, imperial ruler.

As I have argued throughout this thesis, the profit-narrative does not cover all aspects of privateering during the American Revolution. There was an ideological motivation for the practice. For American privateersmen, that ideology manifested in the form of resistance to British authority over their economic and social liberties. Privateer sailors, though, were only one part of the privateering equation; on the other side were the investors, the merchants and patriots that funded privateer expeditions. These men, and the ideological underpinnings behind their involvement in privateering, will be the focus of the next chapter.

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<sup>70</sup> Prince, *Autobiography of a Yankee Mariner*, 210.

## CHAPTER THREE: PRIVATEER INVESTORS AND THE IDEOLOGIES OF REPUBLICANISM

In the early months of the Revolution, Congress and individual colonial governments sought support for the war from their citizens. They called upon American patriots to serve in the militias and devote themselves to the cause of freedom. From more affluent members of society, governments sought donations of property and materiel to fight the war. One such wealthy individual was John Brown, the bombastic Rhode Island merchant and patriot that led the attack on the *Gaspee* in 1772. Rhode Island Governor Nicholas Cook had asked Brown to donate his sloop *Caty* to the public service to protect Narragansett Bay from British ships. Brown refused, complaining that “its unreasonable that the publick should Desire me to sacrifice all my private Interest for the Benefit of the common Cause.”<sup>1</sup> He would, however, lease the *Caty* to the government, provided they paid for the necessary repairs.<sup>2</sup>

John Brown’s concerns over his own private interest in relation to the public good was a critical component of the privateering phenomenon for the American merchants and investors who supported the practice. Whereas the documents left by privateersmen make almost no mention of morality, the correspondence of elites is rife with considerations of morality, legality, and virtuosity. For Revolutionary elites, privateering was seen within the context of a broader debate on the nature of republicanism and the

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<sup>1</sup> John Brown to Nicholas Cook and Ambrose Page, June 12 1775, in the John Brown Papers, Folder 1, Box 1, MSS 312, Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence; hereafter RIHS.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Brown eventually agreed to lease the *Caty* to Rhode Island at ninety dollars per month. See “An Agreement,” June 22, 1775, in *ibid.*

future construction of the new American nation. On one side were those who espoused the classical republican virtue of disinterestedness and sacrifice to the public commonwealth; to these patriots, privateering was an abhorrent practice irreparably tarred with immorality, unscrupulousness, and avarice—vices that had no place in a virtuous republic. Those who supported privateering built off a different strand of republican thought, arguing that by pursuing their own private interest through privateering investments they were, in fact, aiding the cause of the public good. For investors privateering could not be characterized solely as profit-driven; they had to defend their actions as supportive of the revolutionary cause and republican ideology.

The debate among American patriots regarding the morality of privateering has been covered by Michael J. Crawford in his excellent article “The Privateering Debate in Revolutionary America.” This chapter seeks to build on his work by framing that debate within the larger ideological discourse over public and private interest and the importance of those terms to republicanism and the American identity writ large. The vast majority of the sources in this chapter come from correspondence written by elites, a term I use to classify the upper-echelon of revolutionary American society including statesmen, politicians, and members of the commercialized mercantile class. Many of the documents are found in the *Naval Documents of the American Revolution* series, along with archival materials from the John Brown and Nathanael Greene papers housed in the Rhode Island Historical Society. The chapter will begin by discussing how notions of republicanism, commerce, liberty, and virtue were contextualized in the Revolutionary period. I will then place privateering within that debate, outlining the arguments of those who were against the practice as well as those in favor of it. The chapter will conclude with a case study of

General Nathanael Greene to show in practice how gentlemen who were at the same time patriots and investors managed to marry their devotion to the American republic and its idealized conception with their own self-interests.

### **Republicanism, Liberty, and Commerce: The Great Debate**

The writings of America's Founding Fathers are awash with notions of republicanism and liberty, cast in the mold of the new nation they hoped to build. But as John Adams wrote, "there is not a more unintelligible word in the English language than republicanism."<sup>3</sup> American patriots debated at length the necessary prerequisites for a virtuous republic, and how to instill those necessities within an independent America. The primary debate this thesis is concerned with is the place of commerce within a republic. Many intellectuals saw republicanism through the classical perspective of sacrifice to the public commonwealth, but the rising importance of commerce to the American nation—not least to the many merchants involved in the Revolution—made the sacrifice of personal interest an impractical goal. Understanding the broad debate on republicanism and commerce is crucial to understanding the frameworks with which elites approached their investments in privateering.

Notions of republicanism in the Revolutionary period built off of a rich intellectual debate that found its origins in the ancient Roman Republic and the actions of "the great hero of republican mythology," Brutus.<sup>4</sup> The Renaissance revived discussions of republicanism, largely with Niccolo Machiavelli's *Discourses* and his admiration of *virtu*. Virtue was the key component of republicanism, though its meaning varied from

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<sup>3</sup> David Wootton, ed. *Republicanism, Liberty, and Commercial Society, 1649-1776* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Wootton, *Republicanism*, 2.

thinker to thinker. To some, virtue referred to the “fulfillment of ethical endeavor in public life and public action.”<sup>5</sup> Others built off Machiavelli’s vision of virtue that placed “courage and resolution before ethical scruples.”<sup>6</sup> English republicans of the seventeenth century emphasized republicanism as resistance to tyranny while synthesizing Machiavellian and classical republican notions of virtue.

By the time of the Revolution American republicans cherished the notion of disinterestedness as a republican virtue. John Adams—who later wrote a three-volume work on republicanism—summarized the position of these Americans when he said:

There must be a possitive Passion for the public good, the public Interest, Honour, Power, and Glory, established in the Minds of the People, or there can be no Republican Government, nor any real Liberty. And this public Passion must be Superiour to all private Passions. Men must be ready, they must pride themselves, and be happy to sacrifice their private Pleasures, Passions, and Interests, nay their private Friendships and dearest Connections, when they Stand in Competition with the Rights of society.<sup>7</sup>

The liberty lauded by Adams was “republican liberty,” which considered political activity a necessary part of liberty.<sup>8</sup> Most of the Founding Fathers sought to overthrow the tyranny of British rule and create a republic of virtuous citizens who would willingly give up their own personal interests to the greater good of the new American commonwealth.

The grand notions of disinterestedness did not fall in line with the increasing commercialization of American society. Human nature itself tended towards selfishness and “the pursuit of power, wealth, and sensual pleasure.”<sup>9</sup> One pamphlet released by

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<sup>5</sup> Blair Worden, “Marchamont Nedham and the Beginnings of English Republicanism, 1649-1656,” in Wootton, *Republicanism*, 47.

<sup>6</sup> Worden, “Marchamont Nedham,” in Wootton, *Republicanism*, 47.

<sup>7</sup> Paul A. Rahe, “Antiquity Surpassed: The Repudiation of Classical Republicanism,” in Wootton, *Republicanism*, 237.

<sup>8</sup> M.M. Goldsmith, “Liberty, Virtue, and the Rule of Law, 1689-1770,” in Wootton, *Republicanism*, 197.

<sup>9</sup> Goldsmith, “Liberty, Virtue, and Rule of Law,” in Wootton, *Republicanism*, 207.



American artisans in the 1760s declared that “*Self-Interest* is the grand principle of all Human Actions.”<sup>10</sup> Merchants and traders lived in pursuit of profit, expanding their own wealth and influence. Commerce generated prosperity and wealth, which for Montesquieu undermined the pursuit of republican virtue by replacing that virtue with ambition for profit, extravagance, and “degrading luxury.”<sup>11</sup> The concerns over commerce in republicanism reflected the antipathy between the commercialized classes and the landowning, aristocratic elites. The ideas of John Locke, so cherished by American intellectuals, “believed in the natural virtue of the owner of landed property, who was financially independent, and whose long-term interests corresponded with those of the nation.”<sup>12</sup> In contrast, those who made their living in commerce would always put their own interests over that of the national commonwealth, and thus undermine the virtues of republicanism and the liberty they provided.

Not every intellectual saw commerce as antagonistic to liberty. Writing in the early eighteenth century, Bernard Mandeville argued that “private vices, within the bounds of regularly enforced laws, if left to stimulate consumption and trade, would produce the public benefits of wealth and prosperity.”<sup>13</sup> David Hume expanded on Mandeville’s ideas, arguing that wealthier societies that utilized commercial activities provided their citizens with more “industry, knowledge, and humanity,” and therefore that commerce was a civilizing force. These ideas culminated with Adam Smith’s treatise of political economy *The Wealth of Nations*, which introduced the “invisible hand”

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<sup>10</sup> Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 253. Emphasis in original.

<sup>11</sup> Richard B. Sher, “From Troglodytes to Americans: Montesquieu and the Scottish Enlightenment on Liberty, Virtue, and Commerce,” in Wootton, *Republicanism*, 376-77.

<sup>12</sup> Wootton, *Republicanism*, 9.

<sup>13</sup> Goldsmith, “Liberty, Virtue, and Rule of Law,” in Wootton, *Republicanism*, 213-14.

argument. Smith too saw merchants and traders acting in their own self-interest; however, he argued that by promoting their own wealth they were also promoting the “publick interest.”<sup>14</sup> To Smith, commercial pursuits were not antagonistic to a republic’s liberty; rather, the pursuit of private interest led to unforeseen benefits for the public good.

The idealized dream of a disinterested body of citizens sacrificing their own interests for those of the public did not play out in the Revolution, much to the disappointment of many American elites. Congress hoped that the militiamen comprising the bulk of the Continental Army would stay on past their enlistments without pay. Most soldiers refused, forcing Congress to dip into their coffers to pay enlistment bounties.<sup>15</sup> Some soldiers even defrauded the government by enlisting twice or even three times to receive multiple salaries.<sup>16</sup> Accusations of selfishness extended to elites as well. Frequent charges of corruption hounded officers of the Continental Army, particularly those in the quartermaster position.<sup>17</sup> Some merchants continued to trade with the British during the war, while others drove up prices on contracts for the Continental Army. Alexander Hamilton attacked these profiteers with typical scorn, deriding their pursuit of private interest as “hostile to the present revolution” and stating that such men should “be detested as traitors of the worst and most dangerous kind.”<sup>18</sup> Throughout the colonies individual Americans pursued their own interests rather than those of the public during

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<sup>14</sup> Nicholas Phillipson, *Adam Smith: An Enlightened Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 230. For a full analysis of the *Wealth of Nations* see *ibid.* 214-238.

<sup>15</sup> Stuart D. Brandes, *Warhogs: A History of War Profits in America* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 35.

<sup>16</sup> James L. Nelson, *George Washington’s Secret Navy: How the American Revolution Went to Sea* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 47. See also Brandes, *Warhogs*, 36.

<sup>17</sup> In some circles quartermaster Nathanael Greene was even blamed for the country’s wider financial challenges; see Robert H. Patton, *Patriot Pirates: The Privateer War for Freedom and Fortune in the American Revolution* (New York: Random House, 2008), 203. See also Brandes, *Warhogs*, 38-39.

<sup>18</sup> Henry Steele Commager and Richard B. Morris, eds. *The Spirit of ‘Seventy-Six: The Story of the American Revolution as Told by Participants* (New York: Harper Row, 1967), 807.

the war, leading Washington to conclude that the small minority that “act upon Principles of disinterestedness are, comparatively speaking, no more than a drop in the Ocean.”<sup>19</sup>

The debates over republicanism, liberty, and commerce engaged intellectuals throughout the early modern era. Many thinkers saw republican virtue as the sacrifice of one’s private interests to the public good, believing the disinterestedness of the citizens was the foundation of a virtuous republic. These classical republican ideals clashed with the commercial pursuits of American merchants, who sought to acquire wealth for their own private gain. Other intellectuals argued that by pursuing their own interests, merchants and commercialized classes were in fact supporting the public interest.

The battle-lines of the republicanism debate were the framework through which privateering investments were viewed during the American Revolutionary War. Many patriots saw privateering as a pursuit of private interest instead of devotion to the commonwealth, and derided the practice as anti-republican. Merchants and commercial leaders who invested in privateers defended their actions as a contribution to the war effort and, thusly, the public good. They could not describe their actions as profit-driven; to do so would fly in the face of the dominant discourse on republican ideals. The next two sections will apply the frameworks of the republicanism debate to consider both positive and negative perceptions of privateering during the American Revolution.

### **For the Public Interest: Privateering, Avarice, and Immorality**

In July 1778, New Hampshire representative to the Continental Congress William Whipple went on a lengthy tirade regarding his negative views of privateering in a letter to fellow New Hampshire statesman and privateer investor Josiah Bartlett:

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<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 252.

No kind of Business can so effectually introduce Luxury, Extravagance, and every kind of Dissipation, that tend to the destruction of the morals of people. Those who are actually engaged in it soon lose every Idea of right and wrong, and for want of an opportunity of gratifying their insatiable avarice with the property of the Enemies of their Country, will without the least compunction seize that of her Friends...Those people who have the most influence with Seamen think it their interest to discourage the Public service, because by that they promote their own interest, viz., Privateering.<sup>20</sup>

Whipple's statements synthesize the broad scope of arguments against privateering during the American Revolution. Those republicans who cherished the public interest looked down upon privateering as little more than theft and avarice. They complained that privateers stole crew and supplies from the Continental Navy, itself an instrument serving the public good in fighting the British at sea. Other privateer naysayers latched onto the unruliness and despicability of privateering, arguing that the practice was unfit for use by a moral and upstanding republic the likes of which America was attempting to create. To this crowd of elites, privateering was a practice founded on avarice, greed, and immorality, one that placed the private interest above that most virtuous of pursuits, the public good.

#### *Privateers in Competition with the Continental Navy*

Once the war began, the American colonists quickly realized they needed ships to fight the British. Congress slowly moved towards the creation of a navy in October 1775, but before any Continental ships sailed colonies sent out their own privateers to attack British trade. For the remainder of the war, privateers and the Continental Navy would compete for limited resources of sailors, supplies, and weapons available in the colonial

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<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Gardner Weld Allen, *Massachusetts Privateers of the Revolution* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1927), 16. All of Whipple's letters to Bartlett vilifying the actions of privateering did little good; Bartlett remained a strong investor in privateer ventures for much of the war.

seaports. Numerous American elites saw the competition in terms of public and private interest; where the Continental Navy served the public commonwealth, privateers served no one but their investors.

While there was no shortage of patriotic spirit in the colonies, there were only so many men willing to go to sea during the Revolutionary War. As I demonstrated in Chapter Two, sailors often preferred sailing in privateers rather than the Continental Navy due to the perceived financial advantages in prize money and wages offered by investors. Privateers would even seek to recruit from the Navy; Andrew Sherburne was nominally a sailor in the navy when he joined his first privateer, the *Greyhound*.<sup>21</sup> In March 1776 the Pennsylvania Committee of Safety attempted to discourage “wicked & ill-disposed persons” from encouraging sailors to desert the service. They passed an act stipulating punishments of fines “not exceeding Fifty nor less than Thirty Dollars” or “three months imprisonment” for harboring deserters.<sup>22</sup>

Such sanctions did little to stop the flood of seamen from joining privateers and eschewing the Continental Navy. Esek Hopkins, Commodore of the Navy, complained to Congress almost daily about the difficulties in manning his vessels. In September of 1776 he wrote that the frigates *Providence* and *Warren* “will be ready for Sea in a week or 10 days,” but continued on to describe how “it will be very difficult to mann any of them without you will make the Chance of Prize Money as good as they get in the

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<sup>21</sup> Andrew Sherburne, *Memoirs of Andrew Sherburne: A Pensioner of the Navy of the Revolution* (Providence: H.H. Brown, 1831), 35-36. <https://archive.org/details/sherburnememoirs00sherrich>.

<sup>22</sup> The punishments applied to merchant ships harboring Navy deserters as well, but was primarily targeted towards privateers. See “Minutes of the Pennsylvania Committee of Safety,” June 27 1776, in William B. Clark et. al, eds. *Naval Documents of the American Revolution* vol. 5 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1970), 773. Hereafter *NDAR*.

Privateers.”<sup>23</sup> A month later Hopkins ran into the same problem trying to man the *Columbus* and the *Providence* (for her second cruise), writing to the Marine Committee that he expected “to meet with great difficulty in getting Men – the Privateers being so plenty, and having great Success that the Men look on their Shears [shares] better than what they have in the Navy.”<sup>24</sup>

When Hopkins’ appeals came to naught, prize agent John Langdon stepped in. He wrote to John Hancock, then-President of the Continental Congress, that he was “verry fearful we shall not have a hand left on board...there being the Greatest Demand for Officers & Seamen to Man the Privateers.”<sup>25</sup> Not two days later Langdon wrote another letter, this one to William Whipple, showing his exasperation:

For Mercy sake let something be done immediately or our Ship will never go to Sea, I do not expect to have one Man left in few days In short them want to be excused, as they have great offers every Day in the Privateering way there is scarce now one single man out of employ fit for Midshipman Privateers every Day calling for Men—<sup>26</sup>

Eventually Congress did issue embargoes on privateering, preventing any private vessels from leaving port until the public ships had been manned. Investors petitioned to have them removed, but were told that “the public good must be prefer’d to private interest.”<sup>27</sup> That stance was apparently difficult to maintain; the embargoes proved largely ineffective and were lifted after four months.<sup>28</sup>

There was also a limited supply of gunpowder and weapons in the American ports; privateers and the Continental Navy clashed over these resources. The demand

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<sup>23</sup> Commodore Esek Hopkins to the Continental Marine Committee, September 22 1776, in *NDAR* vol. 6, 948-49.

<sup>24</sup> Commodore Esek Hopkins to the Continental Marine Committee, October 24 1776, in *ibid.* 1399.

<sup>25</sup> John Langdon to John Hancock, November 4 1776, in *NDAR* vol. 7, 31.

<sup>26</sup> John Langdon to William Whipple, November 6 1776, in *ibid.* 56-57.

<sup>27</sup> Captain Thomas Thompson to the New Hampshire Committee of Safety, in *ibid.* 1114-15.

<sup>28</sup> Patton, *Patriot Pirates*, 126.

grew so great that some privateers went to sea “with what they dig up on Wharfs and at the Corner’s of Streets.”<sup>29</sup> The Continental Navy did not have such a luxury; they needed larger complements of guns to stand toe-to-toe with British warships. However, due to extraordinary demand prices on weapons were exorbitant; Commodore Hopkins complained to the Marine Committee that “any Small Carriage Guns will now Sell at the extraordinary Price of 400 Dollars pr Ton—”<sup>30</sup> In the procurement of weapons, private vessels again hampered the effectiveness of ships serving the public commonwealth.

The construction of the Continental ships *Warren* and *Providence* encompasses the competition between privateers and the Navy, and the wider debate over private and public interest it represented. In 1776 the Brown brothers, John and Nicholas, were hired by Congress to construct and outfit two Continental warships, the *Warren* and the *Providence*. The construction was repeatedly delayed, as Nicholas and John turned their attentions to their own private vessels. They even put the best equipment on board their own ships, leaving the two Continental vessels in despicable condition; Philadelphia financier and statesman Robert Morris declared them “the two worst frigates” he had ever seen.<sup>31</sup> Once the ships were finally completed, the Browns’ privateers stole most of the able-bodied seamen from the port, leaving the Continental vessels undermanned. Robert Morris accused the Browns, and other wealthy Rhode Islanders, of having “sacrificed every other pursuit to [privateering], both public and private.”<sup>32</sup> Elites who emphasized

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<sup>29</sup> David Cobb to Robert Treat Paine, September 9 1776, in *NDAR* vol. 6 754-55. Some privateers even set sail without guns; the *New York Gazette* reported on December 30, 1776, that “Several of the Rebel Privateers, in order to intimidate the Merchant Ships, have placed Wooden Guns of a considerable Size upon their Decks.” *New-York Gazette*, Monday, December 30, 1776, in *NDAR* vol. 7 627.

<sup>30</sup> Commodore Esek Hopkins to the Continental Marine Committee, September 10 1776, in *NDAR* vol. 6, 770.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in James B. Hedges, *The Browns of Providence Plantation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), vol. 1, 280.

<sup>32</sup> Robert Morris to Silas Deane, December 20 1776, in *NDAR* vol. 7, 528-34.

service to the public good bemoaned the activity of privateers who expressly stole ships, crew, and supplies from the vessels of the Continental Navy; they saw it as the unhealthy triumph of private avarice over virtuous service to the public commonwealth.

### *Immoral and Roguish Privateers*

Where some American republicans saw privateering as antagonistic to the public interests in its competition with the Continental Navy, others saw it as harmful to public interest in its corruption of the national character. Privateers could be an unruly, ill-disciplined lot. Their attacks, even if legal, could look remarkably similar to piracy, especially given the lax regulations on privateering in the colonies. American idealists feared that privateers would irreparably tarnish the new republic's reputation abroad and sow the seeds of disunity at home, threatening the integrity and virtuosity of the American nation.

Noted statesman and Philadelphia financier Robert Morris was firmly against privateering at the outset of the war, believing that privateers were unbecoming of America's national principles. The actions of privateers struck Morris as "more of Moorish Piracy than Christian Forbearance." In the same letter, Morris continued:

...what shall we say for these Plunderers when Individuals, honest Industrious Men, Friends to the Freedom & Independence of [America] lose their Property Credit & reputation by these Depredations, & the Misrepresentations they make to Cover their own Villainies, indeed my good friends if we do not take some effectual measures to punish the guilty and put a Stop to this kind of Arbitrary Thieving we shall be Sharers in their Guilt and probably incur the Suspicion of being Sharers in the Plunder.<sup>33</sup>

Near the end of the letter, Morris spoke to the actions of privateers in relation to the identity of the new American republic; he feared that unless something was done to stop

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<sup>33</sup> Robert Morris to William Hooper, January 24 1777, in *NDAR* vol. 7, 1031-32.



the practice, America would gain a reputation as “a lawless Set of Freebooters, which God forbid sh[oul]d ever be the Characteristicks of the Country I love.”<sup>34</sup> Morris’s fears of the unruly actions of privateers convinced him that such a practice was not in the public interest of the nation for the negative affect it would have on the nation’s reputation.

Captain John Paul Jones was of a similar mind. A captain of great renown in the Continental Navy, Jones was consistently infuriated with what he perceived to be the selfish acts of privateers. In a letter to Robert Morris Jones stated that “Self Intrest...determins all Adventurers in Privateers; the Owners as well as those whom they employ.”<sup>35</sup> Later in the war, Jones’ attacks on privateering and the damage it caused the national reputation grew more spirited:

I have seen with Indignation, the sordid Adventurers in Privateers sporting away the Sinews of our Marine...Publick Virtue is not the Characteristick of the concerned in Privateers. No wonder then that they let their Prisoners go, in such a manner, that they immediately augment the Strength of the Enemies Fleet. Their selfishness furnishes them with Reasons for this conduct; were they to keep their Prisoners, their Provision would be the sooner consumed; which might perhaps oblige them to return home before they had sufficiently glutted their Avarice?<sup>36</sup>

Jones saw himself a consummate patriot, putting the needs of his country before his own self-interest; the privateers, focused on plunder and loot as they were, stood in stark contrast to Jones’ ideals for the American nation.

To Jones and Morris, privateers damaged the national character of the American republic; to William Hooper, they could potentially break apart the unity of the colonies. The northern and southern colonies were unified in the cause of liberty, but had starkly

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Captain John Paul Jones to Robert Morris, October 17 1776, in *NDAR* vol. 6, 1302-04.

<sup>36</sup> Captain John Paul Jones to Robert Morris, in *NDAR* vol. 10 1090-92.

different economies. The northern colonies had a long history of livelihood by maritime trade, whereas southern planters focused their efforts on the cultivation of cash crops rather than the cultivation of maritime trading networks. Most privateers, then, sailed out of New England ports, while ships leaving the southern colonies were loaded with lucrative cotton and tobacco and were often poorly defended. In a letter to Joseph Hewes, Hooper spoke of “a state of general confusion” caused by the seizure of southern colonial trading ships by northern privateers.<sup>37</sup> Hooper feared that such transgressions could lead to “One Part [of America] warring against another, and the defenceless Southern colonies become a devoted prey to their more formidable Eastern neighbours.”<sup>38</sup> The colonies managed to remain unified under Congress during the war, but it was a fragile unity that continual transgressions from northern privateers could jeopardize.

Hooper’s concerns were not unfounded; American privateers did on occasion seize ships belonging to their fellow countrymen. One of Nicholas Brown’s privateers, the *Willful Murther*, was accused of plundering the schooner *Nightingale*, owned by the people of Nantucket. William Rotch, the primary complainant, maligned Brown for investing in “such atrocious Villany,” and asked Brown “for impartial justice...for at present I cannot apprehend you can acquiesce in such a conduct, nor be partaken to interpose & assist us in justly wresting our Intrest from the hands of such wicked Men.”<sup>39</sup> Privateer seizures of American property damaged the bonds that held the colonists together and, as a result, damaged the united national interest of the public commonwealth.

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<sup>37</sup> William Hooper to Joseph Hewes, January 1 1777, in *NDAR* vol. 7, 838-39.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> William Rotch to Nicholas Brown, November 26 1776, in *ibid.* 292-93.

American idealists, statesmen, and republicans put forward numerous arguments against privateering, all centered on the practice's inconsistencies with the virtue of promoting the public good. Privateers hindered the effectiveness of the Continental Navy—a public institution itself—by stealing potential crewmen and weapons. The actions of privateers, it was feared, would sour America's reputation abroad and tear apart the unity of the Revolution at home. Those elites that cast America's future as that of a virtuous republic built on the disinterestedness of its citizens and the elevation of the public good were infuriated with privateering; to them, it was the epitome of avarice and the corrupting influence of private pursuits. The arguments against privateering were vocal, but never practically realized; colonies continued to issue privateer commissions quite literally until the day of the ceasefire.<sup>40</sup>

### **For the Private Interest: Privateering, Reprisal, and Victory**

Though numerous American elites derided privateering, hundreds more happily invested in privateer ventures during the war, and every colony and the Continental Congress issued commissions. These investors were in part driven by financial motivations. Privateering was a business where successful investments could net huge profits. However, these investors also recognized the importance of republican ideals to the Revolutionary cause; they too sought to create a virtuous republic, but did not feel that the sacrifice of private interest to the public good was the epitome of virtue. To defend their investments, these elites used both the discourse of reprisal as well as other

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<sup>40</sup> On March 24 1783, Governor of Rhode Island William Greene received two letters. One, from John Hancock, enclosed "Four Continental Commissions" for Greene to send out privateers; John Hancock to William Greene, March 24 1783, William Greene Papers, Folder 12, Box 1, MSS468, in Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence. The second, from Robert Livingston, enclosed "an abstract of the preliminary Article for a general peace" between the colonies and Great Britain; Robert Livingston to William Greene, March 24 1783, in *ibid*.

republican arguments demonstrating how the pursuit of private wealth could benefit the national interest and the public commonwealth.

Recall from Chapter One that early privateer expeditions justified their seizures on the basis of reprisal. Merchants and aristocrats who had property seized by the enemy outfitted privateers to recover their assets and recoup lost profits. Supporters of privateering during the American Revolution used the law of reprisals to justify their own activities with privateering. Even the names of privateer vessels suggest the notion of reprisal; the first officially commissioned privateer out of Massachusetts was named the *Boston Revenge*.<sup>41</sup>

The legal documents related to privateering consistently characterize it as an act of reprisal. The Massachusetts law authorizing privateer commissions stated that the British “are infesting the Sea Coast with Armed Vessells, and daily Endeavouring to distress the Inhabitants, by burning their Towns...and making Captures of Provisions and other Vessells being the Property of said Inhabitants.”<sup>42</sup> With such attacks occurring, the Massachusetts General Assembly believed privateering gave their citizens a chance to recover property lost to the British. When the Continental Congress finally authorized their own privateers, they too framed the practice in terms of reprisal. The declaration of March 23, 1776 stated that since Britain had “declar[ed] their property, wherever found upon the water, liable to seizure and confiscation,” Congress felt it “necessary to provide for their defence and security, and justifiable to make reprisals upon their enemies, and otherwise to annoy them, according to the laws and usages of Nations.”<sup>43</sup> Couching

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<sup>41</sup> Allen, *Massachusetts Privateers*, 40.

<sup>42</sup> Massachusetts Act Authorizing Privateers and Creating Courts of Admiralty, November 1 1775, in *NDAR* vol. 2, 834-839.

<sup>43</sup> Journal of the Continental Congress, March 23 1776, in *NDAR* vol. 4, 477-480.

privateering in the long-established tradition of reprisal gave it a greater degree of legitimacy; it was not about acquisition of profit, some elites argued, but recovery of property already lost to the British.

It was this notion of property recovery that encouraged Robert Morris to change his attitudes towards privateering. Morris was originally against privateering as it undermined the national interest and reputation abroad. In September of 1776, Morris wrote to Silas Deane that privateering “does not square with my Principles,” and that he did want to outfit privateers to attack British merchant ships for he “Coud not consent to take any part of their property because the Government have Seized mine.”<sup>44</sup> Only a few months later, though, Morris wrote a letter to William Bingham, a former business associate then responsible for most American privateers in the West Indies, wherein Morris claimed that he “had determined not to be Concerned in privateering but having had several Vessels taken from me & otherways lost a great deal of my property by this War, I conceive myself perfectly justifiable in the Eyes of God or Man to seek what I have lost, from those that have plundered me.”<sup>45</sup> Interestingly Morris continued to lambast privateering even after investing in the practice with Bingham, suggesting he still had serious concerns regarding the legitimacy of the practice. Those concerns faded over time; Morris would go on to become one of the most ardent investors in privateer expeditions during the war effort, having overcome his earlier concerns by viewing privateering as a means to recover lost property.

Privateering was consistently couched within the law of reprisal, giving it a greater degree of legitimacy. However, the law of reprisal had loopholes as well. It was

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<sup>44</sup> Robert Morris to Silas Deane, September 12 1776, in *NDAR* vol. 6, 793-96.

<sup>45</sup> Robert Morris to William Bingham, December 4 1776, in *NDAR* vol. 7, 368-70.

impossible to tell who was sailing to recover lost property, and who was sailing in pursuit of profit. While maintaining that privateering was an act of reprisal, investors also cast privateering as a benefit to the war effort and, as a result, the public good. The petition of Bartholomew Putnam demonstrates such a defense of privateering:

And should she be successful – your petitioner begs leave to suggest, that the emolument will not be merely personal & private – every instance of success will be doubly beneficial to the Colonies, by diminishing the wealth & strength of our enemies, and in the same proportion adding to our own.<sup>46</sup>

As Putnam argues, privateering would indeed provide personal interest and gain to the investors. However, by seizing British commercial property and bringing that property into the colonies, privateers were serving the public interest by aiding the war effort.

Washington's fleet of privateers—some of the earliest privateers in the Revolution—were outfitted not for profit, but exclusively to benefit the public interest by raiding British logistics.<sup>47</sup> Having taken over the army outside of Boston, Washington quickly realized he needed to put pressure on the British by sea as well as by land. He acquired the *Hannah* from John Glover to be “the first Armed Vessel fitted out in the Service of the United States.”<sup>48</sup> The *Hannah*'s service record was unimpressive, but Washington was undaunted. He fitted out more private warships to seize British supply ships entering Boston harbor and capture those supplies for use among his soldiers. His ships had a mixed record of service, but did make one capture of particular note: the

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<sup>46</sup> Petition of Bartholomew Putnam to the Massachusetts General Court, July 2 1776, in *NDAR* vol. 5, 870-71.

<sup>47</sup> It is important to note the ambiguity of Washington's ships. They were never officially approved by Congress before they set sail, meaning they were not public vessels. However, they were apparently fitted out at Congressional expense, making their status as privateers questionable. Washington himself referred to the fleet as privateers, but a more accurate term may have been private ship-of-war. For more on the exact nature of Washington's fleet see Nelson, *Washington's Secret Navy*, 78-88.

<sup>48</sup> George Washington's Instructions to Captain Nicholson Broughton, September 2 1775, in *NDAR* vol. 1, 1289n.

ordnance ship *Nancy*, captured by Captain John Manley in the *Lee*. The prize provided the American forces with much-needed weapons and powder, as well as a considerable supply of artillery rounds.<sup>49</sup> Though Washington had concerns over privateers, he felt that they were worth the potential drawbacks in exchange for the support they could provide to his army at Boston.

Massachusetts was a hotbed for privateer investment. Many of the elite merchants and statesmen of that colony argued that privateering was an effective means to fight the war and provided a tangible benefit to the public good. In October 1775 Elbridge Gerry told Samuel Adams that his “attention is directed to the fitting out of privateers, which I hope will make them swarm here.” Gerry continued on in the letter to discuss various options for naval strategy, but surmised that “it is certain that other plans will not meet with such success as will probably attend [privateering].” He suggested that a large group of privateers, perhaps even working in combination with “a heavy ship or two” from Congress, could “see the coast clear of cutters.”<sup>50</sup> James Warren was more confident, writing to Samuel Adams in December 1775 that “Fifteen privateers fixed out last June would before this have put an End to the War, or at least have Obligated the Fleet and Army to leave Boston.”<sup>51</sup> While Warren’s claims would prove rather over-confident, his advocacy of privateering fell in line with other prominent Massachusetts statesmen who contended that privateering offered an ideal means for the American colonies to take the war to the British at sea.

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<sup>49</sup> One of the highlights of the capture was a thirteen-inch brass mortar. In the celebrations following the capture, General Israel Putnam “mounted on the large mortar which was fixed in its bed for the occasion, with a bottle of rum in his hand, standing parson to christen, while godfather Mifflin [Colonel Thomas Mifflin] gave it the name of CONGRESS.” See Nelson, *Washington’s Secret Navy*, 214-18.

<sup>50</sup> Elbridge Gerry to John Adams, October 9 1775, in *NDAR* vol. 2, 369-70.

<sup>51</sup> James Warren to Samuel Adams, December 5 1775, in *ibid.* 1286. Warren’s statement is clear hyperbole; he does not provide any details on how fifteen privateers could defeat the ships of the mighty Royal Navy.

The American commissioners stationed in France were another outspoken group of privateer advocates. Their role was to establish cordial relations with France in order to negotiate weapons shipments to the colonies and potentially forge an alliance with the continental power. In multiple letters sent back to his superiors in the colonies, Silas Deane pleaded with them to send blank commissions for privateers. He argued to John Jay that “under these [commissions], infinite damage may be done, to the British Commerce.”<sup>52</sup> Deane’s efforts in privateering were motivated by desire to help the American cause. Congress, however, was ever-watchful for corruption among high-ranking officials.<sup>53</sup> When one of Deane’s colleagues charged him with corruption, Congress removed him from his post, demonstrating that there were acceptable limits to the pursuit of private interest even when inspired by devotion to the public good.<sup>54</sup>

After Deane was removed, Benjamin Franklin began outfitting his own ships. Franklin hoped to use privateers to capture British sailors to exchange with American prisoners, but he recognized the value in sending ships against British trade. In a letter to Luke Ryan, one of his captains, Franklin wrote that he was “pleased with your Activity and Bravery, in distressing the Enemy’s Trade, and beating their Vessels of superior force by which you have done honour to the American flag.”<sup>55</sup> The American commissioners outfitted privateers out of European ports in the hopes that attacks on

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<sup>52</sup> Silas Deane to John Jay, December 3 1776, in *NDAR* vol. 7, 775-77. As I shall demonstrate in Chapter Four, Deane’s statement was prescient, as American privateers in Europe did considerable damage British commerce and public pride.

<sup>53</sup> Brandes, *Warhogs*, 38-39.

<sup>54</sup> For more on Deane and privateering, see Patton, *Patriot Pirates*, 50-77; for Deane’s removal, see *ibid.* 190-95.

<sup>55</sup> William Bell Clark, *Ben Franklin’s Privateers; a Naval Epic of the American Revolution* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1956), 96.



British commerce would help bring the war home to the British people and ultimately help the Americans triumph.

Massachusetts statesman and future US President John Adams believed wholeheartedly in the virtues of disinterestedness; however, he also remained an ardent supporter of privateering throughout the war. Adams wrote that “our People may as well fight for themselves as the Continent,” as in doing so they contributed to the fight against the British.<sup>56</sup> In the same letter, written to Major Joseph Ward in July of 1776, he proclaimed that “our Privateers have the most Skill or the most Bravery, or the best Fortune, of any in America.”<sup>57</sup> He even wrote to his wife regarding the activity of privateers.<sup>58</sup> Adams was vehemently opposed to any embargoes on privateering crews, as he described in a letter to James Warren in April 1777:

I hope your Embargo is off, before now, that the Privateers may have fair Play. Indeed I am sorry it was ever laid. I am against all Shackles upon Trade. Let the Spirit of the People have its own Way, and it will do something. I doubt much whether you have got an hundred Soldiers the more for your Embargo, and perhaps you have missed Opportunities of taking many Prizes and several Hundreds of Seamen.<sup>59</sup>

The line regarding trade in that extract is critical; in including it, Adams ties his views on privateering with the republican views of Mandeville and Hume regarding commerce’s place within a virtuous republic. His enthusiasm for privateering in no way contradicts his republican values; Adams saw privateering as a means of providing incentives to the American people, channeling their pursuit of self-interest towards the public good.

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<sup>56</sup> John Adams to Major Joseph Ward, July 17 1776, in *NDAR* vol. 5, 1118.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> John Adams to Abigail Adams, August 12 1776, in *NDAR* vol. 6, 158. She responded, “I think we make a fine hand at prizes.” See Abigail Adams to John Adams, August 25 1776, in *ibid.* 299.

<sup>59</sup> John Adams to James Warren, April 6 1777, in *NDAR* vol. 8, 282.

Privateer investors could not explain their investments as merely profit driven; to do so would have flown in the face of prevailing winds of republicanism, virtue, and disinterestedness. They instead characterized their investments as supportive of republicanism. Sacrifice of private interest to the public good was not necessarily the sole virtue of a republic, they argued; rather, one could promote and support the republic through their private activities. In doing so they found themselves arguing for a different form of republicanism than those against privateering, a form of republicanism that allowed commerce and profit to play a role within the virtues of republican thought.

### **Nathanael Greene and Privateering in Practice**

Privateering during the American Revolution was caught up in a debate on the very nature of republicanism. One segment of elites lauded the notions of classical republicanism, believing that sacrificing private interest for the good of the nation was the foundation of a virtuous republic. Another group of elites moved away from the emphasis on self-sacrifice and argued that by pursuing their own private interest they were providing a benefit to the public good. In practice a number of privateer investors tried to hold true to both ideas, positioning themselves as disinterested supporters of the Revolution yet at the same time profiting from the ongoing conflict.

Nathanael Greene was one such investor attempting to marry the two sides of his wartime activities. Greene was unquestionably a patriot and a war hero. A native Rhode Islander, Greene joined the Kentish Guards in 1774, abandoning his peaceful Quaker lifestyle to fight for the American cause. Once the war began in earnest, he joined the Guards outside of Boston, where he was promoted to brigadier general of the Rhode

Island forces.<sup>60</sup> One of Washington's most trusted generals, Greene was present at many of the major battles of the Revolution including Long Island, Trenton, Princeton, and Brandywine. After the disastrous winter at Valley Forge, Washington appointed Greene to the post of quartermaster. Greene reluctantly accepted the position and served as quartermaster until 1780, at which point he took command of the army in the south and won battle after battle, helping to drive Cornwallis into Yorktown for the final blow.<sup>61</sup> Greene's career during the Revolution was seemingly one of devotion to the cause of his country; as he stated in a letter to his brother Jacob in October of 1776, "it is necessary for some to be in the field, to secure the property of others in their stores."<sup>62</sup>

Greene's actions while serving as quartermaster are a notable piece of the republican-patriot narrative Greene attempted to construct. Greene did not want the position; indeed, he attempted to refuse it before Washington convinced him that he was needed in that role. Robert Patton quotes Greene writing to a colleague upon his appointment stating that "All of you will be immortalizing yourselves in the golden pages of history while I am confined to a series of drudgery to pave the way for it."<sup>63</sup> But while the quartermaster position may have been a "series of drudgery," it did bring major financial benefits. The quartermaster was granted almost unlimited use of funds to purchase contracts to supply the army. With few regulations in place it was a simple

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<sup>60</sup> Greene was the third choice for the job; the two ahead of him declined. See Elswyth Thane, *The Fighting Quaker: Nathanael Greene* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1972), 19.

<sup>61</sup> For more on Greene's actions in the south during the war, see Gregory D. Massey and Jim Picuch, eds. *General Nathanael Greene and the American Revolution in the South* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2012); see also Thane, *Fighting Quaker*, 167-259.

<sup>62</sup> Nathanael Greene to Jacob Greene, October 3 1776, in Nathanael Greene, *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene*, ed. Richard K. Showman, et al. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1976-2015), vol. 1, 305. Hereafter *PNG*.

<sup>63</sup> Patton, *Patriot Pirates*, 103.

matter to funnel those funds into other, more private investments; as a result, the quartermaster was often viewed as a corrupt official.

There is little evidence to suggest that Greene diverted an excessive amount of public funds towards his own private endeavors, but there is plenty that he was concerned about that perception. He assured his brother Jacob that as quartermaster he would not “depart from the line of honor and truth in any business committed to my care,” and in the same letter asked Jacob to “write me the public sentiments respecting transactions in the quartermaster’s department and how the public views me.”<sup>64</sup> The quartermaster position offered Greene the chance to further his own private interest; however, he was careful to demonstrate to his fellow patriots that his acceptance of the position was motivated only by a desire to help the public good and the Revolution, and not to profit from the war.

Such displays of disinterestedness, though, do not tell the whole story of Greene’s character. While he was careful to avoid charges of corruption while serving as quartermaster, Greene did profit from the position, even calling it “flattering to my fortune” for the high wages he received.<sup>65</sup> While service was his patriotic duty, Greene remained jealous of the success of other businessmen, complaining to John Brown about “those that have been at home making their fortune, and living in the lap of luxury” while he “stood as a barrier between them and ruin.”<sup>66</sup> During his wartime service Greene sought to increase his own wealth through numerous investments. In particular, Greene

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<sup>64</sup> Nathanael Greene to Jacob Greene, May 24 1778, in *PNG* vol. 2, 404.

<sup>65</sup> Quoted in Patton, *Patriot Pirates*, 105.

<sup>66</sup> Quoted in Hedges, *Browns of Providence Plantation* vol. 1, 285.

worked with Jacob Greene & Co., the company he shared with his brothers, to funnel investments into privateers.

Greene was not a prudent privateer investor. His letters strike the reader with a tone more of a poker player than a patriot. He frequently referred to the success of privateers on the coast as the “golden harvest,” and begged his brother to “Give me a history of the Navigation matters,” referring to his privateer activity.<sup>67</sup> He joined with Barnabas Deane and Jeremiah Wadsworth to start Barnabas Deane & Co. to provide another avenue for his privateer investments.<sup>68</sup> By 1779 Greene had investments in some twenty different vessels.<sup>69</sup> Like many gamblers, Greene did not know when to walk away. He wrote his brother that “we have been peculiarly unfortunate in Navigation; but I am not for quitting yet. It is a long Lane that has no turn.”<sup>70</sup>

Unfortunately for Greene, his luck never picked up. Almost none of the ships in which he had a stake managed to seize British vessels. As early as May of 1777 Jacob wrote to Nathanael that “the Brothers Have Almost Come To A Resolution Not To Venture To Sea Any More: as they Have Met With So Many Looses [losses] they think they Had Better Stop Before All is Gone.”<sup>71</sup> Matters did not improve at any time during the war; in 1780 Jacob informed Nathanael that “The Devil Still had Got It Against us in Navigation way.”<sup>72</sup> Depressingly for Greene, the failures of his privateers seem to be more due to horrendous luck than anything else. As Nathanael wrote in a letter to Christopher Greene in January 1778:

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<sup>67</sup> For golden harvest, see Nathanael Greene to Jacob Greene, October 3 1776, in *PNG* vol. 1, 305. For navigation matters see Nathanael Greene to Jacob Greene, February 2 1777, in *PNG* vol. 2, 18.

<sup>68</sup> For the articles of agreement of this company, see *PNG* vol. 3, 377-79.

<sup>69</sup> Griffin Greene to Nathanael Greene, enclosed, November 28 1779, in *PNG* vol. 5, 125.

<sup>70</sup> Nathanael Greene to Jacob Greene, May 8 1778, in *PNG* vol. 2, 381.

<sup>71</sup> Jacob Greene to Nathanael Greene, May 7 1777, in *ibid.* 72.

<sup>72</sup> Jacob Greene to Nathanael Greene, September 7 1780, in *PNG* vol. 6, 270.

It seems that fortune is no friend of ours in the Privateering business. Pray what affront have you given her ladyship? Have you been wanting in a blind confidence in her bounty and generosity or have you insulted her by endeavoring to take your measures from the Laws of reason or the rules of prudence? It is almost immaterial from what quarter her displeasure originates she is determined to be cruel. Let her go on and do her worst, we can surmount all her embarrassments by honest industry and free use of common sense.<sup>73</sup>

Greene gambled on privateer ventures but persistent bad luck left him in serious debt after the conflict. In 1785, with financial woes mounting, he wrote his wife that “I tremble when I think of the enormous sums I owe. I seem to be doomed to a life of slavery and anxiety.”<sup>74</sup> He would die of heatstroke only a year later.

Greene was insecure about his position, trying to posture himself as a virtuous republican patriot while still reaping the benefits of wartime investments. To that end, he tried to hide his involvement in privateering or paint it as a service to the public good. Greene feared the negative impact his privateer investments may have on his reputation, asking his brother to “not to let people see my letters as they contain sentiments that I would not wish made public.”<sup>75</sup> His euphemisms for privateering also suggest a fear of association; he consistently referred to his investments as “navigation matters.”<sup>76</sup> In his correspondence with Barnabas Deane Greene wrote about their privateer investments in numeric code, perhaps to hide his involvement in the practice.<sup>77</sup> In 1779 Greene advised Colonel Samuel Webb to “keep that business [his “private concerns”] as secret as possible,” for fear of negative reactions. Most telling is Greene’s correspondence with

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<sup>73</sup> Nathanael Greene to Christopher Greene, January 5 1778, in *PNG* vol. 2, 247.

<sup>74</sup> Quoted in Patton, *Patriot Pirates*, 213.

<sup>75</sup> Nathanael Greene to Jacob Greene, May 25 1778, in *PNG* vol. 2, 404.

<sup>76</sup> Nathanael Greene to Jacob Greene, February 2 1777, in *ibid.* 18.

<sup>77</sup> For an example of such a coded letter see Barnabas Deane to Nathanael Greene, September 5 1781, in *PNG* vol. 9, 349.

Samuel Otis, a noted privateer investor from Massachusetts. Otis offered Greene one-sixteenth share in the privateer vessel *Tartar* in 1779. Though he had let his brothers handle most of the on-site transactions, Greene was by this time a long-experienced privateer investor. Yet to Otis, someone he did not know as intimately, he wrote that he did not “wish to become an adventurer; indeed I should have little or no inclination to be concerned in privateering, but for its being the business of my present profession, and calculated to annoy the Enemy, and Consiquently to favor our cause.”<sup>78</sup> To Otis, Greene positioned himself not as a privateer enthusiast, but one who only got involved in the practice for of the public interest.

Why was Greene so concerned with how his peers perceived his privateering activities? Some of it comes down to his personal insecurity, but much of it relates to the environment of republicanism in Revolutionary America. There was a large section of American elites that held to the belief that disinterestedness and self-sacrifice were the hallmarks of virtue in a republic. Privateer investors like Greene did not want to run directly contradictory to that strain of thought, as republicanism and virtue were pillars of the American Revolutionary ideology.<sup>79</sup> Some investors tweaked their conceptions of republicanism, arguing that pursuing their own interests did not undermine the virtue of republican thought. Others, like Greene, chose rather to hide their investments and construct their reputation around their perceived sacrifice to the good of the Revolutionary cause. Had Greene’s privateer activities been widespread public knowledge, that reputation of disinterestedness would have shattered and his loyalty to

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<sup>78</sup> Nathanael Greene to Samuel Otis, September 17 1779, in *PNG* vol. 4, 394.

<sup>79</sup> As Stuart Brandes states, “American revolutionaries viewed the War of Independence as a struggle between a virtuous society and a corrupt society.” See Brandes, *Warhogs*, 31.

the ideals of republicanism and the Revolution questioned. Greene's deception demonstrates the rich nuances of privateering for elites in Revolutionary America. Privateering was not simply about profit—it could not be, with the close ties between the Revolution and republican thought. Privateer investors either had to defend their actions on alternative views of republicanism that did not see disinterestedness as the pinnacle of virtue, or hide their investments to protect their public devotion to republican ideals.

### **Conclusion**

No ideology was more crucial to the American Revolution than that of republicanism. American elites wanted to create a new virtuous republic on the Atlantic seaboard; however, there were disagreements on what virtue meant to a republic. One group saw disinterestedness and sacrifice of private interest to the public good as the pivotal virtue of a republic. Others argued that this classical republican notion left no room for commerce and trade, and instead argued that pursuit of private interest could be directed to benefit the public good.

American elites viewed privateering through these contrasting lenses of republicanism. Those who lauded public interest as the primary virtue despised privateering, seeing in that practice all the vices of commerce, luxury, and avarice that could undermine republicanism. Privateer investors defended the practice as supportive of the public good rather than merely profitable to their own interests. Others like Nathanael Greene tried to sit on both sides of the fence, casting themselves as a disinterested supporter of classical republican virtues while seeking to enrich themselves through privateering. Though investors entered privateering largely to seek a profit, they had to place their investments within the contemporary debates on republican virtue.



For both the sailors and the investors, privateering was not a solely profit-driven phenomenon. In privateering, sailors saw a means to fight for their economic and social liberties against the British authorities. Investors defended their actions within the context of republican virtues, complicating the nature of republicanism and disinterestedness in the Revolutionary period. The ideological components of privateering should come as no surprise; indeed, the American Revolution was saturated with ideology. The British brought their own ideologies to the war as well, particularly in the ideological construction of their empire. Privateering had a role to play in this discussion as well, as it was perceived by British observers in relation to the identity of their empire. The perspective of the British regarding American privateers is the focus of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR: BRITISH OBSERVERS AND THE IDEOLOGIES OF EMPIRE

The port of Dunkirk on the northern coast of France was a thorn in the side of the British for years. It had long been a haven for French and Dutch privateers preying on English shipping in the Channel; the British even derisively called Channel privateers “Dunkirkers.” As related in Chapter One, the British sought to curb the Dunkirk problem with the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht, which stipulated that no privateers were allowed to sail from that port. They even stationed observers in the harbor to monitor the situation.<sup>1</sup> By the time of the American Revolution Dunkirk was, in the words of historian Mark L. Hayes, “the one port in France in which the French could not possibly get away with accepting American privateers and prizes.”<sup>2</sup> Imagine the surprise, then, when on May 3, 1777, American Captain Gustavus Conyngham brazenly sailed into Dunkirk with two British prizes in tow, one of which was the lucrative Harwich packet *The Prince of Orange*.

Though initially furious, British officials calmed down upon the news that France had promptly imprisoned Conyngham upon his entry into Dunkirk. King George III wrote to Lord North that “this is so strong a proof that the Court of Versailles mean to

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<sup>1</sup> E. Gordon Bowen-Hassell, Dennis M. Conrad and Mark L. Hayes, *Sea Raiders of the American Revolution: The Continental Navy in European Waters* (Washington, DC: Naval Historical Center, Dept. of the Navy, 2003), 23. Patton cites this as a result of the Treaty of Paris in 1763 that ended the Seven Years War; however, Article XIII of that treaty actually states that “the town and port of Dunkirk shall be put into the state fixed by the last treaty of Aix la Chapelle, and by former treaties”, with no reference to privateers or British observers at all. See Robert H. Patton, *Patriot Pirates: The Privateer War for Freedom and Fortune in the American Revolution* (New York: Random House, 2008), 172, and “Treaty of Paris 1763,” *The Avalon Project*. [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/paris763.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/paris763.asp).

<sup>2</sup> Bowen-Hassell, Conrad, and Hayes, *Sea Raiders*, 23.

keep appearances.”<sup>3</sup> However, among the British press Conyngham’s capture of the Harwich packet sparked an outrage and fear that continued unabated after his imprisonment. The *London Chronicle* reported that insurance rates in Holland had jumped to “six per cent,” and suggested that Conyngham may be a pirate rather than a privateer.<sup>4</sup> The *General Advertiser* of Liverpool reported that “upwards of sixty [privateers] were actually fitting out at Brest, Rochelle, Nantz, and other ports” to cruise against British trade; in truth the figure was a gross exaggeration.<sup>5</sup> Fishermen from Penzance reported sighting a large American privateer near the harbor.<sup>6</sup>

The argument that privateering was solely profit-motivated fails to explain the consternation from the British over American privateering. But when wider ideological frameworks are applied to the privateering phenomenon, it becomes clear that to the British, privateering meant more than a loss of profit; it represented an attack on the very foundations of the British Empire. Over the course of the early modern era the British constructed an empire that was “Protestant, commercial, maritime, and free.”<sup>7</sup> A key component of that empire was its commercial and logistical transoceanic networks, which were guarded by the mighty Royal Navy. American privateers targeted these very networks, putting the Royal Navy to shame in doing so. American privateers pilfered

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<sup>3</sup> George III to Lord North, May 14 1777, in William Bell Clark et. al, eds. *Naval Documents of the American Revolution* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1964--), vol. 8, 844. Hereafter referred to as *NDAR*.

<sup>4</sup> *London Chronicle*, Tuesday, May 6 to Thursday, May 8, 1777, in *NDAR* vol. 8, 830. He was in fact a commissioned officer in the Continental Navy at the time, captaining the ship *Surprise*.

<sup>5</sup> *The General Advertiser, Liverpool*, Friday, May 16, 1777, in *ibid.* 836.

<sup>6</sup> “Extract of a Letter from Penzance, May 16,” 1777, in *ibid.* 851. It is unclear if this report is accurate or not.

<sup>7</sup> David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 8.

British profits but, more than that, they challenged the very notion of British imperial identity and their place in the transatlantic commercial networks upon which it was built.

The previous two chapters investigated the ideologies of Revolutionary privateering from the American perspective, analyzing how sailors viewed privateering as a means to economic and social liberty and how investors placed it within the preexisting debates on republicanism and interest. This chapter flips the script by looking at Revolutionary privateering from the British perspective, where privateering was viewed in the context of imperial ideologies. The first part of the chapter details the ideological foundations of the British Empire, building off of David Armitage's helpful summation cited above. I will then describe the ways that privateers attacked those foundations during the American Revolution, relying on primary source newspapers and correspondence from British observers. The chapter will conclude by considering the American viewpoint on British ideology; American sailors and merchants were not opposed to the presence of a vibrant transatlantic commercial maritime network, but rather fought back against their perceived inferior place within that network. Privateering, and the Revolution writ large, helped Americans create a new sense of "freedom" while maintaining commercial connections with their former British countrymen.

### **The British Empire: An Ideological Perspective**

In a speech to the House of Lords in 1707, Lord Haversham eloquently described the maritime nature of Britain's empire:

Your fleet and your trade have so near a relation, and such a mutual influence upon each other they cannot be well separated; your trade is the mother and nurse of your seamen; your seamen are the life of your fleet, and your fleet is the security and protection of your trade, and both together are the wealth, strength, security, and glory of Britain.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 65.

As an island nation, Britain had always needed a strong navy for home defense. The expansion of the early modern Atlantic commercial system was the catalyst for the ideological creation of the British Empire. As Britain founded more colonies overseas it grew to rely on its maritime commerce to support growing military budgets, cement the idea of “British-ness,” and compete with the European continental powers – namely, France. The empire of Britain was built upon a foundation of transoceanic commercial and logistic networks, networks that were all protected by the British Navy. The Navy, and the commerce it guarded, became major symbols of freedom, patriotism and pride for the new British nation. Understanding the construction of this empire is crucial to the reader in order to grasp the ways later British observers saw privateering as a direct attack upon these ideological foundations.

With his phrase “Protestant, commercial, maritime, and free” David Armitage suggests that Protestantism was a key underpinning of the British Empire; that aspect of his work will not be a focus of this thesis. A religious dimension is certainly critical for a complete analysis of the British Empire and its ideological construction, but my work looks to connect that discourse to the actions of privateers during the Revolutionary War. After the conclusion of the Seven Years’ War, the “Protestant” moniker did not apply so neatly to the British Empire. The Crown had gained new territories from France in Canada and from Spain in Florida, regions that were predominantly Catholic rather than Protestant. Linda Colley states that the conflicts between Britain and France – she includes the Revolutionary War in this context – were “not religious but overwhelmingly

political.”<sup>9</sup> The privateers themselves were not likely to be extraordinarily religious individuals either. Andrew Sherburne believed that “no other person on board prayed,” and Christopher Prince stated bluntly that after a few months at sea, “All my religion was gone.”<sup>10</sup> Religion played a role in the foundation of the British Empire; however, its role had diminished by the 1770s, and it had miniscule influence on Revolutionary privateers and their attacks on Britain.<sup>11</sup>

Ruling over an island gave Britain’s leaders major strategic advantages as they looked to project power outward in the early modern era. Its geographic isolation allowed Britain to remain aloof of violent conflicts on the European continent. It was far harder for continental powers to invade Britain than it was for them to invade other rivals on the mainland; an invasion of Britain would require a contested amphibious assault, one of the most challenging strategic operations. Weather could also play a role in repulsing invasions of Britain, as was the case with the Spanish Armada invasion of 1588. But most importantly, the nature of the British Isles meant that for home defense, Parliament and the Crown could rely upon the navy as the main bulwark to protect its assets and citizens.

As discussed in Chapter One, in the seventeenth century England worked to move away from a reliance on privateers and towards the construction of a state navy, one that could both protect England’s coasts and establish its sovereignty over the seas. While the navy grew in strength, intellectuals debated the ideas of *mare liberum* and *mare clausum*.

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<sup>9</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 4. Seeing the Revolutionary War as a predominately political conflict is a viewpoint shared by P.J. Marshall; see P.J. Marshall, *The Making and Unmaking of Empires: Britain, India, and America, c.1750-1783* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 5.

<sup>10</sup> For Sherburne, see Andrew Sherburne, *Memoirs of Andrew Sherburne: A Pensioner of the Navy of the Revolution* (Providence: H.H. Brown, 1831), 20. <https://archive.org/details/sherburnememoirs00sherrich>. For Prince, see Christopher Prince, *Autobiography of a Yankee Mariner: Christopher Prince and the American Revolution*, ed. Michael J. Crawford (Washington, DC: Brassey’s, 2002), 16.

<sup>11</sup> For discussions on Protestantism and its relation to the British Empire, see Colley, *Britons*, 11-54; see also Armitage, *Ideological Origins*, 61-99.

The former referred to freedom of the seas, emphasizing that the sea was the “common property of all” and could not be considered the sovereign territory of any state or ruler.<sup>12</sup> This line of thinking was championed by Dutch scholar Hugo Grotius. The English more often advocated the ideas of *mare clausum*, as discussed by John Selden in his work of the same name. Under this principle, seas and bodies of water could be controlled and kingdoms could treat the oceans as their dominion.<sup>13</sup> By the end of the seventeenth century the *mare liberum* policy had won out, but the temerity of the English to push for sovereignty of the seas—seas that they would be in control of—showed their outward-looking approach to maritime matters. As England entered the eighteenth century, the navy would not just be a tool for defense, but a tool to project power outward through the North Sea and into the Atlantic.

The protection and strength of the navy was crucial to the creation of Britain’s transatlantic trade network. This network, and the commerce it facilitated, was crucial; more than any other factor commerce was the backbone of the British Empire. Commerce made the economy work, bringing in raw materials from the colonies for budding industries back home in Britain. Trade tariffs and customs fees allowed the government to profit from transatlantic commercial activity. Intellectuals saw trade as a fundamental necessity for a successful state.<sup>14</sup> Patriotic societies based around London in the eighteenth century heralded the importance of commercial activity and sought to promote “work and discoveries [that] seemed likely to benefit the economy.”<sup>15</sup> Ideologically,

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<sup>12</sup> Armitage, *Ideological Origins*, 109.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 113.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 141.

<sup>15</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 90.

economically, and politically, the British Empire rested on a foundation of transoceanic maritime commercial networks; commerce was the lynchpin of the British Empire.

Commerce also served the important function of uniting the disparate entities of the empire, both among the British Isles and the colonies overseas; author John Chamberlayne stated it best when he proclaimed that self-interest, profits, and trade “naturally bring people together, and keep ‘em together.”<sup>16</sup> The idea of Britishness was rather new in the eighteenth century, with the Act of Union creating the Kingdom of Great Britain in 1707. The creation of the Union itself was spurred by economic issues; Scotland’s economy was in poor shape after the failed Panama expedition, and free trade between Scotland and England would help Scottish merchants and landowners recoup some of their losses.<sup>17</sup> Commerce would soon become a symbol of this new nation, a way to tie self-interest to national loyalty and patriotism. David Armitage argues that provincial and colonial leaders were some of the most vocal supporters of a British nation connected through commercial networks, in that it served to “encourage equal treatment for their compatriots” as well as bringing in considerable profit.<sup>18</sup> Domestically, it brought together people of varying social classes and backgrounds to take part in the British economy. Colley suggests that “one in every five families in eighteenth-century Britain drew its livelihood from trade and distribution,” and an even greater number participated in industries that were reliant on commercial networks.<sup>19</sup> A new commercial middle class arose, and its firm relationship with the governing elites “was a vital source

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 39.

<sup>18</sup> Armitage, *Ideological Origins*, 181-82.

<sup>19</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 56.



of stability” for the British Empire.<sup>20</sup> The growth and maintenance of strong commercial networks served to strengthen the unity of the British Empire both within the Isles and among the periphery colonies.

At the same time, commerce emphasized the position of the ruling classes—or, to be more accurate, the propertied classes. Property took on a symbolic, almost spiritual importance in the eighteenth century, as Douglas Hay demonstrates:

Again and again the voices of money and power declared the sacredness of property in terms hitherto reserved for human life. Banks were credited with souls, and the circulation of gold likened to that of blood. Forgers, for example, were almost invariably hanged, and gentlemen knew why: ‘Forgery is a stab to commerce, and only to be tolerated in a commercial nation when the foul crime of murder is pardoned.’<sup>21</sup>

John Locke, one of the most influential thinkers of the Enlightenment, also heralded the importance of property, stating that a civil society’s “chief purpose...is the preservation of property.”<sup>22</sup> Locke primarily discussed property in its relation to land and the landowning elites, but the idolization of property trickled down throughout society.

Where the landowning elites saw property in the context of land and estates—items to be inherited—the commercial merchant class saw property in commodities, items to be bought and sold with almost reckless abandon in order to make a profit. Treating property as a tradeable commodity brought it into the discourse of international power and commerce. Commerce was a bulwark to the position of the ruling elites and commercialized middle classes, reinforcing their dominant position domestically and increasing their wealth and prestige internationally.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 56.

<sup>21</sup> Douglas Hay, Peter Linebaugh, John G. Rule, E.P. Thompson, and Cal Winslow, *Albion’s Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975), 19.

<sup>22</sup> John Locke, “Second Treatise of Government,” *Project Gutenberg*, ch. 7, sect. 85.  
<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/7370/7370-h/7370-h.htm>.

With commerce closely tied to international wealth and prestige, it played a central role in conflicts between Britain and her continental rivals, particularly France. Mercantilist economic theory dominated the landscape during the eighteenth century. In a mercantilist system, wealth acquisition and trade were zero-sum games; as one party gained wealth, another lost it.<sup>23</sup> It was crucial, then, for Britain to expand her overseas commercial networks to not only line the pockets of its ruling classes but to take that opportunity away from their French rivals. The profits generated from commerce could be also funneled towards the navy to cover the costs of fighting against the French; indeed, trade was “essential to the ‘sinews of war.’”<sup>24</sup> It was the foundation upon which Britain’s war-making ability was placed. Trade was, simply put, “the most reliable means of creating national wealth.”<sup>25</sup> There was a symbiotic relationship between commerce and the Navy, another source of national power. The Navy would protect transatlantic trade, which would increase profits back in London. Those profits then could be put towards the maintenance and expansion of the Navy, which could project power against Britain’s continental rivals.<sup>26</sup> In the great game of international rivalry of the eighteenth century, everything tied back to commercial success.

Commerce unified the disparate parts of the empire, reinforced the ruling power of the propertied classes, and helped finance wars against France. But it served one more critical role in the ideological construction of the British Empire; it was the bridge that brought together empire and liberty. Intellectuals like Niccolo Machiavelli and John

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<sup>23</sup> A notable example of mercantilist theory in practice can be found in the Navigation Acts of 1651; these acts limited trade from the colonies exclusively to other parts of the empire. See Armitage, *Ideological Origins*, 105.

<sup>24</sup> Marshall, *Making and Unmaking*, 81.

<sup>25</sup> Armitage, *Ideological Origins*, 159

<sup>26</sup> For more on the relationship between trade and the navy see Colley, *Britons*, 68.

Milton struggled to see how an empire focused on territorial expansion and outward projection of power could maintain its freedom; Armitage referred to this as “the competing pressures of liberty at home and expansion abroad.”<sup>27</sup> Some English thinkers suggested that a maritime commercial empire not focused on universal territorial gains could be a free empire—free, of course, only for white men of property. Britain looked to the examples set by trading republics like Venice and the Netherlands. Armitage sums up the British concepts of liberty, empire, and commerce with a syllogism: “If liberty were the precondition for successful commerce, and commerce was the cause of greatness, then liberty would be the guarantee of commercial *grandezza*.”<sup>28</sup> Commerce was a means to keep the empire free, allowing Britain to be a “civilizing influence” on the world in contrast to the “oppressive empires” of their European rivals.<sup>29</sup> In turn, the freedom provided by commerce would bring about greater profits from trade. Commerce brought unity; it cemented power; it elevated prestige abroad; and it was one of the very foundations of British freedom, even if that freedom was restricted to elite white men.

To protect the all-important commercial networks, Britain relied on its navy, which during the eighteenth century grew into an indomitable and unstoppable fighting force. After the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714), the British Navy made a priority of constructing dockyards at every corner of their empire. Gibraltar and Minorca were prominent dockyards during the war, and in the 1720s installations were added in the Caribbean at Jamaica and Antigua.<sup>30</sup> The wars of the 1740s saw Britain repeatedly

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<sup>27</sup> Armitage, *Ideological Origins*, 133.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* 143.

<sup>29</sup> Marshall, *Making and Unmaking*, 46.

<sup>30</sup> Jonathan R. Dull, *The Age of the Ship of the Line: The British & French Navies, 1650-1815* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 34.

deal defeats to France and Spain at sea to further their naval dominance. After the Seven Years' War, Britain's control of the seas was unmatched by any continental rival.<sup>31</sup>

The Navy, much like the commerce it was protecting, was seen as an instrument of freedom to Britain. Intellectuals warned of the dangers of standing armies, using the ancient example of the Roman Empire and the more contemporary example of the Glorious Revolution to demonstrate the tyrannical potential of a full-time land force.<sup>32</sup> Another oft-cited example of the horrors of a standing army came from the domain of Louis XIV of France, a kingdom looked down upon as "unfree" by the British. Standing navies, however, did not offer the same threat of tyranny. A strong transoceanic navy would not only protect commerce—itsself an important facet of the liberty of the British Empire—but also nullify the need for a full standing army and thus protect the British homeland from suffering under potentially restrictive military repression.

Boasting the strongest navy in the world gave Britain an immense sense of national pride verging on arrogance. Edward Grey's famous line that "the British Army should be a projectile to be fired by the British Navy," though stated many years after the Revolution, accurately describes British attitudes toward maritime dominance in the eighteenth century. As one source claimed, Britain's "*Trade, Commerce, and Publick Wealth* are chiefly owing to our NAVY."<sup>33</sup> Pride in the Navy existed at all levels of society; the War of Jenkins' Ear (1739-48) was waged primarily to appease public outcry

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<sup>31</sup> Dull, *Age of the Ship of the Line*, 90; Jonathan Dull does suggest that while the Seven Years' War was a victory, it helped bring about the setbacks of the American Revolution. He states: "In the British victory lay the seeds of defeat; in the ruins of the French defeat lay the seeds of future victory." For more on the growth and eventual dominance of the British Navy, see Jeremy Black, *The British Seaborne Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 88-132, and N.A.M. Rodger, *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649-1815* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005), 291-311.

<sup>32</sup> Armitage, *Ideological Origins*, 143-4.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 168. Emphasis in original.

for naval war against Spain. James Thomson's famous poem, written during that conflict, encapsulates the heroic sentiments directed towards the Navy:

When Britain first, at heaven's command,  
Arose from out the azure main,  
This was the charter of the land,  
And guardian angels sung this strain –  
'Rule, Britannia, rule the waves;  
Britons never will be slaves.'<sup>34</sup>

Montesquieu may have summarized British attitudes perfectly when he stated in the early eighteenth century that "A naval empire has always given the peoples who have possessed it a natural pride, because, feeling themselves able to insult others everywhere, they believe that their power is as boundless as the ocean."<sup>35</sup> The successes of the Navy gave the British people a sense that the world – or at the least, the world's oceans – was theirs to control.

Protestant, commercial, maritime, and free: that was the contemporary conception of the British Empire. Their secure position on the British Isles and the strength of their navy protected them from European attacks. Britain invested in that navy to expand outward, establishing colonies in America and trading posts all over the globe. The protection of the Navy allowed Britain to forge a commercial network that united British identity, funded international rivalries, and preserved the freedom of the British people. The successes of that commercial network and the victories of the Navy made Britain a powerful country. The fact that did not go unnoticed by the British people, who boasted of their achievements and increasingly saw themselves as entitled to greatness after the Seven Years' War. However, the addition of new territory after that conflict brought

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<sup>34</sup> Quoted in *ibid.* 170. In this poem we again see the connection between a maritime dominion – the "azure main" – and the benefits of freedom, as "Britons never will be slaves."

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 195.

insecurity over the ideological construction of their empire, an insecurity that grew to exasperation over reports of unrest in the American colonies. The coming Revolutionary War would strike further blows at the ideological framework of the British Empire; many of these blows came from American privateers.

### **Logistics, Commerce, and Pride: Privateer Attacks in the Revolution**

The American Revolution itself was a direct attack against the integrity of the British Empire; trade with the American colonies made up a large portion of the British economy, and Britain had just fought a war with France to protect those holdings. The British public detested the rebellious Americans for their insolence, but reserved some of their most vehement attacks for American privateers. The logistical and commercial maritime networks protected by the Royal Navy were crucial to Britain's identity as a free and prosperous empire; it was these networks that privateers attacked. American privateers devastated British commerce, driving up insurance rates and severely restricting the British accumulation of wealth. They decimated the crucial logistical networks across the Atlantic, seizing ships carrying munitions for the army and food for colonists still loyal to the Crown. Privateers also dented the pride of the Royal Navy, who were unable to prevent American attacks on trade or even on the coast of Britain proper, and in doing so dented the pride of the British nation. If British pride and identity could be so easily attacked by a band of quasi-legal rebel plunderers, what did that mean for Britain's standing as a glorious nation?

#### *Attacks on Commerce and Logistics*

British expansion across the Atlantic world was built on the backs of its maritime networks, as discussed in the previous section. Those maritime networks provided a boon

to commerce and trade for British merchants and logistical support for colonists overseas. Commerce and logistics, in turn, brought liberty and unity to the British Empire. However, commercial and logistical networks across the Atlantic only functioned effectively when the Atlantic was safe and secure. During the Revolution, American privateers made the Atlantic a dangerous place for British merchant and supply vessels, decimating the existing maritime networks and disrupting the liberty and unity they provided the British Empire.

The attacks of American privateers had a significant impact on British commerce during the Revolutionary War. American privateers swarmed British shipping the world over, seizing prizes off the American coast, in the Caribbean, and even in European waters. The number of ships captured is a testament to the impact of American privateering. One captain, Gustavus Conyngham, captured thirty-one ships alone.<sup>36</sup> Benjamin Franklin's small fleet of privateers tallied 114 British ships captured or destroyed during the war.<sup>37</sup> More important than the total number of ship captures is the value of those prizes; as privateers primarily targeted commercial vessels, the loss of profits for British merchants was profound. In the West Indies alone, privateers seized assets worth over 2 million pounds sterling – and that figure only covers through the year 1777.<sup>38</sup> One author suggests that over the course of the war, privateer attacks resulted in twenty-seven million dollars of damage to British commerce.<sup>39</sup> In an attempt to avoid losing cargo to the privateers, British merchants occasionally used extreme tactics:

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<sup>36</sup> Bowen-Hassell, Conrad, and Hayes, *Sea Raiders*, 41. This figure includes both his cruises as a captain in the Continental Navy and as a privateer.

<sup>37</sup> William Bell Clark, *Ben Franklin's Privateers; a Naval Epic of the American Revolution* (Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge, 1956), 173.

<sup>38</sup> Patton, *Patriot Pirates*, 135

<sup>39</sup> Michael Scott Casey, *Rebel Privateers: The Winners of American Independence* (master's thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1990), 69. As Casey emphasizes, quantitative studies of

The Thames also presented the unusual and melancholy spectacle of numbers of foreign ships, particularly French, taking in cargoes of English commodities for various ports of Europe, the property of our own merchants, who were thus seduced to seek that protection under the colours of other nations, which the British flag used to afford to all the world.<sup>40</sup>

The evidence of privateering's impact on the British economy is so prevalent throughout primary and secondary source literature that in a recent publication Robert Patton was able to claim that privateering's "impact on the British economy wasn't in question."<sup>41</sup>

Along with the loss of property for British merchants came a sharp rise in insurance costs. Merchants could insure their cargoes through organizations like Lloyd's of London to protect themselves from losses if the cargo should be captured or lost at sea. With so many ships being seized by American privateers during the war, insurers demanded astronomically high insurance rates. A press report from 1777 stated that "Insurance on Ships from Jamaica for London was done at 20 l. [percent] and from the Leeward Islands at 15 per Cent."<sup>42</sup> For comparison, insurance rates during the Seven Years War only rose to six percent in times of great crisis.<sup>43</sup> Insurance even spiked to unheard-of rates on such short voyages as the route from London to Holland.<sup>44</sup> The rise in insurance rates was a force multiplier; even if merchants' property arrived at its destination safely, the inordinately high rates for insurance drastically cut commercial profits during the war.

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privateering during the Revolutionary War are inherently estimative, for the records of the time period are questionable and incomplete. These figures then should be taken as informed estimates and not concrete data. It would be difficult to offer a hypothesis as to exactly what percent of British trade was impacted or seized by American privateering.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Gardner Weld Allen, *Massachusetts Privateers of the Revolution* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1927), 18.

<sup>41</sup> Patton, *Patriot Pirates*, 135.

<sup>42</sup> *Public Advertiser*, Saturday, August 3 1776, in *NDAR* vol. 6, 524.

<sup>43</sup> Patton, *Patriot Pirates*, 135.

<sup>44</sup> *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, Tuesday, August 5, 1777, in *NDAR*, vol. 8, 834.



While Britain's oceanic networks brought profit for merchants, they also brought supplies to colonists living on the fringes of the Empire. Privateer attacks disrupted the logistical supplies lines of the British Empire during the war, disrupting the unity provided by those maritime networks. Nowhere were privateering attacks on logistics felt more than in the British West Indies. Their archipelagic nature meant the networks running to these colonies were vulnerable to attack by commerce-raiding ships. American entrepreneur William Bingham made the most of that susceptibility. Upon arriving in the French port of Martinique in 1776 Bingham immediately set to work commissioning privateers to attack British trade. News of Bingham's activities quickly reached Europe. Letters from St. Christopher characterized Bingham as the man "who commissions all the French pirates."<sup>45</sup> King George was even informed of the privateer activity in the Caribbean.<sup>46</sup> Bingham's entrepreneurial activity flooded the waters of the Caribbean with American privateers; in an attempt to salvage some profit from the quagmire, British merchants began sending their goods on French vessels; some even made their own side deals with Bingham.<sup>47</sup>

While Bingham's privateers made him a rich man, and cut into British profits from the West Indies, their attacks had a far greater impact on logistics in the region. Planters in the Caribbean devoted almost all their arable land to the cultivation of cash crops like sugar and tobacco, leaving little space to grow foodstuffs. As a result, the Caribbean colonies were reliant on food supply from overseas. The attacks of American

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<sup>45</sup> News from St. Christopher, April 12 1777, in *ibid.* 333-35. The privateers commissioned by Bingham sailed under American commissions, but were largely composed of French crews. The same letter claimed that "one of these pirates, who took a brig from Cork, after a short engagement, had not a single man on board who could speak any English but 'strike to Congress.'"

<sup>46</sup> Helen Augur, *The Secret War of Independence* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1955), 205.

<sup>47</sup> Patton, *Patriot Pirates*, 72.

privateers jeopardized the supply of food for the British West Indies, resulting in devastating conditions for the planters there. One commentator from Grenada wrote a letter in 1777 that was published widely on both sides of the Atlantic:

Every thing continues excessive dear here...A fleet of vessels came from Ireland a few days ago; from sixty vessels that departed from Ireland not above twenty-five arrived in this and the neighboring islands; the others (as it is thought) being all taken by the American privateers. God knows, if this American war continues much longer, we shall all die with hunger.<sup>48</sup>

The swarms of privateers in the West Indies had reduced the region's output to a trickle, and had wrecked British logistical networks in the area. As Admiral George Rodney stated in 1780, the attacks in the Caribbean have "done England more harm than all the arms of her most potent enemies."<sup>49</sup>

The maritime networks of the British Empire were supposed to facilitate the safe flow of goods and supplies between the colonies and the homeland, ensuring the guarantees of liberty and unity provided by commercial and logistical activity. American privateers disrupted those networks during the Revolution by cutting into the commercial profits of British merchants—both through seizures at sea and by forcing insurers to drive up their prices—and by seizing supplies bound for colonists precariously close to starvation. Their attacks on commercial and logistical maritime networks represented to the British a direct attack on the Empire's ideological foundations. If the networks were in danger, the liberty and unity of the Empire was in danger. For protection the British turned to their vaunted Royal Navy—but they were to be disappointed.

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<sup>48</sup> "Extract of a Letter from Grenada, April 18," in *NDAR* vol. 8, 372.

<sup>49</sup> Augur, *Secret War of Independence*, 51.

### *Attacks on the Pride of the Navy*

The British were a maritime people, increasingly reliant on their navy for protection, security, and projection of power. Throughout the eighteenth century the Royal Navy had won victory after victory, acquiring a prideful attitude perilously close to overconfidence. Parliament trusted the Royal Navy with an immense slate of duties in the Revolution. They were tasked with protecting the homeland from attack, guarding the transatlantic networks from commerce-raiders, providing combat support to the British Army in America, and engaging the French Navy after they joined the conflict in 1778. The tenacity of American privateer attacks proved too much. In the Revolutionary War the Royal Navy failed to live up to its lofty reputation in the eyes of the British public, who sharply criticized the Navy for its failures to protect British commerce and logistics from the depredations of American privateers.

The British mercantile class was especially critical of the Royal Navy. Merchants were afraid to send their ships for fear of privateers. A 1776 letter to the *Public Advertiser*, a strongly anti-government publication, warned of a privateer prowling the waters around Plymouth, and beseeched the publication to “make it public at Lloyd’s” to warn merchants of the danger.<sup>50</sup> The same year the *Public Advertiser* reported on a fleet of merchant ships holed up in Barbados, fearful to sail without any escort “on account of the Multiplicity of American Privateers.”<sup>51</sup> As privateer attacks began to cut into profits, merchants demanded convoys to protect their ships and hopefully put a damper on skyrocketing insurance rates. The Navy attempted to alleviate the crisis by providing convoys to merchant fleets, but even these were no guarantee of protection. On long

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<sup>50</sup> Letter from Plymouth, July 28 1776, in *NDAR* vol. 6, 512.

<sup>51</sup> *Public Advertiser*, Wednesday, July 10, 1776, in *ibid.* 472.

Atlantic crossings, ships could get separated from their escort and subsequently picked off by lurking American privateers. In one instance a convoyed merchant fleet sailing from Jamaica to England only arrived with 23 of the original 118 ships of the fleet.<sup>52</sup> The Royal Navy did attempt to alleviate the pressures it faced during the war; however, in the public eye they more often came out the scapegoat than the hero.

The press was merciless to British admirals who proved ineffective in their positions. Admiral Samuel Graves was one such officer. Responsible for the Navy's forces outside of Boston, Graves was in command during the outbreak of the conflict and subsequent Siege of Boston. The ships at his disposal were in a state of disrepair, but Graves himself was not a particularly competent officer; one British official referred to him as "a corrupt Admiral without any shadow of capacity."<sup>53</sup> As the siege continued American ships – including those under George Washington – proved more audacious in their attacks on British supply ships, yet Graves remained apathetic and unable to stop the tide. For his troubles the British press lambasted him in sarcastic fashion:

This vigilant officer [Graves], instead of sending his squadron to protect the store-ships and transports from England, had, with the utmost prudence, ordered the ships of war in this harbor to be secured with bombs [booms] all round, to prevent their being boarded and taken by the Rebel whale-boats...no doubt the Parliament will thank him on his glorious return for so effectually preserving his Majesty's ships.<sup>54</sup>

Yet the most virulent responses towards privateering and the Navy's failure to respond came from incidents in home waters. As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, Gustavus Conyngham's seizure of the Harwich packet sparked a large degree of

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<sup>52</sup> *Public Advertiser*, Monday, October 28, 1776, in *NDAR* vol. 7, 716.

<sup>53</sup> Quoted in James L. Nelson, *George Washington's Secret Navy: How the American Revolution Went to Sea* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2008), 4.

<sup>54</sup> Letter from an Officer at Boston, December 21 1775, in *NDAR* vol. 3, 194.

concern in Britain. While many of the papers committed to fearmongering, the *Public Advertiser* placed the blame squarely on the shoulders of the Admiralty:

The Capture of the *Orange* Packet is a complete Refutation of what we have been so often told concerning the reduced State of the Americans. They have hitherto kept us in sufficient Play on their *own* Coasts, and now, in their Turn they even venture to assail *ours*. Old *Twitcher* [Lord Sandwich, head of the Admiralty] may blush *for once* at having suffered such an *Insult* so near our very Doors, after such *repeated* but *impudent* Boasts about the Number and Readiness of his Ships. But his Fleets seems to be literally *Fleets of Observation* only.<sup>55</sup>

The Royal Navy's job, first and foremost, was the protection of the British Isles. After the seizure of the Harwich Packet, there was some concern as to whether that mission was actually being fulfilled.

In 1779, Benjamin Franklin wrote, "We continue to insult the Coasts of these *Lords of the Ocean* with our little Cruisers."<sup>56</sup> Privateers did not directly confront the Navy; however, by effectively raiding British commerce, they damaged the pride and invincibility of the Royal Navy. For Britain, the Royal Navy was more than a military institution; it was a symbol of national pride, a bulwark of freedom and empire. American privateers circumvented the power of the Royal Navy to launch devastating attacks on the British Empire's maritime commercial and logistical networks. In doing so, they struck directly at the heart of Britain's imperial ideology. For British observers during the War for Independence privateer attacks were a nuisance to profit-making but, more than that, they represented a challenge to the very identity of the British Empire.

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<sup>55</sup> *Public Advertiser*, Thursday, May 15, 1777, in *NDAR* vol. 8, 847. Emphasis in original.

<sup>56</sup> Clark, *Ben Franklin's Privateers*, 96. Emphasis in original.

## **Ideology and Identity: The American Perspective**

The British Empire, to use Armitage's phrase, was seen by both British and American observers as "Protestant, commercial, maritime, and free." Their maritime commercial and logistical networks, and the protection the Royal Navy provided to those networks, ensured the freedom, prosperity, and prestige of the British Empire. American privateers attacked those networks during the Revolutionary War, cutting into British profits and leading British observers to question the very identity of their empire. The British response to American privateering was so outspoken because they viewed privateer attacks in the context of the ideological construction of their empire. But did American privateers view their own actions in the same way? Were American privateers motivated by a desire to rid themselves of the transatlantic networks of which they had for so long been a part? Not exactly. Americans enjoyed the benefits of the transatlantic system; increasingly after the French and Indian War, though, Americans felt that system and the ideological construction of the British Empire did not guarantee them the freedom it was supposed to. Privateer attacks were not motivated by any antagonism towards the existence of British maritime networks; rather, they were fighting to improve their place within that network, to guarantee themselves the benefits of freedom they felt were lacking in their current situation.

The so-called "Pamphlet Debate," the multitude of essays and opinions on relations between the colonies and Britain following the Seven Years' War, offers insight into the primary grievances of the American people leading up to the Revolution. Notably lacking are complaints against Britain's strong maritime networks; rather, American authors primarily railed against the Stamp Act and the perceived unjust British imposition

of power upon the colonists. Authors particularly framed their grievances with the British in terms of property. James Otis proclaimed, “Now can there be any liberty, where property is taken away without consent?”<sup>57</sup> The consent to which Otis refers is representation in Parliament, another common theme from the pamphlets. Stephen Hopkins was more forceful in his writings, stating that “Those who are governed at the will of another, or of others, and whose property may be taken from them by taxes, or otherwise, without their own consent, and against their will, are in the miserable condition of slaves.”<sup>58</sup> The main grievance the Americans had was the nature of Parliament’s taxation of the colonies without colonial representation in Parliament. Such a scenario, Otis suggested, would breakdown the “barrier of liberty.”<sup>59</sup>

Neither party wanted out of the British-American commercial network. Indeed, American commerce accounted for almost half of all British shipping, and regulations mandated that the vast majority of America’s trade went to Britain or other British colonies.<sup>60</sup> In his deposition to Parliament, Benjamin Franklin addressed the colonists’ grievances regarding British regulation of the Empire’s commerce. He spoke of a difference between internal and external taxation, suggesting that Parliament had every right to lay external taxes, but none to lay internal duties. External duties were not placed on necessities; as Franklin stated, “If people do not like it at that price, they refuse it; they are not obliged to pay it.” Internal taxes, however, were “forced from the people without their consent,” and would by their very nature extort money from the people who offered

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<sup>57</sup> James Otis, *The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved*, in Gordon S. Wood, ed. *The American Revolution: Writings from the Pamphlet Debate, 1764-1776* (New York: Library of America, 2015), vol. 1, 78.

<sup>58</sup> [Stephen Hopkins], *The Rights of Colonies Examined*, in Wood, *Pamphlet Debate*, vol. 1, 125.

<sup>59</sup> Otis, *Rights of British Colonies*, in Wood, *Pamphlet Debate*, vol. 1, 94.

<sup>60</sup> Wood, *Pamphlet Debate*, vol. 1, xix.

no representation towards such a tax. He stressed repeatedly in his deposition that he had “never heard any objection to the right of laying duties to regulate commerce,” but also stated that “a right to lay internal taxes was never supposed to be in parliament, as we are not represented there.”<sup>61</sup> Benjamin Franklin’s deposition demonstrates that American protests were not related to Britain’s commercial network, but rather their impositions upon the Americans’ participation in that network and their own personal, internal affairs.

The actions and motivations of the privateer sailors discussed in Chapter Two demonstrate that, in addition to profit motives, privateers were driven by a notion of resistance to British rule. They resented British involvement in their mercantile maritime activities, perceiving such action to be a violation of their economic and social liberties. They benefited from British maritime networks, just not British authority over those networks. Once the war concluded and America had its independence, many former privateersmen found work on merchant vessels following the conclusion of hostilities. Andrew Sherburne sailed for nearly another five years after the war on various merchant cruises between America, the West Indies, and Britain, utilizing similar networks to those in place before the war.<sup>62</sup> Gideon Olmsted too continued to captain merchant cruises with Britain following the cessation of hostilities.<sup>63</sup> Privateer sailors did not want to push back against maritime commerce—it was their livelihood. Rather, they wanted the freedom to pursue that commerce the way they saw fit, outside of the models of a British Empire that had never quite offered the freedom to sailors it promised.

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<sup>61</sup> *The Examination of Doctor Benjamin Franklin, before an August Assembly, relating to the Repeal of the Stamp Act*, in Wood, *Pamphlet Debate*, vol. 1, 341.

<sup>62</sup> Sherburne, *Memoirs of Andrew Sherburne*, 127-35.

<sup>63</sup> Gideon Olmsted, *The Journal of Gideon Olmsted: Adventures of a Sea Captain during the American Revolution*, ed. Gerald W. Gawalt (Washington: Library of Congress, 1978), xiii.



The privateer investors and elites who so ardently supported the American cause also saw no need to do away with the existing maritime networks. Those who strove to create a classical republic based on devotion to the public interest in America were especially critical of Britain for its lack of virtue, but many of their complaints related to the perceived corruption of the British army and not the existence of maritime networks connecting Britain to America.<sup>64</sup> Many of the most avid privateer investors were merchants, who expressly benefited from close commercial connections to British merchants. Robert Morris originally could not bring himself to invest in privateers for he “had extensive Connections & dealings with many Worthy Men in England” and did not want to steal from his former associates.<sup>65</sup> The merchants’ livelihoods depended on the maritime commercial networks that were part of the British Empire; they saw no need to eradicate those connections. Rather, privateer investors wanted the freedom to do as they wished within a transatlantic system, supporting the American cause while maintaining their mercantile connections.

Perhaps the most definitive piece of evidence that Americans were not rebelling against the existence of transatlantic commercial networks is the continuation—and even the increase—of trade between the former colonies and Britain following the Revolutionary War. Emily Buchnea analyzes the expansion of the New York-Liverpool network during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Before the Revolution New York and Liverpool were relatively minor ports for transatlantic trade, but they grew in

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<sup>64</sup> For more on American views on virtue and British corruption see Stuart D. Brandes, *Warhogs: A History of War Profits in America* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 32-34.

<sup>65</sup> Robert Morris to Silas Deane, September 12 1776, in *NDAR* vol. 6, 794.

importance during the war.<sup>66</sup> After the war, trade between the two ports “not only recovered but thrived.”<sup>67</sup> She goes on to suggest that some of that growth was due to “greater confidence in the US new economic independence” on the part of merchants and businessmen.<sup>68</sup> While the Liverpool-New York trade described by Buchnea is but one example, on the whole trade between the new United States and Britain continued and indeed expanded following the American War of Independence.

American privateer attacks did strike at the ideological foundations of the British Empire, but the evidence does not suggest that the Americans were motivated by a desire to do away with those foundations. Much of the discourse leading up to the war related to the argument of “taxation without representation.” Americans wanted to be a part of the empire and reap the benefits of a transoceanic trade network protected by the Royal Navy, but they questioned whether such a construction of empire granted them the freedom they felt was rightfully theirs. After the war Anglo-American trade continued in earnest, with former privateersmen finding work aboard merchant ships and former privateer investors returning to their peacetime businesses of transatlantic trade, partaking in trading networks now as independent Americans rather than subjects of the British Empire. Americans enjoyed the benefits of a commercial and maritime position; with independence, they hoped to reap the benefits of those networks along with the freedom won in the Revolutionary War.

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<sup>66</sup> Emily Buchnea, “Transatlantic Transformations: Visualizing Change over Time in the Liverpool-New York Trade Network, 1763-1833,” *Enterprise and Society* 15, no. 4 (2014), 694.

<sup>67</sup> Buchnea, “Transatlantic Transformations,” 704.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* 705.

## Conclusion

After the war, London's Livery trading guilds proclaimed to King George III, "Your armies are captured, the wonted superiority of your navies is annihilated; your dominions are lost."<sup>69</sup> The empire that the British had come to see as "Protestant, commercial, maritime, and free" had taken a number of blows during the war, not the least from American privateers. Privateers had weakened Britain's maritime shipping lanes, threatening British logistics and commerce, and were undeterred by the ineffective actions of the Royal Navy. As a result, American privateers threatened the construction and identity of the British Empire itself. Americans involved in privateering, though, were not against every component of the British Empire; indeed, they benefited greatly from the transatlantic commercial and logistical networks. Their actions were driven by a desire to regain the freedom that they no longer felt was theirs within the British Empire.

The actions of privateers during the Revolutionary War cannot be solely explained through the lens of the profit motive. That narrative deigns commerce merely the practice of making money through trade. British observers, though, clearly thought of commerce as a component of their free and prestigious empire. Privateers who attacked commerce did so with the understanding that commerce was indelibly tied to ideological debates regarding freedom and liberty. Their desires for independence, profit, and a better place within the transatlantic trading system are inseparable from the ideological construction of the British Empire and cannot solely be explained by the motivations of profit and plunder.

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<sup>69</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 143.

## CONCLUSION

Privateering was no flash in the pan in American history. Though it may be a forgotten part of the Revolution today, at the time it was important enough to the Founding Fathers to enshrine privateering in the Constitution of the United States. Article I Section 8 of the document grants Congress the power “To declare War [and] Grant Letters of Marque and Reprisal.”<sup>1</sup> By including the authority to authorize privateers in the founding documents of the nation, the Revolutionary generation ensured that privateering would remain a part of America’s approach to war. And remain it did; when America went to war with Britain again in 1812, Congress was quick to outfit privateers. Some of the same themes discussed in this thesis emerged in that war. Members of the United States Navy frequently complained that privateers confounded the Navy in recruiting and outfitting vessels. Privateering was then a component of American maritime culture during wartime in the early years of the Republic. Even when European nations outlawed privateering with the Declaration of Paris in 1856, America refused to sign; they wanted to preserve their right to commission privateers.<sup>2</sup>

All of that future privateer activity built off of the actions of privateers during America’s founding war, the War for Independence. During that war privateers were front and center. Major figures on the American side got involved in privateer ventures, thousands of men signed up to go sailing, and privateers preyed on British commerce in

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<sup>1</sup> “The Constitution of the United States: A Transcription,” *National Archives and Records Administration*. <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript>.

<sup>2</sup> For more on the diplomatic interplay surrounding the Declaration of Paris, see Jan Martin Lemnitzer, *Power, Law and the End of Privateering* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

American, Caribbean, and European waters. But scholars have largely ignored privateering during that conflict. There is a great debate among scholars on the strategic effectiveness of the privateers in the war and an analysis of their place in the military context of the Revolution; there is however little attempt to push privateering any further than the fields of strategy. Historians write off privateering as driven by the desire for profit and the occasional desire to fight back against the British. Such a self-interested activity does not fit the narrative of the “virtuous” Revolution that has become the mythos of America’s founding.

With this thesis I have attempted to complicate the profit-narrative of privateering by connecting it to the wider world of the Revolutionary Period. From its origins privateering was not a mere profit-driven plunder spree, but rather an integral part of the expanding state system in the Atlantic world. Privateering took on different meanings for the sailors and the investors. For the men actually on board the ships, it provided both a chance to make a profit and an ideal course with which to resist British authority at sea. For investors, privateering was a way to make a profit during war, but that profit-making had to contend with the prevailing attitudes lauding classical republicanism and disinterestedness among American patriots. On a broader scale, privateers attacked the commercial maritime foundations of the British Empire, helping to push the American colonists away from a British conception of their identity and towards a new American notion of self.

My approach to privateering in this project has been one of breadth. I have connected privateering with a number of different debates contemporary to the Revolution, including debates on commerce, republicanism, identity, and interest. Further

research could look into privateering's place in these debates in more depth. For example, one could investigate in more detail how privateering affected broader economic market trends in maritime commerce before, during, and after the Revolutionary War. Another course of study would be to apply my methodology to privateering in the War of 1812 to understand how privateering fit into the ideological frameworks surrounding the American nation during that conflict. I have shown that privateering as a phenomenon was intricately linked with a variety of groups and facets of Revolutionary-era society; analyzing each of those relationships in turn could provide a more complete understanding of privateering and its place in the American Revolution.

Motivation is a tricky thing to analyze historically. While one individual may take up arms for the good of their country, another may do so for the good of their wallet. Motivations are rarely so one-sided or detectable. The only advantage historians have is that motivations are not developed in isolation; they are created in reaction to the world around an individual. That world, and the ideologies, attitudes, and frames of mind within it, drove the motivations for privateering during the American Revolution. It was profitable, yes—but it was also caught up in the spirit of independence, republicanism, and identity. The action ran both ways; privateering both influenced and was influenced by the Revolution. As the practice was intricately linked with so many facets of society, the ripple effects of those influences were felt across the spectrum of the American Revolutionary Period.

## APPENDIX

### *Orders for a Letter of Marque*<sup>1</sup>

Cap<sup>t</sup> Silvanus Jenkes

Providence Decem<sup>r</sup> 15<sup>th</sup> 1779

Sir,

You being Command<sup>r</sup> of my Sloop *Revenge* now fitting for the Sea, my Orders are that you proceed to Ocoys [Cayes] on the South Side of Hispaniola, after Chasing any Vessels you may think best on your passage, and there dispose of the Cargoe for the most you can takeing especial care to ask a good high price for Every Article, as you know the difficulty of getting a Cargoe here is very great and Expensive, as you are a Letter of Mark I hope youl take a good prize going which if should be the Case, youl send her to me under the Command of your mate, Unless she should be loaded with Silk or Lumber, in which Case you will take her with you, & sell the Cargoe at Ocoys [Cayes], & bring her home with you Loaded with Good Sugar, Rum, Coffee &c. In this Case I hope you will be able to get some more hands for the *Revenge* there, so that you may be able to make another prize on your passage back, which youl bring with you to me. Youl bring home in the *Revenge*, a Full Load good Sugar Inclosed by some Rum, Powder, Coffee & Brandy if to be had cheap or any other Article you may see which will answer better if you can get some good Duck their at a moderate price I recommend your getting such new Souls as the Sloop may want, if you should be so Lucky as to arrive to a good market, so that youl have more than you can Bring on good Sugar, Rum, Powder Coffee & Brandy, youl in this case bring some Cambricks [cambric, a fine fabric]

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<sup>1</sup> John Brown to Silvanus Jenckes, December 15 1779, in the John Brown (1736-1803) Papers, Folder 2, Box 1, MSS 312, Rhode Island History Society, Providence, RI.

together with some good Skirting & other [items] or whatever you think will nett more proffitt. Your Commission is 5% on Sales & 2% on Returns in goods but nothing on your Disbursements, & if you pay any Commissions to a French Man its to be out of the 2<sup>d</sup> 5&2%. I had Rather you should Draw no Commission their In which Case 7% of all the goods you bring home for the Cargoe will be yours on your Return and your priviledge is also to be 7% in all you bring in the Sloop Exclusive of what belongs to your Mate & people, who you are to see has not more goods on board than is allowed them by your Portledge Bill. If any thing happens to you which Renders you Unable to do the business of the Voyage, your Mate Mr. Warner is to Observe these Orders, and act in your place on in his absence your 2<sup>d</sup> mate Mr. Hopkins. I hope to see you back to my Wharf by the 20<sup>th</sup> of March with a Rich Cargo and a good prize--- And,

Am Sir your friend & Owner—

John Brown

...

by the above Prices you must Calculate which Articles will Answer best to bring, Allways makeing due Allowance for the Bulk & weight of Each Article on acc<sup>t</sup> of the Freight. If you should find that Good molasses may be had Easey & Very Cheape, and on the other hand sugars should be scars [scarce] and high you may in this Case bring me 10, 12, or 15 [units] Molasses but if Sugar & Coffee should be Cheape, I chose you should bring me no Molasses—

I am &c John Brown



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Brown, John, Papers. MSS 312. Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence.

John Brown was many things: he was a bombastic patriot, an entrepreneurial merchant, a wealthy member of Rhode Island society, and a member of one of the colony's oldest families. This collection of letters and correspondence is but some of his writings from the Revolutionary period. Many are personal letters, particularly those to his son. Those that pertain to his business dealings in the Revolution are of particular interest to me. John Brown was a merchant and a privateer investor during the war; some documents in this collection include a survey of all of Brown's assets--including his ships--and a set of instructions to his privateer captains. Given Brown's role as an investor, many of these sources will come into play in my third chapter on investor perspectives on privateering.

Clark, William Bell, et al, ed. *Naval Documents of the American Revolution*. 12 vols. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1964--.

The *Naval Documents of the American Revolution* series (NDAR) is the main collection of primary sources for maritime scholars interested in the Revolutionary War. Over the past fifty years historians of the US Navy have tirelessly collected primary sources from various historical societies and collections in both the United States and Britain and compiled them into this multivolume work. The series includes a wide variety of sources including correspondence, newspaper articles, mercantile receipts, and even popular songs. I will draw a great deal of my primary source evidence for my arguments from this series, the foremost collections of primary source material on the naval aspects of the war.

Commager, Henry Steele, and Richard B. Morris, eds. *The Spirit of 'Seventy-Six: The Story of the American Revolution as Told by Participants*. New York: Harper & Row, 1967.

Commager and Morris have collected an immense number of primary sources related to the whole American Revolution in this work. Their work spans the time period from the Boston Tea Party to the Treaty of Paris in 1783. Sources range from letters between leaders to pamphlets and widely published newspaper articles. Of particular use to me are chapters twenty-three and twenty-four, which include documents related to the Continental Navy and privateers, respectively.

"The Constitution of the United States: A Transcription." National Archives and Records Administration. Accessed March 9, 2017. <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript>.

The Constitution of the United States, written over the summer of 1787, was in some ways the final touch of the Revolution. With this document American

statesmen and politicians created the government still in place today. Of note for this study is Article One; in that section, the Framers granted Congress the right to commission privateers, enshrining the practice in America for years to come. I have used the Constitution to show how privateering continued to play a role in American history after the war.

Davis, Joshua. "Narrative of Joshua Davis." Naval History and Heritage Command. April 9, 2015. Accessed November 5, 2016.

<https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/n/narrative-joshua-davis-american-citizen-1811.html>.

Davis's memoir serves as a primary source account of privateering during the Revolutionary War. Davis was an active privateer, cruising almost constantly during the war. He was, however, rather unsuccessful as a privateer, being captured and impressed on six different occasions by the British. Davis's narrative is one of my main sources for chapter two, discussing the motivations of privateer sailors during the war. I have particularly drawn on his descriptions of life aboard a ship, and of his experiences with British officers while impressed.

"Declaration of Independence: A Transcription." National Archives and Records Administration. Accessed March 9, 2017. <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>.

The Declaration of Independence, primarily written by Thomas Jefferson, officially marked the American colonies' split from the British Empire. The document includes a long list of grievances against the British monarch, King George III. Of use for this study is Jefferson's complaints about impressment. I have used that detail in my second chapter to show how the practice, and thus the seamen threatened by it, were intricately wrapped up within the broader fight for social liberties during the Revolution.

Drowne, Solomon. *Journal of a Cruise in the Fall of 1780, in the Sloop-of-war, Hope, of Providence, R.I.* Edited by Henry T. Drowne. New York: C.L. Moreau, 1872.

Accessed September 25, 2016. <https://archive.org/details/journalofcruisei00drow>. With his journal Solomon Drowne provides an insightful first-hand account of life aboard a privateer vessel. It is one of the few complete first-hand accounts written by someone who served on board a privateer during the war -- albeit for only one cruise. Drowne's work not only shows how a privateer on the American coast typically operated during the war, but also includes his opinions on the practice as a whole and his reasons for shipping out on the *Hope*. Drowne's account is one of the privateer narratives I draw on for my second chapter.

Gage, Thomas. *The Correspondence of General Thomas Gage*. Edited by Clarence Edwin Carter. 2 vols. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1931.

This primary source compilation consists of letters sent by British General Thomas Gage, the commander-in-chief of North America during the 1760s and governor of Boston from 1774 through 1775. They provide a British perspective on the various riots staged by Americans -- primarily seamen -- in the years leading up to the outbreak of war. I have used his letters to aid my understanding

of the types of crowd actions that occurred during the 1760s and 1770s, and the way those actions were received by the British leadership.

Greene, Nathanael. *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene*. Edited by Richard K. Showman, et al. 12 vols. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1976-2015.

General Nathanael Greene has become an iconic figure in the American Revolution, serving as Washington's de-facto second in command and Brigadier General of the Continental Army. Greene particularly made a name for himself in the latter half of the war, beguiling the British in the South and helping to drive Cornwallis into Yorktown. For my purposes, though, Greene was an avid privateer investor. His correspondence, helpfully collected in this series, includes numerous letters to his brothers and other privateer adventurers regarding his investments and interests in the practice. He also speaks to the conflict between his own public service and the desire to make a profit and live comfortably. The letters included in this collection are invaluable for my third chapter, as Greene exemplifies the type of privateer investor I am interested in studying.

Greene, William, Papers. MSS 468. Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence.

William Greene was governor of the Rhode Island colony in the later years of the Revolutionary War. He was distantly related to Nathanael Greene, but did not do much business with him during the war. Much of his time as governor was spent focused on maritime matters, from the presence of the British fleet in Newport to the arrival of the French fleet in 1778. Throughout his time as governor, he supported the use of privateers, and frequently authorized privateer cruises from his colony. Of particular interest in my third chapter is the fact that Greene issued commissions quite literally on the last day of the conflict; he then had to rescind those commissions.

Locke, John. *Second Treatise of Government*. Project Gutenberg. Accessed December 7, 2016. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/7370/7370-h/7370-h.htm>.

Few philosophers typify the Age of Enlightenment like Englishman John Locke. In his *Second Treatise of Government*, he discusses how governments emerged from the state of nature to bring order. One area that is of particular interest is his discussion of property. Locke posits that civil society and government were created to protect property; to Locke, property is paramount to the organization of government and society. Property serves as a crucial underpinning to commerce and thus commerce raiding during this time period. I use Locke's ideas to support the ideological importance of commerce to Britain.

Nightingale-Jenckes Papers. MSS 588. Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence.

Samuel Nightingale (sometimes seen as Samuel Nightingale, Sr. after his son came of age) was a prominent member of the Providence mercantile community along with his business partner John Jenckes. Like many merchants, Nightingale invested heavily in privateering during the Revolutionary War. His letters regarding privateering are scarce; however, I have used one incident that comes up repeatedly in his correspondence to show the complexities of adjudicating

privateering prizes. Nightingale's schooner *La Committee* was taken by a British ship, then recaptured by a Virginian vessel; Nightingale wrote repeatedly to Virginia Governor Thomas Jefferson, pleading with him for help in recovering his property.

Neeser, Robert Wilden. *Letters and Papers Relating to the Cruises of Gustavus Conyngham, a Captain of the Continental Navy, 1777-1779*. New York: De Vinne Press, 1915.

Neeser's work serves as a primary source compilation of documents related to the cruises of Captain Gustavus Conyngham. Conyngham primarily sailed in European waters, capturing prizes and sending them into French and Spanish ports. Most of the sources are correspondence between Conyngham and the American commissioners in Paris, as well as mercantile receipts from Conyngham's prizes. Neeser's collection will help me when I discuss Conyngham's actions in relation to prize courts and British ideologies in Chapters Two and Four, respectively.

Olmsted, Gideon. *The Journal of Gideon Olmsted: Adventures of a Sea Captain during the American Revolution*. Edited by Gerald W. Gawalt. Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1978.

Gideon Olmsted's journal provides a primary-source account of sailing during the Revolutionary War. He did cruise on board a few privateers, but after making money in those ventures invested in merchant shipping. He was captured by the British, but led a mutiny to seize the ship on which he was placed. Olmsted's narrative shows the importance of the prize courts; Olmsted continued to fight in court for the legitimacy of his mutiny and the subsequent capture of the ship into the nineteenth century. Olmsted's account serves as one of the privateer narratives I analyze in Chapter Two.

Prince, Christopher. *Autobiography of a Yankee Mariner: Christopher Prince and the American Revolution*. Edited by Michael J. Crawford. Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 2002.

Christopher Prince provides one of the most complete accounts of a seaman's life during the American Revolution with this autobiographical account. The memoir was never written to be published, but rather shared with his children and passed down through the family line. Prince provides an account of the events of his life during the Revolution, including his service in captivity aboard a Royal Navy vessel in the St. Lawrence, his time aboard the *Oliver Cromwell* (Capt. William Coit), and his numerous cruises aboard privateers. The manuscript is edited by preeminent naval scholar Michael J. Crawford, who provides important historical context for Prince's work. Prince provides readers with an insight into his emotions and feelings during the events of the Revolution, making this a critical work for me in my investigation of privateersmen in Chapter Two.

Shelvocke, George. *A Privateer's Voyage round the World*. Edited by Vincent McInerney. Barnsley: Seaforth Publishing, 2010. Accessed December 29, 2016. <https://goo.gl/DYdIJM>.

George Shelvocke's manuscript detailing a privateer expedition to the South Sea in the early eighteenth century is provided here in condensed form. The narrative serves as a defense of Shelvocke's actions; he is careful to demonstrate his own unwillingness to succumb to piracy, the mutinous actions of his own crew, and the failures of other leaders of the expedition. It provides a lively, if melodramatic description of the voyage, which resulted in no financial gain and severe loss of life. I'm using the narrative in my first chapter, and it offers interesting comparisons to privateer narratives from the American Revolution; Shelvocke's narrative is more of a travel story, while the American sources take on a more nostalgic and heroizing tone.

Sherburne, Andrew. *Memoirs of Andrew Sherburne: A Pensioner of the Navy of the Revolution*. Providence: H.H. Brown, 1831. Accessed September 18, 2016. <https://archive.org/details/sherburnememoirs00sherrich>.

Andrew Sherburne was only ten years old when the Revolution began, yet that did not prevent him from serving on a Continental Navy ship and two privateers, and being captured and housed in a British prison ship. Long after the war, Sherburne penned this memoir, the largest portion of it focused on his years spent during the Revolution. Sherburne's memoir is one of the privateer narratives I analyze in Chapter Two to understand the possible ramifications of liberty on privateer motivations.

Staples, William R. *The Documentary History of the Destruction of the Gaspee*. Providence: Knowles, Vose, & Anthony, 1845.

In this primary source collection William Staples presents a number of documents related to the burning of the *Gaspee* in 1772 in Narragansett Bay. Like most primary source compilations investigating this time period, the bulk of the sources are letters between the major players in the incident. Staples' account provides the bulk of my source material for my description of the *Gaspee* attack in the Introduction, an attack I believe is starkly reminiscent of later acts of private maritime violence in the war.

"Treaty of Paris 1763." Avalon Project. Accessed December 7, 2016. [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/paris763.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/paris763.asp).

The Treaty of Paris ended the Seven Years' War between Britain and France. As part of the treaty, Dunkirk was returned to the conditions placed on it in earlier treaties. One of those conditions demanded the presence of British officials in port to prevent the commissioning of armed vessels. Their presence made it highly difficult for American ships to sell prizes in Dunkirk as long as France remained neutral. It relates to my brief discussion of Gustavus Conyngham in the introduction to Chapter Four.

Vail, Christopher. "Christopher Vail's Journal." AmericanRevolution.org. Accessed September 25, 2016. <http://www.americanrevolution.org/vail.php>.

Vail's journal serves as one of the few primary source accounts written by an individual who served on board a privateer during the war. Vail tells of his exploits first with the New York militia, then on board a whale boat during the Siege of New York, and continues through his time on a privateer and his internment in a British prison in Antigua. As one of the first-hand accounts written by a privateer during the war, this source is invaluable to me in my second chapter on privateersmen.

Wood, Gordon S., ed. *The American Revolution: Writings from the Pamphlet Debate*. 2 vols. New York: Library of America, 2015.

This two-volume work compiled by Brown University Professor Emeritus Gordon S. Wood consists of over thirty-five complete primary-source pamphlets produced in the colonies during the lead-up to the Revolutionary War. Included are works by authors such as Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson. The pamphlets included in this work detail many of the reasons for the Revolution itself. I have used Wood's compilation in my fourth chapter, when I compare America's conception of independence and privateering with that of the British.

## Secondary Sources

Allen, Gardner Weld. *Massachusetts Privateers of the Revolution*. Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1927.

Gardner Weld Allen's exhaustive work provides a compilation of nearly every colonial privateer cruise out of the colony of Massachusetts. Most of his sources are drawn from various county records showing receipts of privateer commissions as well as bonds distributed to the privateer sailors. The list shows the immense popularity of privateering during the war, though some ships are included more than once on the list. Allen also includes an informative introduction to his work detailing some general information on the practice of privateering, the number of privateers that sailed during the war, and how privateering was received in the colonies. Allen's work is one of the main sources on privateering in the Revolution, and will be consulted throughout this thesis.

Anderson, John L. "Piracy and World History: An Economic Perspective on Maritime Predation." In *Bandits at Sea: A Pirates Reader*, edited by C. R. Pennell, 82-106. New York: New York University Press, 2001.

John Anderson attempts to look at the broad scope of piracy across various geographic regions in this chapter of Pennell's work. He cites examples from the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean, and the Caribbean in his work, wherein he attempts to like the phenomenon to wider discussions of early modern statehood and diplomacy. Anderson's work analyzes how piracy affected states in terms of commerce, legality, and oceanic expansion, but does not describe how the pirates viewed themselves in relation to the state system. I have used Anderson's work in

my first chapter to relate piracy and statehood to the related--but altogether different--phenomenon of privateering.

Andrews, Kenneth R. *Elizabethan Privateering; English Privateering during the Spanish War, 1585-1603*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964.

This work provides a broad analysis of the practice of privateering as it manifested during the latter part of the sixteenth century, in the form of English letters of reprisal. Andrews suggests that the practice was pioneered by merchants who lost cargo to the Spanish; these letters of reprisal allowed them to outfit ships to recoup those losses, but soon merchants and individuals who hadn't lost anything joined the practice. He categorizes privateers with the phrases "amateurs" (rich but inexperienced and often incompetent adventurers), "professionals" (both small-time but successful ship captains and competent investors) and "great merchants" (traders who already had the necessary infrastructure to fund privateer expeditions). The study connects the Anglo-Spanish conflict and transoceanic commerce with the rise in popularity of privateering and the English merchant marine, and provides me with a useful study of early privateering to use in my first chapter.

Armitage, David. *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

With this study David Armitage traces the evolution of ideology and the construction of the concepts of "empire" in the British context from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. He defines the British Empire as "Protestant, commercial, maritime, and free." Armitage demonstrates how intellectuals of the time perceived freedom and liberty to be built upon a foundation of commercial success, which for Britain meant a strong maritime state and the creation of a trans-Atlantic commercial network protected by the Royal Navy. His work is critical for my fourth chapter, where I demonstrate that American privateers attacked the very foundations of the British Empire: its commercial maritime networks.

Augur, Helen. *The Secret War of Independence*. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1955.

*The Secret War of Independence* looks at what Helen Augur considers a forgotten part of American Revolutionary history -- attacks on Britain's "commercial-maritime-diplomatic complex." She looks at how American sailors -- primarily privateers -- staged attacks against Britain's maritime commerce and hurt the British diplomatic standing during the war. Much of her piece looks at attacks in Europe, namely those orchestrated by Benjamin Franklin. She argues in favor of privateering's effectiveness during the war. Augur's work includes a number of strong primary references like statements on privateer recruiting and modes of operation. I will also reference Augur in my fourth chapter, as she also highlights the importance of Britain's maritime empire in understanding privateering during the war.

Beattie, Tim. *British Privateering Voyages of the Early Eighteenth Century*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2015. Accessed December 27, 2016. <http://0-www.jstor.org.dewey2.library.denison.edu/stable/10.7722/j.ctt12879hk>.

Tim Beattie analyzes three separate long-distance British privateering voyages to the Spanish South Sea in the early eighteenth century in this book. He pushes back against scholars like N.A.M. Rodger and David Starkey who have described the expeditions in question as outdated and backward-looking. Beattie argues that these privateer expeditions are important in that they expanded British mercantile interests in the region, showed the shortcomings of the British Navy, and represented the ambitions of the British mercantile class. His work includes a fair description of privateering in general during this time, with some notable comparisons to my own period of study. He also discusses the importance of narratives written about these privateering voyages and how they influenced British popular fiction like Robinson Crusoe. I will be using Beattie's work in my first chapter tracing the practice of privateering and its differences from piracy.

Belich, James. *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-world, 1783-1939*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

James Belich analyzes the power of the Anglo-settler world of the nineteenth century in this book, highlighting the immense growth of cities in the frontiers of the United States and Australia. He particularly tries to compare aspects of the two experiences to draw conclusions about Anglocentrism in the 1800s. I have specifically used Belich's work for his brief discussion on gold rushes in Chapter Nine, providing a useful theoretical framework to explain the causes of gold rushes. I then take this framework and apply it to privateering in the 1770s and 1780s.

Black, Jeremy. *The British Seaborne Empire*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.

Jeremy Black's massive work investigates the naval components of the British Empire from its early days in the seventeenth century to very near the present day. He connects Britain's maritime dominance with its empire, showing how each built off of the other. Throughout the book he also connects Britain's maritime relationship with America, from their split in the Revolution to their close partnership in the twentieth century. I have particularly used Black's work to investigate the rise of the British Navy through its expansion of empire, a discussion that takes place in my fourth chapter.

Bourne, Russell. *Cradle of Violence: How Boston's Waterfront Mobs Ignited the American Revolution*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2006.

Russell Bourne looks at the role that sailors played in anti-British demonstrations in Boston over the course of the eighteenth century, culminating in the Revolutionary War. His scholarship correlates with that of Gilje and Rediker, emphasizing the role that sailors and "rabble" played, and working to return them to a position of prominence in Revolutionary histories. His narrative specifically focuses on the port of Boston, a hub of sailor demonstrations before the war. Bourne's work includes a lengthy description of the Knowles' Affair, which I have drawn on for my discussion of that incident in Chapter One.



Bowen-Hassell, E. Gordon, Dennis M. Conrad, and Mark L. Hayes. *Sea Raiders of the American Revolution: The Continental Navy in European Waters*. Washington, D.C.: Naval Historical Center, Department of the Navy, 2003.

This publication of the Naval Historical Foundation focuses on three separate captains of the Continental Navy during the Revolution: Lambert Wickes, Gustavus Conyngham, and John Paul Jones. All three sailors primarily cruised off the coast of Great Britain during the war. The authors argue for the impact that the vessels of the Continental Navy sailing in Europe had on Britain during the war, building off of mainly primary source evidence related to the three captains. The authors demonstrate the diplomatic, economic, and psychological effects that the captains had. In my discussions of these three captains, particularly Conyngham, I have relied upon this secondary source.

Brandes, Stuart D. *Warhogs: A History of War Profits in America*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997.

University of Wisconsin history professor Stuart Brandes provides a thorough history of American warfare in his work *Warhogs*. However, he eschews military and political strategy to analyze the economic and moral questions surrounding war profiteering and speculation in wartime. Brandes uses a wide range of primary and secondary sources to investigate the full gamut of American history from colonial years to modern day. His argument is primarily an economic one, as he suggests that money and financial gain can be seen as a chief cause for America's wars, including the Revolution. During the Revolution, he suggests that men fought at the beginning of the war out of fervor for the cause, but as the war went on increasingly needed economic benefits from war. I have mainly used his first and second chapters analyzing the early colonial years and the Revolutionary War to analyze the ideas of virtue and morality present in that war, and how they compared to notions of privateering.

Bromley, J.S. "Outlaws at Sea, 1660-1720: Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity among the Caribbean Freebooters." In *Bandits at Sea: A Pirates Reader*, edited by C. R. Pennell, 169-94. New York: New York University Press, 2001.

J.S. Bromley's chapter analyzes piracy socially, looking at how pirates developed egalitarian communities in the Caribbean. He discusses the interplay between plunder, privateering, and various forms of piracy from freebooting to buccaneering. His primary argument relates to the fraternity expressed among pirate communities, a unique trait that Bromley believes emerged from class consciousness on shipboard during Atlantic expansion. Bromley's chapter helps me analyze the place of piracy in the early modern Atlantic, and how it was both similar and dissimilar to privateering.

Buchnea, Emily. "Transatlantic Transformations: Visualizing Change Over Time in the Liverpool-New York Trade Network, 1763-1833." *Enterprise and Society* 15, no. 4 (2014): 687-721.

This journal article provides an analysis of the changing nature of Anglo-American trading networks during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Buchnea particularly uses visual representations to convey the enormity of the trading volume between Liverpool and New York. She then delves into possible explanations for those changes like wars, changing goods, and natural turnover in the mercantile marketplace. One of my primary arguments to show that Americans did not want a complete break from the empire's mercantile networks is demonstrated in this article; trade actually increased considerably following the conclusion of the war.

Casey, Michael Scott. *Rebel Privateers: The Winners of American Independence*. Master's thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1990. In his thesis Michael Scott Casey investigates the effectiveness of American privateers during the Revolution, and argues comprehensively that they were far more effective in the war against the British than their Continental Navy counterparts. His work uses quantifiable data to support his findings, particularly building off of total commercial tonnage records from Lloyd's of London. Casey's work takes the side of the privateers in the seemingly never-ending battle between scholars over the relative effectiveness of the Navy and the privateers. Casey's work is primarily useful for me in its strong use of quantifiable data which I will rely on to show the economic impact of privateering in Chapter Four.

Clark, William Bell. *Ben Franklin's Privateers; a Naval Epic of the American Revolution*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1956. William Bell Clark's focus in this work is the privateers commissioned by Benjamin Franklin to capture prisoners from the British to exchange for the Americans held in Mill and Forton prisons. Clark argues that though the privateers under Franklin failed to capture many prisoners to exchange, they did succeed in terrorizing the British coasts and wreaking havoc on offshore commercial assets. Clark's work is one of the cornerstone sources investigating American privateers sailing in European waters during the war, and is thus my main source for information on the privateers sailing under Franklin's authority.

Colley, Linda. *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992. Linda Colley's book is a cornerstone in the literature on British nationalism and the development of British identity in the eighteenth century. Colley shows that Britain was forged in relation to France, the "other," identifying itself as a Protestant nation. The nation used its overseas colonies to create a rich commercial transatlantic network; as such, people wanted to be a part of the British Empire. The failure to understand exactly how that empire changed following the new acquisitions in the Seven Years' War led directly to the breakaway of the American colonies, Colley argues. Colley's work provides key arguments and ideas to support my discussion of the ideological foundations of the British Empire in chapter four, particularly its commercial and maritime components.

Crawford, Michael J. "The Privateering Debate in Revolutionary America." *The Northern Mariner* 21 (2011): 1035-051.

Michael Crawford synthesizes many of the arguments related to privateering's contribution to the American war effort. He also investigates the opinions of historical actors on privateering to build a portrait of how Americans perceived the practice during the war. The first part of his article serves as a literature review of the relevant secondary source material on privateering; the second half is compiled primarily of primary sources from NDAR. This journal article is particularly useful for me for its synthesis of a number of helpful secondary sources, and covers much of the same ground that I do in my third chapter; however, I add a component of republican ideology that Crawford neglects.

Dull, Jonathan R. *The Age of the Ship of the Line: The British & French Navies, 1650-1815*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009.

Jonathan Dull provides a comparative history with his analysis of the British and French navies during the eighteenth century. The two powers were in constant rivalry during that time period, and Dull makes a convincing case that changes to one navy had clear impacts on the other. He demonstrates that the British Navy consistently got the better of their French opponents, but was never able to fully neutralize the power of the French until the victory at Trafalgar. I have used Dull's work particularly for its description of the expansion of British naval presence during the early part of the eighteenth century, a move that correlated with the expansion of their empire.

Gilje, Paul A. *Liberty on the Waterfront: American Maritime Culture in the Age of Revolution*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.

Paul Gilje, Professor of History at the University of Oklahoma, is one of the foremost scholars of maritime culture in the Age of Revolution. In this book, he looks at sailors' concepts of "liberty" in the context of the American Revolution. He goes against Rediker and other Marxist historians, positing that sailors were not rioting and acting out of class interests. In his analysis of primary source memoirs and journals, he sees more activity related to personal liberty and "living for the moment." His attempt to paint a picture of maritime life at the time is effective. Though I do not agree fully with every component of his work, Gilje's writings help me to support my arguments about sailors' resistance before and during the war, and offers a wide breadth of primary sources that I can potentially draw upon for further research.

Gilje, Paul A. "Loyalty and Liberty: The Ambiguous Patriotism of Jack Tar in the American Revolution." *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 67, no. 2 (April 1, 2000): 165-93. Accessed October 16, 2016. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27774256>.

Paul Gilje's article examines the motivation of American seamen during the Revolutionary War. He situates himself in opposition to Jesse Lemisch; he is not convinced of a class consciousness or ideological drive among the seamen, emphasizing more economic impetus. He is careful though to say that we cannot apply a single motivation to an entire set of diverse historical actors. Gilje builds his work off of primary source narratives of sailors and seamen from the Revolutionary Period. Gilje's article looks almost at the exact same historical

question that I am investigating in my thesis. I will be expanding upon his work by also looking at the role of sailors before the Revolution as a driving force towards independence, and by investigating the interplay between the privateer sailors (the focus of Gilje's article) and privateer investors, looking at privateering as a practice that took equally from "the above" and from "the below."

Goldsmith, M. M. "Liberty, Virtue, and the Rule of Law, 1689-1770." In *Republicanism, Liberty, and Commercial Society, 1649-1776*, edited by David Wootton, 197-232. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994.

M.M Goldsmith's chapter directly confronts the issue of virtue in republican thought. She argues that English republicans, influenced by Puritan thought, connected with the virtue of disinterested as pivotal to a successful republic. In doing so, virtue promoted civic liberty, which necessitated the involvement of all citizens (at the time, all white men of property) in the political process. However, not all republicans agreed with this concept of virtue; others like Mandeville and Hume believed that self-interest could still exist within a virtuous republic. The ideologies discussed by Goldsmith in this chapter provided an important foundation and framework for my third chapter on privateering's place within contemporary debates on republicanism in the American Revolution.

Hay, Douglas, Peter Linebaugh, John G. Rule, E. P. Thompson, and Cal Winslow. *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1975.

This compilation of essays investigates the relationship between the haves and the have-nots in English society in the eighteenth century, with a particular focus on the punishments meted out by the ruling classes on those beneath them. The authors of this work use the "history from below" methodology, looking at how criminals, peasants, and other members of lower societal rungs have shaped history. Of particular use for my study are Chapters One ("Property, Authority, and the Criminal Law" by Douglas Hay), Three ("Sussex Smugglers" by Cal Winslow), and Four ("Wrecking and Coastal Plunder" by John G. Rule). These chapters relate to the interplay between commercial property and criminal activity along the coast, and as such offer similar phenomena to the practice of privateering during the American Revolution later in the same century.

Hedges, James B. *The Browns of Providence Plantation*. Vol. 1: Colonial Years. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952.

Hedges' two-part biography serves as the primary family history of the Brown family, offering insights into the various branches of the family. Much of the first volume looks at the Brown brothers -- John, Nicholas, and Moses -- and their actions during the years of the Revolutionary War. Moses was a noted abolitionist, but John and Nicholas were avid investors in privateering. I have used Hedges' biography primarily in my third chapter to augment the primary sources of John Brown's correspondence I used to bolster my arguments on privateer investors.

Hill, Richard J. "Prizes." *Oxford Encyclopedia of Maritime History*. Edited by John B. Hattendorf. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. Accessed January 28, 2017. <https://goo.gl/n53uZE>.

Hill's brief article takes a closer look at the functioning of prize courts and the justification for prize jurisdiction. Prize courts were crucial to both privateering and naval captures, serving as the governing bodies deciding on the legitimacy of the capture. Hill's article is a useful summary of prize courts for it considers both the practical components of the courts' operation as well as the legal justifications for the courts, and augments my discussion of prize courts in Chapter One.

Lane, Kris E. *Blood & Silver: A History of Piracy in the Caribbean and Central America*. Oxford: Signal, 1999.

This work offers a helpful overview of piracy in the early modern period, beginning with the rise of Spain and corsairs on the Barbary Coast and continuing to the early eighteenth century, when Britain fought a concerted campaign to eliminate piracy from the Caribbean. Lane, a professor at Tulane University, particularly looks to complicate the romanticized notion of piracy; he instead considers the ways they related with the greater early modern Atlantic world around them. The book proceeds in a more narrative format, jumping from pirate story to pirate story. Lane's book provides a great starting point for my analysis of piracy and its relationship with privateering and the early modern Atlantic.

Lemisch, Jesse. "Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of Revolutionary America." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (July 1, 1968): 371-407. Accessed October 16, 2016. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1921773>.

With this work Jesse Lemisch offers one of the first works of "history from below" examining seamen during the years preceding the Revolution. It is a comprehensive essay with immense use of footnotes that demonstrates the caged life of a seaman – even comparing it to the enslavement of African Americans. Lemisch builds off of that portrait to examine the seamen's resistance to British policies – particularly impressment – and argues that the riots and acts of resistance were not disorganized responses, but rather politically-motivated movements against British policies. Lemisch's work is key for my analysis of the role seamen played in the build-up to the American Revolution, as he touches on nearly every major point in the discussion.

Lemnitzer, Jan Martin. *Power, Law and the End of Privateering*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Lemnitzer's book is an excellent analytical study of the legal dimensions of the Declaration of Paris and the abolition of privateering in the mid-19th century. Lemnitzer analyzes the complicated diplomatic interactions between Britain, France, and the United States over the free ships-free goods policy so closely intertwined with privateering. The fact that the US refused to sign the Declaration is a testament to the acceptance of privateering among the elites of the US, despite some qualms over its morality already present during the Revolution.

Linebaugh, Peter, and Marcus Rediker. *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2000. Accessed October 2, 2016. <https://goo.gl/jQmP6j>. Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh look at the creation of what they call the "hydrarchy," the section of society that resisted the rise of capitalism, imperialism, and global commercial activity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Rediker and Linebaugh approach their topic from below, looking more at how members of the hydrarchy use their own agency rather than emphasizing the actions of the ruling classes. Many of their sources, then, come from criminals, pirates, and members of the "motley crew" of sailors and slaves. Chapters Five (Hydrarchy: Sailors, Pirates, and the Maritime State) and Seven (A Motley Crew in the American Revolution) are of particular interest to me in my investigation of privateers. Though privateers were far from pirates, it is useful to study that class of characters to see what influence pirates had on later privateers. Their investigation on the role that sailors had in spurring forward the American Revolution is particularly insightful for my arguments that privateering was not strictly about financial gain.

Lunsford, Virginia West. *Piracy and Privateering in the Golden Age Netherlands*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. Accessed January 2, 2017. <https://goo.gl/3198HW>. This book analyzes the duality of Dutch privateers and freebooters during the Golden Age of the United Provinces (around the 16th and 17th century). Lunsford observes that while the Dutch had strict anti-piracy laws, particularly in an effort to keep their multitude of privateers in check, they were often weakly enforced when privateers would turn pirate, even against their own countrymen. She argues that the reasons for the lax discipline can be explained by looking at privateering from a cultural perspective; privateers in the Netherlands were heroes and patriots, the successors of the Sea Beggars of the 16th century, and were integral parts of the Netherlands economically and culturally. Her argument is similar to mine in that she analyzes privateering from social perspectives and not strategic ones, and supports my suggestion that privateering is a more complex phenomenon than the phrase "legalized piracy" would suggest.

Maclay, Edgar Stanton. *A History of American Privateers*. New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1899. Published in 1899, Maclay's book serves as the first major study of American privateers. Maclay contends that the American privateers deserve more credit for the victory in the American Revolution than they were given in other histories, notably those by Alfred Thayer Mahan. Maclay works off of a number of letters and newspaper articles, but unfortunately does not provide citation information for those sources. The first half of Maclay's work, surveying privateering before and during the Revolutionary War, will be of the most use to me. Maclay's work is one of the first sources analyzing privateering, and as such plays an important role in the discourse of the topic despite its somewhat-dated findings and style.

Magra, Christopher P. "Anti-Impressment Riots and the Origins of the Age of Revolution." *International Review of Social History* 58, no. S21 (2013): 131-51. Accessed October 16, 2016. <http://rave.ohiolink.edu/ejournals/article/312651041>. Magra's article turns its focus on the practice of impressment, and the variety of ways American sailors resisted the practice in the lead-up to the Revolutionary War. He builds off of Linebaugh and Rediker's work postulating that the revolutionary actions of sailors helped push American elites closer to independence. Magra cites numerous incidents of American resistance, including the arrest of impressment gangs and the burning in effigy of British tenders. Magra's work adds to my investigation of sailor actions preceding the Revolution, and helps support my argument that perhaps privateering and resistance to Britain was about more than financial gains.

Magra, Christopher P. "The New England Cod Fishing Industry and Maritime Dimensions of the American Revolution." *Enterprise & Society* 8, no. 4 (December 1, 2007): 799-806. Accessed October 16, 2016. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23700768>. This short article serves as a long-form abstract for Magra's dissertation on the New England cod industry and its role in the American Revolution. Magra believes that the mobilization of such a large workforce of sailors and fishermen had a major impact on the Revolution, but so few scholars have even broached upon the industry in their analysis of the war. I can borrow from Magra's critique of most histories of the American Revolution as being "terra-centric," as well as building off of his arguments and including a brief discussion on the fishing industry within the role that seamen played in the Revolution.

Magra, Christopher P. "'Soldiers... Bred to the Sea': Maritime Marblehead, Massachusetts, and the Origins and Progress of the American Revolution." *The New England Quarterly* 77, no. 4 (December 1, 2004): 531-62. Accessed October 16, 2016. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1559726>. University of Tennessee Professor Christopher Magra focuses exclusively on the activity of one seaport – Marblehead – in this investigation of sailors and the American Revolution. He works to place the sailors and seamen of New England coastal towns, and Marblehead in particular, back in the forefront of the conversation on causes and motivations of the American Revolution. He connects a number of strands together, including the resistance to impressment, the rebellions against increased taxes, and the importance of the Fisheries Bill to the merchants and sailors of Marblehead. I will be using Magra's points on sailor resistance to reinforce my stance that sailors played a role in pushing America closer to Revolution.

Marshall, P. J. *The Making and Unmaking of Empires: Britain, India, and America, C.1750-1783*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. Marshall attempts to combine two strands of British imperial scholarship by analyzing the "unmaking" of the British Empire in the Thirteen Colonies in conjunction with the "making" of the British Empire in India and other overseas territories. He discusses how Britain expanded organically in the 17th and 18th

centuries, and the increase of British political authority that came with that expansion. Most critically Britain's power that came from her overseas possessions came from the many benefits of overseas commerce that her empire provided. For Marshall it was the changes in political authority among the elites that seemed to have the most effect on the "unmaking" of empire in America. Marshall's work is useful for me in his discussion of the ideological and perceptual foundations of the British Empire -- namely, trade.

Massey, Gregory D., and Jim Piecuch, eds. *General Nathanael Greene and the American Revolution in the South*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2012. Massey and Piecuch have collected a series of essays focused on the character and campaigns of Nathanael Greene during his time in the South. The essays cover a range of topics related to Greene, from his relationship to partisan militias of the South to his growing positive attitudes towards the American citizen-soldier. This source is a strong supplement to any historian looking specifically at Greene's campaigns during the later years of the war, though it focuses primarily on his military accomplishments and less on his privateering business investments.

Nelson, James L. *George Washington's Secret Navy: How the American Revolution Went to Sea*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008. James Nelson lends his lively writing style to a study of the naval activity during the Siege of Boston, when George Washington commissioned six schooners to attack British shipping. Nelson argues that Washington's actions helped spur privateer activity and encouraged the Continental Congress to establish the first American navy. Nelson primarily builds his work out of correspondence between Washington, his captains, and his prize agents. Nelson's work provides a bevy of information regarding Washington's fleet, which I argue is an example of privateering driven by the public good in my third chapter.

Patton, Robert H. *Patriot Pirates: The Privateer War for Freedom and Fortune in the American Revolution*. New York: Random House, 2008. Robert Patton provides one of the most recent works investigating privateering during the American Revolution. He uses the phenomenon of privateering to paint a portrait of the social and economic landscape of revolutionary America. *Patriot Pirates* primarily follows a narrative structure, focusing in on a few key characters including Nathanael Greene, Silas Deane, and William Bingham. Patton's work expands the field of privateer studies to look at those merchants that invested in privateers alongside the men that sailed on the ships themselves. *Patriot Pirates* is one of the few full-length books written specifically on American Revolutionary privateering, and is a cornerstone secondary source for the field of study.

Pennell, C. R., ed. *Bandits at Sea: A Pirates Reader*. New York: New York University Press, 2001. Pennell has compiled one of the most complete and diverse collection of essays on piracy with "Bandits at Sea." Scholars provide their takes on piracy from a number of perspectives, looking at macro-elements like how piracy fit into the economic system of the Atlantic world and looking at micro-historical elements



like the social elements on board pirate vessels. This volume breaks the romantic notion of piracy and leads to points about the type of individuals that pirates were: social bandits, renegades, egalitarians, or any number of characters. When taken in full, this book serves to educate the scholar on the broader scope of piracy, and allows me to compare that practice to privateering.

Phillipson, Nicholas. *Adam Smith: An Enlightened Life*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.

With this biography Nicholas Phillipson, an emeritus professor at the University of Edinburgh, offers a complete look at Adam Smith's life and philosophies. Smith, known best for his work of political economy *The Wealth of Nations*, was a major part of the Scottish Enlightenment, and worked closely with David Hume and other moralists in the eighteenth century. Smith's work on political economy engages a number of interesting ideas related to self-interest, commerce, and the virtue of citizens, ideas that were closely related to republican thought of the Revolutionary Period. Phillipson's biography offers me a way to engage with Smith's ideas in my third chapter regarding privateering's role in republican thought.

Rahe, Paul A. "Antiquity Surpassed: The Repudiation of Classical Republicanism." In *Republicanism, Liberty, and Commercial Society, 1649-1776*, edited by David Wootton, 233-69. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994.

Paul A. Rahe is a political historian specializing in ancient conceptions of republicanism and virtue. With this chapter he takes his work into the early modern era to show how republican thinkers in that period differed from their ancient counterparts. Rahe primarily argues that ancient republicanism lacked the ethical and moral components later infused into it by Enlightenment thinkers. Of particular interest is Rahe's discussion of luxury, which many republicans saw as the downfall of the Roman Republic. Other republicans like Montesquieu disagreed, believing that commerce and luxury were not inherently corrupting influences on a republic. Rahe's chapter enhances my discussion of republicanism within the Revolution, into which I place the privateering phenomenon in Chapter Three.

Rappleye, Charles. *Sons of Providence: The Brown Brothers, the Slave Trade, and the American Revolution*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006.

Noted Revolutionary War biography Charles Rappleye puts his efforts towards the Brown family in this effort. He particularly emphasizes John and Nicholas's connections to the slave trade during the latter half of the eighteenth century, and Moses's strong ties to the abolitionist movement. Rappleye touches on privateering during the war, and some of the profiteering done by the Brown family, but most of his narrative looks at the Brown's trading activities with molasses, smuggling, and in particular slave trading. I have cited Rappleye's biography in my discussions of Brown and his mercantile maritime activities, as well as his involvement with the *Gaspee* attack in 1772.

Rediker, Marcus. *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Marcus Rediker, currently a professor at the University of Pittsburgh, is one of the premier scholars of the early modern Atlantic world, and this is one of his premier books. "Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea" investigates the sailors of the Atlantic as a collective labor force, one that was caught in between the often-dictatorial captains and merchants in charge of their lives and the ferocious power of the sea. It serves as a social history from the "history from below" school. Rediker's idea is that the sailors developed a degree of unified class consciousness and egalitarianism in response to the harsh conditions they faced on deck. His ideas on collective action and sailor's identity is invaluable to the early modern maritime scholar; however, his emphasis in the class identity of sailors is open for debate. I personally disagree with Rediker on his ideas of class consciousness; however, his argument that sailors used collective action to improve their lives is crucial to understanding privateersmen in the Atlantic world.

Rediker, Marcus. "The Seaman as Pirate: Plunder and Social Banditry at Sea." In *Bandits at Sea: A Pirates Reader*, edited by C. R. Pennell, 139-68. New York: New York University Press, 2001.

Rediker provides a brief selection for Pennell's anthology regarding his views on class consciousness within pirate and privateer communities. He approaches piracy from a social perspective, analyzing the way pirates related their own experiences to wealthier merchants and elites. He concludes that pirates and pirates communities were elements of resistance, a means to fight back against the tyranny and oppression on board merchant trading vessels. I engage Rediker's arguments throughout my work, but primarily in Chapter One, where I use his work to support my arguments differentiating piracy from the more-regulated practice of privateering.

Ritchie, Robert C. "Piracy." *Oxford Encyclopedia of Maritime History*. Edited by John B. Hattendorf. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. Accessed January 30, 2017. <https://goo.gl/n53uZE>.

This article from Robert Ritchie serves as a useful introduction to the practice of piracy. Ritchie encompasses the vast range of incidents that can be considered piracy, getting at some of the scope of difficulty in conceptualizing the practice. His account particularly gives a good narrative history from the Middle Ages through the eighteenth century, as well as considering later, more minor breakouts of piracy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This article serves as a great starting point for me to come to grips with piracy and understand its relationship to privateering.

Rodger, N. A. M. *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649-1815*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2005.

N.A.M. Rodger, the foremost historian of the British Navy and professor at Oxford University, offers a descriptive history of the navy from the seventeenth into the nineteenth century in the first volume of his larger history. He splits up

his chapters topically, taking one chapter to focus on administrative matters, then operational affairs, then social histories; the book then flows roughly chronologically, but not strictly so. Rodger's work is useful for me as I trace the expansion of the Royal Navy and its primary role of protecting the overseas possessions of the Empire and, more importantly, its role in protecting the commercial maritime networks of that empire.

Rodger, N.A.M. *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy*. London: Collins, 1986.

N.A.M. Rodger is considered one of the top scholars of the Royal Navy. With "The Wooden World" he provides a social history of the British Navy of the eighteenth century. The book is organized topically, with such chapters as "Health," "Discipline," and "Manning." His work provides the most complete view of shipboard life during the eighteenth century. Rodger does however show his bias towards the navy, as he derides the practice of privateering in preference to the importance of the British Navy. In my thesis I have cited his discussion of impressment in my second chapter analyzing the motivations of privateersmen.

Sandler, Todd, and John A.C. Conybeare. "State-Sponsored Violence as a Tragedy of the Commons: England's Privateering Wars with France and Spain, 1625-1630." *Public Choice* 77, no. 4 (1993): 879-97. Accessed January 3, 2017. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30027194>.

Conybeare and Sandler approach the topic from an economic and political science perspective, using commons models to analyze the phenomenon of privateering in seventeenth-century England. They suggest that privateering doesn't quite apply to the "tragedy of the commons," as we would expect to see overexploitation of the market nullifying privateer profits; however, privateering still seemed profitable during this time. The authors consistently repeat the idea that privateering was licensed piracy; I intend to argue against that in my first chapter.

Sher, Richard B. "From Troglodytes to Americans: Montesquieu and the Scottish Enlightenment on Liberty, Virtue, and Commerce." In *Republicanism, Liberty, and Commercial Society, 1649-1776*, edited by David Wootton, 368-404. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994.

Rutgers Professor of History Richard Sher tackles the Scottish Enlightenment in his piece for Wootton's anthology. Sher's argument revolves around the role of Scottish Enlightenment thinkers regarding the role of commerce in virtuous republics. Building off the ideas laid down by Montesquieu in the early eighteenth century, Scottish writers argued that commerce was a civilizing force for the state and its citizens, and a means of progress for society writ large. This work culminated with Adam Smith's work *The Wealth of Nations*, which suggested that the pursuit of self-interest could in fact produce benefits for the whole. Sher's work gives me a strong rebuttal to the ideas of classical republicanism that were also prevalent in the early modern period. I primarily use Sher in my third chapter, which analyzes the republican debate in the Revolutionary Period.

Sherman, Andrew M. *Life of Captain Jeremiah O'Brien, Machias, Maine: Commander of the First American Naval Flying Squadron of the War of the Revolution*. Morristown: G.W. Sherman, 1902.

Andrew Sherman looks at the events in Machias, Maine in the early stages of the war, where Jeremiah O'Brien won the first naval battle of the American Revolution. Like Maclay, Sherman falls victim to a bit of historical idolization in his work, lauding the achievements of Captain O'Brien during the war. Sherman's work helps me understand the Battle of Machias, which I discuss at the beginning of my second chapter analyzing privateer sailors.

Starkey, David J. "The Origins and Regulations of Eighteenth-Century British Privateering." In *Bandits at Sea: A Pirates Reader*, edited by C. R. Pennell, 69-81. New York: New York University Press, 2001.

Starkey's chapter analyzing privateering seems a bit out of place in Pennell's anthology on piracy. However Starkey is clear to point out that while privateering was often tarred with the brush of piracy, it was far different than its illegal and illegitimate counterpart. He goes on to describe how privateering's origins in reprisal and its tough regulation from British authorities separated it from the practice of piracy. Starkey's article is invaluable to my first chapter; like him, I am primarily arguing that privateering and piracy were different in their relationship to the state.

Starkey, David J. "Privateering." *Oxford Encyclopedia of Maritime History*. Edited by John B. Hattendorf. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. Accessed January 28, 2017. <https://goo.gl/n53uZE>.

Starkey's encyclopedia entry provides one of the most useful overviews of the privateering phenomenon from its inception during the Middle Ages through its eventual abolition in the nineteenth century. Starkey discusses the reasons behind privateering's popularity, including the financial profits and strategic benefits. The article tries to encompass privateering and its many-faceted relationships to other institutions during the early modern era, such as its integral part in mercantile investments and its usage by states during wartime. I have primarily used Starkey's entry in my first chapter to provide a conceptualization of the practice of privateering, and as an introduction to privateering's place in the early modern state-mercantile system.

Starkey, David J. "'To Excite the Whole Company to Courage and Bravery': The Incentivisation of British Privateering Crews, 1702-1815." In *Naval Leadership and Management: 1650 - 1950; Essays in Honour of Michael Duffy*, edited by Richard Harding and Helen Doe, 123-40. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012. Accessed January 3, 2017. <http://0-www.jstor.org.dewey2.library.denison.edu/stable/10.7722/j.ctt81r96.15>.

University of Hull Professor David Starkey takes a unique approach to privateering in this chapter, looking beyond the strategic and economic approaches to the topic and turning a closer eye to privateering's organizational structures. Along with covering some general aspects of privateering, Starkey emphasizes the particulars of privateering articles of agreement, contracts

between privateering captains and crews and the owners and investors funding the expeditions. Starkey particularly brings out the tension inherent between the two sides regarding the distribution of prize funds and the intentions and objectives of the voyage itself. Starkey's work will help broaden my discussion of privateering in Chapter One.

Swanson, Carl E. "American Privateering and Imperial Warfare, 1739-1748." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (July 1985): 357-82. Accessed January 3, 2017. <http://0-www.jstor.org.dewey2.library.denison.edu/stable/1918932>. This article surveys the popularity of privateering in the American colonies during the War of Jenkins' Ear and King George's War. Swanson covers many aspects of privateering, showing how it was more popular in urban maritime centers and required a large community of ambitious merchants to successfully engage in privateering. His work provides a considerable amount of general information on the practice of privateering in general. I intend to use this article in my first chapter, to show that privateering during the Revolution was not an isolated phenomenon, but was prevalent in the colonies before the War of Independence.

Thane, Elswyth. *The Fighting Quaker: Nathanael Greene*. New York: Hawthorn Books, 1972. *The Fighting Quaker* offers a decent biography of General Nathanael Greene and his service during the Revolutionary War. Thane's work reads in a narrative form, weaving Greene's actions in with the broader story of the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War; as such, it also provides a decent account of the army's service during the war as a whole. Thane takes care to relate Greene's actions back to his religious upbringing, demonstrating how Greene broke with that tradition and eventually became a southern planter after the war. Like many Greene biographies, Thane fails to consider Greene's privateering investments, but he does offer a decent contextualization of Greene's character within the Revolutionary War.

Usher, Roland G., Jr. "Royal Navy Impressment During the American Revolution." *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 37, no. 4 (March 1951): 673-88. Accessed October 16, 2016. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1889363>. Usher's journal article looks at the policy of impressment during and after the Revolution from the British side of the war, painting it as a necessary and legal, if somewhat uncomfortable, practice. He discounts the influence of patriotism among deserters and resisters to impressment, stating that the reasons for desertion were purely economic in nature. He provides a great deal of quantitative data to show the necessity of impressment on the part of the British. Usher's arguments put him in contrast with later authors who contend that sailors were motivated by liberty and resistance in their actions against impressment. I disagree with Usher's points, and can use his work as a contrast to mine and others regarding the role of sailors before and during the Revolution in the interplay between Revolutionary ideology and sailors.

Williams, Gomer. *History of the Liverpool Privateers and Letters of Marque: With an Account of the Liverpool Slave Trade, 1744-1812*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004. Accessed January 3, 2017. <https://goo.gl/Kjc7hF>.

This work, originally published in 1897, provides an exhaustively-researched look at the privateers and slave traders of Liverpool during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Little is known about the author, Gomer Williams, but introduction author David Eltis states that Williams' accounts of privateering can be verified by newspapers of the day. Williams primarily used newspapers to construct his narrative, which does not provide scholarly analysis but rather describes the actions of various privateers in Liverpool. Williams falls victim to a certain degree of lauding his historical subject, and some of his writing style is outdated, but the extensive referencing of primary-source news material makes this work a useful addition to my first chapter describing the privateering phenomenon.

Wood, Gordon S. *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992.

Gordon S. Wood's work is a key text in understanding the transformation of ideology during the American Revolution. He traces the conceptualization of revolution and of American identity from the colonial years under King George III through the drafting of a new democratic Constitution in 1787. He organizes the work into topical chapters; of particular interest to me for this thesis are the chapters on the ideologies of republicanism and interests. One of my primary goals in my Senior IS is to place privateering in an ideological context of the Revolution; this work in large part provides that context I'm looking for. I have particularly used Wood's discussion of interests and republicanism to build my discussion of republican ideology in Chapter Three.

Wootton, David, ed. *Republicanism, Liberty, and Commercial Society, 1649-1776*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994.

York Professor of History David Wootton offers an expansive investigation of the ideological frameworks of republicanism during the early modern period with this work. In it he and other authors consider the role of virtue in a republic, the various types of liberty a republic can provide, and how commerce--normally seen as a vice and a luxury--can have a role in republican society. Wootton attempts to place Thomas Paine within the discussion on republican thought, tying that ideological movement to the American Revolution. Wootton's book offers a range of ideas and views regarding the intellectual movement of republicanism during the early modern era and into the American Revolutionary Period; as such, it is an invaluable work for me as I lay the groundwork of republican ideology and then fit privateering into that framework.

Worden, Blair. "Marchamont Nedham and the Beginnings of English Republicanism, 169-1656." In *Republicanism, Liberty, and Commercial Society, 1649-1776*, edited by David Wootton, 45-81. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994.

In this chapter Blair Worden, retired professor of history, analyzes the early stages of the republican intellectual movement in England. He considers both classical

republican ideals of antiquity as well as Machiavelli's discussion of virtue in a republic from the Renaissance, concluding that English republicanism emerged from the synthesis of these two notions with Puritan conceptions of morality and vice. Worden also discusses how those ideas on republicanism fit into the actions of Oliver Cromwell in the seventeenth century. Worden's work serves as the starting point for my discussion on republican thought in Chapter Three.