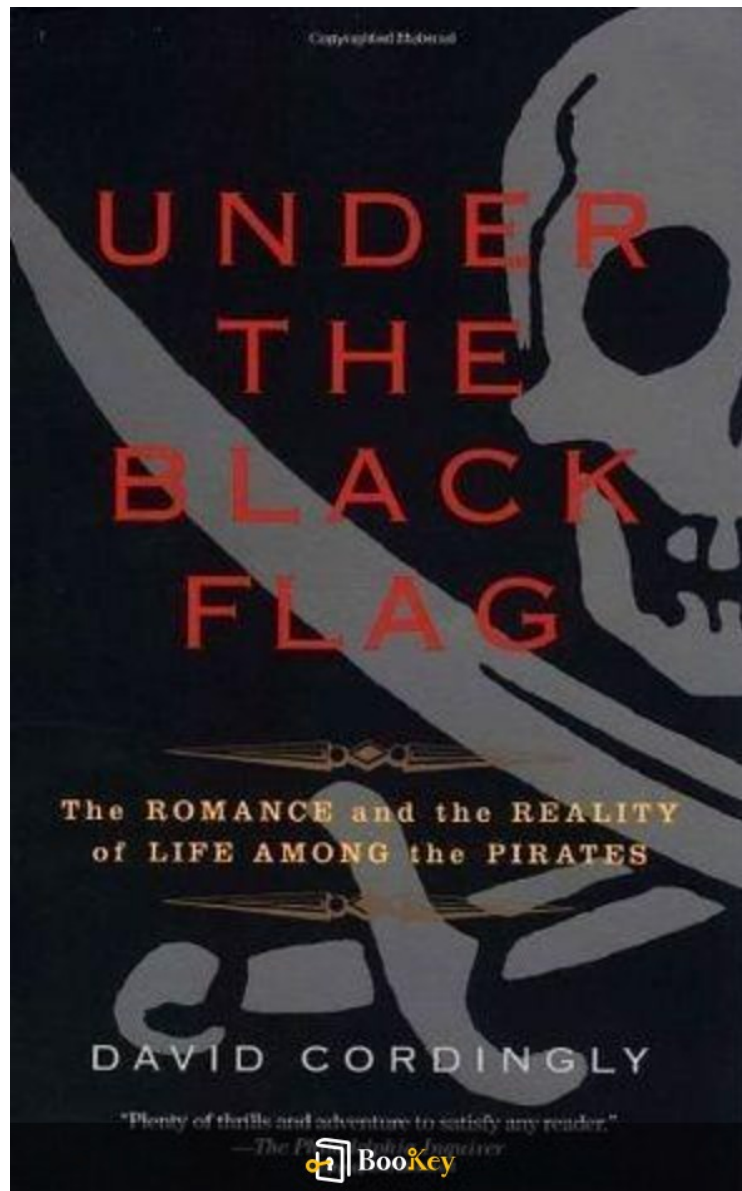


# Under The Black Flag PDF

David Cordingly



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# About the book

Book Overview: "Under the Black Flag" by David Cordingly

- Genre: Historical Non-Fiction

- Author Background: David Cordingly is a distinguished historian and the former head of exhibitions at England's National Maritime Museum, bringing an expert perspective to the subject of piracy.

Description:

Step into the thrilling and often brutal realm of pirates with David Cordingly's "Under the Black Flag". This book dismantles the glamorous myths surrounding pirates, offering readers a stark look at the truth beneath the legendary tales we so deeply admire.

Key Themes:

- The Golden Age of Piracy

- The Realities versus the Romance of Pirate Life

- Detailed Accounts of Infamous Pirates, such as Blackbeard and Anne Bonny

Content Highlights:

- Meticulously Researched: Cordingly combines historical accuracy with engaging storytelling, delivering a compelling account of the lives of pirates.

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- Vivid Narratives: The book is filled with riveting anecdotes that capture the daring adventures, fierce battles, and harsh conditions faced by these notorious sea rogues.

Conclusion:

"Under the Black Flag" is more than just a historical narrative; it is a deep dive into the realities of life on the high seas that will both entertain and educate. Prepare to challenge your perceptions of piracy as you uncover the true stories behind the black flag.

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# About the author

Profile: David Cordingly – Maritime Historian and Author

Background:

- Education: Ph.D. in History from Oxford University
- Current Role: Recognized as a leading expert in maritime history, particularly focused on piracy and naval events.

Career Highlights:

- Position: Former Keeper of Pictures and Head of Exhibitions at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich.
- Notable Work: Organizer of the acclaimed exhibition "Pirates: Fact and Fiction."

Published Works:

- Best Seller: "Under the Black Flag"
  - Cordingly's writing brings the thrilling era of piracy to vivid life, captivating readers globally with compelling stories.

Legacy:

- Cordingly is celebrated for his ability to combine rigorous research with engaging storytelling, positioning him as a preeminent figure in the study of the Golden Age of Piracy. His contributions have significantly influenced

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public understanding of maritime mythology and historical figures.

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# Under The Black Flag Summary

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# Under The Black Flag Summary Chapter List

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# 1. Chapter One: A Deep Dive into the Golden Age of Piracy

The Golden Age of Piracy, which spanned from the late 17th century to the early 18th century, represents one of the most captivating chapters in maritime history. During this period, piracy flourished in the Caribbean Sea, parts of the American coast, and the waters surrounding Europe, a consequence of geopolitical conflicts, colonial expansion, and the growing wealth of trade routes. David Cordingly's "Under the Black Flag" takes a comprehensive look at the social, economic, and political conditions that allowed piracy to thrive during this era, painting a vivid picture of the complexities and motivations of both pirates and the societies they influenced.

At the heart of the Golden Age of Piracy was the increased maritime activity driven by European nations vying for territorial control and profit from new colonies. Spain, Portugal, England, and France competed fiercely for dominance, opening up new trade routes that became targets for pirates eager to seize riches. The lucrative trade in sugar, tobacco, and rum was particularly enticing, as was the transportation of goods from the New World back to Europe. As merchant vessels sailed laden with treasure, they became easy prey for pirates who operated in the shadows of naval warfare and colonial expansion.

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Cordingly illustrates how the discontent of sailors played a crucial role in fueling piracy. Many mariners, including those who worked on naval vessels or merchant ships, were drawn into piracy due to harsh working conditions, low pay, and the often brutal treatment they received from their superiors. Desertion was common, and many disenchanted sailors found a new sense of purpose and camaraderie among pirate crews. Blackbeard, one of the most infamous figures of the Golden Age, was previously a sailor on a merchant ship and later chose the pirate's life as a way to escape the drudgery of legitimate maritime work. His story is emblematic of many pirates who sought freedom from oppressive regimes and the lure of adventure.

The rise of piracy during this period was also supported by the emergence of pirate havens, places like Nassau in the Bahamas, where pirates could find refuge, resources, and a community. These havens enabled pirates to regroup, repair their ships, and plot their next ventures. The relative lack of naval oversight in these regions allowed them to operate with impunity, fostering alliances between pirates and local populations who recognized the economic benefits that piracy could bring to their communities through trade and the influx of silver and gold. In Nassau, for instance, there was a loose kind of governance among the pirates, creating a unique social order devoid of the constraints of national law.

Moreover, piracy was often romanticized in contemporary literature and

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society, which added to its allure. Stories of adventure and feats of bravery found their way into pamphlets and public discourse, creating a cloak of legitimacy around the pirate's life. These tales turned figures like Blackbeard and Bartholomew Roberts into folk heroes, blurring the lines between villainy and heroism. Cordingly commands attention to how these narratives shaped public perception and revealed a cultural fascination with outlawry, as many people began to view pirates not just as thieves, but as adversaries against oppressive imperial powers.

The political turbulence of the era, including constant wars between major European powers, also contributed to the rise of piracy. The War of the Spanish Succession and the Anglo-Dutch Wars saw privateers—legally sanctioned pirates—increasing their activities. While these privateers originally aimed to disrupt enemy trade, many soon crossed the line into outright piracy, taking advantage of the chaos that war created. This phenomenon further complicated the relationship between pirates and empires, with some governments finding it necessary to tolerate or even embrace pirates for their own strategic interests.

In summary, Chapter One of "Under the Black Flag" provides an immersive examination of the Golden Age of Piracy, shining a light on the myriad factors that allowed this notorious chapter of maritime history to flourish. Cordingly strips away the simplistic, romantic notions that often accompany

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pirate lore, offering instead a nuanced view that considers deep-rooted social attitudes, economic conditions, and the cultural narratives that fashioned the pirates' formidable image. The tales of infamous pirates and their exploits are embedded within this rich historical context, inviting readers to not only understand the allure of piracy but also the society that birthed it.

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## 2. Chapter Two: The Most Notorious Pirates and Their Legends

Chapter Two of "Under the Black Flag" by David Cordingly examines the most infamous pirates who roamed the seas during the Golden Age of Piracy, detailing both their notorious deeds and the legends that surround them. Throughout history, the image of the pirate has often been romanticized, and this chapter sheds light on the men and women behind the fearsome reputation.

One of the prominent figures featured in this chapter is Blackbeard, also known as Edward Teach. Blackbeard's notoriety stems not only from his formidable presence but also from his strategic approach to piracy. With his imposing physicality, he famously enhanced his fearsome appearance by tying slow-burning fuses into his beard during battle, creating a terrifying visage of smoke and fire. His flagship, the Queen Anne's Revenge, was a former French slave ship that he outfitted for piracy, making it a symbol of his dominance on the high seas. Blackbeard's most notorious act was the blockade of Charleston, South Carolina, in 1718, where he and his crew captured several vessels and held them for ransom, further cementing his status as a legendary figure in pirate history.

Another notorious pirate illustrated in Cordingly's narrative is Bartholomew Roberts, or Black Bart, who is revered for having captured an astonishing

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400 ships during his brief but extraordinary career. Roberts is seen as a turning point in piracy, exemplifying the shift from the simple, rugged life of early pirates to a more organized and entrepreneurial approach to raiding. His legendary motto, “A merry life and a short one,” encapsulated the hedonistic lifestyle of the era. Roberts also practiced a form of democratic rule among his crew, often allowing them a voice in decision-making, which was remarkably progressive for the time. This contributed to his formidable reputation, and he was heralded in both pirate lore and British folklore, representing the duality of admiration and hatred pirates evoked.

The chapter also delves into female pirates, specifically Anne Bonny and Mary Read. These women, often concealed under the guise of male identity, challenged societal norms in an extraordinary way. Anne Bonny was known for her fierce temper and a violent streak, famously refusing to show fear even when facing capture. She sailed with Calico Jack Rackham, another notable pirate, and their story has become a famous romantic legend within pirate lore. Mary Read, who was equally daring, joined forces with Bonny, leading a mutinous life at sea that has sparked endless fascination regarding the roles women played in an environment typically dominated by men. Their stories highlight the complexities of piracy beyond just the male figures typically celebrated in maritime history.

The legendary tales of these pirates often overshadow the grim realities of

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their lives. Pirates were romanticized in literature and popular culture, which has led to a distorted perception of their actions. In truth, piracy was rife with brutality, betrayal, and violence, yet figures like Blackbeard and Black Bart became embodiments of freedom and rebellion against oppressive maritime powers.

Cordingly also discusses how the exploits of these notorious pirates extended into folklore, such as treasure hunts and buried gold, embellishing their legacies further. For example, the story of Captain Flint from Robert Louis Stevenson's "Treasure Island" draws heavily on the legends of real-life pirates, intertwining their horrific actions with treasure and adventure, reinforcing the romanticized view of piracy that endures today.

In summary, Chapter Two of "Under the Black Flag" enriches our understanding of the most infamous pirates who left an indelible mark on history. Through tales of their exploits, both real and embellished, Cordingly intricately unravels a narrative that portrays the dual nature of piracy—one that combines fear with fascination, rebellion with reality. The legends of figures like Blackbeard, Black Bart, Anne Bonny, and Mary Read continue to captivate imaginations, enabling the pirate's legacy to survive in both history and popular culture.

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### 3. Chapter Three: Life at Sea: The Reality Behind the Myths

Life at sea during the Golden Age of Piracy was often romanticized in literature and film, creating a whirlpool of myths that obscured the harsh realities faced by pirates and sailors alike. Contrary to the adventurous images painted in popular culture, life on a pirate ship—or any ship during this era—was marked by extreme hardship, danger, and unpredictability.

One of the most compelling myths is that pirate crews were composed solely of ruthless criminals. In fact, many individuals who joined pirate crews did so out of desperation. Following the end of the War of Spanish Succession in 1713, a significant number of sailors were forced into unemployment. These men, many of whom were skilled mariners, turned to piracy as a means of survival. The allure of wealth and adventure was strong, but the motivation for many was primarily economic. They were often faced with choices that led them towards the perilous, yet seemingly lucrative, life of a pirate.

Once on board, life was governed by different rules than those ashore. The captain wielded considerable power, but he was expected to share a portion of the spoils from their plunder with the crew, ensuring a level of democracy and shared responsibility that is often overlooked in popular narratives. The infamous Captain Bartholomew Roberts, for instance, instituted rules aboard his ship that ensured all crew members received a fair share of the loot. This

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attitude helped maintain order among a group of men who were otherwise outlaws in their own right. Each member of the crew had roles and responsibilities, from navigators to gunners to swabs, and these designations contributed to the functioning of their floating community.

The constant threat of naval warfare also defined life at sea. Naval powers such as Britain, Spain, and France launched intense campaigns against pirates, leading to thrilling naval battles that often ended in disaster for one side or the other. Notable battles included the defeat of the pirate Black Bart Roberts and the attack on the ship Queen Anne's Revenge by naval forces, which showcases the fierce violence of the time. Engagements like these not only demonstrate the dangers of constant conflict but also the calculated strategies pirates had to adopt to ensure their survival.

Moreover, the conditions aboard pirate ships were notoriously difficult. Sanitation was minimal, and disease was a constant threat. Sailors suffered from scurvy, dysentery, and other ailments due to poor living conditions and a lack of fresh food. Water would often become contaminated during long voyages, leading to further health crises. The grim reality was that many pirates did not live long enough to enjoy their ill-gotten gains. Shipwrecks, battles, and illness claimed a significant number of lives on the high seas; many who set sail in search of treasure never returned home.

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Food was also a significant issue. While treasures were plentiful, provisions were not. Pirates often had to resort to foraging or raiding other ships simply to find enough supplies to keep their crew alive. The diet of a pirate could consist of ship's biscuit, salted meat, and whatever fresh food was available, which was rarely the nutritional bounty one envisions when thinking of a pirate's life.

Furthermore, discipline on board was strict. The pirate crew operated under a system of rules often dictated by a 'Articles of Agreement,' which outlined a code of conduct and provided for punishment for infractions. For example, a crew member caught stealing from the ship's store could expect severe penalties, which often included flogging or even execution.

In summary, while the life of a pirate is often depicted in a colorful and adventurous veneer, the stark reality was often one of grueling labor, constant danger, and a fight for survival. These men lived in a world defined by the whims of the sea, the threat of naval capture, and the ever-looming presence of disease and starvation. Behind the flag of piracy, the life at sea bore little resemblance to the myths perpetuated by storytellers and filmmakers, revealing instead the true nature of a perilous existence driven largely by circumstance and desperation.

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## 4. Chapter Four: The Pirate Code: Law and Order Among Outlaws

Among the romanticized images of swashbuckling pirates and buried treasure lies a surprising reality: the existence of a code, or set of informal laws, guiding the conduct of pirates. Contrary to the chaotic and anarchic life one might expect aboard a pirate ship, many crews established a form of governance that promoted order, shared responsibilities, and fairness among their members. Chapter Four of "Under the Black Flag" delves deeply into this intriguing aspect of piracy, examining the principles of the notorious "Pirate Code."

The Pirate Code was not a singular set of rules but varied from ship to ship, reflecting the needs, expectations, and cultures of individual pirate crews. Nevertheless, certain core elements remained fairly consistent among different groups. These codes typically specified the distribution of plunder, the roles and responsibilities of crew members, and punishments for transgressions. The most famous of these codes was perhaps that of Bartholomew Roberts, who outlined his rules in 1721. Under Roberts's Code, every crew member had a say in decisions regarding ship captures and their spoils, reinforcing a democratic system remarkably ahead of its time.

One of the more notable articles from many codes addressed the sharing of loot. For instance, Roberts's Code stated that a captain was entitled to a

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double share of the loot, while the quartermaster, responsible for maintaining order during and after an engagement, would receive a single share. Ordinary crew members, who took on considerable risks, received their fair dues as well. This distribution not only incentivized loyalty and motivation among the crew but also encouraged a sense of camaraderie, as the setbacks and gains of each crew member affected the entire unit.

Another significant aspect of the Pirate Code was the preservation of democratic principles aboard the ship. Most pirate crews elected their captains and other officers through a voting system. This practice ensured that the leadership was representative of the crew's collective will, and it contrasted sharply with the rigid hierarchies of naval vessels of the era, where rank was typically predetermined. Additionally, captains could be ousted by their crews if they were deemed ineffective or excessively tyrannical. Hence, this semblance of power balance was paramount in maintaining morale and loyalty among the crew.

Discipline was also an essential element of the Pirate Code, albeit paradoxically so given the outlaws' freedom-seeking lifestyles. Pirates strictly enforced their laws; severe punishments could be meted out for offenses such as theft, disobedience, and cowardice during battle. For example, the code sometimes specified marooning as punishment for significant breaches, a fate that was probably more terrifying than death for

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those accustomed to the company and camaraderie of their fellow pirates.

However, these codes extended beyond mere punishment and reward—they represented a form of social contract. The codes fostered a community among those who had chosen to reject the laws of the state and forge their own path. For many, the inability or refusal to conform to the norms of society made piracy not only a lifestyle but also an identity steeped in hardship, rebellion, and camaraderie.

Moreover, there was an implicit sense of honor among pirates, and the violation of the Pirate Code could bring about social ostracism within the pirate community. This culture of mutual respect among pirates sometimes prevented internal conflicts, as the codes acted as guidelines that allowed individuals to know what was expected of them and what they could expect from others. However, when pirates encountered external enemies—such as naval ships or merchant vessels—their sense of order would often dissolve into chaos, driven by the primal instincts of survival and territorial defense.

The Pirate Code underscores a key irony in the perception of piracy; rather than being purely lawless, pirates exercised a form of governance that reflected their values and reality. This layer of legality offered a semblance of structure and discipline in an otherwise tumultuous life at sea. As Cordingly illustrates, the Pirate Code reveals the complexities of pirate life

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and the social structures that emerged from necessity, cooperation, and the undeniable human need for order.

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## 5. Chapter Five: The End of an Era: The Decline of Piracy

As the 18th century drew to a close, the phenomenon of piracy steadily waned, marking the end of an era that had captivated the imaginations of both those who sailed the high seas and the various nations that sought to control them. This decline was not sudden or singular; rather, it was a complex interplay of several interrelated factors that led to the diminishing prevalence of piracy, effectively transforming the maritime landscape.

One of the most significant contributing factors to the decline of piracy was the shifting power dynamics in the Caribbean, where piracy had thrived. During the height of piracy, the Spanish Empire was in decline, and the waters were fraught with opportunities for privateers and pirates to disrupt trade and plunder ships. However, as the empires of Britain, France, and Spain solidified their influence in the region, naval patrols became more frequent and formidable. The Royal Navy, in particular, grew in strength and resolve in its efforts to eradicate piracy. By employing a strategy of aggressively pursuing pirates and confronting them in their strongholds, the British government sent a clear message that piracy would no longer be tolerated.

Notably, the introduction of legislation aimed specifically at eradicating piracy also played a crucial role in this decline. The British and American

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governments enacted laws with severe penalties for those caught engaging in piratical activities. The infamous Act for the More Effectual Suppression of Piracy, implemented in the early 18th century, made provisions for the execution of pirates upon conviction, creating a heightened sense of risk for those who chose to pursue a life of crime on the seas. The swift and brutal punishments that followed captives, like the execution of the notorious pirate Edward Teach, better known as Blackbeard, served not only as a warning but as a deterrent that further stifled potential recruits to the pirate life.

Furthermore, the economic landscape shifted dramatically due to the increased globalization of trade. As economies in Europe expanded and trade networks grew more extensive, merchant companies began investing in enhanced security measures. The deployment of armed merchant ships grew commonplace, effectively creating a more challenging environment for pirates. The growing reliance on naval fleets for the protection of trade routes diminished the feasibility and allure of engaging in piratical activities.

For example, the rise of the East India Company and its heavily armed vessels meant that potential prey were no longer easy targets for unsanctioned raiders. Pirates faced daunting opposition and few opportunities for ill-gotten gains.

In addition to military fortifications and legislative actions, the internal

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dynamics of piracy shifted during this period. The so-called 'golden age' of piracy had attracted a certain romanticism, drawing in adventurous young men eager for a life of freedom and riches. However, as the narrative around piracy evolved and became more associated with brutality and lawlessness, it lost its charm. Increasing reports of atrocities committed by pirates, combined with the portrayal of pirates in literature and drama—such as Daniel Defoe's fictionalized accounts—turned public sentiment against pirates. This cultural shift led to a decline in recruitment for pirate crews, further weakening their ranks and making survival increasingly difficult.

Additionally, the social dynamics that fueled piracy began to evolve. Many of the factors that had previously provided a fertile ground for piracy, such as poverty, desperation, and unemployment among sailors post-war, began to dissipate with the advent of new maritime careers and opportunities for work. The post-war era saw a rise in legitimate seafaring jobs, as nations rebuilt their navies and merchant fleets. As these opportunities grew, they offered a more stable and less perilous way of life—one that stood in direct contrast to the uncertainties of a life dedicated to piracy.

In conclusion, the decline of piracy by the end of the 18th century can be attributed to a tapestry of social, economic, and military changes that collectively reshaped the maritime world. Increased military presence, rigorous legislation, cultural shifts, and changing economic opportunities

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signaled the end of a once-thriving era. As piracy waned, the high seas transformed into dominions of commerce and official naval authority, paving the way for a new chapter in maritime history, one that would reshape international laws and trade practices for centuries to follow.

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