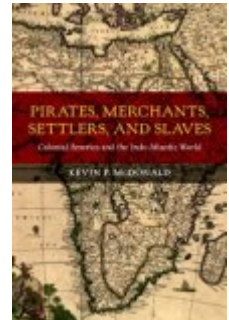


Mark G. Hanna. *Pirate Nests and the Rise of the British Empire, 1570-1740.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015. Maps. 464 pp. \$45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4696-1794-7.

Kevin P. McDonald. *Pirates, Merchants, Settlers, and Slaves: Colonial America and the Indo-Atlantic World.* California World History Library Series. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015. 224 pp. \$60.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-520-28290-2.



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Pirate histories are framed in one of two ways. Some are borderlands histories, highlighting the limits of state authority at the periphery, the strength of local institutions and power brokers, and the persistence of local political arrangements. Others are national histories that illustrate how piracy declined as national governments built up their power and legitimacy, extending their administrative control over peripheral territories and communities. The two books under review display both approaches. Both examine the culture of maritime and coastal borderlands, but while Kevin P. McDonald describes the opening

and growth of a new maritime frontier, Mark G. Hanna analyzes the closing of a frontier.

In *Pirates, Merchants, Settlers, and Slaves*, McDonald directs readers' attention to connections between Britain's imperial projects in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. Echoing P. J. Marshall (*The Making and Unmaking of Empires: Britain, India, and America, c. 1750-1783* [2005]), he undermines the conventional division between the "First" and "Second" British Empires. He traces commercial, personal, and political ties between merchants and pirates (or merchant-pirates) in British America and the Indian Ocean, drawing up a global map of economic activity and person-

al and familial relationships. This map—stretching from New York to Madagascar to India—challenges the historiographical habit of separating the Old World from the New, and the Second British Empire from the First.

In the process, McDonald also undermines the conventional division between merchants and pirates. Commerce raiders emerge not as outlaws and renegades but as members of local communities, who shared the values and interests of their neighbors, associates, clients, and patrons. They served their neighbors through their trade, and in times of crisis, also through military service. Indeed, they volunteered their services to defend Jamaica, Tortuga, the Bahamas, and New Providence from Spanish and French fleets. That pirates practiced their trade in the open, and were neither shunned by respectable families nor pursued by local and imperial authorities, casts doubt on anti-piracy statutes (both provincial and imperial) as credible reflections of the legal beliefs and conduct of English subjects. Instead, it reveals that imperial trade laws enjoyed little legitimacy and virtually no command in peripheral localities. McDonald thus calls the official definition of pirates as “enemies of all mankind” a legal fiction. In doing so, he implies that it is also a historiographical fiction, in the sense that historians accept early modern fiction as historically credible, and rely on it to understand mercantile and political culture in the English Empire. In this respect, *Pirates, Merchants, Settlers, and Slaves* supports and reflects the work of legal historian Lauren Benton, whom McDonald credits as a mentor.

In examining the extension of American trade (including illegal trade and piracy) into the Indian Ocean, McDonald focuses on New York, which was the central hub of Indo-Atlantic trade. He ties the fortunes of New York’s leading families and the consumer tastes of New Yorkers to the illegal India trade. One of the interesting aspects of McDonald’s study is his portrayal of the English pirate nest in Madagascar not as a trading outpost

or trading partner of New York merchants but as an extension of New York’s mercantile and social life. He reveals the inner workings of a fully operational, reliable, and timely communications network between New York and Madagascar—a mail system that sustained familial relationships and business ties and transactions across two oceans. Madagascar thus emerges as both a European colony and an American community.

McDonald succeeds in sketching a new geography of the British Atlantic in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, one that extends—through Madagascar—to the Indian Ocean. He demonstrates that contemporary Englishmen’s horizons were broader than those of most historians of the British Atlantic. This is an eye-opening and enlightening contribution, which requires other scholars to reframe their histories and periodizations (including such concepts as “First” and “Second” British Empires). Yet McDonald’s conceptual framework—“the piracy/slave-trade nexus”—might perplex readers. It highlights the centrality of slavery and piracy in American colonial economies, and details the role of pirates and privateers in supplying the New World with African slaves. McDonald provides a compelling account of slaves’ experiences of life and labor, and of their ingenuities in carving out a measure of privacy and control over their lives within slavery. But it remains unclear why the slave trade is more critical to understanding piracy than trade in other pirated commodities (such as rice, grain, timber, fish, sugar, and tobacco).

McDonald concludes his monograph with the Atlantic still a lawless borderland, in which piracy’s status as an outlaw trade was a legal fiction. While he himself does not examine how this seventeenth-century legal fiction later became reality, he avers that by the mid-eighteenth century piracy was stamped out, as “the North Atlantic had been transformed by and large into an English pond” (p. 37).

Hanna shares a belief in piracy's rapid demise, and dedicates *Pirate Nests and the Rise of the British Empire* to the study of this remarkable transformation. He identifies Anglo-American pirate nests (communities that supported, sponsored, and protected pirates) and traces their transformation into pirate-hunting nests in the early eighteenth century. For Hanna, this transformation was produced by the rise of the British Empire—the extension of its jurisdiction and bureaucratic reach into imperial peripheries, and the consequent attachment of British provincials to the interests, values, and laws of the British state, rather than to those of their local communities.

Hanna constructed his monograph as two books rolled into one. The first five chapters chart the formation and functioning of piratical networks and markets in America, the Caribbean, and the Indian Ocean up to the 1690s. Hanna offers readers a ground-level view of the empire and its trade, presenting piracy as an endemic and central feature of provincial economies and politics. Like McDonald's study, these five chapters are a story of local interests, beliefs, and allegiances, in which the flourishing pirate trade of the seventeenth century reflected a decentralized imperial state, one in which both state authority and piracy were vaguely defined.

The book's last five chapters advance Hanna's argument regarding revolutionary change in the empire—a consolidation of power in London, by which the empire's center became the master of its varied provincial peripheries. As provincials reoriented themselves to London on the issue of piracy, they integrated themselves into a new imperial scheme promoted by the late Stuarts—a structured, hierarchical empire, governed from the center. This revolutionary transformation occasioned the transition from private commerce raiding (piracy) to state-sanctioned and state-directed privateering, which continued to thrive in the eighteenth century.

Hanna painstakingly examines the mechanics of what he calls a turn-of-the-century “imperial revolution”—a legal, jurisdictional, and administrative revolution that transformed a decentralized salutary-neglect empire into a modern state governed from the center by a government that wielded power credibly and legitimately in its peripheries. It was the presence of English pirate nests that had exposed the central government's impotence in the New World. The campaign to eradicate piracy was the vehicle of the consequent “imperial revolution.”

Whereas other piracy scholars who subscribe to this thesis focus on the Royal Navy as the central agent of Britain's anti-piracy campaign, Hanna argues that this campaign took place mostly on land. Imperial authorities (the Crown, Board of Trade, and Parliament) recognized that pirates owed their prosperity and immunity to the economic interests and constitutional and legal beliefs of British provincials. Britain's anti-piracy campaign, therefore, was not a naval campaign against pirates at sea, but a legal, bureaucratic, and public-relations campaign for the hearts and minds of provincial merchants, consumers, and mariners.

In this campaign, Hanna identifies courts of law and print culture as the two major tools deployed by imperial authorities in London to penetrate the empire's peripheries and convert hearts and minds. From the start, imperial reformers sought to skirt local custom and precedent, which accommodated violent seizure at sea, and instead applied parliamentary statutes and royal proclamations and instructions directly in piracy cases. To accomplish this, piracy cases were diligently removed from the jurisdiction of local juries, magistrates, and judges, who—as Hanna demonstrates in chapters 1-5—shielded pirates as a matter of course in the seventeenth century.

Imperial authorities buttressed this reform of the court system with a public-relations campaign designed to castigate and delegitimize pirates and

their commercial and political associates. Hanna demonstrates that royal proclamations, court proceedings on pirate prosecutions, and harrowing accounts of piracies were published by an activist central government as part of a purposeful endeavor to change the public's legal and ethical beliefs regarding freebooting. This included efforts to popularize the novel legal distinction between "pirate" and "privateer" (p. 240). Hanna holds that this campaign was crowned with success. Within twenty-five years, provincials came to repudiate their former commercial habits, ethics, and legal beliefs; they instead adopted the moral, legal, and constitutional framework articulated for public consumption in government publications. Rather than signs of frustrated governmental aspirations, Hanna sees in these publications a testament to the power of print culture in the eighteenth century.

Hanna uses literary sources to read eighteenth-century culture and values. And while social and cultural historians might express a measure of skepticism, literary scholars will appreciate his approach to print sources as useful guides to the general public's sensibilities. Hanna's focus on the cultural power of the press, rather than on naval power, is appropriate. It is inconceivable that the revolutionary transformation of hearts and minds that he describes could have been accomplished by force, across three thousand miles of oceanic expanses, in numerous and varied provincial peripheries, with few tools of coercion, and facing the combined forces of economic interest, local custom, and judicial precedent. The shift Hanna sees in British sentiments and beliefs was not produced by coercion but through cultural transmission. Peripheral communities in the British diaspora were reeducated by their government, rather than coerced into submission.

Although challenging accepted orthodoxy on piracy suppression at sea, Hanna's broader thesis will find support among most piracy specialists (adherents of Marcus Rediker, Roy Ritchie, and

David Starkey, to name the field's leading lights). They share his understanding of a thoroughgoing transformation of the Atlantic, within a single generation (1690s to 1720s), from a wild violent frontier to a policed and pacified locus of imperial trade. Hanna will face resistance, however, from piracy specialists who hold that eighteenth-century Britons did not perceive a transformation—neither in maritime security nor in provincials' commercial habits and legal beliefs regarding "armed commerce." But his real challenge is to convince skeptics in other fields of scholarship on the British Empire.

Hanna's formulation of successful state building on the broadest of scales is what makes his study so ambitious and, likely, controversial. It constructs a novel British imperial history that will strike many colonial and imperial scholars as unusual, given their longstanding understanding of entrenched localism in British communities. Such scholars as Bernard Bailyn, Linda Colley, Jack Greene, James Henretta, and John Phillip Reid highlight the persistent distance and dissonance between metropole and peripheries. They concede that a campaign by the metropole to consolidate power and reorient the peripheries (over piracy, among other issues) took place under late Stuarts. But where Hanna sees metropolitan success, Greene, Henretta, and others see frustration in the face of provincial commitment to preserve the status quo and enshrine "salutary neglect" as the empire's governing structure and constitutional philosophy. As evidence, they can point to the government's inability to curb or delegitimize violent and illicit trades like smuggling, wrecking, and trade with the enemy, all of which remained popular and respectable in local communities.

Hanna, by contrast, argues for an imperial revolution through which the metropole invaded and captured the peripheries, brought them into its orbit, and integrated them. Thus, a seventeenth-century imperial culture of legal and administrative pluralism was replaced with a cul-

ture of imperial uniformity in the early eighteenth century. Perhaps what explains this divergence are the literary and printed sources that Hanna deploys as evidence in the second half of his monograph. His critics would charge that he is overly attentive to sources and people that reflected legal beliefs in London. Hanna, for his part, ably defends his sources and his method. He describes an incremental jurisdictional conquest and ethical conversion of peripheral pirate nests—first in the southwest of England, nearer the seat of government, then in Ireland, and finally in American waters. He finds evidence of the central government's budding successes in the fact that royal colonies reflected the policy preferences, ethical standards, and legal beliefs of the Crown. In private colonies, by contrast, governors, their staffs, and appointed magistrates reflected the preferences and sensibilities of local merchants and consumers. Although not all royal governors pursued the king's policy preferences on piracy suppression (New York being a prime example), Hanna sees evidence that royal pressure and conditioning could and did produce results, even in the seventeenth century, during piracy's golden age. In this way, London's perspective on jurisdiction, law, the economy, and the national interest crowded out provincials' local orientations, beliefs, allegiances, and habits.

Hanna's main narrative is enriched by copious notes that will reward readers with a wealth of data, as well as entertaining and engrossing historiographical context. UNC Press has done readers a favor in providing footnotes, as this important component of the book would have been lost in endnotes. Lamentably, the book does not feature a bibliography, but at 450 pages, this is understandable.

McDonald and Hanna share a conviction that what happened at sea reflected the culture (or cultures) on land. Both approach the sea as an extension of ports, rather than viewing seafarers as a subculture unto itself, as do some piracy and

maritime scholars. But while McDonald provides a snapshot of maritime borderlands, Hanna examines the process by which these borderlands were integrated into a national community, within the framework of a rising modern state. Perhaps they differ on this because Hanna's monograph is Atlantic in scope, whereas McDonald's is truly Indo-Atlantic. The disappearance of piracy in the Atlantic raises questions unique to this theater—when, how, why—because it was anomalous: while piracy persisted elsewhere around the globe, it disappeared in the Atlantic and Mediterranean. It is understandable therefore that disappearance is not as intriguing or pertinent a topic for McDonald as it is for Atlanticists like Hanna. McDonald's pirates never did disappear, and their descendants are still on the job in the Indian Ocean and off the coast of Africa.

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