

Frank Lambert. *The Barbary Wars: American Independence in the Atlantic World.*
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Since 9/11, several books about the Barbary Wars have appeared. Most draw parallels between Muslim corsairs and modern-day jihadists, and portray both as fighting a holy war against Americans. Frank Lambert's *The Barbary Wars* stands apart for several reasons. For instance, his work avoids celebrating the American navy, its birth, and early exploits. Instead, Lambert strives to place the Barbary Wars in an Atlantic world context. By positioning the Barbary Wars in the Atlantic world, Lambert shifts the narrative from an exclusively U.S. perspective to one in which Americans play a minor role. The Barbary States perform only as minor players, as well, caught between European powers and the Ottoman Empire. Lambert's attempts to de-center the American narrative and to contextualize the encounters within an Atlantic world make his work one of the more balanced accounts of U.S. encounters with the Barbary States.

The Barbary Wars details American rhetoric and partisan politics alongside world developments, which allows Lambert to describe how internal politics and external events shaped U.S. for-

eign policy, particularly relations with the North African Barbary States. After the Revolution, for example, the United States entered the "highly competitive Atlantic" shorn of Great Britain's protection (p. 4). Though Americans wanted to trade freely, they were buffeted by warring European powers and annoyed even by "petty" powers like the Barbary States. Certainly, this was "not the world Americans had envisioned" (p. 4). Instead, Americans imagined a postwar world in which they would "extend [their] newly won independence to overseas commerce" (p. 7). At the same time, they longed for free and open trade; however, Americans faced disunited states loosely organized under a government hamstrung by the Articles of Confederation, daunting federal and state debts, and a foreboding economic environment. To make matters worse for the new country, mercantilist policies dominated world trade. Despite their dire circumstances, some Americans longed to spread "free commerce among nations" that would "one day usher in a 'universal peace and benevolence'" (p. 26).

Lambert appears taken with American rhetoric while trying to describe American reality of the early Republic. Americans needed and wanted to trade after the war, and when they could not easily do so, they blamed the British for unfairly stacking the deck against them. As Lambert points out, however, longstanding mercantilist policies dominated world trade before and after the Revolution, and cutting one's enemy out of any and all trade was standard practice. It is hardly surprising, then, that the British cut Americans out of the "lucrative West Indian trade" after the Revolution, or that other powers protected their trade prerogatives against another nation (p. 43). Still, Lambert argues that the British refused a "commercial treaty favorable" to the United States, because the British feared the "United States as a competitor" (p. 43). What did the British fear, given that Americans were, as Lambert repeatedly writes, a "bit player" on the world stage (p. 12)?

According to Lambert, although Americans vied primarily against the considerably closer British and French, a "small band of pirates [Algerians] brought [American] commerce to standstill" when they captured a total of thirteen American ships between 1785 and 1793 (pp. 30, 56). Lambert, simultaneously, notes the actions of the great naval powers. The French took three hundred American ships and the British, refusing to recognize Americans' neutrality, seized hundreds of ships as well. These comparative numbers indicated that the French and British brought commerce to a standstill, while Barbary corsairs only threatened the trickle of American commerce that slipped past the European powers.

Lambert vacillates in places in how he depicts the United States. At times, he portrays the United States as the underdog, who, through brains and brawn, showed corrupt Europeans how to deal with barbarian pirates. At other times, he shows the United States as a victim caught in international and economic forces until loosed by shift-

ing world events. On the one hand, he claims that Algerian capture of eleven ships mobilized Congress to respond in 1793. On the other hand, he carefully describes changing conditions that allowed Congress to respond only in 1793, such as the ratification of the Constitution, a brighter economic outlook, and enough federal money to authorize a navy.

What finally ended the Barbary Wars? Was it a newly aggressive U.S. policy and its implementation? According to Lambert, the Napoleonic War ended, and this "gave America freedom of navigation in the Atlantic" (p. 188). Americans' actions and re-actions to Barbary "humiliations" resulted in nothing, for "America's rise was the result of changes in the Atlantic world more than in the country's military exploits" (p. 202).

Lambert's attempt to situate the Barbary Wars in an Atlantic context is ambitious and important, but only partially successful. Readers will find that this book, better than most works on this subject, offers balance and context. Lambert weaves together American partisan politics, naval history, and European events into a broader tapestry of political and commercial contexts. His book begins the work of re-situating the Barbary Wars in a world context so that the story is no longer just about the United States, but America's place in world events.

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