Privateering, buccaneering, and piracy played central parts in the creation of a English-speaking system of maritime trade and settlement in the Americas, and to a surprising extent the story of the first British empire’s fortunes can be told through the medium of piracy. At first most English activity in the western Atlantic was undertaken simply to prey on the riches of the Spanish empire, hoping to undermine it by parasitic privateering. The subsequent growth of English settlements and plantations in the Caribbean, Virginia, and the Carolinas was closely intertwined with piracy. After plundering Panama City in time of peace, for example, the buccaneer Henry Morgan emerged from a piracy trial in England with the governorship of Jamaica. By the late seventeenth century, pirates working with official connivance from such ports as New York and Philadelphia were raiding shipping lanes as distant as the Red Sea. Imperial administrators grew determined to iron out smuggling, piracy, and other irregularities within the empire. And as this happened, pirates—many of whom flitted in and out of legality during England’s regular wars with France and Spain—found themselves at once the subjects of an effective eradication campaign and of an explosion of cheap print that started to fashion them into adventurers and attractive bandits. During the eighteenth century, the British state’s replacement of privateers by the regular navy could never be made wholly effective, especially in America, and during the American revolutionary war, rebel privateers reemerged to wage devastating war on British—so that this particular story ends with Atlantic privateers dismantling the same empire they had helped to found.

Because piracy and privateering have attracted the interest of many scholars, often working from wildly variant interpretive angles, this subject provides us with a point of entry not only into specific aspects of Atlantic and maritime history but into different ways of writing history as well. Along the way we will accordingly investigate not only the maritime and shipboard worlds of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries but some of the ways pirates have been seen: as sources of specie for cash-starved colonial economies; as the founders of interethnic communes; as pre-Romantic literary constructs; as the creators of a floating counterculture, and liberators of the Atlantic proletariat; as the practitioners of peculiarly brutal forms of violence; as anti-Catholic heroes; and as barometers of early modern state expansion.

In short, this course aims to explore the world of Atlantic piracy, and to trace piracy’s relationship both with British maritime power and with the creation, transformation, and eventual destruction of much of the British empire before 1800. It is also designed to help students learn how to conceive and execute a major independent project in historical research and writing. There
will accordingly be an emphasis throughout the semester on learning how to find and critically assess both existing historiography and primary documents; on constructively debating one another’s scholarly interpretations; and on writing clearly and learning to edit yourself. Seminar members will even engage in a collective exercise of rewriting woolly published prose, with the winner being awarded an Orwell Prize for editing. Students will make use of all these experiences to write and edit substantial research papers on topics of their own choosing that are in some way related to the course’s subject, and determined in consultation with me.

**Books**


These required course books are available for purchase at Amazon.com. Assigned articles and book chapters will be placed on Sakai as PDF files, for download, printing, and reading before each class meeting.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Seminar members are responsible for emailing me a very brief reading response (between 150 and 175 words long) at least 12 hours before each seminar meeting held in weeks 1–6 and 8–10—which is to say, no later than 10:00 P.M. on Wednesday. My email address is peter.silver@rutgers.edu.

Each reading response you write should ask, and propose a possible answer to, one question about the week’s assigned reading. In composing your reading responses before class, some aspects of the assigned secondary sources that you will always find it useful to think about are: what arguments the historians who wrote them are trying to make; how well their evidence supports those arguments; what sorts of evidence they use, and how they organize and present it; their attitudes toward the historical actors they describe; and what interpretations and other scholars they seem to argue or agree with. Some useful questions to consider about the primary sources are: how and why those sources were produced and disseminated (not overlooking the obvious—were they written? printed? posted? sung? watched? sold? collected? concealed?); the sorts of people who created them and the personal situations in which they did so; the intended audiences for the sources and how they might have reacted to them; and how you can interpret them to make sense of this period. For definitions of primary and secondary sources, see William Kelleher Storey, Writing History: A Guide for Students (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 18–19.

The responses will not be read by other members of the seminar, so you should—at an absolute minimum—be certain to bring up the points from your responses in class discussion each week. Your vocal, well-informed participation in class counts for three times as much toward your seminar grade as the reading responses themselves (see “Grading and Preparation of Written Materials,” below).

You will meet with me in office hours during week 3 or week 4 (October 4 or October 11, with extra office hours on October 16) to discuss possible subjects for your paper. You can sign up for my office hours at http://www.supersas.com/schedule/psilver (available days are shown on the overview calendar in white highlighting). My office is Van Dyck 2c, my office hours are Thursdays from 3:00 to 5:00, and my office telephone number is (732) 932–8512.

You will then report briefly to the rest of the class in week 5 (October 18), explaining what you’ve found in your research so far and what your paper is likely to be about.

In week 7 (October 25), you will give a fuller formal presentation about your project to the class. Plan on talking for no more than 5 minutes and answering questions for about 10. In advance of this meeting, you will write and circulate to the class by email a paper preview consisting of a prospectus (2 to 3 pages carefully describing what you intend to write about, what specific question or questions you are trying to answer, what you think your argument is likely to be, how it will relate to the existing historiography on your topic, and how you will approach your sources) and a research bibliography (an annotated list of at least a dozen of the primary and secondary
sources you expect to use). You can also append an outline, if you have one. These paper previews must be emailed no later than Sunday, October 21, and read by all seminar members before the class meeting. There is no reading response in week 7, because your assignment is simply to come well prepared to ask questions about one another’s projects.

For week 8 (November 1), you will be asked to find a passage of truly bad published prose and “translate” it into clear English. These translations will be presented in class, and the student whose translation is judged best will win an Orwell Prize.

Weeks 11 and 12 will be devoted to final presentations by all the members of the seminar, who will be required to precirculate final paper previews. This time each presenter will have about 10 minutes to talk and 20 minutes to answer questions. The paper previews in weeks 11–12 should take the following form: (1) a standard introduction to your paper, consisting of 3–4 pages stating the problem that your paper examines and giving its thesis, summarizing the historiographical context, and providing the first bits of concrete detail and analysis that you will use to draw readers into the rest of the paper; and (2) a full outline. After reading your introduction, we should at a minimum know what your topic is, why we should care about it, and what you are going to argue about it. These paper previews must be emailed no later than the Sunday before the class meeting in which you will present. As in week 7, there are no reading responses, since your collective assignment is to come to class prepared to ask interesting questions about one another’s projects. When it is your turn to present, please also bring to seminar any excerpts from interesting documents, visual sources, or other materials that you have found and would like to use to assist in a discussion of your junior paper.

Your final paper is due to me via email, in PDF format, by 5:00 P.M. on reading day—the final day before examination period begins—Thursday, December 13.

SEMESTER OVERVIEW

WEEK 1: Sea dogs (September 13)
WEEK 2: Buccaneering (September 20)
WEEK 3: Captain Kidd (and meetings with instructor) (October 4)
WEEK 4: The literature of piracy (and meetings with instructor) (October 11)
WEEK 5: American colonies in the golden age (and first presentation of topics to class) (October 18)
Submission of paper previews to class by email (no later than Sunday, October 21)
WEEK 6: Seaborne subversion? (Make-up sessions: October 23 for Group I, October 24 for Group II)
WEEK 7: Economics afloat (and discussion of paper previews (October 25)
WEEK 8: Gender and sex at sea (and Orwell writing exercise) (November 1)
WEEK 9: From British pirates to American privateers (November 8)
WEEK 10: Twenty-first century perspectives on piracy (November 15)
THANKSGIVING RECESS (November 22–25)
Submission of 1st group of final previews to class by email (no later than Sunday, November 25)

WEEK 11: Student presentations (November 29)

Submission of 2nd group of final previews to class by email (no later than Sunday, December 2)

WEEK 12: Student presentations (December 6)

PAPERS DUE VIA EMAIL: Thursday, December 13, 5:00 P.M.

GRADING AND PREPARATION OF WRITTEN MATERIALS

The components of the seminar grade are vocal and insightful participation in the weekly discussions and presentations (30%); completion of the weekly reading responses (10%); the written paper previews due on October 21 and during weeks 11–12 (each will count 10%, for a total of 20%); and the final paper itself (40%). The Orwell editing exercise is just for fun. Absence from a course meeting will reduce your seminar grade.

The weekly reading responses should be typed in the body of your emails to me as plain text, without special formatting. Please do not send responses as attachments. My email address is peter.silver@rutgers.edu. Remember that responses must be sent a full 12 hours in advance of each class meeting. Each subject heading should read: “Response 2” in week 2, and so on. (It is very helpful to my email client if you use this exact wording in the subject heading.) Your paper previews, drafts, and junior papers should use footnotes, not endnotes, and should follow the citation forms recommended in Storey, Writing History, pp. 36–42. They should also be numbered clearly on every page and saved in PDF format. Paper previews should be sent with the subject heading: “Paper preview.”

RESOURCES FOR WRITING AND RESEARCH

There are no required assignments from William Kelleher Storey’s Writing History (only suggested ones), but I cannot recommend strongly enough that you refer to it often as a handbook. I have used the suggested further readings to point out chapters from Storey that you are likely to find especially useful at different points during the semester. It has concise, insightful essays on everything you will go through—choosing a topic, finding library materials, reading primary sources, taking notes, avoiding plagiarism, composing an argument, and drafting and editing expository prose.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Required readings marked with an asterisk will be on Sakai as PDF files. The other required readings are in the course books listed above for purchase on Amazon.com.
1. SEA DOGS (September 13)


*[Philip Nichols], Sir Francis Drake Revuied: Calling upon This Dull or Effeminate Age, to Folowve his Noble Steps for Golde and Siluer … (London, 1626)


Suggested further reading


2. BUCCANEERING (September 20)

*“The Translator to the Reader,” in John Esquemeling, [Alexander O. Esquemelin], Bucaniers of America, or a True Account of the Most Remarkable Assaults Committed of Late Years upon the Coasts of the West-Indies by the Bucaniers of Jamaica and Tortuga … Now Faithfully Rendered into English (London, 1684), pp. [i]–[x].


Suggested further reading


Lane, Pillaging the Empire, chap. 4 (“The Seventeenth-Century Caribbean Buccaneers”), pp. 96–130, with endnotes at pp. 208–209
3. CAPTAIN KIDD (AND MEETINGS WITH INSTRUCTOR) (October 4)


NOTE: All seminar members should meet with me in office hours either this week or the following one to discuss what you have found on your excursions to the library and settle on a subject for your research paper. All papers must use some form of primary source. There are general suggestions about how to develop a topic in Storey, Writing History, chap. 1.

Suggested further reading


4. THE LITERATURE OF PIRACY (AND MEETINGS WITH INSTRUCTOR) (October 11)


NOTE: All seminar members should have met with me in office hours by this week to discuss where your research has led and to settle on a subject for your research paper.

Suggested further reading

Storey, Writing History, chaps. 3–4 (“Writing History Faithfully” and “Use Sources to Make Inferences”)


5. AMERICAN COLONIES IN THE GOLDEN AGE (AND 1ST PRESENTATION OF TOPICS) (October 18)

*Mark Gillies Hanna, “The Pirate Nest: The Impact of Piracy on Newport, Rhode Island, and Charles Town, South Carolina, 1670–1740” (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 2006): abstract (pp. iii–iv); excerpts from chap. 1 (pp. 1–10 and 15–50 only); excerpts from chap. 2 (pp. 51–57, 72–78, and 86–91 only); chaps. 3–4 (pp. 92–158); introduction to Part II (pp. 198–203); excerpt from chap. 6 (pp. 204–212 only); and chaps. 7–8 (pp. 247–330) — in total roughly 40,000 words (100 pages in a printed book)

**“Commission of Capt. Benjamin Norton as a Privateer, June 2, 1741,” and “Journal of the Sloop Revenge, June 5–October 5, 1741,” in Privateering and Piracy in the Colonial Period:
**Illustrative Documents**, ed. John Franklin Jameson (New York: Macmillan Co., 1923), docs. 144 and 145

NOTE: This week you will give a short oral presentation to the class, describing what you have found in the course of your library research and giving other students a general idea of your paper topic and related sources.

**Submission of Research Paper Previews to Class by Email** *(no later than Sunday, October 21)*

6. Seaborne Subversion? *(Make-up sessions: October 23 for Group I, October 24 for Group II)*


*Suggested further reading*

Storey, *Writing History*, chaps. 5–6 (“Get Writing!” and “Build an Argument”)


7. Economics Afloat (and Discussion of Paper Previews) *(October 25)*

NOTE: This week all seminar members will present their precirculated paper previews to the class (see “Course Requirements” above for a full description of the format of the written previews and oral presentations).

Suggested further reading

Storey, *Writing History*, chap. 7 (“Narrative Techniques for Historians”)


8. Gender and Sex at Sea (and Orwell Writing Exercise) (November 1)


NOTE: This week all seminar members will bring to class and circulate photocopies of the passages of bad scholarly writing they chose to “translate,” and of their improved versions. The editor of the most improved version will win an Orwell Prize.

Suggested further reading


Storey, *Writing History*, chaps. 8–9 (“Writing Sentences in History” and “Choose Precise Words”)


9. FROM BRITISH PIRATES TO AMERICAN PRIVATEERS (November 8)


Suggested further reading

Storey, Writing History, chap. 10 (“Revising and Editing”)


10. TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY PERSPECTIVES ON PIRACY (November 15)


THANKSGIVING RECESS (November 22–25)

SUBMISSION OF 1ST GROUP OF FINAL PAPER PREVIEWS TO CLASS BY EMAIL (by Sunday, November 25)

11. STUDENT PRESENTATIONS OF FINAL PAPER PREVIEWS (November 29)

Note: This week half of the seminar’s members will present their precirculated paper previews to the class for discussion and constructive criticism (see “Course Requirements” above for a full description of the format of the written previews and oral presentations).

SUBMISSION OF 2ND GROUP OF FINAL PAPER PREVIEWS TO CLASS BY EMAIL (by Sunday, December 2)

12. STUDENT PRESENTATIONS OF FINAL PAPER PREVIEWS (December 6)

Note: This week the other half of the seminar’s members will present their precirculated paper previews to the class for discussion.

SUBMISSION OF PAPERS VIA EMAIL: Reading day (Wednesday, December 13, 5:00 p.m.)