



# Flying the Black Flag: A Brief History of Piracy

*Alfred S. Bradford*

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Many peoples throughout history have fought pirates, writes Alfred Bradford in *Flying the Black Flag*. Some have lost and some have won. We should learn from their experience. From Odysseus?the original pirate of literature and lore?through Blackbeard and the feared pirates of the Spanish Main, his book reveals the strategies and methods pirates used to cheat, lie, kill, and rob their way into the historical record, wreaking terror in their bloody wakes.

The story begins with a discussion of Piracy and the Suppression of Piracy in the Ancient World. It details, for example, how the Illyrians used pirate vessels to try to wrest control of the Adriatic Coast from the mighty Romans, as well as how the intrepid Vikings went from pirate raids to the conquest of parts of Western Europe.

Moving into the 17th century and to the New World, Bradford depicts the golden age of the pirates. Here are the Spanish Buccaneers and the fabled Caribbean stronghold of Tortuga. Here are Henry Morgan, Captain Kidd, and their fearsome counterparts. But piracy was hardly just a Western phenomenon. The Barbary Pirates looks East to examine the struggle between Christian and Muslim in the Mediterranean, while *To the Shores of Tripoli* details the American conflict with the Barbary Pirates. It reveals the lessons of a war conducted across a great distance against a nebulous enemy, a war in which victory was achieved only by going after the pirates' sponsor. On the South China Coast, we meet the first Dragon Lady, leader of Chinese pirates.

As intriguing as these tales of the past are in and of themselves, the stories and their swashbuckling villains hold lessons for us even today. In *Conclusions and Reflections*, Bradford gathers all of the chords together, discussing the conditions under which piracy arises, the conditions under which pirates organize and become more powerful, and the methods used to suppress piracy. Finally, he examines similarities between pirates and terrorists?and whether the lessons learned from the wars against pirates of the past might also apply to modern day terrorists.

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