

Pirates, Jews, and Pirate Jews: The Relationship of Jews and Pirates in the Development of Colonial Jamaica

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In Colonial Jamaica, Jews and pirates coexisted and created a reciprocal relationship to develop a fledgling colonial economy. Pirates took shiploads of wealth from Spanish treasure galleons, then sold it to Jewish merchants, who then sold it onward for profit. Jews sponsored pirate ships to return to the sea and collect more to sell. As a result, these groups created a thriving economy that allowed both groups the freedom they desired. This research argues that together, Jews and pirates developed a symbiotic relationship that created a thriving mercantilist society in Early Colonial Jamaica. This relationship allowed both parties to gain legitimacy and freedom in the English Colonial Period beginning in 1655. This research follows the Sephardic diaspora from the Iberian Peninsula to the Caribbean and the history of piracy in the Atlantic and then analyzes the relationship between these groups in Jamaica. Written for the Agnes Scott College History Senior Seminar, this research draws from many different fields, such as economics, archeology, political science, and religious studies. While there is research conducted on pirates in the Caribbean in the Colonial period and Jews in the Caribbean in the Colonial period, there is little academic research on the relationship between pirates and Jews in Colonial Jamaica. By piecing together research from across the humanities, *Pirates, Jews, and Pirate Jews* tells the untold parallel histories between two historically “othered” groups.

Pirates sailed the seven seas searching for freedom. Jews escaped persecution and fled to the New World, searching for freedom. Both found a home on the island of Jamaica. In Jamaica, Jews and pirates developed a reciprocal relationship: pirates took shiploads of wealth from Spanish treasure galleons, then sold it to Jewish merchants, who then sold it onward for profit. Jews then sponsored pirate ships to return to sea and collect more to sell, and so forth, until both groups created a thriving economy that allowed both the freedom they desired.

Together, Jews and pirates developed a symbiotic relationship that created a thriving mercantilist society in Early Colonial Jamaica. This relationship allowed both parties to gain legitimacy and freedom in the English Colonial Period beginning in 1655. As pirates built Jamaica, Jews built Jamaica. Together, they created a mutually beneficial relationship that brought not only freedom but legitimacy in the eyes of the English colonial rulers.

But how did Jews and pirates come to the island of Jamaica? How did they turn a fledgling colonial settlement into one of the busiest and most successful port cities in the New World? There is little academic research on the relationship between pirates and Jews in Colonial Jamaica. There is a decent amount of research conducted on pirates in the Caribbean in the Colonial period, but that research tends to focus on individuals such as Henry Morgan, rather than the

effects and relationships of piracy. Likewise, there is research on the Jews of the Caribbean. However, this research tends to focus on religion and culture, rather than relationships with other groups, like pirates. In addition to a lack of academic research on this relationship, there are only a few primary sources regarding Jews or pirates in Jamaica specifically. Due to natural disaster, like an earthquake in 1692 that destroyed much of Port Royal, Jamaica, the majority of primary sources from Jews or pirates were destroyed. Records are abundant from the perspective of the Colonial rulers and the British government, but one must acknowledge the colonial bias of these documents.

Because of the lack of academia and primary source material, I have attempted to piece together the history available. My research draws from many different fields, such as economics, archeology, political science, and religious studies. In this patchwork research, I have found untold parallel histories between two historically ostracized groups. By drawing attention to the symbiotic relationship between Jews and pirates, I believe my research not only complicates these histories but adds to a field that lacks significant research and analysis.

To contribute to these fields, this paper will first examine the historical background of Sephardic Jews and how they came to settle in Jamaica. Then, it will examine the background of the pirates of Jamaica, and will give a brief history of piracy, as well as ex-

plain the paper's definition of "pirates" with regard to the scope of research in a section entitled "Journey to Jamaica." Then, both sections "Jews" and "Pirates" will begin with English conquest of Jamaica in 1655 and the settlement and success of Jews and Pirates in Jamaica until the 18th century. Finally, the section "Pirate Jews" will examine the relationship between Jews and pirates and their success in gaining legitimacy and freedom before the paper's conclusion.

Journey to Jamaica

It is a tale as old as the Torah: time and time again, Jews have been chased out of their communities, by an emperor; by a king; or by an angry mob. They pack their belongings, leave their homes carrying their valuables, their bibles, and little else, and they move on to the next place where they are marginally tolerated, until someone, an emperor, a king, or an angry mob, decides that once again, they must leave. However, in 1492, the narrative changed. Instead of retreating to hidden niches in the familiar old world, the Sephardic Jews of the Iberian Peninsula moved outward, and into the new.

In 1492, the Edict of Expulsion expelled Jews from Spain following their forced conversions into Christianity in the 14th century.¹ These Jews were called by many names — crypto-Jews, Conversos, New Christians, Portuguese (a euphemism referencing the Sephardic origins of the community in Portugal), or Marranos (Spanish for 'pigs'),— and were faced with the same expulsion Jews faced in England in 1290, or 1280 in Sicily, or in Paris in 1182 (and again in 1254, 1321, and 1394). These Jews, like so many before them, could no longer practice in secret, in the basements of their homes, lighting candles and welcoming the Sabbath in whispered tones. Following the end of the conquest that ended Muslim rule in the Iberian Peninsula, there was no tolerance by the Spanish kingdoms for those who were not fully and totally Catholic. With Muslims gone, so too were the Jews; either Jews completely left

1. John Edwards, *The Jews in Christian Europe, 1400-1700*, (New York: Routledge, 1988), 35-37. Also known as the Alhambra decree, the Edict of Expulsion was issued by Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon on March 31, 1492. This effectively ended Jewish life in Spanish Kingdoms and in the Iberian Peninsula. Until the Edict of Expulsion, Jews were forcibly converted into Christianity since pogroms in 1391. Jews were not officially expelled from Portuguese kingdoms until 1497, as the Portuguese crown had yet to 'ratify' the Edict.

Spain and Portugal, or they would die at the stake.²

From there, the Sephardic diaspora of these crypto-Jews spanned the globe. Banished from the Iberian Peninsula, they turned to two main places: cities marginally more welcoming of Jews such as Amsterdam; or the New World, where the inquisition could not reach them.³ Many chose the former and settled into a comfortable life in the Dutch city. By 1620, there were around 200 Jewish families in Amsterdam who lived in a thriving Jewish quarter called Jodenbuurt (Dutch for Jewish neighborhood) and were significant contributors to the Dutch economy, especially as merchants.⁴

Jews who did not settle in Amsterdam settled oceans away from the Catholic Monarchy of Spain and took advantage of the wealth of resources that the New World afforded, with scarcely settled colonies and an abundance of natural resources ready to be traded. A few settled on the island of Jamaica, which was then owned by the Columbus family (who was sympathetic to Jews) since the early 1500s, and perhaps as early as 1504.⁵ There was a settlement in Mexico until a Spanish Inquisition tribunal was established in the colony in 1571.⁶ From there, Jews dispersed to Dutch Brazil, settling in Recife, where a community thrived for 24 years before Spain took the colony.⁷ Some tried to move to a growing city called New Amsterdam — today's New York City — but were turned away by an antisemitic governor.⁸ Many Jews moved to Caribbean islands owned by the same empires of the aforementioned Protestant cities, such as Dutch-ruled Curaçao, English-ruled Barbados, and, of course, Jamaica, where Jews had been living under Spanish rule. Jews were allowed to settle in Jamaica despite the Spanish, hiding as they did in pre-1492 Spain: using their status as 'converted' Portuguese crypto-Jews, as well as the original protection and favor of the Columbus family.

There were two main settlements of Jews on the island of Jamaica came in 1530 when the Marquis of

2. Albert M. Hymason, *The Sephardim of England: A History of the Spanish and Portuguese Jewish Community 1492-1951* (London: Methuen & Co., 1951), 2.

3. Mordehay Arbell, *The Portuguese Jews of Jamaica* (Kingston, Jamaica: Canoe Press, 2000).

4. Edward Kritzler, *Jewish Pirates of the Caribbean: How a Generation of Swashbuckling Jews Carved Out an Empire in the New World in Their Quest for Treasure, Religious Freedom — and Revenge* (New York: Anchor Books, 2009), 98.

5. *Ibid.*, 13.

6. Arbell, *Portuguese Jews of Jamaica*, 2.

7. Kritzler, *Jewish Pirates of the Caribbean*, 8.

8. *Ibid.*, 177.

Jamaica, Portugallo Colon (the husband of the granddaughter of Columbus), was approached by Jews who asked Colon to allow their settlement on the island.⁹ They came as merchants and settled in St. Jago de la Vega (today called Spanish Town), a village in the south of Jamaica, upriver from another settlement of Jews on the bay of Port Royal. Between 1530 and 1640, Jews emigrating to the Spanish colonies of the New World were nearly all Portuguese subjects or Portuguese who had lived in the Spanish main, and in most of these colonies, ‘Portuguese’ was synonymous with crypto-Jews. Jews lived under Spanish rule in Jamaica until 1655, when the English took the island.

Pirates, similarly to Jews, were rejected outcasts who made their way to Jamaica. In the 17th and early 18th centuries, piracy was a viable tool for socioeconomic mobility and freedom. There was much to gain by participating in piracy: not only could one fight against their prescribed social station, but one could live freely away from the social, economic, and political norms of mainland Europe — and, maybe, get rich.

Many pirates began their careers as such in some form of maritime trade, whether it be on merchant ships or in the Royal Navy. In the British Royal Navy, many sailors were pressed into service, meaning that they were forcibly conscripted into service and released when there were no wars to fight. The conditions that naval sailors and merchants faced on these ships were poor; the work was dangerous and often deadly, the pay was little, and when sailors were paid, their wages were often received late. Merchant captains and naval officers were notoriously cruel and harsh in punishments given to sailors. These harsh conditions drove many sailors to “jump ship” and join a pirate crew, whether by sailing with the pirates who took their vessels as a prize or by mutiny, electing a captain and crew, and drawing up articles of agreement of their own.¹⁰ Those who became pirates were leaving behind destitute lives with rigid social structures and little to no upward mobility. The demographics of these pirates suggest young men eager to make a living wage, away from oppressive forces of slavers, merchant ship captains, or the Royal Navy.¹¹ There were an estimated 1,000-2,000 active pi-

9. Arbell, *Portuguese Jews of Jamaica*, 7.

10. Marcus Rediker, *Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010), 39. Articles of Agreement were a mutually agreed upon code drafted on pirate ships. When creating a new crew, pirates would draft an agreement together. A new pirate needed to sign his name to the articles before officially joining the crew.

11. *Ibid.*, 43.

rates in the early 18th century.¹² The median age of these pirates was 27, with the oldest pirates nearing 50 years of age, and the youngest only 14.¹³ Pirates, by and large, originated in England, although the pirates of Jamaica were originally French buccaneers who inhabited the islands of Tortuga and Hispaniola.

In order to examine the specific history of the pirates of Jamaica, one must first understand the definition of piracy and the different forms of piracy in the 17th and 18th century. Generally, there are four terms used interchangeably for piracy, though all have unique origins and differences. Corsairs, perhaps the least used term, were sailors sanctioned by the Ottoman empire to attack ships in the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of North Africa. Most Corsairs were Muslim and attacked Christian ships specifically. Privateers, similarly to Corsairs, were state-sanctioned pirates. Often, ships were authorized to attack a rival country’s ships, such as pirates sanctioned by Great Britain attacking Spanish vessels. Buccaneers were initially a specific group of French Protestant outlaws who lived on the modern-day island of Haiti (then called Hispaniola) and Tortuga. Buccaneers were driven off the island by the Spanish, and then, in 1657, were invited by Colonel Edward D’Oyley, on behalf of Oliver Cromwell, to move to Jamaica to work as privateers for the British, to attack Spanish ships and pioneer commerce on the island.¹⁴

Corsairs, Privateers, and Buccaneers can be seen as a progression through a timeline of piracy, spanning from the late 16th century and culminating in the Golden Age of Piracy, which began and ended in the early 18th century.¹⁵ “Pirate” acts as a catch-all term for Corsairs, Privateers, and Buccaneers. However, it is important to note that ‘pirates’ as we traditionally think of them are a distinct class separate from corsairs, privateers, and buccaneers: true outlaws with allegiance to no nation, attacking ships indiscriminately.¹⁶ These pirates operated mostly during the Golden Age of Piracy, from 1716-1726, but, for the most part, remain outside the scope of this research.¹⁷ The research of this paper focuses on the

12. *Ibid.*, 29-30.

13. *Ibid.*, 49-51

14. Kritzler, *Jewish Pirates of the Caribbean*, 222.

15. The years of the Golden Age of Piracy are debated, but for the purposes of this paper, I use Rediker’s definition of 1716-1726.

16. Peter T Leeson, *The Invisible Hook: The Hidden Economics of Pirates* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 6-7.

17. Rediker, *Jewish Pirates of the Caribbean*, 8-9.

privateers and buccaneers of the 17th and 18th centuries; specifically, the ones who called Jamaica home.

Pirates, throughout history, have existed wherever merchants and trade thrive. Piracy was an illegal trade — a criminal activity — punishable by death, and most pirates came to their end via the British and their Royal Navy, or, most commonly, the noose.¹⁸ Their illegality is parallel to the ostracized status of the Jews of Jamaica, who would not become British citizens until 1831. These ostracized Jews and the vilified pirates found a home in Jamaica and created a thriving commercial port on the shores of an island they developed together.

The Jews and pirates came together when England successfully captured Jamaica from the Spanish. Jews helped the English on the island because the Jews saw England as a friendly ruler, when Jews gained readmission to England in 1655.¹⁹ The English were also aided in their mission by Buccaneers and other adventurers of Dutch, English, and French origin. These Buccaneers, like the Jews, were similarly exiled from their homes. The Buccaneers lived on the island of Tortuga and were largely Huguenots from France. When Spain took the island of Tortuga, they were forced to leave.

Buccaneers sided with the English in Cromwell's expedition (The Western Design) to take land and gold from the Spanish in 1654, but these pirates were not the only ones who acted as such. The Western Design was, as historian Kris E. Lane states, "nothing more than a sneaky, state-sanctioned piracy writ large."²⁰ Even General Venables, who leads the expedition alongside William Penn, essentially sanctioned piracy within his troops. His commissioned soldiers demanded they be allowed to plunder and pillage the Spanish at will after their original prohibition from doing so. At a council of war in Bridgetown, Barbados, Venables ordered that his commissioned soldiers be allowed to pillage and plunder with free reign, so long as they did not bring their prizes to "public stock or store."²¹ With the English acting like pirates and
18. Ibid, 127.

19. Hymason, *The Sephardim of England*, 2-3. This was the result of growing pro-Jewish sentiments, as Christians thought the readmittance of Jews to England would bring the second coming of Christ.

20. Kris E. Lane, *Pillaging the Empire: Piracy in the Americas, 1500-1750* (Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 104.

21. Robert Venables, "At A Council of War Held at the Indian Bridge Town in Barbadoes, March 18, 1654 to consider the Wants of the Army" in *Interesting Tracts, Relating to the Island of Jamaica, Consisting of Curious*

helped by pirates, it was no surprise that once the English settled Jamaica, the main settlement of Port Royal would become a base for pirates. Oliver Cromwell formally invited the pirates in a proclamation, declaring "that every planter or adventurer to that mind shall be exempt and free from paying any excise, or custom, for any manufactures, provisions, or any other goods or necessaries, which he or they shall transport to the said island of Jamaica."²² Cromwell wanted Jamaica to have a thriving economy, and to do so, he needed the free trade that piracy brought to its shores. In the same proclamation, Cromwell also invited Jews to settle the island, including "divers persons, merchants, and others,"²³ in his address. While Cromwell does not mention Jews by name, their merchant status, alongside the welcoming of "divers persons," as well as the recent readmission of Jews to England, Jews felt encouraged by the proclamation, to move to Jamaica. Alongside the proclamation, the new and abundant flow of commerce enticed the Jews, as well as their true freedom from the Spanish, began to thrive on an island still dominated by pirates.

Jews

By the time the English came to the island in 1655, Jamaica was sparsely settled with only seven sugar farms — not yet plantations — producing "negligible quantities."²⁴ The Spanish ignored the island in favor of developing other colonies, leaving Jamaica barely developed. The Spanish were more interested in mines and mineral wealth than arable land, and Jamaica was abundant in the latter and lacking the former.

However, the Jews coming to Jamaica were not farmers. They were merchants, and Jamaica sat on prime trade lanes that Jews took advantage of through

State-Papers, Councils of War, Letters, Petitions, Narratives, &c. &c., Which Throw Great Light on the History of That Island, from Its Conquest down to the Year 1702 (St. Jago de la Vega [Jamaica] Printed by Lewis, Lunan, and Jones, 1800), <https://archive.org/details/interesting-trac00iigoog/page/n24>. 14. Page 24 on digital version. 22. Ibid, 1-2. Page 11 on digital version. In *Interesting Tracts*, there is a prefacing proclamation made by "the protector." I have taken this to mean Cromwell and not Charles II, based on its contents and references to events in 1654 and 1655, as well as its differences from the Windsor Proclamation, published in 1661 by Charles II. I believe this proclamation, while unsigned and undated, was written between 1655 and 1658.

23. Ibid.

24. Nuala Zahedieh, "Trade, Plunder, and Economic Development in Early English Jamaica, 1655-89," *The Economic History Review* 39, no. 2 (1986): 205-22, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2596150>. 207.

their already established connections. Jews had historically worked as merchants, but there was a substantial increase in the presence of Jewish mercantilism between 1550-1750.²⁵ These merchant Jews created a new social class David Sorkin, a professor of Jewish Studies at Yale, defines as “Port Jews.” Sorkin states, Many of the conversos and crypto-Jews who left the Iberian peninsula moved to the Mediterranean ports of Venice and Livorno, the Atlantic ports of Bordeaux, London, Amsterdam and Hamburg, and the New World ports of Jamaica, Surinam, Recife, and New Amsterdam. [...] The result was a Sephardi trade network which connected the old Mediterranean routes with the new Atlantic economy. In an age without a developed banking system, these merchants had the great advantage of being able to do business with, and to draw bills of exchange on, relatives, friends or business associates whom they could trust [...]²⁶

As Sorkin explains, following their expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula, Jews created a transatlantic trade network by settling in the Atlantic ports of Europe and the developing ports of the New World and then trading with other Jews. Crypto-Jews utilized this trade network, as well as their proficiency in Spanish to integrate themselves through trade into the societies from which they saw removal. Jews provided monetary gain and successful development of economies, and in return, gained readmission into the societies that once demanded their expulsion.

In Jamaica, there were no established banks, nor any permanent, intentionally colonized settlement at all, yet because of their ethnoreligious trade network, Jews were still able to do business with the Spanish main, the Dutch, the Portuguese, and the English. However, Jewish development on the island of Jamaica did not begin to thrive until the English took the island in 1655. Unlike the Spanish, England worked to establish a permanent, thriving colony, and the influx of pirated raw wealth. Following this intentional effort to grow Jamaica, more Jews started to migrate to the island, where commerce started to explode.

The most successful and established concentration of Jews was in Port Royal. However, there is little to no primary source evidence about Jews

in Port Royal due to a massive earthquake that destroyed the city, partially sinking it, in June 1692. What evidence remains demonstrates Jewish success. New Street, often called Jew Street, boasted the address of the Synagogue and was also where many Jews congregated in the surrounding taverns to conduct business.²⁷ These Jews were successful merchants, and because of their success, often petitioned for denization, allowing them a few rights as residents but not citizens. The English government issued Letters of Denization and allowed individuals the protection of property and permission to pursue trade freely. Petitions for denization were made often before Jews gained full citizenship, as evidenced by an entry in the Calendar of State Papers in 1668: July 3. 381. The King to Sir Thos. Modyford, Governor of Jamaica. Whereas Solomon Gabay Faro and David Gomes Henriquez made free denizens of England and recommended to him on behalf of some considerable merchants, who suppose it may be for the benefit of the Colony, so long as they behave themselves, to remain upon the island and freely to trade there. Countersigned by Sec. Sir Wm. Morrice. 1p. [Col. Entry Bk., Vol. 110, p. 7.]²⁸

Denization, given directly by the King as evidenced above, gave Jews social and economic legitimacy, despite still lacking political power and the right to vote. The petition above was submitted through a colonial legislature on the island, as was the normal process to communicate with the King. However, in August 1692, Jews directly petitioned the monarchy to gain denizenship, rather than going through the due process of the colonial legislature.²⁹ Jews of Jamaica always faced issues with the colonial government, issues that were rooted in antisemitism — which Jews continued to face in Jamaica, despite their readmission to England.

Antisemitic sentiments, while prevalent in colonial Jamaica, were unsupported by the Monarchy in England. Jews received relatively equal rights in England in the last half of the 17th century, but Jews in Jamaica could not say the same. Antisemitism in Jamaica was primarily due to Jewish success as merchants,

27. Maureen J. Brown, “Evidence for Port Royal’s British Colonial Merchant Class as Reflected in the New Street Tavern Site Assemblage,” in *Out of Many, One People: The Historical Archaeology of Colonial Jamaica*, 62.

28. “America and West Indies: Addenda 1668,” in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 9, 1675-1676 and Addenda 1574-1674*, ed. W Noel Sainsbury (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1893), 147.

29. Arbell, *Portuguese Jews of Jamaica*, 43.

25. Jonathan I. Israel, *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism, 1550-1750* (London ; Portland, Or: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1998), 1-3.

26. David Sorkin, “The Port Jew: Notes toward a Social Type,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 50, no. 1 (April 1, 1999): 87–97, <https://doi.org/10.18647/2168/JJS-1999>.

which angered the non-Jewish colonists of the island. In 1672, a petition by thirty-one non-Jewish white merchants expressed their dislike and distrust of Jewish merchants. They wrote that the Jews of the island had a monopoly on trade and would not trade with non-Jews. Because of this monopoly and selective trading, white Jamaicans merchants demanded Jews' expulsion from the island.³⁰ While antisemitic sentiments by white settlers likely precede this document, it was the first in a series of complaints to courts, governors, and kings by white settlers who felt threatened by Jewish success on the island. Twenty years after the initial petition by white Jamaicans, another petition was written by the Board of Trade in 1692, stating, "Jews eat us and our children out of all trade. [The Board of trade does] not want them at Port Royal, a place populous and strong without them. [The Jews have] made Port Royal their Goshen,³¹ and will do nothing but trade. [...] This a great and growing evil and had we not warning from other Colonies we should see our streets filled and the ships hither crowded with them. This means taking our children's bread and giving it to Jews."³²

The Board of Trade was a subset of the governing body of colonial Jamaica, the Jamaican House of Assembly. The Board of Trade was established to regulate mercantilism and trade on the island. The Board of Trade and the Jamaican House of Assembly (which excluded Jews as they were denizens, not citizens) were allowed to set taxes for the island without regulation by the monarchy. Lack of regulation, alongside antisemitic sentiments held by the Board and Assembly, resulted in heavy taxation of Jamaican Jews, without the permission of the English government.

The first set of taxes levied on the Jews came in 1698. The declaration, entitled "An Act for, and towards the Defence of this Island" proclaimed that the Jews must pay 750 pounds towards sloops and support constabularies. This tax was levied *in addition to taxes already in place* for all inhabitants.³³ Why Jews

were singled out to support constabularies is unknown, but it is possible that Jews were required to pay extra taxes because they did not serve in Militias or bear arms on the Sabbath, which required them to pay a fine to the Assembly, which may have then raised taxes in anger.³⁴ The Jamaican Assembly met thrice more from 1699-1700, creating new specialized taxes for the Jews, of, in sequence, 1000 pounds, 350 pounds, 437 pounds, and finally, 5250 pounds.³⁵ By today's standards, that is approximately USD \$1,041,573.³⁶ Thankfully, a new Assembly was elected before the tax of 5250 pounds was levied, and the Jews did not have to pay the outlandish tax. Despite the dissolution of the council, then-Governor William Beeston defended the policy, and Jews continued to be unfairly taxed.

However, Jews in Jamaica did not wait for a miraculous dissolution of an antisemitic assembly in order to fight back against ridiculous taxes. In 1700, Governor Beeston received a letter wherein the Jews argued that their letters of denization and naturalization granted by King Charles II and his successors were more than enough reason to end the taxation.³⁷ Beeston defended the policy until his governorship ended in 1702. In 1721, the Jews appealed their still-high taxes to a new Assembly, but presumably lost, as in 1736, they appealed *again*. In 1738, they sent a petition to King George II stressing the issues with the specialized taxes against Jews. Finally, in 1739, Governor Edward Trelawny received instructions from the King of England to dismiss the special taxes against the Jews.³⁸

Despite a 40-year-long period of specialized taxes against them, Jews saw an incredible economic gain. Jews spread out across the island following the earthquake that destroyed Port Royal. In 1692, a synagogue was founded in Spanish Town.³⁹ When Kingston was settled in 1693, it immediately gained a Jewish population, no doubt to be on the Bay of Kingston for better access to trade. (Spanish Town, as previously mentioned, is inland). Jews also saw growth in population. In 1700, there were 400 Jews on the island to 7,000 whites, but in 35 years, that number doubled, while the population of whites only grew by 600.⁴⁰ In 1720, Jews made up 18% of the population of Kings-

30. Herbert Friedenwald, "Material for the History of Jews in the British West Indies," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, no. 5 (1897): 45-101, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43058618>. 73.

31. A pastoral region in Lower Egypt, occupied by the Israelites before the Exodus. Gen. 45:10.

32. Frank Cundall, N. Darnell Davis, and Albert M. Friedenberg, "Documents Relating to the History of the Jews in Jamaica and Barbados in the Time of William III," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, no. 23 (1915): 25-29, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43057968>. 26-27.

33. Friedenwald, *Materials for the History of Jews*, 87-88. (Appendix XIV)

34. Arbell, *Portuguese Jews of Jamaica*, 19.

35. *Ibid*, 45.

36. Eric W. Nye, *Pounds Sterling to Dollars: Historical Conversion of Currency*, accessed Sunday, October 28, 2018, <http://www.uwoy.edu/numimage/currency.htm>.

37. Arbell, *Portuguese Jews of Jamaica*, 45.

38. *Ibid*.

39. *Ibid*, 27.

40. *Ibid*, 36.

ton. And, finally, in 1831, Jews received full citizenship by order of His Majesty the King.⁴¹ By 1831, Jews gained political rights. However, Jews had gained socioeconomic rights long before in Jamaica, and it was, in thanks, to the pirates that called the island home.

Pirates

Piracy is often beneficial to prosecuting nations. Privateers and Buccaneers, especially the ones on the island of Jamaica, were state-sanctioned and were allowed to practice piracy as it suited the needs of king and country. Nations permitted piracy for numerous reasons: it was profitable; merchants were able to sell pirated goods and make higher profit margins, and it was a form of national defense and espionage. Piracy was legally allowed via Letters of Marque, which were a license to outfit a ship and use it in the capture of enemy merchant shipping and to commit acts that would otherwise have constituted illicit piracy. Letters of Marque were issued to privateers in Jamaica, legitimizing the work of the pirates. Letters of Marque may have been issued to Jamaican pirates as early as July 1656. On July 1st, 1656, letters of marque were issued for six vessels:

Warrant for letters of marque against the Spaniards for Capt. Wm. Cooke, master of the Hopewell, and five other vessels, named, ready to sail with soldiers to Jamaica. [Ibid., Vol. CXXXIV., p. 4]⁴²

Recorded at Whitehall in the Calendar of State Papers, the record above details the issuing of licenses to capture Spanish shipping vessels for the ship *The Hopewell*, Captained by William Cooke, and five other vessels. Not only did the English government provide the six vessels with licenses to attack enemy ships, but they also provided them with soldiers. Alongside licensing piracy, the English celebrated it, noting their exploits as courageous. In a book published in 1672, Governor of Jamaica Thomas Lynch described the privateers of Jamaica as, “[...] Privateers, Hunters, Sloop and Boatmen (which ply about the Isle) at the least 3000 lusty and stout Fighting Men, whose courage hath been sufficiently evidenced in their late exploit, and attempt made against the Spaniards at Panama.”⁴³

41. Ibid, 47.

42. “America and West Indies: July 1656,” in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 1, 1574-1660*, ed. W Noel Sainsbury (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1860), 443-447.

43. Thomas Lynch, *A Description of the Island of Jamaica with the Other Isles and Territories in America, to Which the English Are Related ... : Taken from the Notes*

Governor Lynch describes the variances in the types of pirates on the island, differentiating between Privateers and Hunters, which may indicate a difference in legality, and also celebrates recent successes of Privateers, referencing Henry Morgan’s raid on Panama in 1671.⁴⁴ As the English authorized and celebrated the exploits of buccaneers and privateers attacking Spanish ships, merchants could participate in trade with the pirates without fear of legal retribution. Not only could Jamaica develop as a colony due to the profit off of goods received, but the English could harm a naval superpower, as well as gain valuable information about shipping schedules, and transportation of valuable goods like gold, silver, timber, and spices.⁴⁵

When the English launched an attack on the Spanish West Indies in 1655, they did not just intend to weaken Spain (and Catholic) influence in the region. When Spanish-held Jamaica fell to the English in May 1655, the English gained more than just an island stronghold in the Spanish-dominated Caribbean.⁴⁶ They gained a prime location to reap the fruits of the new world. The English wanted more than land or fortitude; the English wanted commerce and trade routes, which the Spanish wholly dominated. The value of treasure taken from the Americas during the Spanish reign ranges from \$4 to \$6 billion, value unadjusted for inflation.⁴⁷ “Treasure” included whatever resources the Spanish could pillage from the New World, including timber, spices, sugar, but most often, gold and silver. In 1535, Spain established a mint in Mexico City, and the Spanish coin became a global currency of sorts, allowing globalized trade to explode. The English did not want just a fort on an island in the West Indies; they wanted Spanish trade, and their gold, too. So the English allowed their new capital in the West Indies, a Jamaican town called Port Royal, to flourish as the epicenter of privateering and piracy in the New World.

The English acknowledged privateering and piracy as vital to the growth of Jamaica. In 1666, a record in the Calendar of State Papers stated,

of Sr. Thomas Linch, Knight, Governour of Jamaica, and Other Experienced Persons in the Said Places : Illustrated with Maps / Published by Richard Blome. (London: Richard Bloom, 1684), 42.

44. ‘Hunting’ was a common term used by pirates to reference capturing ships and prizes.

45. Kritzler, *Jewish Pirates of the Caribbean*, 207-210.

46. Stephan Talty, *Empire of Blue Water: Henry Morgan and the Pirates Who Ruled the Caribbean Waves* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2007), 19-22.

47. Ibid, 29.

[...] Reasons why the private men-of-war are advantageous to the Island of Jamaica, and how the discountenancing of them already hath and will also for the future prove prejudicial to the settlement of that island. Capts. David Martin and Murran and divers of the English privateers, on the news that the commissions against the Spaniards were called in, resolved never to return to Jamaica unless a war, but daily prey upon the Spaniards from Tortuga. [...] Two of his Majesty's nimble fifth rate frigates would do manifest service in commanding the privateers on all occasions to their obedience, making discovery of any enemies' actions and guarding the coast from rovers. There is no profitable employment for the privateers in the West Indies against the French and Dutch, and being a people that will not be brought to planting, will prey on the Spaniard whether countenanced at Jamaica or not. The Spaniards have so inveterate a hatred against the English in those parts that they will not hear of trade or reconciliation, but any of the islanders that they can cowardly surprise they butcher inhumanly. [...] If his Majesty allow two or three of his fifth-rate frigates for that service, such men should be appointed commanders as are experienced in affairs there, and of good parts and conduct, that the privateers may the more willingly go on any design with them. 2 pp. [Col. Papers, Vol. XX., No. 135.]⁴⁸

The record above states that attempting to dissuade privateering and piracy in Jamaica is futile, and it is more beneficial to not only allow 'private men-of-war,' or private warships, to work in the Caribbean, but it is even more useful to issue those private men-of-war commissions, in that it would be beneficial to the settlement of the island. In referencing two former privateers for the English (Martin and Murran), the record argues that the former privateers continued to attack Spanish ships, presumably without commissions, from the island of Tortuga.

The further record states that "[the privateers] will not be brought to planting" and "will prey on the Spaniard whether countenanced (admitted as successful) or not." By issuing commissions and letters of marque, as well as outfitting the privateers with "fifth-rate frigates," the English would allow privateers
48. "America and West Indies: August 1666," in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 5, 1661-1668*, ed. W Noel Sainsbury (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1880), 402-411.

to continue their attacks against the Spanish. They would also benefit from the commerce brought to Jamaica's shores by providing a safe haven, rather than that commerce going to another island like Tortuga, where privateers like Martin and Murran continued to operate. By allowing Port Royal to become a center of piracy, the English also encouraged trade to develop, and more merchants to move there as a result.

In Jamaica, commodities were not traded, and merchants who moved to the island did so not to take advantage of Jamaica's natural resources. When the English first conquered the island, the island was scarcely settled or planted. Jamaica had only seven sugar works in 1655 and produced "negligible quantities."⁴⁹ Sugar eventually came to the island, but in the meantime, the English utilized Jamaica's prime location in the underbelly of the Spanish West Indies. In 1671, Governor Thomas Lynch stated that less than a quarter of what was shipped from the island was grown there.⁵⁰ This indicates that there was a strong economy of exporting illegally acquired goods that did not originate from the island. Privateers imported illegally acquired slaves, sugar, indigo, timber, and minerals, then traded them with merchants on the island, who then exported those goods. This import and export of pirated goods allowed a thriving mercantilist economy to develop in Port Royal, despite the acquisition of those goods by illegal means.

Pirates also contributed to the economic development of Jamaica, not just through their bounty, but through the vast amounts of money they would spend while in port. One account from dutch Buccaneer John Esquemeling reads, "Such of these pirates are found who will spend 3000 pieces of eight in one night [...] I saw one give a common strumpet 500 pieces of eight only that he might see her naked. My own master would buy on like occasions, a whole pipe of wine, and, placing it in the street, would force everyone to drink with him; threatening also to pistol them, in case they would not. At other times, he would throw these liquors about the streets, and wet the clothes of such as walked by, without regarding whether he spoiled their apparel or not, were they men or women."⁵¹

49. Zahedieh, *Trade, Plunder, and Economic Development*, 207.

50. *Ibid*, 216.

51. John Esquemeling as quoted in Clinton Vane De Brosse Black, *Port Royal: A History and Guide* (Kingston, Bolivar Press: 1970), 21. The book, unfortunately, has no bibliography to

Regardless of the morality of these wild men, their debauchery and rambunctious spending no doubt had a significant effect on the economic growth of the island. Three thousand pieces of eight spent in one night could lead the owner of that tavern (or brothel, as is just as likely) to invest that wealth in a larger house, finer goods, a new business, land, and other such things. This cycle developed Port Royal into an economic powerhouse that benefitted not only the pirate residents of the island, but the English economy that saw prosperity in their Caribbean capital.

In a decade, Port Royal became the busiest port in the West Indies. In 1660, Port Royal saw only 20 merchant ships in a year. By 1670, it saw 100.⁵² Out of all trades represented in Port Royal inventories before 1694, merchants accounted for 133 listings, with the next most inventoried trade being mariners at 62, and carpenters following with 26 listings.⁵³ Merchants, spurred by the flow of wealth from piracy, developed Port Royal into a bustling hub of commerce. In 1668, there were eight hundred houses in Port Royal, whereas New York at the time had only 500. Port Royal had more brothels and taverns than all the other English colonies combined.⁵⁴ It had a governor's mansion, churches built in both the English and Spanish style and a Synagogue, where the majority of the island's Jewish population practiced.⁵⁵

Jews were just as integral as pirates, if not more so, to the capitalist development of Jamaica. As pirates traded with Jews and invested their wealth in Port Royal, so did Jews. Together, both Jews and Pirates turned a fledgling colony into the most prosperous port city in the New World. As a result of their role in developing Jamaica, pirates and Jews gained freedom unparalleled in the New and Old world alike.

Pirate Jews

find where this quotation came from. It is possible it came from Esquemeling's famous book, *The Buccaneers of America*.

52. Zahedieh, *Trade, Plunder, and Economic Development*, 215.

53. Marianne Franklin, "Port Royal and Jamaica: Wrought- Iron Hand Tools Recovered as Archaeological Evidence and the Material Culture Mentioned in Probate Inventories ca. 1692," in *Out of Many, One People: The Historical Archaeology of Colonial Jamaica*, James A. Delle, Mark W. Hauser, and Douglas V. Armstrong, eds., (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2011), 50, table 3.2 and table 3.3.

54. Talty, *Empire of Blue Water*; 40.

55. Mordehay Arbell, *The Jewish Nation of the Caribbean: The Spanish-Portuguese Jewish Settlements in the Caribbean and the Guianas* (Jerusalem, Israel ; New York: Gefen Pub, 2002), 231.

There may or may not have been actual swash-buckling, eye-patch wearing, sword swinging pirate Jews, but there is no denying there is a correlation between Jews and pirates. For example, Moses Cohen Henriques, was a notable Jewish pirate who operated out of the Jewish community of Recife in Dutch Brazil in the 1620s. Henriques helped captured a Spanish treasure galleon to benefit the Dutch, who moved to Jamaica and eventually submitted a petition for naturalization in 1861.⁵⁶ The petition was personally endorsed by Sir Henry Morgan, perhaps one of the most famous buccaneers of all time, who was Lieutenant Governor of Jamaica from 1674-1680. Or, in the story of buccaneer Bartholomew Portugues. Detailed in Esquemeling's *Buccaneers of America*, Portugues openly claimed Portuguese nationality at a time when the nationality was totally equated with being Jewish. Furthermore, Portugues had a common Jewish name, sailed to and from Jamaica in the 1660s, and attacked Spanish ships with little regard to profit.⁵⁷ Ed Kritzler, a historian who researched Jewish piracy for over 20 years, argues that Portugues was Jewish, but this cannot be proven, due to a lack of concrete evidence.⁵⁸

However, if one considers bankrolling or sponsoring pirate ships and privateering missions throughout the Caribbean to be participating in piracy, then the Jewish merchants of Jamaica not only participated but allowed piracy to flourish. They outfitted pirates, learned of potential targets through their extensive trade networks, and, in return, received priority to purchase prizes for trade.⁵⁹

The trade monopoly between Jews and pirates was longstanding. Jews and pirates had worked together to trade illicitly with Spanish merchants and

56. Kritzler, *Jewish Pirates of the Caribbean*, 251.

57. John Esquemeling, *The Buccaneers of America: A True Account* (New York; London: Dover ; Constable, 1967). 65-68.

58. Ed Kritzler was a historian and journalist who lived in Kingston, Jamaica. He passed away in 2010, following the publication of his book *The Jewish Pirates of the Caribbean*. I had the privilege to speak with Ainsley Henriques, former president of the Jamaican National Heritage Trust and former president of the United Congregation of Israelites, the last remaining congregation of Jews on the island of Jamaica. Henriques was Kritzler's friend and was present in the writing of Kritzler's book. In conversation with Henriques, we agreed that while Kritzler's primary source documentation and interpretation was invaluable, he tended to fit those primary sources to a narrative that may have not been totally accurate. I have kept this in mind, as I use his book extensively in my research, and have utilized his work mostly for primary source documents and to shape my own understanding of events.

59. Kritzler, *Jewish Pirates of the Caribbean*, 244-245.

colonies in Port Royal since before 1670.⁶⁰ In the 1680s, “about half the ships entering Port Royal [proceeded] to Spanish colonial markets.⁶¹ Privateers originating from Jamaica traded illegally with the Spanish, either in Port Royal or in Spanish colonies.⁶² In 1669, The ship *Mary and Jeane*, captained under Bernard Nicholas, a veteran privateer, was twice found with cargoes intended for the Spanish market.⁶³ According to Economist Nuala Zahedieh, “the captain called first at Jamaica, where the governor gave him a letter of friendship to provide a pretext for entering a Spanish port.”⁶⁴ A letter of friendship, similar to a letter of marque, allowed the privateer to semi-permissibly trade with the Spanish, despite the act being illegal. Jews also traded illicit contraband with the Spanish. In 1662, a ship sailed to Port Royal, and was co-signed by two resident Jewish merchants, Isaac Cordosa and Benjamin Muskett, was headed towards Cuba, and contained goods desired in Spanish trade.⁶⁵

With an established relationship and trade monopoly, it is possible that Jews and pirates worked together to trade illicitly with the Spanish. As Zahedieh states, there is little documentation of Jamaican trade with the Spanish because of the illegal nature of the trade. But if both privateers and Jews traded with the Spanish, it is possible that commonality strengthened their trade monopoly. If both parties had no issues trading illegally with the Spanish (whereas the English, non-Jewish merchants did), it is possible that they saw each other as a means towards a common goal of freedom.

The monopoly between Jews and pirates was another complaint addressed through petitions, as the merchants of Port Royal asked in 1672 for Governor Thomas Lynch to stop a “perfect trade monopoly” that Jews and Pirates devised together.⁶⁶ The petition read,

[...] Are emboldened to inform his honour of the prejudices and inconveniences which threaten them by the infinite number of Jews which daily

60. Nuala Zahedieh, “The Merchants of Port Royal, Jamaica, and the Spanish Contraband Trade, 1655-1692,” in *The William and Mary Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (1986): 570–93, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1923683>. 579.

61. Zahedieh, *The Merchants of Port Royal*, 576.

62. *Ibid.*, 575.

63. *Ibid.*, 576.

64. *Ibid.* The governor in this quote is Sir Thomas Lynch, who supported and endorsed piracy as well as illicit trade with the Spanish.

65. *Ibid.*, 580.

66. “America and West Indies: June 1672,” in *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies: Volume 7, 1669-1674*, ed. W Noel Sainsbury (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1889), 364-381.

resort to this island and trade amongst us, contrary to all law and policy; there being a positive Act of Parliament which gives a general proscription to them all, and others... to forbid positively any aliens to sell anything by retail. Their trading is a perfect monopoly, for they are a kind of joint stock company, and not only buy the choicest and best goods but frequently buy up whole cargoes, undersell petitioners, which they can better bear because of their own penurious way of living, and at last give the whole measure to the market.⁶⁷

While the petition makes no direct mention of pirates, it can be inferred that Jews were trading with pirates due to the fact that they traded “contrary to all law and policy,” as well as the fact that Jews “buying up whole cargoes.” If most cargos that were brought to the shores of Port Royal were by privateers and pirates, then one can infer that Jews were buying majority portions of cargoes from pirates.

The monopoly did not stop, of course, because pirates and Jews worked well together, creating a system that benefited both parties. Furthermore, the monopoly was endorsed by Governor Lynch, as he wrote in a letter alongside the 1672 petition, stating, [...] His Majesty cannot have more profitable subjects than the Jews. They have great stocks and correspondence; His Majesty cannot find any subjects but Jews who will adventure their goods or persons to get a trade. Their parsimony enables them to sell the cheapest; they are not numerous enough to supplant us; nor is it in their interests to betray us.⁶⁸

Because of Jews’ success as merchants and the wealth they brought, it was a smart financial decision to endorse their trade, despite antisemitic sentiments (such as Lynch’s antisemitic ideas of the Jews’ “parsimony”). By endorsing Jews as profitable subjects, Lynch made the Jews legitimate in the eyes of the King.

Legitimacy is a common theme in the parallel stories of Jamaican pirates and Jamaican Jews. Despite antisemitism displayed by non-Jewish colonists of Jamaica in their many petitions to remove the Jews, the Jews stayed, because they were profitable to the king. The English profited off of Jewish mercantilism, and as a result, Jews eventually gained legitimacy and citizenship. The same happened with pirates. When their skills could be exploited

67. *Ibid.*

68. *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, America & West Indies, 1669-1674*, 27, no 697. In Kritzler, *Jewish Pirates of the Caribbean*, 241-242.

for use against the Spanish, pirates were given letters of marque and were able to sail legally. Profitability and financial legitimacy allowed Jews to stay in Jamaica by the favor of the English Monarchy. Similarly, profitability and financial legitimacy allowed pirates to stay in Jamaica by the favor of the English Monarchy, despite anti-pirate sentiments.

Jews and pirates gained more than just legitimacy due to their symbiotic relationship. They each gained respective freedoms that were unparalleled in the Old World. As referenced earlier, pirates were French buccaneers and former sailors from England who left the rigid socioeconomic restraints of the Old World. In Jamaica, they ran wild and free, with an emphasis on wild. Between brothels, rambunctious taverns, and hero-like status, as well as the opportunity to become richer than they had ever been before, it is no wonder that Port Royal was often referred to as ‘Sodom’--from the Biblical Sodom and Gomorrah.⁶⁹ Nowhere else in the world was there a pirate safe-haven, and there would not be a place like it until the Golden Age of Piracy where pirate safe-havens like New Providence Island, Bahamas, Madagascar, and Blackbeard’s Ocracoke Island became more common.⁷⁰

Jews, too, gained freedom like the pirates, but instead of a lawless freedom, they gained religious freedom. In Jamaica, Jews practiced their religion openly and without shame, in a way that their brethren in the Old World were forced to hide. Unlike the crypto-Jews of Spain and Portugal, Jamaican Jews kept kosher, employed a kosher butcher, refused to do business on the Sabbath, and took their prayer shawls when they sailed.⁷¹ Whereas Jews in the Old World were allowed entrance into cities like London and Amsterdam, they still had to live quietly, and their right to remain was dependent on the ever-shifting loyalties of their monarchs. For example, Jews in London did not build a Synagogue until 1701.⁷² Jews in Jamaica built a Synagogue as early as 1688.⁷³ Jews may have been more disliked in Jamaica, based on numerous petitions to the Monarchy for their removal, but they were still able to open a synagogue decades earlier than the Jews of London, where they may have been more openly tolerated. Cemeteries, too, were a

69. Talty, *Empire of Blue Water*, 39-45.

70. Rediker, *Villains of All Nations*, 25-39.

71. Arbell, *Portuguese Jews of Jamaica*, 4.

72. David S. Katz, *The Jews in the History of England, 1485-1850* (Oxford: New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1994). 200-201. Congregation Bevis Marks was built in 1701.

73. Arbell, *The Jewish Nation of the Caribbean*, 235.

space of religious freedom. In the Old World, Jewish graveyards displayed the languages of the land they lay upon and made little to no reference to the buried person’s Judaism. In Jamaica, every single epitaph, even the earliest dated, read in Hebrew, with Hebrew months and dates marking deaths. The engravings on the tombstones are inherently Jewish, with six-pointed stars, rabbinical hand-greetings, and other common epitaphs celebrating Jewish heritage and life.⁷⁴

The names upon these gravestones is another act of religious freedom. When Iberian Jews were forced to convert at the hands of the Spanish Inquisition, their Hebrew names were all but erased from their lives. In Jamaica, Jews openly reclaimed their names that were identifiers of their religion. In Spain, Jews hid their Judaism by changing their names to common Spanish and Portuguese names. In Jamaica, Jews readopted family names such as *Cohen*, *Ben Israel*, and *Baruch*, in addition to first names of biblical Jews: Moses, Jacob, Isaac, David, and Abraham, as well as Rachel, Esther, Leah, and Sarah. This led to Hebrew-Spanish name amalgamations like Isaac Henriques Alvin, Moses de Lucena, David Hayim Nunes, or Abraham Baruch Alvares, all of whom were Rabbis in Port Royal in the late 17th and early 18th centuries.⁷⁵

While Jews still faced antisemitism in Jamaica, Jews were never removed or ostracized for their outward religious expression. The Jews of Jamaica, just like the pirates of Jamaica, made their presence vital to the establishment and continued success of the island. For their hard work, they were rewarded with rich Jewish life, both religiously and socially, that was unrivaled in throughout the world, New and Old alike.

Conclusion

By 1831, Jamaica was no longer an island haven for piracy. Pirates had either left the island with pardons granted to them by governor and former Buccaneer Henry Morgan, died, or moved on to new islands to continue their crusade.⁷⁶ It remained, however, an island haven for Jews, where they were able to express themselves fully and totally. In 1831, Jews finally received full citizenship as natural born citizens of the British Empire. Jews exploited and participated in piracy, and it bought them stability and legitimacy in the eyes of the British Monarchy. Similarly, pirates were able to live free lives, unlike the conditions they

74. Delevante, *The Knell of the Parting Day*, 86-149.

75. *Ibid*, 175-176.

76. Talty, *Empire of Blue Water*, 272-273.

faced in England or on merchant and naval ships, because their commerce brought prosperity to Colonial Jamaica, and therefore, bought pirates legitimacy.

The stories of Jamaican Jews and Jamaican pirates run parallel to each other. Jews were expelled from their homes in Europe throughout the Middle Ages and early modern period. Buccaneers were expelled from the islands of Hispaniola and Tortuga by the Spanish. Pirates and privateers escaped harsh and unforgiving conditions in the British Royal Navy and aboard merchant ships. Jews did not let the Spanish Inquisition or the antisemitism of the Old World stop their trade, their growth, or their religious expression. Pirates sought freedom in the harbor town of Port Royal, lived wildly and freely and brought wealth and a free-for-all, laissez-faire capitalism that legitimized not only the island but those who lived and traded there.

The stories of Jamaican Jews have been studied and published. The stories of Jamaican pirates have been studied and published. However, there is little academic study on Jewish Pirates or the relationship between Jews and pirates in Jamaica. By putting these two stories together, I believe I show that the history of the Sephardic Jewish diaspora is more complicated than originally established by historians. Likewise, I think the history of piracy, especially in regards to the legitimacy of piracy, is complicated.

By showing the parallel history of these two historically ostracized and vilified groups, perhaps people will think differently about not only Pirates, Jews, and Pirate Jews, but also think differently about the concepts of legitimacy and freedom. Freedom begets freedom. As pirates lived and traded freely on the island of Jamaica, so did Jews. As pirates built Port Royal, Jews built Port Royal. Maybe Jews were swashbuckling, sword-slinging, gold-hungry, Spanish-slaying pirates. Maybe they weren't. Maybe pirates didn't seek out legitimization and mercantilism. Maybe they only wanted to be swashbuckling, sword-slinging, searching for gold and slaying the Spanish. Regardless, the evidence is clear that pirates and Jews worked together to create a safe haven for each other. The island of Jamaica, between 1650 and 1800, was an island of economic freedom. Of social freedom. Of political freedom. Of religious freedom. Of pirate freedom. And, perhaps, those freedoms are one and the same. ♦

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Jews have been a recognized part of Jamaican cultural life since 1655, when Britain took power from Spain and welcomed Jewish immigration, though some date their presence here to Columbus's second voyage to the Americas. Many were successful gold traders and sugar merchants. Historic Fort Charles in Port Royal, once a hotbed of pirate activity in the Caribbean (Jessica Antola). Since 2007, Caribbean Volunteer Expeditions (CVE), a nonprofit focused on cultural preservation throughout the Caribbean, has been leading groups like mine in an effort to document this largely forgotten history by transcribing epitaphs and compiling an inventory of grave sites. Jewish pirates were those seafaring Jewish people who engaged in piracy. While there is some mention of the phenomenon in antiquity, especially during the Hasmonean period, most Jewish pirates were Sephardim who operated in the years following the Alhambra Decree ordering the expulsion of Iberia's Jews. After Jews were expelled from Spain and Portugal, many of them settled in the friendlier Muslim lands of the Mediterranean (the Ottoman Empire for example). One of the most famous Jewish pirates of Jamaica was Moses Cohen Henriques, who in 1628, led with Piet Pieterszoon Hein the only successful capture of the Spanish treasure fleet. [15] He went on to aid the Dutch capture of northeast Brazil from Portugal. [1]. Jamaica's Jewish Pirates. Having played a key role in establishing numerous successful trading posts in the new colonies of the Caribbean, Jewish privateers found common cause with the British. In 1655, Britain's Royal Navy captured Jamaica from the Spanish and subsequently turned Port Royal into a naval base. Jewish buccaneers were among the fleet of officially sponsored pirates assembled by the British in Jamaica to take the fight to the Spanish. It is possible today to see traces of the Jamaican Jewish pirate legacy if you look hard enough. Some notable places include: Hunt's Bay Cemetery. Dating from 1672, this contains the graves of Jewish pirates, marked vividly with the infamous skull and crossbones symbol.

