



IN FOCUS

SEEING HUMANS, SOCIETY & CULTURE IN GLOBALIZATION

In its third month of running this series on globalization and neoliberalism, AN focuses on the role of the media, Internet and tourism in shifting understanding of public signs and practice of cultural rituals, and the roles and responsibilities of anthropologists in these processes, as well as other social actors. Three commentaries follow.

Pirates of the Caribbean

Which Version Should We Be Listening To?

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Whether you are taking in the latest blockbuster pirate movie, or preparing for "Talk-like-a-Pirate-Day" to hit your campus in September, it's a good time to scrutinize the West's perennial fascination with pirate archetypes, from Shakespeare's Dionides in *Henry V* through Johnny Depp's Captain Sparrow in this summer's *Pirates of the Caribbean—Dead Man's Chest*. What is it about pirates that have made them so appealing to European and European-American audiences? Why has there been a resurgence of interest in pirates in the last few years?

Closer examination reveals that pirate stories serve as vehicles by which European-Americans represent, process and understand their own nation's historical roles in the Caribbean. At a time when many of us in the US are uncomfortable with roles our nation has adopted vis-à-vis the nations and people of the Caribbean, we have to ask ourselves: does pirate folklore make us feel good about license, domination and violence?

COMMENTARY

Pirates and Port Royal

In 2003 I was engrossed in a study of plans for heritage tourism attractions in Port Royal, Jamaica, the quiet fishing village where the "wickedest city of the Western hemisphere" was once situated. Port Royal was the setting of that year's *Pirates of the Caribbean—Curse of the Black Pearl*, as it has been of countless other pirate films, so it was understand-

able that I was among the throngs of movie-goers the weekend it was released—though I was the only one in the theater taking notes.

In planning for Port Royal, Anglophiles enamored with Horatio Nelson have given way to Afro-Jamaican archaeologists and other professionals who are recovering the African cultural connections in the historic records of Port Royal. Different constituencies struggle to control the way Port Royal's rich piratical history is framed. In my research I discovered that people of European descent and people of African descent have dramatically different views of piracy.

European-Derived Picture

The first element of appeal pirates have for white people is piratical license or lawlessness. A man who stages pirate reenactment festivals told me "American independence" began with pirates. "The declaration of independence," he told me, "is a pirate creed. [Pirates] were free; every man was his own man." In a study of pirates in 19th century American periodicals, Janice Hume found that fictional pirates became fearless and romantic adventurers whose "manly and independent lifestyle" was appropriate material for nursery stories. Freedom from rules is doubtless one of the metaphor's appeals for children. A recent children's picture book called *How I became a Pirate* promises that pirates do not have to eat spinach or say please.

Freedom from the constraints of domestic life is part of the European picture of pirates, in this case backed up by scholarship on early pirate writings. In his book *Sodomy and the Pirate Tradition*, B R Burg suggests that homoeroticism was part of pirate life. Literary critic Hans Turley found pirates in 18th century literature were *hyper-masculine*; even mentioning women on board pirate ships was

said to be taboo. At the same time, they are portrayed as eroticized and infused with sexual desire. A 1995 Christian romance novel entitled *Port Royal* takes place in Jamaica in the 1660s; its protagonist, "Emerald," has steamy piratical encounters.

For some European-Americans, pirates represent the forbidden and libertine possibility of an intimate connection with individuals

of *Treasure Island*, Long John Silver returns to his "old negress."

Contemporary European-American scholars have contributed to the rehabilitation of pirates by stressing their conformity to codes of their own choosing. Richard Dunn, author of the often cited *Sugar and Slaves: the Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies*, called Henry Morgan "the most authentic hero the English islands produced." Robert E Lee, professor of law at Wake Forest University, wrote a "reappraisal"



Port Royal's past as an outpost of the British Royal Navy is deliberately more obvious to tourists than its piratical past; the cast iron Naval Hospital (built in 1819) shown here is one well-known landmark. Photo courtesy of Anita M Waters

of African descent. Janice Hume found tales of pirates' conquests of "women of exotic locales." In one 1846 story the pirates "retired with great wealth, amalgamated with dusky daughters ... and raised a hybrid progeny." Pirates have "tumultuous orgies ... filled with troops of black and coffee-colored Delilahs" where the "principal charm" is the presence of "depraved women of all nations, and of all colors." On the last page

of Blackbeard in which he warns that we shouldn't judge the historical figures like the "bold" Edward Teach by current day moral standards. And who could not feel good about the pirates in Marcus Rediker's labor history *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, who espouse democracy, loyalty and egalitarianism?

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Pirates

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Finally, outrageous wealth is part of the European-American pirate construct. Port Royal was not just the wickedest, but also the richest city in the hemisphere. This historical marker at the entrance to the village refers to the "treasures of silks, doubloons and gold from Spanish ships, looted on the high seas by the notorious 'Brethren of the Coast'." One of the strongest visuals in *Treasure Island* was the mounds of coins that the adventurers needed to transport to their ship: "Day after day this work went on; by every evening a fortune had been stowed aboard, but there was another fortune waiting for the morrow."

African-Derived Version

The European-American picture of pirates stands in stark contrast to the view of pirates in black Jamaican culture, which centers squarely on the tortures, murders and other atrocities against innocent people carried out by actual pirates. In Afro-Jamaican culture, pirates are

plantation elite who controlled the enslaved labor of Africans.

According to an Afro-Jamaican student report about Port Royal, pirates are "treacherous, demeaning and deplorable," and their glorification in history books has led to higher rates of crime in contemporary Jamaica. Informal sources of Afro-Jamaican history, like literary fiction and reggae songs, uniformly eschew the romantic, swash-buckling vision of the freedom-loving pirate in favor of a more sinister, pedestrian character. The opening line of Bob Marley's well-known *Redemption Song* identifies pirates as enslavers: "Old pirates, yes they rob I/ Sold I to the merchant ship."

The Pirates of the Caribbean sequel this past summer will doubtless locate itself in "normal culture," reinforcing the European narrative of pirates: Captain Jack Sparrow will probably exemplify the free living and independent adventurer, loyal to his own personal code. Eroticized but free of familial obligations, he'll have some encounter with a "dusky daughter" or some other exotic object of desire. Caribbean cultures will be short-changed and misrepresented; that's already confirmed with the pre-release controversy about the

movie portraying Carib Indians as cannibals. Carib Chief Charles Williams of Dominica officially objected to the film, arguing that Caribs were falsely labeled as cannibals because of their fierce resistance against the first European colonizers.

I was in the theater this summer to see the new movie, with a pen and notebook of course. But I'm

They are the heads of transnational corporations that swoop in for cheap labor and leave as suddenly when more lucrative opportunities arise elsewhere, cruise ship operators who pollute the sea without consequences, and music industry moguls who take local cultural products and turn them into money-making enterprises. They run the sex-tourism businesses that

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no longer comfortable with the appeal that such pirate tales have. My research has led me to think instead about the North Americans who enjoy unbounded privileges in the Caribbean today. They operate a prison camp in Guantánamo Bay on the island of Cuba, free from constitutional guarantees that protect human rights and dignity.

cater to North American tourists. These are the 21st century pirates of the Caribbean, and they get away with murder. ■

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The Story of Nemesis and Negro Mountain

How Far Should You Go in Reading a Public Sign?

ANITA WYNN

How far should an anthropologist go to conduct further investigation into cultural meaning when there is no [open] protest to that meaning? While traveling to visit relatives in the Allegheny Mountains, I've seen a highway sign on Route 40 near the border of the Maryland panhandle and western Pennsylvania that creates a host of various reactions. The sign, which is in the middle of nowhere, reads "Negro Mountain / Elevation 2,740 feet."

From those I've casually talked to at the Sideling Hill rest stop, I've gathered that the sign has

generated plenty of private conversations as they continue on. For those who have driven through this area before, there is a cautious expression of amusement, annoyance or curiosity. But the sign has never garnered enough attention or importance for anyone to formally question the Maryland and Pennsylvania Park Services.

Anthropologists conduct studies to uncover facts and gather evidence in support of creating social change and cultural awareness, but what does one do when there is a public sign broadcasting undercurrents of past and present social problems but no one seems to want to rock the boat?

Appropriating Public Space

If this were merely to correct historical fact or debunk a myth then it might be just an interesting footnote, but in today's technological world, where the Internet

often becomes the best source of navigating through public opinion, the sign does not truly stand "in the middle of nowhere."

An online search should have enabled me to find some type of formal historical account as to why there should be this public site of memory, but in the case of Negro Mountain there is nothing concrete to legitimize the sign. African Americans who have seen the sign have expressed annoyance but the consensual feeling is that "... there are more important things our people need to be focused upon" or "well, it's in the middle of nowhere so what harm can it do?"

The few European Americans willing to discuss it simply wondered why it was there or as one stated "... well, you know, at least the sign didn't say that other word you people don't like." It reminded me of an interesting piece I read in the October 2005 issue of

Essence Magazine about the inhabitants of rural Nigton, Texas, who either refused to acknowledge or have collectively forgotten why the town was named as such.

COMMENTARY

So here we have a tourist destination: the highway sign is in memory of a man named Nemesis of which there is very little fact known. He is said to have fought alongside Colonel Thomas Cresap (of whom there is a good amount of historical documentation) against an unnamed tribe of Native Americans during the French and Indian War. In 1755, the scouting party was reported as being ambushed while looking for Indians alleged to be raiding homesteaders in the area.

Archives of the *Maryland Gazette* newspaper dated June 10, 1756, reveal the only timely reference to

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