

HISTORY 2188B:
Pirates & Piracy on The World's Seas and in the Public Imagination
Winter 2025
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Office Hours: Mondays 1pm-3pm, or by appointment



Images: Lady Cheng; Vikings; Blackbeard; Captain Jack Sparrow

This is a draft outline. Please see the course site on OWL Brightspace prior to the start of classes in January for a final version listing all required readings.

Course Description:

This course examines the history of pirates and piracy from antiquity through to the present day. Among its major themes are changing definitions of piracy; the reasons individuals, groups, and nations have practiced or supported piracy; and how pirates have been depicted in popular culture. There are no course prerequisites!

Course Syllabus:

Pirates have been the scourge of the seas since maritime trade and commerce began. From its origins in the classical period to its continued existence in the modern day, piracy has had significant economic, political, social and cultural effects on societies. The Jolly Roger, Long John Silver, the “prostitute pirate” Lady Cheng, Blackbeard and Captain Jack Sparrow have informed popular depictions of piracy and stirred romantic visions of freedom, adventure and buried treasure. This course seeks to separate myth from reality by tracing the history of piracy from antiquity through the medieval and early modern pasts to the present day.

Among the chief questions explored throughout the course will be what constituted piracy in a given era; why people ‘turned pirate’; what a pirate’s life was like; and why pirates continue to

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generate public fascination. Changes in the definition of piracy, from violent robbery at sea to theft and murder of any kind, were driven by major societal transitions such as the rise of nation-states and their projection of political, military and commercial power through permanent navies. Privateering or state-sanctioned piracy, hostage-taking and kidnapping, as well as bootlegging and terrorism, will be discussed. Were pirates radicals? Early democrats? Heroes? Villains?

The motives for turning pirate and the nature of that reality will be discerned through examining themes of race, class, gender, labour, sex, religion, and the ideals of equality, liberty and fraternity. Pirates and piracy will be examined through an interdisciplinary lens, framing questions and using methodologies from history as well as archaeology, film studies, folklore, law, literature, sociology/ criminology, visual arts, and music.

Upon completion of this course, students should have:

- o an understanding of the origins, causes and major periods of piracy in world history;
- o identified significant events and personalities in the history of global piracy;
- o assessed the impact and enduring relevance of piracy on the economic, political, military, social, and cultural history of world societies;
- o separated myth from reality through examining the depiction of piracy in popular culture (fiction, folklore, literature, film);
- o a better understanding of how to critically assess both primary and secondary sources on the extensive history of global piracy;
- o explored themes relating to the history of piracy through a variety of disciplinary approaches and methods;
- o further developed highly transferable skills of critical thinking;
- o expressed their ideas and arguments clearly and concisely in writing.

Course Materials:

There is no textbook for the course. Instead, required readings will consist of 1-2 book chapters, journal articles, illustrations and videos per week, all of which will be provided and accessible through the OWL Brightspace course website.

Methods of Evaluation:

Students must complete two in-person exams in order to pass this course.

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Midterm Exam	40%	12 February 2025	In-Class
Final Exam	60%	Date & Location:	TBA - April Exam Period

Exams

Students must write two in-person exams: one two-hour in-class midterm, scheduled during class time on **Wednesday, 12 February 2024**, and a three-hour final exam, to be scheduled during the **April Exam Period** by the Registrar's Office. Both exams will be non-cumulative and will feature two sections: one will ask students to identify and describe the significance of a choice of five of eight historical terms; and the other section will ask students to write on a choice of essay-style questions (i.e. one essay for the midterm and two essays for the final). Electronic devices of any kind (egs. phones, apple watches), are not permitted to be near or carried by the student during exams.

The **Midterm Exam** will examine students on course materials from Weeks 1 to 5 inclusive. Students should prepare their answers with reference to the relevant course materials only. Information and sources external to the course will not be given credit. The midterm exam is weighted at 40% of the final course grade. Any accommodations for this assignment will require supporting documentation.

The **Final Exam** will examine students on all course materials since the midterm exam (ie. from Week 6 to Week 11 inclusive). Students should prepare their answers with reference to the relevant course materials only. Information and sources external to the course will not be given credit. The final exam is weighted at 60% of the final course grade.

Accommodation for Missed Exams:

Make-up midterms and exams can only be approved by Academic Counselling. Please see https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program_module_information/policies.html for department procedures and requirements involving make-up tests and exams.

Tentative Course Schedule & Readings:

This course will be taught through in-person lectures and the OWL Brightspace course website. It contains all course materials and is where students will access the final course syllabus, announcements, calendar, assigned readings, exam information and their grades.

I hope this will be an enjoyable experience for you. Please let me know as soon as possible either in-person during office hours or via email if you are encountering issues or have concerns about your performance in the course. We will work towards finding a solution. Thank you for enrolling. Arrrrr!

Cap'n Dove

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JANUARY

08 – WEEK 1: Pirates & Piracy: An Introduction

Readings: TBA

15 – WEEK 2: Sea Robbers of Antiquity

Readings: TBA

22 – WEEK 3: Medieval Sea Raiders: Muslim Corsairs & Viking Invaders

Readings: TBA

29 – WEEK 4: Elizabethan Seadogs

Reading: TBA

FEBRUARY

05 – WEEK 5: Piracy's 'Golden Age', Part I: Buccaneers & the Pirate Round

Readings: TBA

12 – MIDTERM EXAM (IN-CLASS)

19 - NO CLASS: WINTER STUDY BREAK!

26 – WEEK 6: Piracy's 'Golden Age', Part II: 'The Most Notorious Pyrates'

Readings: TBA

MARCH

05 – WEEK 7: Female Pirates & Agents of Piracy

Readings: TBA

12 – WEEK 8: Pirates & Privateers of Atlantic Canada

Readings: TBA

19 – WEEK 9: Rovers of the Barbary Coast

Readings: TBA

26 – WEEK 10: Sea Bandits of China and SE Asia

Readings: TBA

APRIL

02 – WEEK 11: Modern Piracy & Pirates in Popular Culture

Readings: TBA

Please review the Department of History's shared policies and statements for all undergraduate courses at: https://history.uwo.ca/undergraduate/program_module_information/policies.html for important information regarding accessibility options, make-up exams, medical accommodations, health and wellness, academic integrity, plagiarism, and more.