



Course Syllabus: The History of Piracy

Capstone Class

Prothro-Yeager College of Humanities & Social Sciences

HIST 4993

Spring 2026

Contact Information

Instructor: Dr. Mary Draper

Office: O'Donohoe 220

Office hours: MWF: 11am-12pm; MW 2pm-3pm

Office phone: (940) 397-4455

E-mail: mary.draper@msutexas.edu

Course Description

The Capstone in History is the culmination of all history majors; it is where the student will do 'real' historical work. All history majors must take at least one Capstone in order to graduate. Students must take the Capstone during their last 30 hours and must have completed 18 hours in history before taking the class. The Capstone in History is writing intensive. The topics vary by instructor.

This semester, we will study piracy across the early modern world with a focus on the Atlantic Ocean and the Golden Age of Piracy. First, we'll consider terminology. How should we define piracy? How did it differ from privateering, marauding, and smuggling? Then, we'll turn to the people that became pirates. We'll track them as the pillaged towns, trafficked goods and people, abided by codes of conduct, and faced punishment. Why did they resort to piracy? What were their lives like? We'll also track how governments—local and imperial—responded to the actions of these men and women. In doing so, this course will touch on several important developments in the early modern world, including the rise of the British empire, the birth of global economies, the formalization of international law, and the development of the state as well as the activities of non-state actors.

Additionally, Students will research and write a 12–15-page thesis-driven paper, based on primary source evidence, on some aspect of early modern piracy.

By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

- Analyze the rise and decline of piracy in the early modern world

- Conduct original research in primary and secondary sources, synthesize that research into academic papers, and make an argument based on primary source evidence

Textbook & Instructional Materials

Marcus Rediker, *Villains of all Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004).

- Available via [e-book](#) through Moffett Library

Kris Lane and Arne Bialuschewski, *Piracy in the Early Modern Era: An Anthology of Sources* (Hackett, 2019)

- Available via [e-book](#) through Moffett Library

Optional (excerpts will be provided): Daniel Defoe, *A General History of Pirates*, ed. Manuel Schonhorn (Dover, 1999)

Additional articles, chapters, and sources will be linked on D2L and/or distributed in class.

Grading

Table 1: Percentage allocated to each assignment

Assignments	Percentage
Attendance & Participation	10%
Reading Response #1	10%
Reading Response #2	10%
Two Topics Memo	5%
Topic Proposal	5%
Primary Source Analysis #1	10%
Primary Source Analysis #2	10%
Annotated Bibliography	10%
5-7 Page Excerpt of Final Paper	10%
Peer Review of Excerpt	0%
Revision Plan	0%
First & Final Drafts	15%
In-Class Presentation	5%

Table 2: Total percentages for final grade.

Grade	Percentages
A	90+
B	80-89
C	70-79
D	60-69

Grade	Percentages
F	Less than 60

Classroom Participation

Attendance and Participation (10%): All of our classes will be discussion-based. To succeed in this class, you need to prepare for and participate in-class discussion. Come ready to talk about primary and secondary sources. If you have perfect attendance but never speak, your discussion grade cannot be higher than a C. Likewise, if you do not attend class, your discussion grade will suffer. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of class. You will be given three unexcused absences. This grade will drop one letter grade with subsequent absences. As part of this grade, you might be asked to turn in brief reflections or analyses.

Reading Response Papers

Reading Response Papers (20%): You will write two reading response papers. They are due on February 9 and February 22. These are 3-4-page papers that engage with the primary sources from the class. The prompts are listed in the class schedule.

Research Paper Assignments

You will write a 12-15 page thesis-driven research paper in this class. The paper will be broken down into eleven assignments throughout the semester. They are as follows:

Two Topics Memo (5%): (~200-250 words for each topic): Propose two potential research topics. In your proposal, explain what (or who) you are interested in studying. Moreover, you should answer the following questions for each possible topic: What questions are driving your research? What sources do you plan to use? Why does this research project matter? What does this research project reveal about your topic? This is due Wednesday, February 25.

Topic Proposal (5%): (2-3 pages): Write a 2-3 page essay that outlines your research topic, identifies the questions you hope to answer, and explains why this research is important. Unlike the Two Topics Memo, your proposal should also include an overview of the primary and secondary sources your plan to use. See the instruction sheet on D2L for more information. This is due Wednesday, March 4.

Primary Source Analysis #1 (10%): Write a 2-3 page analysis of a primary source relating to your research project. See the instruction sheet on D2L for more information. This is Monday, March 23.

Primary Source Analysis #2 (10%): Write a 2-3 page analysis of a primary source relating to your research project. See the instruction sheet on D2L for more information. This is due Monday, March 30.

Annotated Bibliography (10%): Write an annotated bibliography that includes 10-15 secondary sources. These sources must be peer-reviewed publications (academic books or journal articles) that are not assigned in this course. This is due Monday, April 6.

5-7 page Excerpt of Final Paper (10%): You will circulate a 5-7 page excerpt of your final paper for peer review. This will allow you to receive feedback from me as well as a partner before completing your final draft. See the instruction sheet on D2L for more information. This is due Monday, April 13.

Peer Review of Excerpt (0%): You will provide feedback on another class member's excerpt. See the instruction sheet on D2L for more information. If you do not complete the assignment, you will lose points off your participation grade. This due Wednesday, April 15.

Revision Plan (0%): You will submit a one-page revision plan that outlines what you will do to complete the final draft of your paper. This plan will take into account feedback from me and your peer reviewer. If you do not complete the assignment, you will lose points off your participation grade. This is due during your meeting with Dr. Draper the week of April 20.

First Draft: You will submit a polished twelve- to fifteen-page draft of a paper based on original research. It should include footnotes as well as a bibliography. This is due Monday, April 27.

Final Draft (15%): You will submit a polished twelve- to fifteen-page paper based on original research that takes into account feedback from our meeting. It should include footnotes as well as a bibliography. This is due during Finals Week.

In-Class Presentation (5%): You will deliver a 5-10 minute presentation on your research project in class.

Extra Credit

There will be no extra credit opportunities in this course.

Late Work

I want you to succeed in this course, so I am willing to accept late work under certain conditions. Please meet with me to discuss this in person.

Important Dates

- Last day for term schedule changes: January 23, 2026
- Deadline to file for graduation: February 16, 2026
- Last Day to drop with a grade of "W": April 29, 2026.
- Refer to: [Drops, Withdrawals & Void](#)

Desire-to-Learn (D2L)

Extensive use of the MSU D2L program is a part of this course. Each student is expected to be familiar with this program as it provides a primary source of communication regarding assignments, examination materials, and general course information. You can log into [D2L](#) through the MSU Homepage. If you experience difficulties, please contact the technicians listed for the program or contact your instructor.

Academic Misconduct Policy & Procedures

Academic Dishonesty: Cheating, collusion, and plagiarism (the act of using source material of other persons, either published or unpublished, without following the accepted techniques of crediting, or the submission for credit of work not the individual's to whom credit is given). Additional guidelines on procedures in these matters may be found in the Office of Student Conduct. [Office of Student Conduct](#)

Attendance

Students are expected to attend all meetings of the classes in which they are enrolled. Although in general students are graded on intellectual effort and performance rather than attendance, absences may lower the student's grade where class attendance and class participation are deemed essential by the faculty member. In those classes where attendance is considered as part of the grade, the instructor should so inform students of the specifics in writing at the beginning of the semester in a syllabus or separate attendance policy statement. An instructor who has an attendance policy must keep records on a daily basis. The instructor must give the student a verbal or written warning prior to being dropped from the class. Instructor's records will stand as evidence of absences. A student with excessive absences may be dropped from a course by the instructor. Any individual faculty member or college has the authority to establish an attendance policy, providing the policy is in accordance with the General University Policies.

Computer Requirements

Taking this class requires you to have access to a computer (with Internet access) to complete and upload your assignments. It is your responsibility to have (or have access to) a working computer in this class. ***Assignments and**

tests are due by the due date, and personal computer technical difficulties will not be considered reason for the instructor to allow students extra time to submit assignments, tests, or discussion postings.

Computers are available on campus in various areas of the buildings as well as the Academic Success Center. Contact your instructor immediately upon having computer trouble. If you have technical difficulties in the course, there is also a student helpdesk available to you. The college cannot work directly on student computers due to both liability and resource limitations; however, they are able to help you get connected to our online services. For help, log into [D2L](#).

Change of Schedule

A student dropping a course (but not withdrawing from the University) within the first 12 class days of a regular semester or the first four class days of a summer semester is eligible for a 100% refund of applicable tuition and fees. Dates are published in the Schedule of Classes each semester.

Refund and Repayment Policy

A student who withdraws or is administratively withdrawn from Midwestern State University (MSU) may be eligible to receive a refund for all or a portion of the tuition, fees, and room/board charges that were paid to MSU for the semester. HOWEVER, if the student received financial aid (federal/state/institutional grants, loans, and/or scholarships), all or a portion of the refund may be returned to the financial aid programs. As described below, two formulas (federal and state) exist in determining the amount of the refund. (Examples of each refund calculation will be made available upon request).

Moffett Library

Moffett Library provides resources and services to support student's studies and assignments, including books, peer-reviewed journals, databases, and multimedia materials accessible both on campus and remotely. The library offers media equipment checkout, reservable study rooms, and research assistance from librarians to help students effectively find, evaluate, and use information. Get started on this [Moffett Library webpage](#) to explore these resources and learn how to best utilize the library.

Services for Students with Disabilities

In accordance with Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Midwestern State University endeavors to make reasonable accommodations to ensure equal opportunity for qualified persons with disabilities to participate in all educational, social, and recreational programs and activities. After notification of acceptance, students requiring accommodations should make application for such assistance through Disability

Support Services, located in the Student Wellness Center, (940) 397-4140. Current documentation of a disability will be required in order to provide appropriate services, and each request will be individually reviewed. For more details, please go to [Disability Support Services](#).

Student Handbook

Refer to: [Student Handbook](#)

College Policies

Campus Carry Rules/Policies

Refer to: [Campus Carry Rules and Policies](#)

Smoking/Tobacco Policy

College policy strictly prohibits the use of tobacco products in any building owned or operated by MSU Texas. Adult students may smoke only in the outside designated-smoking areas at each location.

Alcohol and Drug Policy

To comply with the Drug Free Schools and Communities Act of 1989 and subsequent amendments, students and employees of Midwestern State are informed that strictly enforced policies are in place which prohibits the unlawful possession, use or distribution of any illicit drugs, including alcohol, on university property or as part of any university-sponsored activity. Students and employees are also subject to all applicable legal sanctions under local, state and federal law for any offenses involving illicit drugs on University property or at University-sponsored activities.

Campus Carry

Effective August 1, 2016, the Campus Carry law (Senate Bill 11) allows those licensed individuals to carry a concealed handgun in buildings on public university campuses, except in locations the University establishes has prohibited. The new Constitutional Carry law does not change this process. Concealed carry still requires a License to Carry permit, and openly carrying handguns is not allowed on college campuses. For more information, visit [Campus Carry](#).

Active Shooter

The safety and security of our campus is the responsibility of everyone in our community. Each of us has an obligation to be prepared to appropriately respond to threats to our campus, such as an active aggressor. Please review the information provided by MSU Police Department regarding the options and strategies we can all use to stay safe during difficult situations. For more information, visit [MSUReady – Active Shooter](#). Students are encouraged to watch

the video entitled "*Run. Hide. Fight.*" which may be electronically accessed via the University police department's webpage: ["Run. Hide. Fight."](#)

Grade Appeal Process

Students who wish to appeal a grade should consult the Midwestern State University [MSU Catalog](#)

***Notice:** Changes in the course syllabus, procedure, assignments, and schedule may be made at the discretion of the instructor.

Course Schedule:

You will find the schedule of readings and assignments below.

Day	Activities/Assignments/Exams	Readings & Due Dates
Week 1: Wed., Jan. 21 Welcome!	Welcome to HIST 4993! Please note: In this schedule, each *DAY* has its own row.	Syllabus & Course Schedule
Week 2: Mon., Jan. 26 Big Questions	What is piracy?	General Introduction in <i>Piracy in the Early Modern Era</i> (pgs. xv-xxviii) Section 1: Global Piracy and European Law in <i>Piracy in the Early Modern Era</i> (pgs. 1-8) Come prepared to discuss the questions on page 8

Day	Activities/Assignments/Exams	Readings & Due Dates
Wed., Jan. 28 Big Questions	Who owns the sea?	Excerpts of Grotius and Selden (PDF on D2L) Carla Gardina Pestana, "Why Atlantic Piracy?" in <i>The Golden Age of Piracy: The Rise, Fall and Enduring Popularity of Pirates</i> (UGA Press, 2018): 15-31. PDF on D2L
Week 3: Mon., Feb. 2 Global Pirates	The First Pirates in the Atlantic World	Section 2: Atlantic Expansion and the First Global Pirates <i>Piracy in the Early Modern Era</i> (pgs. 9-36) Come prepared to discuss the questions on page 36

Day	Activities/Assignments/Exams	Readings & Due Dates
Wed., Feb. 4 Global Pirates	What about the Mediterranean? Or the Dutch?	<p>Section 3: Pirates of the Mediterranean in <i>Piracy in the Early Modern Era</i> (pgs. 37-51)</p> <p>Section 4: The Age of Dutch Corsairs in <i>Piracy in the Early Modern Era</i> (pgs. 52-66)</p> <p>Come prepared to discuss the questions on page 51 and 66</p> <p>Reading Response #1 due: Sunday, Feb. 8</p> <p>Using at least three primary sources from the past two weeks, write a 3-4 page paper that analyzes how pirates operated before c.1650. How did they aid or hinder imperial projects during this time period?</p>
Week 4: Mon., Feb. 9 The Caribbean	The Buccaneers	<p>Section 5: The Buccaneers in <i>Piracy in the Early Modern Era</i> (pgs. 67-105)</p> <p>Come prepared to discuss the questions on page 105</p>

Day	Activities/Assignments/Exams	Readings & Due Dates
Wed., Feb. 11 The Caribbean	Henry Morgan: Pirate turned Governor	"Contesting Jamaica's Future, 1655-1688" in <i>Pirates Nests and the Rise of the British Empire, 1570-1740</i> , pgs. 102-143.
Week 5: Mon., Feb. 16 The Caribbean & Beyond	The South Sea & The Indian Ocean	<p>Section 6: The South Sea Raiders in <i>Piracy in the Early Modern Era</i> (pgs. 106-116)</p> <p>Section 7: Pirates in the Indian Ocean in <i>Piracy in the Early Modern Era</i> (pgs. 117-132)</p> <p>Come prepared to discuss the questions on page 116 and 132</p>

Day	Activities/Assignments/Exams	Readings & Due Dates
<p>Wed., Feb. 18</p> <p>The Caribbean & Beyond</p>	<p>Seventeenth-Century Piracy</p>	<p>"Natives and Intruders in Central America" in Arne Bialuschewski, <i>Raiders and Natives: Cross-Cultural Relations in the Age of Buccaneers</i> (UGA Press, 2022): 48-68 (PDF on D2L, ebook via Moffett)</p> <p>Excerpts from Alexander O. Exquemelin's <i>The Buccaneers of America</i>, pgs. 105-118 (copies to be distributed in class)</p> <p>Check out the images from this source on the Library of Congress Website</p> <p>Reading Response #2 due: Sunday, Feb. 22</p> <p>Using the at least three primary sources from the past two weeks, write a 3-4 page paper that analyzes how piracy changed over the course the 17th century. What was distinctive about this era of piracy?</p>

Day	Activities/Assignments/Exams	Readings & Due Dates
Week 6: Mon., Feb. 23 The Golden Age of Piracy	Welcome to the Golden of Piracy	Section 8: The Golden Age of Piracy in <i>Piracy in the Early Modern Era</i> (pgs. 133-148) Come prepared to discuss the question on page 148
Wed., Feb. 25	Pirate Lives	Read two biographies in Defoe's <i>A General History of Pyrates</i> (more info to be distributed in class) Due: Two Topics Proposal
Week 7: Mon., Mar. 2	Pirate Diaries	Read an excerpt from a pirate account (more info to be distributed in class)
Wed., Mar. 4	Pirates in Official Records	Activity with British History Online (in class, bring computer) Due: Topic Proposal
Mon., Mar. 9	No class. Enjoy Spring Break!	No assignments.
Wed., Mar. 11	No class. Enjoy Spring Break!	No assignments.
Week 8: Mon., Mar. 16	The Atlantic World in the Eighteenth Century	Ch. 1 in Marcus Rediker's <i>Villains of All Nations</i> (1-18)

Day	Activities/Assignments/Exams	Readings & Due Dates
Wed., Mar. 18	Life and Labor on the Seas	<p>Ch. 2 in Marcus Rediker's <i>Villains of All Nations</i> (19-37)</p> <p>David Wilson, "Protecting Trade by Suppressing Pirates: British Colonial and Metropolitan Responses," in <i>The Golden Age of Piracy: The Rise, Fall, and Enduring Popularity of Pirates</i> (UGA Press, 2018), 89-110</p>
Week 9: Mon., Mar. 23	People as Pirates	<p>Ch. 3 in Marcus Rediker's <i>Villains of All Nations</i> (38-59)</p> <p>Read two more biographies in Defoe's <i>A General History of Pyrates</i> (more info to be distributed in class)</p> <p>Due: Primary Source Analysis #1</p>

Day	Activities/Assignments/Exams	Readings & Due Dates
Wed., Mar. 25	Democratic Pirates?	<p>Ch. 4 in Marcus Rediker's <i>Villains of All Nations</i> (60-82)</p> <p>Peter T. Leeson, "The Economic Way of Thinking about Pirates," in <i>The Golden Age of Piracy: The Rise, Fall, and Enduring Popularity of Pirates</i> (UGA Press, 2018), 151-164.</p> <p>Excerpts from Pirate Codes (PDF on D2L)</p>
Week 10: Mon., Mar. 30	Smuggling in the Atlantic World	<p>Ch. 5 in Marcus Rediker's <i>Villains of All Nations</i> (83-102)</p> <p>Due: Primary Source Analysis #2</p>
Wed., Apr. 1	Women Pirates	<p>Ch. 6 in Marcus Rediker's <i>Villains of All Nations</i> (103-126)</p> <p>Read the biographies of Mary Read and Anne Bonny in Defoe's <i>A General History of Pyrates</i> (more info to be distributed in class)</p> <p>Excerpts from Read and Bonny's trial</p>

Day	Activities/Assignments/Exams	Readings & Due Dates
Week 11: Mon., Apr. 6	Ending Piracy	Ch. 7 in Marcus Rediker's <i>Villains of All Nations</i> (127-147) Douglas R. Burgess, "Trial and Error: Piracy Trials in England and Its Colonies, 1696-1723" in <i>The Golden Age of Piracy: The Rise, Fall, and Enduring Popularity of Pirates</i> (UGA Press, 2018), 75-88 Due: Annotated Bibliography
Wed., Apr. 8	Ending Piracy (Part II)	Ch. 8 & Conclusion in Marcus Rediker's <i>Villains of All Nations</i> (148-176)
Week 12: Mon., Apr. 13	Workshopping your Papers	Due: 5-7 page Excerpt for Final Paper
Wed., Apr. 15	Workshopping your Papers (Part II)	Due: Peer Review of Excerpt
Week 13: Mon., Apr. 20	No class. Meet with Dr. Draper this week.	Due: Revision Plan
Wed., Apr. 22	No class. Meet with Dr. Draper this week.	
Week 14: Mon., Apr. 27	Planning Revisions	Due: First Draft
Wed., Apr. 29	No class. Meet with Dr. Draper this week.	
Week 15: Mon., May. 4	How should we think about piracy?	In-Class Presentations
Wed., May. 6	How should we think about piracy?	In-Class Presentations