**[Daniel](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/352-daniel/" \o "Go to Daniel's profile)**

* Pyrate Captain
* http://pyracy.com/uploads/pip_pyrate_captain.gif
* [](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/352-daniel/&wr=eyJhcHAiOiJmb3J1bXMiLCJtb2R1bGUiOiJmb3J1bXMtY29tbWVudCIsImlkXzEiOjE4NzYxLCJpZF8yIjo0MDk1MDl9)
* Member
* 652 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:McLean, VA
* Interests:History, pirates, fiction, writing, writing historical fiction about pirates, jokes, games, law.

([IP: 98.169.129.53](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/modcp/ip-tools/&ip=98.169.129.53)) ·

[Posted May 29, 2012](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/&do=findComment&comment=409509) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/&do=reportComment&comment=409509)

In the past, I've often said that pirates were parasites, stealing the wealth and labor of others while contributing nothing in return. I've been especially prone to say that when arguing against Marxist types who like to see pirates as social revolutionaries, but who ignore the fact that their description of capitalists as exploiters is at least equally applicable to pirates.

But lately, I've noticed some evidence against my position, especially from the 17th-century buccaneering period. At least for food, the most basic productive need of all, pirates could be self-sufficient. Dampier mentioned that Miskito Indians who joined the pirates could feed the whole crew just by spearing manatees. And while the average pirate lacked the Miskito's skill with the harpoon, any pirate could harvest green turtles just by turning them on their backs. The book I'm reading now, Galvin's *Patterns of PIllage,* seems to suggest buccaneers continued at times to hunt wild cattle and swine even aftr moving to Tortuga.

Then also, pirates sometimes made their own trade goods by cutting logwood, and not just during the buccaneer period; Galvin says that Blackbeard himself may have been a logwood cutter before joining up with Hornigold.

The most basic need of pirates besides food was a ship, and obviously this was usually obtained by robbery (although even then, Exquemelin mentions that some Tortugan buccaneers actually hired their ships, and of course Bonnet bought his). I have not heard of pirates building any vessel larger than a periagua.

So what about pirates' other needs: vegetable food, rope and other ship's supplies, clothing, etc.? How much of that was stolen, and how much did they make or trade for? Can we say that, while the *objective* of piracy was always robbery of that which others had created, the *lifestyle* of piracy was often that of a hunter/scavenger rather than a mere robber?

* [Quote](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/)
* [Edit](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/&do=edit)

[**Fox**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1019-fox/)

* Old Twillian
* http://pyracy.com/uploads/pip_pyrate_legend.gif
* [Fox](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1019-fox/&wr=eyJhcHAiOiJmb3J1bXMiLCJtb2R1bGUiOiJmb3J1bXMtY29tbWVudCIsImlkXzEiOjE4NzYxLCJpZF8yIjo0MDk1MTB9)
* Moderator
* 2,564 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Beautiful lush Devon, England
* Interests:Nautical history of the 16-18th centuries and living history based thereon.  
    
  Shooting pirates.

([IP: 109.154.100.160](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/modcp/ip-tools/&ip=109.154.100.160)) · · 

[Posted May 29, 2012](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/&do=findComment&comment=409510) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/&do=reportComment&comment=409510)

Ooh, good question Daniel (as yours usually are). I naturally have some thoughts of my own, but I'm going to wait and see what others chime in with first.

* [Quote](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/)
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[**Swashbuckler 1700**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/20630-swashbuckler-1700/)

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* [](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/20630-swashbuckler-1700/&wr=eyJhcHAiOiJmb3J1bXMiLCJtb2R1bGUiOiJmb3J1bXMtY29tbWVudCIsImlkXzEiOjE4NzYxLCJpZF8yIjo0MDk1MTJ9)
* Member
* 1,115 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Europe
* Interests:pyrates, pryvateers, naval military and other history, different books, good movies, music (a little bit), drawing, games,...

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[Posted May 29, 2012](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/&do=findComment&comment=409512) (edited) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/&do=reportComment&comment=409512)

Good points.

Now I say what I know about pirates "helping the society" (would parasites do that?)

Many pirates had already contributed something in return as their served they nation as privateers.

And if speaking buccaneers they helped their land's economy and ports like Port Royal. And that sometimes was the case in later times as well

Captain Quelch said **"*They Should take care how they Brought Money into New England To Be Hanged for it."*** (but Quelch did not give anything to Portuquese that he robbed)

I have read (was it Cordingly's book) that Edward Low was a logwood cutter too.

In almost all ships had as far as I know (what does not sometimes mean too much :P) animals like hens or hogs.... pirate could get food in other ways as well as stealing.

**Edited May 29, 2012 by Swashbuckler 1700**

* [Quote](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/)
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* [Options](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/#elControls_409512_menu)

[**Mission**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1929-mission/)

* Goat Specialist
* http://pyracy.com/uploads/pip_immortal_pyrate.gif
* [](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1929-mission/&wr=eyJhcHAiOiJmb3J1bXMiLCJtb2R1bGUiOiJmb3J1bXMtY29tbWVudCIsImlkXzEiOjE4NzYxLCJpZF8yIjo0MDk1MTV9)
* Admin
* 5,082 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Monroe, MI
* Interests:Scholarly piracy, designing and creating haunted house rooms and props, movies, abstract thinking, abstruse thinking, obstructive thinking, ideating, random thinking, movies, cartoons, movies, movies scores, cycling, world peace and small furry dogs, movies, writing, drawing, personal skills training, gremlins and, of course, lest I forget, movies.

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[Posted May 29, 2012](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/&do=findComment&comment=409515) (edited) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/&do=reportComment&comment=409515)

I can't speak to the buccaneers specifically since they don't interest me as much as the Golden Age pirates and I don't retain a lot of their info.

However, Captain Nathaniel Uring had this to say about the Logwood cutters while he was shipwrecked in Honduras Bay.

“The Wood-Cutters are generally a rude drunken Crew, some of which have been Pirates, and most of them Sailors; their chief Delight is in drinking; and when they broach a Quarter Cask or a Hogshead of Wine, they seldom stir from it while there is a Drop left: It is the same thing when they open a Hogshead of Bottle Ale or Cyder, keeping at it sometimes a Week together, drinking till they fall asleep; and as soon as they awake, at it again, without stirred off the Place. Rum Punch is their general Drink, which they’ll sometimes sit several Days at also; they do most Work when they have no strong Drink, for while the Liquor is moving they don’t care to leave it.” (Uring, p. 241-2)

I don't know if I'd call that the Marxist ideal. In fact, it is more in the spirit of Marx's "opiate of the masses" comment.

I can give you a lot of accounts of pirates stealing goods and food but not nearly as many of them gathering it. But, again, not the buccaneers, the Golden Age pirates (as Foxe defined them in another post.) There are also some curiously vague references to pirates "trading" for the stuff they need, although sometimes the trade was a promise and not an actual good. Of course, the *General History* (where I found this) is decidedly biased against the real pirates as being anything other than scheming lowlifes, so that may not be the best source.

Still, I always sort of viewed (GA) pirates as being opportunists who got whatever they needed however they could get it to sustain themselves. If that meant trading, they traded. If it meant harvesting, they harvested. If it meant stealing, they stole. There are more than a few examples of desperate pirates resorting to pretty base behaviors to sustain themselves. (Think 'shoe leather'...)

**Edited May 29, 2012 by Mission**

* [Quote](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/)
* [Edit](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/&do=editComment&comment=409515)
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[**Grymm**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/10793-grymm/)

* First Mate
* http://pyracy.com/uploads/pip_1st_mate.gif
* [](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/10793-grymm/&wr=eyJhcHAiOiJmb3J1bXMiLCJtb2R1bGUiOiJmb3J1bXMtY29tbWVudCIsImlkXzEiOjE4NzYxLCJpZF8yIjo0MDk1MTZ9)
* Member
* 281 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Chilterns UK
* Interests:Stuff

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[Posted May 29, 2012](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/&do=findComment&comment=409516) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/&do=reportComment&comment=409516)

On 5/29/2012 at 10:48 AM, Mission said:

. If it meant stealing, they stole.

Even raiding fishing fleets and robbing the fishermen of their hard earned catch when times got hard ...

* [Quote](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/)
* [Edit](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/&do=editComment&comment=409516)
* [Options](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/#elControls_409516_menu)

[**Fox**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1019-fox/)

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* Moderator
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[Posted May 29, 2012](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/&do=findComment&comment=409517) (edited) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/&do=reportComment&comment=409517)

I'm going to ignore buccaneers here, because I think they're a totally different kettle of fish to pirates of the golden age, for reasons I've given several times elsewhere.

On 5/29/2012 at 7:42 AM, Daniel said:

Then also, pirates sometimes made their own trade goods by cutting logwood, and not just during the buccaneer period; Galvin says that Blackbeard himself may have been a logwood cutter **before** joining up with Hornigold.

I've highlighted this because I think it's an important point. I don't know of any really decent evidence about what Blackbeard did before turning to piracy, but it's more or less irrelevant - he, and every other pirate of the golden age, must have done something, whether logwood cutting or privateering. A significant porportion were seamen on merchant ships and at least a few that we know of were in the Royal Navy. But they weren't pirates when they did it.

What's important is what they did *after* they became pirates.

Most (all?) pirates robbed passing ships of their provisions at some time or another. Not just provisions but clothing and ships' equipment too, and of course, of their cargoes and portable wealth. This is the act of a parasite.

But pirates, like everyone else, were unable to live entirely outside the economy of legitimate commerce, and when they traded with passing ships, which they did on a fairly regular basis, they were symbiotes. Colonial merchants in particular often found trading with pirates to be highly profitable because pirates, disbarred from most normal legitimate markets, were usually willing to pay top dollar, and the extra profit was worth the risk for many people. The trade which occurred at sea between pirates and unscrupulous merchants is naturally one of the grey areas of history, because neither side was much interested in keeping detailed records, but there are enough glimpses for us to know that it occurred.

In 1718, for example, an unnamed ship set out from New Providence specifically to trade with pirates anchored nearby: we know about it because they were caught. In the same year one North American colonial official wrote to the Council of Trade and Plantations that '*the Pirates themselves have often told me that if they had not been supported by the Traders from thence with Ammunition and Provisions according to their Direction, they could never have become so formidable, nor arrived to that degree that they have*.'

Earlier, in the 1690s, Adam Baldridge's trading post on St. Mary's conducted a flourishing trade with the pirates based there, but the profits went back to New York, from where Baldridge was supplied by NY merchant Frederick Phillipse.

On occasion pirates traded directly with merchants on land, the most spectacular example of which is probably Blackbeard's importation of 50+ slaves into North Carolina in 1718. North Carolina was a plantation colony in desperate need of slaves, but had no slave market of its own nor any established deep-water port through which slaves might be imported, so Blackbeard supplied a very definite niche in the market. Without him, NC planters had to purchase their slaves from South Carolina or Virginia, in both of which places they found the slaves poor quality and expensive. There is also evidence that England, la Buse and Cocklyn gathered several hundred slaves which they intended to sell to the Portuguese at Principe, until Howell Davis's little (and fatal) interlude there shut that market to pirates.

Then, of course, pirates who were lucky enough to retire with a pocket full of gold (and there were probably more of them than is generally acknowledged) usually attempted to get ashore somewhere, where their gold eventually found its way into the legitimate economy. When four pirates managed to get ashore in Virginia in 1720, for example:

*'their first care was to find out a Tavern, where they might ease themselves of their Golden Luggage. They soon found a place to their mind, where for some time they lived very profusely treating all that came into their Company, and there being in the House English Women Servants, who had the good fortune by some hidden Charms, to appear pleasing to these Picaroons, they set them free, giving their Master 30 Pounds, the price he demanded for their time. Their Extravagant way of living soon discovered they were not Passengers from London, as they pretended, but rather Pyrates, accordingly they were taken up and Commited on suspicion, as such, to the County [Jail].*' [*American Weekly Mercury*, 17/3/1720]

Thomas Tew's company were well known for the amount of money they spent in New York, and the companies of Edward Condent, John Taylor, and Henry Every all managed to retire in the colonies or Britain with substantial amounts of money to their credit.

So, as Daniel said in the original post (more or less) I think the *aim* of pirates was to be parasitic, but the *reality* is that they were symbiotic. (And for the Marxists out there, just as capitalist as anybody else).

**Edited May 29, 2012 by Foxe**

* [Quote](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/)
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[Posted May 29, 2012](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/&do=findComment&comment=409519) (edited) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/&do=reportComment&comment=409519)

Robbing the rich and giving to it the barmaid ... in exchange for beer and or a knee trembler behind the jakes.

**Edited May 29, 2012 by Grymm**

* [Quote](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/)
* [Edit](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/&do=editComment&comment=409519)
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* Location:Europe
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Is picaroo so old term?

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* [Options](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/#elControls_409523_menu)

[**James Smythe**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/14991-james-smythe/)

* Ship's Master
* http://pyracy.com/uploads/pip_shipsmaster.gif
* [](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/14991-james-smythe/&wr=eyJhcHAiOiJmb3J1bXMiLCJtb2R1bGUiOiJmb3J1bXMtY29tbWVudCIsImlkXzEiOjE4NzYxLCJpZF8yIjo0MDk1MjZ9)
* Member
* 175 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Where the winds may take me.
* Interests:Pyrates, ukulele, beaches, bowling, reading, video games

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[Posted May 29, 2012](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/&do=findComment&comment=409526) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/&do=reportComment&comment=409526)

I remember reading something about Roberts dealt heavily with traders. Off to find out where I read it.

* [Quote](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/)
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* Interests:Scholarly piracy, designing and creating haunted house rooms and props, movies, abstract thinking, abstruse thinking, obstructive thinking, ideating, random thinking, movies, cartoons, movies, movies scores, cycling, world peace and small furry dogs, movies, writing, drawing, personal skills training, gremlins and, of course, lest I forget, movies.

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[Posted May 29, 2012](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/&do=findComment&comment=409528) (edited) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/&do=reportComment&comment=409528)

Oh, that reminds me - there are several accounts of people bringing alcohol to Madagascar and the African coast to trade/sell with the successful pirates. I read that in the *General History* as well as in several of the merchant captain's sea journals.

To say anyone in as large a group as this was could be completely parasitic would be sort of absurd. If you have goods, they eventually enter the regular stream of commerce one way or another. (Today we call it laundering money.)

**Edited May 29, 2012 by Mission**

* [Quote](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/)
* [Edit](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/&do=editComment&comment=409528)
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[**Tartan Jack**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/4587-tartan-jack/)

* Notorious Pyrate
* http://pyracy.com/uploads/pip_notorious_pyrate.gif
* [](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/4587-tartan-jack/&wr=eyJhcHAiOiJmb3J1bXMiLCJtb2R1bGUiOiJmb3J1bXMtY29tbWVudCIsImlkXzEiOjE4NzYxLCJpZF8yIjo0MDk1MzB9)
* Member
* 908 posts
* Location:South Carolina
* Interests:History, Scotland, Batman, Cars, and more<br />Married with 2 kids<br />

([IP: 74.181.91.31](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/modcp/ip-tools/&ip=74.181.91.31)) · · 

[Posted May 29, 2012](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/&do=findComment&comment=409530) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/&do=reportComment&comment=409530)

Goods with no real personal need are useless. They must trade them for something they can use.

That includes "riches" one can't spend. They become so much junk metal and rock, even if pretty.

* [Quote](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/)
* [Edit](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/&do=editComment&comment=409530)
* [Options](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/#elControls_409530_menu)

[**Fox**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1019-fox/)

* Old Twillian
* http://pyracy.com/uploads/pip_pyrate_legend.gif
* [Fox](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1019-fox/&wr=eyJhcHAiOiJmb3J1bXMiLCJtb2R1bGUiOiJmb3J1bXMtY29tbWVudCIsImlkXzEiOjE4NzYxLCJpZF8yIjo0MDk1MzJ9)
* Moderator
* 2,564 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Beautiful lush Devon, England
* Interests:Nautical history of the 16-18th centuries and living history based thereon.  
    
  Shooting pirates.

([IP: 109.154.100.160](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/modcp/ip-tools/&ip=109.154.100.160)) · · 

[Posted May 29, 2012](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/&do=findComment&comment=409532) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/&do=reportComment&comment=409532)

On 5/29/2012 at 4:01 PM, Tartan Jack said:

Goods with no real personal need are useless. They must trade them for something they can use.

That includes "riches" one can't spend. They become so much junk metal and rock, even if pretty.

Captain Kidd's crew once used £15 worth of myrrh to caulk their ship because they'd run out of pitch...

And yes, pickaroon goes back at least as far as the 17th century to my knowledge.

* [Quote](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/)
* [Edit](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/&do=editComment&comment=409532)
* [Options](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/#elControls_409532_menu)

[**Tartan Jack**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/4587-tartan-jack/)

* Notorious Pyrate
* http://pyracy.com/uploads/pip_notorious_pyrate.gif
* [](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/4587-tartan-jack/&wr=eyJhcHAiOiJmb3J1bXMiLCJtb2R1bGUiOiJmb3J1bXMtY29tbWVudCIsImlkXzEiOjE4NzYxLCJpZF8yIjo0MDk1MzN9)
* Member
* 908 posts
* Location:South Carolina
* Interests:History, Scotland, Batman, Cars, and more<br />Married with 2 kids<br />

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For the "riches" to be worth anything, they need a buyer who values them. The pirates only could "move" non-supplies if they had a merchant or vendor of services connection they could trade the item with to get a return.

I'd agree with Foxe that they likely intended to be parasites or on a series of personal revenges and a revolt, BUT they ended up serving an economic necessity-> namely getting goods to those desperate enough for those good to trade with criminals.

* [Quote](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/)
* [Edit](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/&do=editComment&comment=409533)
* [Options](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/#elControls_409533_menu)

[**Tartan Jack**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/4587-tartan-jack/)

* Notorious Pyrate
* http://pyracy.com/uploads/pip_notorious_pyrate.gif
* [](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/4587-tartan-jack/&wr=eyJhcHAiOiJmb3J1bXMiLCJtb2R1bGUiOiJmb3J1bXMtY29tbWVudCIsImlkXzEiOjE4NzYxLCJpZF8yIjo0MDk1MzR9)
* Member
* 908 posts
* Location:South Carolina
* Interests:History, Scotland, Batman, Cars, and more<br />Married with 2 kids<br />

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Had to take my girl to something . . .

Something I'd be interested in is the second tier of transactions by the taverns, prositutes, and other "wine, women, and song" expenses that the pirates spent their funds on and where that went.

Quite a few decades ago, Clemson University had to work to have games against Georgia Tech, as the 2 became big rivals even before they were in the same athletic conference. So, the Clemson fans would stamp their money with little tiger paws (the schools mascot and teams logo). The reason was that the residents of Atlanta, Georgia (where Georgia Tech's campus is located) could see the Clemson dollars filter around the city as they changed hands-> showing the money the Clemson-Tech football game brought to the city. Thereby, they could justify the argument of the economic impact of the game, causing it to happen more often and also fueled the interschool rivalry.

Likewise, I wonder the real-world economic impact of the pirates on the non-major populations, where the pirates COULD unload their non-personal-need goods.

* [Quote](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/)
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* [Options](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/#elControls_409534_menu)

[**Daniel**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/352-daniel/)

* Pyrate Captain
* http://pyracy.com/uploads/pip_pyrate_captain.gif
* [](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/352-daniel/&wr=eyJhcHAiOiJmb3J1bXMiLCJtb2R1bGUiOiJmb3J1bXMtY29tbWVudCIsImlkXzEiOjE4NzYxLCJpZF8yIjo0MDk1MzV9)
* Member
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* Gender:Male
* Location:McLean, VA
* Interests:History, pirates, fiction, writing, writing historical fiction about pirates, jokes, games, law.

([IP: 98.169.129.53](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/modcp/ip-tools/&ip=98.169.129.53)) · · 

[Posted May 29, 2012](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/&do=findComment&comment=409535) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/&do=reportComment&comment=409535)

When I talked about parasitism, I meant on humanity in general. The benefit pirates provided to merchants was necessarily less than the detriment they inflicted on their victims, with the pirates themselves swallowing the difference. Their plundering remained a net drain on humanity. On the other hand, logwood trees that were just standing there, cattle and pigs that were running wild, and manatees swimming freely in the sea were no benefit to any human being until the pirates harvested them, so the pirates actually produced something of value, whether for themselves or for others, when they harvested them.

Foxe, I agree that buccaneers and post-Spanish-Succession pirates were different kinds of pirates with different kinds of operating styles, and it does appear to me that the post-Spanish-Succession pirates were more parasitic than the buccaneers were. But did the later pirates abandon all the buccaneer hunting methods and logwood cutting? Was there not a considerable carryover from buccaneers to Roundsmen and from Roundsmen to post-Spanish Succession pirates? If so, why would they abandon their previous methods of subsistence? (One possible answer; Roundsmen and post-Spanish-Succession pirate crews were a lot smaller and needed a lot less food than the huge buccaneer crews).

* [Quote](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/)
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* [Options](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/#elControls_409535_menu)

[**Mission**](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1929-mission/)

* Goat Specialist
* http://pyracy.com/uploads/pip_immortal_pyrate.gif
* [](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/profile/1929-mission/&wr=eyJhcHAiOiJmb3J1bXMiLCJtb2R1bGUiOiJmb3J1bXMtY29tbWVudCIsImlkXzEiOjE4NzYxLCJpZF8yIjo0MDk1Mzl9)
* Admin
* 5,082 posts
* Gender:Male
* Location:Monroe, MI
* Interests:Scholarly piracy, designing and creating haunted house rooms and props, movies, abstract thinking, abstruse thinking, obstructive thinking, ideating, random thinking, movies, cartoons, movies, movies scores, cycling, world peace and small furry dogs, movies, writing, drawing, personal skills training, gremlins and, of course, lest I forget, movies.

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[Posted May 30, 2012](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/&do=findComment&comment=409539) · [Report post](http://pyracy.com/index.php?/topic/18761-how-parasitic-were-pirates/&do=reportComment&comment=409539)

On 5/29/2012 at 8:45 PM, Daniel said:

On the other hand, logwood trees that were just standing there, cattle and pigs that were running wild, and manatees swimming freely in the sea were no benefit to any human being until the pirates harvested them, so the pirates actually produced something of value, whether for themselves or for others, when they harvested them.

Uring's comment I cited was from the time he was shipwrecked in 1711, smack in the middle of the GAoP. He specifically says some of them had been pirates.

As for raising food, it seems to have been primarily for their own use, which again, doesn't support [in my mind] the idea that they were other than parasites as you want to define the word. However, there is this interesting comment from William Funnel's book:

“[1704] I have heard Captain *Martin* tell of some *French* Pirates who were in these Seas, that having been sometime cruising up and down, and not meeting with a sufficient Booty, and being every where discovered by the *Spaniards*, and out of hopes of getting any more; they concluded to come to this Island of *Juan Fernando’s*, they being twenty in number, and there to lie nine or ten Months; which accordingly they did, and landed on the West side of the Island; then drew there little Armadilla ashoar, and in a small time brought the Goats to be so tame, as that they would many of them come to themselves to be milked; of which Milk they made good Butter and Cheese, not only just to supply their Wants whilst they were upon the Island, but also to serve them long after…” (Funnell, p. 20-1)

But even then, he explains that they were thinking of themselves. We *are* talking about criminals here. Generally (Robin Hood excepted), criminals are self-interested and their behaviors reflect that. You sort of have to put your own interests first if you decide you're going to actively seek victims to take what is rightfully theirs.

Of course, a big problem I see is that when writers take up the subject of pirates, they usually want to emphasize the fantastic. it's good marketing. So we don't often get to read about the day-to-day stuff, like stopping off at some island and harvesting monkeys for dinner. But sometimes...

“[Avery] It was Time to consider what they should do with themselves, their Stock of Sea Provision was almost spent, and tho’ there was Rice and Fish, and Fowl to be had ashore, yet these would not keep for Sea, without being properly cured with Salt, which they had not Conveniency of doing; therefore,

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since they could not go a Cruizing any more, it was Time to think of establishing themselves at Land, to which Purpose they took all Things out of the Sloops, made Tents of the Sails, and encamped themselves, having a large Quantity of Ammunition, and abundance of small Arms.” (Johnson, 3rd, p. 56-7)

“[England] They sent several of their Hands on Shore [of Madagascar] with Tents, Powder, and Shot, to kill Hogs, Venison, and such other fresh Provision as the Island afforded...” (Johnson, 3rd, p. 118)

And then there was 'trading':

“[blackbeard] Captain *Teach*, alias *Black-beard*, passed three or four Months in the River, sometimes lying at Anchor in the Coves, at other Times falling from one Inlet to another, trading with such Sloops as he met, for the Plunder he had taken, and would often give them Presents for Stores and Provisions took from them, that is, when he happened to be in a giving Humour, at other Times he made bold with them, and took what he liked, without saying, *by your Leave*, knowing well, they dared not send him a Bill for the Payment.” {Johnson, 3rd, p. 77)

“[bonnet] In the Month of July, these Adventurers came off the Capes, and meeting with a Pink with a Stock of Provisions on Board, which they happened to

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be in Want of, they took out of her ten or twelve Barrels of Pork, and about 400 Weight of Bread ; but because they would not have this set down to the Account of Pyracy, they gave them eight or tea Casks of Rice, and an old Cable, in lieu thereof.

Two Days afterwards they chafed a Sloop of sixty Ton, and took her two Leagues off of Cape *Henry*, they were so happy here as to get a Supply of Liquor to their Victuals, for they brought from her two Hogsheads of Rum, and as many of Moloises, which, it seems, they had need of, tho' they had not ready Money to purchase them. What Security they intended to give, I can't tell...” (Johnson, 3rd, p. 94-5)

“[bonnet] He took off Cape *Henry*, two Ships from *Virginia*, bound to *Glascow* out of which they had very little besides an hundred Weight of Tobacco. The next Day they took a small Sloop bound from *Virginia* to *Bermuda*, which supply'd them with twenty Barrels of Pork, some Bacon, and they gave her in return, two Barrels of Rice, and a Hogshead of Molossus; out of this Sloop two Men enter'd voluntarily. The next they took was another *Virginia* Man, bound to *Glascow* out of which they had nothing of Value, save only a few Combs, Pins and Needles, and

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gave her instead thereof, a Barrel of Bork, and two Barrels of Bread.” (Johnson, 3rd, p. 95)

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Didn't the buccaneers take to arms in part because the Spanish kicked them off Tortuga? It seems to me they started pirating because their regular livelihood was disrupted and they were, in part, seeking retaliation.