

Book Review: Pirates of the Chesapeake Bay: From the Colonial Era to the Oyster Wars by Jamie Goodall

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Goodall, Jamie, *Pirates of the Chesapeake Bay: From the Colonial Era to the Oyster Wars*. Charleston: History Press, 2020. 160 pages. Softcover, \$23.99.

Early in her work, *Pirates of the Chesapeake Bay*, Dr. Jamie Goodall creates a dynamic and thought-provoking perspective of an often glossed over section in the academic literature. Staff Historian for the Center for Military History, Goodall breaks down the monolith of piracy in the region, elaborating that, “[t]he history of piracy in the Chesapeake is a story of relationships and opportunism, adventure, and bloodshed, and economics and politics” (p.17). Rather than an unchanging monolith, Goodall creates a narrative filled with dynamic movement and exchange between the characters, setting, conflict, and resolution of her story. Goodall positioned this narrative to be successful on different levels. Initially, *Pirates in the Chesapeake Bay* can be seen as a direct response to the current literature. Goodall examines different agents such as George Roberts, John James, and Captain Kidd as a means to illustrate the uniqueness of the individuals. Second, Goodall examines the relationships of historical characters such as pirates, smugglers, and merchants in a way that can actively engage those not extreme experts in the area. This is a vital component to Goodall’s success because all too often dissertation-turned-books can be so entrenched in the academic discourse, that they need a reading list before you can begin to understand the subject. Yet, Goodall balances these goals without sacrificing authority of the work.

In order to accomplish her lofty goals, Goodall organizes the work by different relationships over time between specific historical characters; the pirates or those opposing them. Goodall takes the time to add a timeline of conflicts to the work, in order to allow the reader to better understand the people being examined. This is not an arbitrary use of a page, but an expert addition to allow the reader to understand that nothing exists in a vacuum. These agents in the

Chesapeake Bay was affected by the world in which they inhabit as much as they shaped it. The author uses five individual parts to guide the reader along the macro-historical narrative, while making it easy to create different micro-snapshots of the role different people played. The work moves from colonial life, revolutionary agents, struggles to create a new nation, the United States Civil War, and ending in the Oyster Wars in a way that one section does not overshadow another. This is done by separating individual sub-narratives about the individuals involved in the relationship examined.

As a single work or as independent chapters, *Pirates of the Chesapeake Bay* is extremely successful. Coming out of The History Press, Goodall writes with an authority and appeal that makes the contributions of the work impossible to deny. Even as an unedited proof version, the work appeals to both a general audience and academic researchers. Goodall clearly delineates the relationships she is examining, while providing enough historiography to show the reader where the work is best situated in the academic landscape. This is a delicate act as catering to one audience too much can alienate the other. Yet, Goodall manages to keep the balance.

Goodall's work comes out of an immediate need to re-evaluate the literature of piracy in the Chesapeake. Goodall creates distinctions that previously were not made, such as pirate and privateer. Goodall sets the stage for the reader with the conflicts of the Chesapeake, from tobacco to oysters by examining the conflicts individually. By separating the conflicts, Goodall is able to create a proverbial tug-of-war game between the parties involved. The work is also able to illustrate the circumstances that faced the individual parties in the conflict and how those differences may have placed them at a greater likelihood to succeed.

Based on Goodall's goals, *Pirates of the Chesapeake Bay* is a massive success. It contributes to the literature by illustrating that piracy is more nuanced than other scholars would

admit. Yet, Goodall explains the narrative in a way that maintains a comfortable environment for laymen of the subject as well. This work should be a required addition to the reading of any historian of the region or subject matter, or anyone interested in peeling back some of the misinformation shown in popular culture about pirates.

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