

# *Pirates of the Caribbean*



The Age of Piracy started out with a lot of privateering. Privateers sailed with letters of marque and reprisal, looking for ships from a particular country (an enemy of their homeland). Not only would raids on enemy ships hurt them; the Jamaican governor who gave Henry Morgan the letter for a raid on Porto Bello, Panama, received a tenth of the plunder (Morgan himself only received five percent!). These privateers were accompanied by crews of nationals from England and France, as well as runaway slaves from the Spanish Main. In addition to attacking ships, privateers would also land, and pillage wealthy towns.

Francis Drake (d. 1596) plundered Spanish ships in the late 1500s as a privateer (he later fought the Spanish during the attack of their Invincible Armada in 1588). His biggest haul was *Nuestra Señora de la Concepción*, which he captured en route to the Philippines, with 23 metric tonnes of silver, as well as 13 chests full of coins and jewels.

Henry Morgan (d. 1688) plundered Spanish ships and settlements, his most famous attacks being Porto Bello (1668; part of the plunder was 250,000 pesos) and Panama City (1671, utterly destroying it, capturing in cash alone, 150,000 to 400,000 pesos), both in Panama.

The Spanish realized that the British and French had no reason to co-operate with Spanish shipping. Making the best of a bad situation, in 1670 they granted the British the right to occupy Jamaica, which they had occupied since 1655; and to the French, Haiti, the western half of Hispaniola, which was ceded to France in 1697 (the French called it St. Dominique, the modern day country of Haiti).

With Spain's rivals enjoying access to the sugar islands of the Caribbean, as well as (unauthorized) access to trading with the Latin American colonists, these rivals realized that they now had something to lose with privateering and piracy, and withdrew support for these ventures.

Most of the famous Pirates of the Caribbean (Blackbeard, Captain Kidd, Black Bart, et al.) died in the early 1700s, as they were tracked down by the various colonial powers.