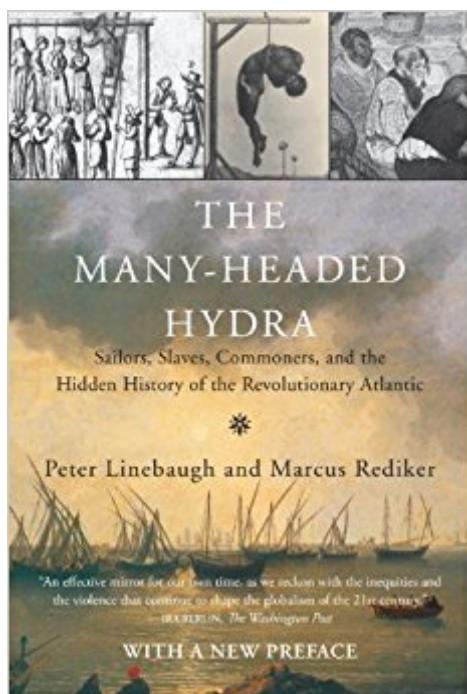


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The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, And The Hidden History Of The Revolutionary Atlantic



Synopsis

Winner of the International Labor History Award

Long before the American Revolution and the Declaration of the Rights of Man, a motley crew of sailors, slaves, pirates, laborers, market women, and indentured servants had ideas about freedom and equality that would forever change history. The Many Headed-Hydra recounts their stories in a sweeping history of the role of the dispossessed in the making of the modern world. When an unprecedented expansion of trade and colonization in the early seventeenth century launched the first global economy, a vast, diverse, and landless workforce was born. These workers crossed national, ethnic, and racial boundaries, as they circulated around the Atlantic world on trade ships and slave ships, from England to Virginia, from Africa to Barbados, and from the Americas back to Europe. Marshaling an impressive range of original research from archives in the Americas and Europe, the authors show how ordinary working people led dozens of rebellions on both sides of the North Atlantic. The rulers of the day called the multiethnic rebels a 'hydra' and brutally suppressed their risings, yet some of their ideas fueled the age of revolution. Others, hidden from history and recovered here, have much to teach us about our common humanity.

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Customer Reviews

Globalism is nothing new, argue leftist historians Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker. Centuries ago, European trade concerns, such as the Dutch East Indies Company and the Virginia Company, sought to create an overseas empire owned by corporations, not governments. Backed by

governments all the same, these companies found themselves opposed only by a congeries of revolutionary sailors, artisans, farmers, and smallholders, who formed a "many-headed hydra" of resistance. Arguing that this history of resistance to globalism has been unjustly overlooked, Linebaugh and Rediker delineate key episodes. When, for instance, a group of English sailors and common laborers were shipwrecked on the island of Bermuda en route to America, they created their own communal government, which was so pleasant to them that they refused to be "rescued" and had to be removed to the colonies by force. Their ideological descendants later banded with runaway slaves and other discontents to form multi-ethnic, multilingual pirate navies that hindered the transatlantic traffic in metals, jewels, and captive humans. Some of the men and women involved in these pirate bands, this "Atlantic proletariat," put their skills at the service of the American Revolution, which, in the author's view, "ended in reaction as the Founding Fathers used race, nation, and citizenship to discipline, divide, and exclude the very sailors and slaves who had initiated and propelled the revolutionary movement." The fire of rebellion soon spread all the same, they note, to such places as Haiti, Ireland, France, even England, helped along by these peripatetic and unsung rebels. Linebaugh and Rediker's book is provocative and often brilliant, opening windows onto little-known episodes in world history. --Gregory McNamee --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Deriding the "historic invisibility" of their subjectsA"the multiethnic class that was essential to the rise of capitalism and the modern, global economy"ALinebaugh (The London Hanged), professor of history at the University of Toledo, and Rediker (Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea), associate professor of history at the University of Pittsburgh, reveal that throughout the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, mobile workers of all sortsAmaids, slaves, felons, pirates and indentured farm handsAformulated ideas about freedom and justice that would eventually find expression in the American Revolution. The moneymen thought of themselves as noble heirs to Hercules, "symbol of power and order," and referred to the people they mobilized across continents as "hydra," after Hercules's many-headed foe. During these early days of intercontinental commerce, there were many small rebellions, and Linebaugh and Rediker's book is especially valuable for its rich descriptions of the lesser-known revolts, including one by slaves in New Jersey who "conspired to kill their masters," burn their property and make off with their horses in 1734, and another by Native American whalers who tried to torch Nantucket in 1738. The authors also describe the March 1736 "Red String Conspiracy": 40 to 50 Irish felons, who planned to burn Savannah, kill all the white men and escape with a band of Indians (the conspirators wore red string around the right wrist to identify

themselves). Their plot was foiled but caused great unrest in Savannah. This book provides a unique window onto early modern capitalist history. The authors are to be commended not only for recovering the voices of obscure folk, but also for connecting them to the overarching themes of the age of revolution. 50 b&w illus. not seen by PW. (Oct.) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

It shows the inside out and ugly side of just how we came about. The use of slaver, where it became racialized (black, brown, red only eventually) how it was used. The philosophy of terror formulated by the likes of Sir Francis Bacon, to decapitate the hydra. What they called the multifarious groups against their enterprise of Capitalism (fledgling), empire, slavery and terror used to destroy the commons, separate and destroy those pockets and undercurrent of rebellion against all those notions promulgated by the powers including the Christian church and its concepts of dominion and slavery as being god given. How Hercules, who slain the hydra was picked as an example of their hero, the one that cut off the heads of the hydra and burned the necks to stop regeneration. How they were metaphorical symbols of their work to remake the wild lands of the Americans and at the same time drain their lands of the people and ideas they found so disagreeable. An excellent addition to any personal library on history and human rights and the foundations of imperial thinking still alive and well in places like the USA. Are you part of the Hydra or with Hercules?

"The Many Headed Hydra" by Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker is an exceptionally well-written and enlightening history of early capitalism. The authors offer a bottom-up theory of resistance and describe the conditions by which the modern nation state was founded as a solution to the problem of proletariat self-rule. Short narratives, biographies and illustrations of key events and individuals are framed within a discussion of the historical forces of the era, making the book an interesting, thought provoking and entertaining read. Linebaugh and Rediker describe the brutal process of primitive accumulation where the poor were forced off the land to create the proletariat class. The newly-dispossessed were disciplined harshly and made to labor for the benefit of the investor class. However, the pervasive "culture of fear" that was "indispensable to the creation of labor-power as a commodity" eventually led to revolt, first with the English Civil War in the 1640s and later throughout the colonial system. The authors spotlight individuals who made the case for the rights of all people, including Edward Despard, James Naylor, Tom Paine, Thomas Spence and Robert Wedderburn. These voices articulated the desires of the masses to achieve equality and social justice. As these rights were consistently denied, the seeds of discontent and rebellion were planted. When not

organizing resistance against empire, many chose piracy, formed their own renegade communities, or chose to live among the Native Americans. In this light, the authors present the American Revolution as a cooptation of the democratic movement. Capitalist property and wage relations were legislated in a manner that secured elitist privilege. Race, sex and class effectively served to split the proletariat into factions that could be politically controlled. The nation state thus was born as an instrument to empower the bourgeoisie and channel the energies of the masses towards capitalist accumulation. The unique value of this book is its convincing argument that the world we know may have turned out very differently. This tantalizing possibility is just one reason why "The Many-Headed Hydra" is an intriguing read. I highly recommend it to all.

This book is a great introduction to the history of social movements. It breaks things down to explain major historical events and how they relate back to one reoccurring theme. History surely repeats itself - what you learn from this book can be applied to the world today.

A thoughtful look at the era from an Atlantic perspective.

One of the rare histories dealing with this subject.

Having been a student of this man let me first begin that he is an intensely interesting and random man that will go from discussing global capitalism to treks on the Punjab in almost Colonel Kirk esq (Apocolypse Now) prose. It would jump and be jumbled but strangely in my mind completely coherent. It amazes me that he was capable of self editing given his nature. The man is just so inquisitive. Brilliant. As the book is concerned, I believe that this is essential reading to economic history. Death of the Commons...Marcus Rediker...also brilliant and in the same vein of labor history. The spirit of humanity. Both of these authors speak to history in a "non-contemporary" way in the Howard Zinn vein. I cannot give higher compliments.

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