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Carl E. Swanson

AS Alexander Hamilton, the Maryland physician, traveled the Atlantic coast from Annapolis to Maine and back in 1744, he discovered a widespread and very active interest in privateering. In Philadelphia he witnessed a large, colorful parade, complete with "flags and ensigns taken from privateer vessels," that greeted Britain's proclamation of war against France and the imperial government's call to Americans to join the contest by sending out private men-of-war.¹ In Boston he

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¹ Carl Bridenbaugh, ed., *Gentleman's Progress: The Itinerarium of Dr. Alexander Hamilton, 1744* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1948), 25. Privateering in early America has attracted little attention from historians. A number of specialists in naval history and imperial warfare have either dismissed its importance or largely ignored it. See, for example, H. W. Richmond, *The Navy in the War of 1739-48*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, 1920), and Douglas Edward Leach, *Arms for Empire: A Military History of the British Colonies in North America, 1607-1763* (New York, 1973). Business historians have discussed the subject only as a peripheral concern. Examples include W. T. Baxter, *The House of Hancock: Business in Boston, 1724-1775* (Cambridge, Mass., 1945); Virginia D. Harrington, *The New York Merchant on the Eve of the Revolution* (New York, 1935); and Ralph Davis, *The Rise of the English Shipping Industry in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (London, 1962). The "new economic" historians have suggested that privateering declined and was "eliminated" in the 18th century. See James F. Shepherd and Gary M. Walton, *Shipping, Maritime Trade, and the Economic Development of Colonial North America* (Cambridge, 1972), 80-90, and Douglass C. North, "Sources of Productivity Change in Ocean Shipping, 1600-1850," *Journal of Political Economy*, LXXVI (1968), 953-970.

Exceptions to the tendency to discount privateering and prizes include Julian Gwyn, *The Enterprising Admiral: The Personal Fortune of Admiral Sir Peter Warren* (Montreal, 1974), and Daniel A. Baugh, *British Naval Administration in the Age of Walpole* (Princeton, N.J., 1965), both focusing on the lucrative nature of prize money for naval officers. John Franklin Jameson, ed., *Privateering and Piracy in the Colonial Period: Illustrative Documents* (New York, 1923), is an extremely useful collection of source materials. Richard Pares explores the economic, military, and

viewed a privateer under construction and a recently captured French prize.² He acknowledged Newport's enterprise when he visited there: "In time of war this place is noted for privateering, which business they carry on with great vigour and alacrity."³ Newport's interest in privateering extended from the city's harbor to its salons; after attending a meeting of the Philosophical Club, Hamilton noted his surprise at finding that "no matters of philosophy were brought upon the carpet. They talked of privateering and building of vessels."⁴ Dinner conversations throughout his journey turned to privateers and prizes—so much so, indeed, that at a supper attended by many of New York City's political luminaries (among them Stephen Bayard, New York's mayor; James DeLancey, the colony's chief justice; and Daniel Horsmanden, city recorder), the conversation bored Hamilton: "The table chat run upon privateering and such discourse as has now become so common that it is tiresome and flat."⁵ Such lively enthusiasm for privateering was widely shared throughout America. Every colonial governor encouraged the fitting out of private men-of-war. Assemblies loaned arms and ammunition to owners of privateers. Merchants in every leading port invested in the seafaring predators, while thousands of mariners enlisted to serve on board.

This article examines British colonial privateering during the wars of 1739-1748 and explores its importance at mid-century. (These dates span two wars commonly called the War of Jenkins's Ear and King George's War.) By 1739, the colonies had grown from Britain's outposts into considerable cities, towns, and agricultural communities. Despite increases in imperial institutions, economic growth, and naval and military strength, private men-of-war still played the important role that had

legal dimensions of Caribbean privateering in *War and Trade in the West Indies, 1739-1763* (Oxford, 1936), and *Colonial Blockade and Neutral Rights, 1739-1763* (Oxford, 1938). J. S. Bromley examines 18th-century European privateering in "The Channel Island Privateers in the War of the Spanish Succession," *La Société Guernesaise, Transactions for the Year 1949*, XIV (1950), 444-478, and "The French Privateering War, 1702-13," in H. E. Bell and R. L. Ollard, eds., *Historical Essays, 1600-1750: Presented to David Ogg* (London, 1963), 203-231.

Recent works such as James G. Lydon's *Pirates, Privateers, and Profits* (Upper Saddle River, N.J., 1970) and Jerome R. Garitee's *The Republic's Private Navy: The American Privateering Business as Practiced by Baltimore during the War of 1812* (Middletown, Conn., 1977) analyze the impact of privateering on the economies of New York and Baltimore respectively. These books improve on earlier accounts that concentrate on the exploits of swashbuckling captains seeking fame and riches. Such works include William P. Sheffield, *Privateersmen of Newport . . .* (Newport, R.I., 1883); Edgar Stanton Maclay, *A History of American Privateers* (New York, 1899); and Howard M. Chapin, *Rhode Island Privateers in King George's War, 1739-1748* (Providence, R.I., 1926).

² Bridenbaugh, ed., *Gentleman's Progress*, 136, 141.

³ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 173.

characterized earlier intercolonial conflicts. Privateering was extensive whether measured by the ports that participated, the number of private men-of-war that embarked on cruises, or the merchants, captains, and seamen who sought prizes. The privateers' scope of operations was also impressive. They sailed throughout the decade and pursued enemy merchantmen from the Grand Banks to the Caribbean. Indeed, privateering operations played *the* leading role in America's war effort and made a major contribution to British sea power by disrupting Spanish and French commerce. To understand the nature and impact of imperial warfare, it is essential to examine privateering.

Thousands of accounts in colonial newspapers from Boston to Barbados provide the principal evidential base for this study. Editors devoted considerable attention to engagements and captures involving British colonial privateers and merchantmen, as well as to the exploits of Spanish and French private men-of-war. Press reports presented many narratives of prize actions.⁶ Americans read, for example, how Capt. Richard Jefferies in the New York brig *Greyhound* had captured the French ship *Rosanna* and how Thomas Gruchy, commander of the Boston privateer *Queen of Hungary*, had seized the French ship *Valliant*.⁷ Articles frequently included such historically valuable information as the names of the privateer commander and vessel, the home port, the type of vessel (schooner, sloop, ship, etc.), the number of crew and ordnance, the nationality and destination of the captured prize and the composition of its cargo, the place of action, and a narrative of the engagement. Press reports are extant for the whole period of the conflict, while other documentary materials are extremely sparse.⁸ The information from the newspapers

⁶ A prize action is defined as an encounter between a vessel of force (privateer, naval vessel, colonial coast-guard vessel) and an enemy craft. An action succeeded when the latter was captured, whether by armed struggle or by surrender at the approach of a predator. Each prize action constitutes a case in the data file; each report that a privateer was embarking on a cruise also constitutes a case.

⁷ For the *Greyhound*'s capture see *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), May 28, 1747; the *Queen of Hungary*'s action was reported *ibid.*, May 9, 1745. Boston's Old North Church contains a plaque commemorating Capt. Gruchy's exploits and his gift of four beautifully carved wooden statues. The plaque reads: "In memory of Thomas James Gruchy Junior warden of the Church and Merchant adventurer from Jersey who in parlous times as Captain of the Privateer Queen of Hungary took from a French ship in the year 1746 the four figures of cherubim now in front of the organ[.]"

⁸ The scarcity of source materials (other than newspapers) poses a serious problem for the study of early American privateering. Many valuable records—ships' journals, vice-admiralty court documents, crew lists, owners' papers—are no longer extant. As a result, the press is the best documentary base. Although newspapers are available for the major North American ports, there are gaps. Newport, R.I., a leading privateering center, had no newspaper until 1758. West Indian newspapers are largely missing for 1739-1748. In addition, no issues of the *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg) have survived for 1741-1744 and 1747-1748, and many issues are missing for 1740, 1745, and 1746.

yields a data file containing 3,973 instances of prize actions during the wars of 1739-1748.⁹ (See Table I.)

I

All the leading ports in British North America and the British West Indies fitted out private men-of-war. Each port's activity can be assessed in different ways. For instance, one might count the private men-of-war that sailed from each city, but this would fail to cover repeated cruises by individual privateers. Alternatively, one might count the prizes captured by a city's privateers, but this would not necessarily indicate the commitment of a city's resources to privateering, since a few skillful or lucky commanders from one port might seize several prizes while another's larger fleet sailed home empty-handed.

The absence of a newspaper in Newport and missing issues elsewhere may result in understating the activities of Rhode Island and West Indian privateers. This is not a serious problem since papers in different cities printed essentially the same news items. Colonial (and British) periodicals circulated widely along the Atlantic seaboard, and editors often reprinted each others' stories. Numerous accounts with West Indian and Newport datelines appeared in Boston or New York or Charles Town newspapers; reports of prize actions frequently appeared verbatim in the *Boston News-Letter*, the *New-York Weekly Post-Boy*, or the *South-Carolina Gazette* (Charleston). Duplicate reports were, of course, rigidly excluded from the data file. For a discussion of colonial newspapers see Warren Bertram Johnson, "The Content of American Colonial Newspapers Relative to International Affairs, 1704-1763" (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1962), 135-136, 452.

⁹ In addition to newspapers, the vice-admiralty court records of Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina provide cases, as do Rhode Island Admiralty Lists and bonds for Rhode Island letters of marque. British prize law required privateers to escort prizes to British ports for vice-admiralty adjudication. Failure to do so constituted the crime of piracy. See 6 Anne, c. 37 (1708), 13 Geo. II, c. 4 (1740), and 17 Geo. II, c. 37 (1744), in Danby Pickering, ed., *The Statutes at Large* . . . (Cambridge, 1762-1807), XI, 433-443, XVII, 360-370, XVIII, 252-263. If they were complete, vice-admiralty court records would constitute the ideal source for studying privateering. Unfortunately, such is not the case. Almost no records for the British West Indian courts, the busiest tribunals, exist for the period before the American Revolution. See Michael Craton, "The Role of the Caribbean Vice Admiralty Courts in British Imperialism," *Caribbean Studies*, XI (July 1971), 5-20. Many mainland vice-admiralty records are also missing. Many were destroyed in Boston, for example, in 1765 when a mob attacked Register of the Admiralty William Story's office during the Stamp Act crisis. See Hiller B. Zobel, *The Boston Massacre* (New York, 1970), 33.

The data file is discussed in detail in Carl Eliot Swanson, "Predators and Prizes: Privateering in the British Colonies during the War of 1739-1748" (Ph.D. diss., University of Western Ontario, 1979), 338-402. The file was constructed and analyzed using Norman H. Nie *et al.*, *SPSS: Statistical Package for the Social Sciences*, 2d ed. (New York, 1975). The file has been increased by further research since the thesis was completed.

TABLE I
SOURCES FOR THE PRIVATEER DATA FILE

<i>Source</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Boston News-Letter</i>	568	14.3
<i>New-York Evening-Post</i>	267	6.7
<i>New-York Gazette</i>	13	.3
<i>New-York Weekly Journal</i>	148	3.7
<i>New-York Weekly Post-Boy</i>	174	4.4
<i>Pennsylvania Gazette</i>	2,153	54.2
<i>Virginia Gazette</i>	27	.7
<i>South-Carolina Gazette</i>	502	12.6
Colonial Vice-Admiralty Court Records ^a	73	1.9
Mass. Archives ^b	14	.4
R.I. Admiralty Lists ^c	21	.5
R.I. Bonds for Letters of Marque ^d	13	.3
Totals	3,973	100.0

^a Massachusetts Vice-Admiralty Court Records, V, Suffolk County Court House, Boston; Rhode Island Vice-Admiralty Court Records, Rhode Island Admiralty Papers, I-VIII, Rhode Island State Archives, Providence; Minutes of the Vice-Admiralty Court of the Province of New York, I-II (photostats), Library of Congress; Pennsylvania Vice-Admiralty Court Records, Boxes 1 and 2 (photostats), Lib. Cong.; South Carolina Minutes of the Vice-Admiralty Courts at Charles Town, Boxes 4, 5 (photostats), Lib. Cong.

^b Massachusetts Archives, LXIV, Maritime, 1740-1753, Massachusetts State House, Boston.

^c Maritime Papers: Colonial Wars, 1723-1760, 82-124, R.I. State Archs.

^d Bonds for Rhode Island Letters of Marque, Rhode Island Notary Public Records, IV-V, R.I. State Archs.

The method adopted here for measuring each port's participation is to determine the number of privateers at sea in each year of the hostilities. This measure takes into consideration multiple voyages by the same captain. If, for example, Capt. John Lush of New York embarked on one or more cruises in 1740, he would be counted as one "yearly privateer." If Lush sailed in 1741, 1742, and 1743, three yearly privateers are recorded. The calculation is conservative since some of these "yearly privateers" undertook more than one cruise a year. The nature of the data, however, prevents a more precise measure. Ideally, the time at sea for each private man-of-war should be determined, but though colonial newspapers reported hundreds of captures, they did not usually state the length of time the cruisers had been on the hunt. Fortunately, this is probably not a serious problem. The evidence suggests that privateering voyages were lengthy: the average duration of ninety-four cruises conducted by Newport, New York, and Philadelphia privateers was nearly seven months.¹⁰

¹⁰ The Newport data consisted of 47 voyages (average length 6.89 months) contained in privateer officer lists filed with the Newport vice-admiralty court. See Maritime Papers: Colonial Wars, 1723-1760, 82-124, Rhode Island State Ar-

TABLE II
YEARLY PRIVATEERS AND PRIVATEERING BERTHS,
BRITISH COLONIAL PORTS, 1739-1748

Port	Yearly Privateers		Privateering Berths ^a	
	N	%	N	%
Boston	29	6.2	2,591	7.1
Newport	117	25.1	9,309	25.6
New York	105	22.6	10,328	28.4
Philadelphia	47	10.1	4,646	12.8
Charles Town	36	7.7	2,553	7.0
West Indies ^b	112	24.0	5,372 ^d	14.7
Other ^c	20	4.3	1,605	4.4
Totals	466	100.0	36,404	100.0

^a Several procedures were employed to estimate yearly privateering berths. For cases listing size of crew there was no need to estimate. When data on crew size were missing, estimates were based on the type of vessel—ship, snow, brig, etc.—using the mean crew size for all British colonial privateers of that type. (See Table III.) When data were missing for crew size and vessel type, no estimate was made.

^b Includes Bermuda.

^c Cape Fear, N.C.; Norfolk, Va.; Frederica, Ga.; Portsmouth, N.H.; and New Jersey.

^d This estimate suffers rather dramatically from missing data.

Accordingly, it would have been unusual for a captain to make more than one or two voyages a year.

By identifying the types of vessels fitted out as privateers, one may estimate the crew complements and the value of the shipping thus employed. Ships and brigs were larger and more expensive than schooners and sloops, and they carried more men and ordnance.¹¹ Table II presents the number of yearly privateers and yearly privateering berths for the

chives, Providence. The New York and Philadelphia data were obtained from dates of departure and arrival for 28 New York privateers (average length 6.5 months) and 19 Philadelphia privateers (average length 6.9 months) reported in the *New-York Weekly Journal*, *New-York Gazette*, *New-York Evening-Post*, *N.-Y. Wkly. Post-Boy*, and *Pa. Gaz.*

¹¹ The value of colonial vessels according to vessel type is discussed in John J. McCusker, "Sources of Investment Capital in the Colonial Philadelphia Shipping Industry," *Journal of Economic History*, XXXII (1972), 146-157. Pearson product-moment correlations (r) were computed to test the relationships of tonnage with crew size, carriage guns, and swivel guns. These tests revealed that all variables were strongly and directly related. The correlation coefficients for tonnage with crew size, carriage guns, and swivel guns were, respectively, $r = .6909$, $r = .6948$, and $r = .7520$. All coefficients were significant at the .01 level.

TABLE III
MEAN TONNAGE, CREW SIZE, AND ORDNANCE FOR
BRITISH COLONIAL PRIVATEERS, 1739-1748

<i>Type of Vessel</i>	<i>Tonnage</i>	<i>Size of Crew</i>	<i>Number of Carriage Guns^a</i>	<i>Number of Swivel Guns^b</i>
Ship	267 (19)	131 (17)	21 (18)	25 (12)
Snow	160 (10)	116 (11)	16 (13)	19 (8)
Brig	132 (9)	109 (16)	15 (27)	17 (21)
Sloop	87 (47)	72 (48)	11 (56)	12 (42)
Schooner	80 (4)	54 (12)	9 (9)	11 (6)
Grand Mean	136 (92)	88 (114)	13 (130)	15 (95)

Note: This calculation of means is based on a subset of the data file in which each privateer appeared only once. The figures in parentheses indicate the number of cases upon which the means are based. An analysis of variance revealed that the differences in the means were statistically significant at the .001 level.

^a Carriage guns varied in size from three- to nine-pounders and were the privateers' heavy artillery. They could inflict serious damage on an enemy vessel.

^b Swivel guns fired projectiles that were lethal to the opposing crew without seriously damaging the vessel. Small arms for boarding parties completed the privateers' ordnance.

leading British colonial seaports.¹² The mean tonnage, crew size, and ordnance for the several types of vessels appear in Table III. The types of vessels and their value for each port are indicated in Table IV. These tabulations demonstrate that the colonies risked many men and much capital in the maritime war.

These data also indicate a strong correlation between urban development and participation in the prize war. Privateering ventures required entrepreneurial ability, shipping, and manpower. The largest seaports—Boston, Newport, New York, Philadelphia, and Charles Town—possessed more of these requisites than did such smaller ones as Providence, Perth Amboy, or Norfolk, though even these larger ports, as Charles Town's experience indicates, could encounter difficulties in marshalling the resources for fitting out privateers.

Organization of a privateering cruise required experienced merchants who were unafraid of taking risks and who commanded sufficient capital to acquire a strong sailing vessel, substantial ordnance, and enough victuals for a long voyage. They needed skilled captains with established reputations to attract large crews. Once a privateer captured an enemy merchantman, the owners' business skills were especially important because profits

¹² The cruisers tabulated in Table II were all full-time privateers. Letter-of-marque vessels—merchantmen combining a trading voyage with prize actions—are not included. This wartime activity, so popular in the 16th century, was nearly extinct by the 1740s; under 2% of the cases in the data file involved letter-of-marque vessels.

TABLE IV
TYPES AND VALUE (£ STERLING) OF YEARLY PRIVATEERS, 1739-1748

Port	Schooners	Sloops	Brigs	Snaws	Ships	Other ^a	Missing	Value
Boston	1 (233)	9 (2,646)	12 (8,668)	3 (2,394)	0	0	4	£13,941
Newport	4 (932)	68 (22,896)	14 (10,616)	12 (10,153)	8 (13,597)	0	11	£58,194
New York City	0	39 (14,579)	43 (34,605)	7 (6,961)	13 (20,197)	1	2	£76,342
Philadelphia	9 (2,377)	6 (1,765)	6 (4,942)	9 (9,898)	12 (18,850)	1	4	£37,832
Charles Town	8 (2,837)	9 (3,045)	4 (3,388)	3 (1,982)	5 (7,516)	5	2	£18,775
West Indies ^b	10 (3,071)	31 (11,324)	13 (9,248)	6 (5,967)	1 (2,519)	6	45	£32,129
Other ^c	3 (735)	7 (2,639)	4 (3,051)	3 (2,345)	1 (1,261)	0	2	£10,031
Totals	35 (10,185)	169 (58,894)	96 (74,518)	43 (39,700)	40 (63,940)	13	70	£247,237

Note: Estimated values are based on the Philadelphia construction costs from 1735 to 1754 presented in John J. McCusker, "Sources of Investment Capital in the Philadelphia Shipping Industry," *Journal of Economic History*, XXXII (1972), 146-157. The estimates consider the difference between measured tons and tons burden and also assume that private men-of-war were vessels converted to privateers, not new-built craft.

^a Includes galleys, boats, and petty augers. Lack of data precludes calculation of values.

^b Includes Bermuda.

^c Cape Fear, N.C.; Norfolk, Va.; Frederica, Ga.; Portsmouth, N.H.; and New Jersey.

did not materialize until the prize was condemned in a vice-admiralty court and the vessel and cargo were sold to advantage. Business correspondents, warehouse facilities, and market information were all necessary for success. Clearly, this was not a business for amateurs. Accordingly, the overwhelming majority of privateer investors listed their profession as "merchant" when they applied for letters of marque. Many leading businessmen in the large seaports owned shares in private men-of-war. John Bannister, Godfrey Malbone, and John Brown of Newport; Thomas Hancock of Boston; the Livingstons, Beekmans, and Van Hornes of New York; and Robert Pringle of Charles Town, among others, invested in privateering. To minimize risks, few cruisers were owned by a single investor.¹³

In addition to entrepreneurial ability, shipping and manpower were also available in the larger ports. Although some vessels were constructed specifically for privateering, most private men-of-war were converted merchantmen.¹⁴ Thus communities with large merchant fleets could dispatch private men-of-war when hostilities erupted in 1739 and when France became involved in 1744. In addition, the principal ports more easily supplied the enormous number of men needed for privateering crews. These vessels must have been manned almost to the gunwales since crews of fifty to seventy were normal even on schooners and sloops. Such requirements placed severe pressures on the maritime labor market because merchantmen also sailed with large crews during wartime to protect themselves from enemy predators and because colonial governments competed for mariners to man the vessels that patrolled their coasts. In addition, Royal Navy vessels assigned to the North American station "recruited" colonial sailors by the press. Although crews were often difficult to secure, bigger cities offered the amplest supply of men.¹⁵

¹³ Of 89 bonds for Rhode Island letters of marque, only 2 (2.3%) failed to list merchants among the investors. See Rhode Island Notary Public Records, IV-V, R.I. State Archs. For the various merchants' privateering investments see *ibid.*; Baxter, *House of Hancock*, 80-82; Lydon, *Pirates, Privateers, and Profits*, 274-275; and Robert Pringle to Andrew Pringle, July 20, 1744, in Walter B. Edgar, ed., *The Letterbook of Robert Pringle* (Columbia, S.C., 1972), II, 728.

¹⁴ Privateer owners frequently advertised in the newspapers for crews. The promoters stressed aspects of their venture likely to produce a rewarding voyage—their captain's reputation, past successes, lucrative profit-sharing arrangements, and the vessel's strength. These advertisements rarely stated that the craft was "a new ship, built for a Privateer." See the recruiting ad for the Philadelphia ship *Pandour* in *Pa. Gaz.*, Apr. 18, 1745.

¹⁵ The difficulties of recruiting mariners during wartime are examined in Baugh, *British Naval Administration*, 147-240; Davis, *Rise of the English Shipping Industry*, 320-327; and Carl E. Swanson, "The Competition for American Seamen during the War of 1739-1748," in Roger Emerson et al., eds., *Man and Nature: Proceedings of the Canadian Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies* (London, Ont., 1982), 119-129.

Not all the men sailing on privateers were experienced mariners; some were landsmen seeking adventure, gain, or escape from rural boredom. The largest ports probably attracted more of these recruits than the outports.

New York and Newport were the leading privateering centers. They not only possessed large numbers of vessels and mariners, but their merchants may have been motivated to participate in the speculative business of privateering by their secondary position in the regular channels of commerce. Each of the two ports operated in the shadow of a larger neighbor. Boston dominated the overseas trade of New England, while Philadelphia was the premier port of the Middle Colonies.¹⁶ Newport and New York merchants may thus have had more to gain from privateering. Both cities could also draw on a tradition of successful prize activity. Rhode Island governor John Wanton had been heavily involved in privateering during Queen Anne's War, and William Wanton, a younger kinsman, was an early investor in 1739.¹⁷ Richard Partridge, Rhode Island's London agent, recalled "the Wars of the late Queen," when "the Privateers from this Colony of Rhode Island did more Execution agst the Privateers of the Enemy that infested their Coasts than all the Ships of War . . . of all the Colonys in those parts put together."¹⁸ Manhattan merchants had also invested in privateering in the wars of King William and Queen Anne. Several of the same families—the Van Hornes, Philipeses, and Provoosts—sent out private men-of-war in the 1740s.¹⁹

Although Boston, Philadelphia, and Charles Town were among the largest American cities, they were far less active in privateering than New York and Newport. A few Massachusetts and Pennsylvania businessmen who bought shares in private men-of-war apparently accepted Newport merchant John Bannister's assessment of privateering investments: "In case of a French Warr I don't think theres any business near so profitable as a proper Vessell or two well fitted out a Privateering."²⁰ Most

¹⁶ Boston's dominance is discussed in Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in the Wilderness: The First Century of Urban Life in America, 1625-1742*, rev. ed. (New York, 1971), 330-333; Jacob M. Price, "Economic Function and the Growth of American Port Towns in the Eighteenth Century," *Perspectives in American History*, VIII (1974), 140-149; and Sydney V. James, *Colonial Rhode Island: A History* (New York, 1975), 291-292. For Philadelphia's ascendancy over New York see Arthur L. Jensen, *The Maritime Commerce of Colonial Philadelphia* (Madison, Wis., 1963), 82-83.

¹⁷ James, *Colonial Rhode Island*, 243; Byron Fairchild, *Messrs. William Pepperrell: Merchants at Piscataqua* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1954), 40.

¹⁸ Partridge to Thomas Ramsden, secretary to the Lords of the Regency, July 20, 1745, in Gertrude Selwyn Kimball, ed., *The Correspondence of the Colonial Governors of Rhode Island, 1723-1775* (Boston, 1902-1903), I, 373.

¹⁹ Lydon, *Pirates, Privateers, and Profits*, 38, 60, 64, 72-74, 274-275.

²⁰ Bannister to Samuel Clark, Oct. 6, 1740, John Bannister Copy Book, 1730-1742, 117, Newport Historical Society, Newport, R.I., hereafter cited as Bannister Copy Book.

prosperous merchants in Boston and Philadelphia, however, saw things differently. They were probably less inclined to take the risks associated with privateering than their fellows in Newport and New York. Religion was also a factor in Philadelphia, where many leading businessmen were Quakers. The Pembertons, the Whartons, John Reynell, Isaac Norris II, John Smith, and John Brinhurst, among others, were members of Philadelphia's Quaker establishment.²¹ Their decision to shun privateering ventures reduced Philadelphia's role in the prize war.²²

As the war dragged on and expanded to include France, Bostonians devoted increased resources to the effort, but not to privateering. Military contracts with the imperial government for supplying British forces in Newfoundland, Annapolis Royal, and Louisbourg engaged the attention of leading merchants. Thomas Hancock, for example, owned shares in the privateers *Speedwell* and *Young Eagle* but preferred to put his money into profitable and safer supply contracts, which became "his absorbing interest" after 1745.²³ Boston's expanding role in the war against France claimed much of the city's resources. The 1745 Louisbourg campaign required more than 3,000 men.²⁴ This expedition and the frequent use of press gangs to man the Royal Navy and the Massachusetts coast guard drove hundreds of seamen out of Boston. This exodus hindered Boston's commercial activity, and the city's trade decayed as the conflict lengthened.²⁵ It also prevented businessmen from turning to privateering. Boston merchants seem to have envied the large cruising fleets of Newport and New York.²⁶

Charles Town's role in privateering was limited by lack of shipping. Although the city was the South's busiest port, most commercial vessels entering its harbor were not locally owned. In his 1740 report to the Board of Trade, Robert Dinwiddie, surveyor general of customs for the southern department, stated that South Carolinians owned only twenty-five vessels.²⁷ The correspondence of Charles Town merchant Robert Pringle reveals that local businessmen often had difficulty securing

²¹ Frederick B. Tolles, *Meeting House and Counting House: The Quaker Merchants of Colonial Philadelphia, 1682-1763* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1948), 109-131.

²² Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt: Urban Life in America* (New York, 1955), 63.

²³ Baxter, *House of Hancock*, 80-82, 97. Other leading Boston merchants profited from such lucrative contracts. See Gary B. Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), 161-184.

²⁴ Worthington Chauncey Ford et al., eds. *Journals of the House of Representatives of Massachusetts* (Boston, 1919-1971), XXII, 204-205.

²⁵ William Shirley to the duke of Newcastle, Dec. 31, 1747, in Charles Henry Lincoln, ed., *Correspondence of William Shirley: Governor of Massachusetts and Military Commander in America, 1731-1760* (New York, 1912), I, 420-423.

²⁶ Ford et al., eds., *Mass. House Jours.*, XXII, 204-205.

²⁷ Robert Dinwiddie to the Board of Trade, Apr. 29, 1740, in Jack P. Greene, ed., *Settlements to Society: 1584-1763* (New York, 1966), 276-277.

shipping during the 1740s to export rice, the colony's chief staple.²⁸ South Carolina governor James Glen reported that the shipping picture had changed little by the end of the war in 1749. "We have few or no ships of our Own. We depend in great measure upon those sent from Britain, or on such as are built in New England for British merchants, and which generally take in this Country in their way to England to get Freight."²⁹ Examination of available shipping registers confirms this view. Only 30 vessels averaging 32.3 tons were registered in South Carolina between 1735 and 1739. Although registration increased to 134 by 1749, the overwhelming majority of these craft were small schooners and sloops averaging under 22 tons, too small for privateering.³⁰ Only 15 vessels larger than 50 tons were registered in South Carolina between 1734 and 1749.³¹ As a result, Carolina merchants were unable to devote much tonnage to privateering. In 1744, when Pringle headed a local syndicate that invested in a privateering venture, he sent Capt. Mark Anderson to London to obtain suitable vessels.³²

Charles Town also faced a shortage of mariners. Slaves composed nearly half of the city's population. Although blacks served on colonial vessels, it is doubtful that privateer owners recruited them for crews, since they may have felt it unwise to arm slaves. Such caution must have been especially prevalent after the Stono Rebellion in 1739.³³ Charles Town's white

²⁸ Pringle to Thomas Burrill, Oct. 10, 1739, June 11, 1740, Pringle to John Erving, Aug. 18, 1744, Pringle to William Cookson and William Welfit, Jan. 15, 1745, in Edgar, ed., *Pringle Letterbook*, I, 139, 218, II, 797.

²⁹ Glen to Lords Commissioners for Trade and Plantations, 1749, quoted in Joseph A. Goldenberg, *Shipbuilding in Colonial America* (Charlottesville, Va., 1976), 120.

³⁰ Summaries from the South Carolina registers are presented in Tables 43-45, *ibid.*, 232-236.

³¹ "Ship Registers in the South Carolina Archives, 1734-1780," comp. R. Nicholas Olsberg, *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, LXXIV (1973), 189-279. Because of its lack of locally owned shipping and its dependence on other ports, Jacob M. Price has characterized Charles Town as a "shipping point" ("Growth of American Port Towns," *Perspectives Am. Hist.*, VIII [1974], 162-163). See also Robert M. Weir, *Colonial South Carolina: A History* (Millwood, N.Y., 1983), 171.

³² R. Pringle to Andrew Pringle, Jan. 21, 1744, in Edgar, ed., *Pringle Letterbook*, II, 636. It would be useful to place the tonnage devoted to privateering in the context of the total shipping of each port, but such a task is impossible. The best sources for colonial shipping, the naval officer lists, are sparse for the 1740s; there are none for Boston, Newport, or Philadelphia, and the New York lists are lost for half of 1743 and 1748, and for all of 1744-1747. Charles Town's lists are missing for 1742-1748. I am indebted to professors Lawrence A. Harper of the University of California, Berkeley, and James G. Lydon of Duquesne University for this information.

³³ For Charles Town's racial composition see Bridenbaugh, *Cities in the Wilderness*, 249, and Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York, 1974), 142-155. Wood describes

population failed to provide a sufficient number of sailors.³⁴ This scarcity of shipping and manpower prevented Charles Town from playing a larger part in privateering.

At first glance, the role of the British West Indies might seem surprisingly large. Like Charles Town, the islands depended on shipping from other ports, and black slaves formed the majority of the population.³⁵ Nevertheless, the islands possessed a key advantage for privateering ventures: they were ideally located for preying on the richest trade routes of the French and Spanish empires. The Caribbean was the principal theater of operations for American privateers. The attraction of merchantmen carrying the lucrative agricultural staples of the West Indies and the lure of the fabled treasure ships of New Spain made the area a magnet for cruisers from all the belligerent nations. In addition to location, the island colonies, like Newport and New York, had a long and successful history of privateering as well as a body of seamen and ships' officers thoroughly experienced in this kind of venture.³⁶ For these several reasons, the British West Indian colonies were among the leaders in sending out private men-of-war.

As Hamilton's *Itinerarium* reveals, enthusiasm for privateering was widespread, and colonists from New England to Barbados joined in the war at sea. They also boasted of their accomplishments: " 'Tis computed that there are and will be before Winter 113 Sail of Privateers at Sea, from the *British American Colonies*; most of them stout Vessels and abundantly

the Negro Act, passed to calm white fears and quell black resistance, as a "noose [that] was being tightened: there would be heavier surveillance of Negro activity" (*ibid.*, 324). Such surveillance probably precluded recruiting black privateersmen.

³⁴ Robert Pringle frequently informed correspondents that departure of their vessels had been delayed "for want of Hands." See R. Pringle to A. Pringle, Dec. 31, 1742, Pringle to Richard Partridge, Feb. 5, 1743, Pringle to Francis Dalby, May 23, 1743, and Pringle to Henry and John Brock, Dec. 12, 1744, in Edgar, ed., *Pringle Letterbook*, II, 471, 496, 557, 777. Henry Laurens also complained about this inadequate supply of mariners. Laurens to James Crockatt, Feb. 15, 1748, in Philip M. Hamer *et al.*, eds., *The Papers of Henry Laurens* (Columbia, S.C., 1968-), I, 111.

³⁵ For West Indian shipping data see Robert Dinwiddie to the Board of Trade, Apr. 29, 1740, in Greene, ed., *Settlements to Society*, 277, and Frank Wesley Pitman, *The Development of the British West Indies, 1700-1763* (New Haven, Conn., 1917), 97. Pitman discusses the islands' populations on pp. 369-390.

³⁶ Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1972); Hugh F. Rankin, *The Golden Age of Piracy* (New York, 1969); Shepherd and Walton, *Shipping, Maritime Trade*, 80-84. Because of their importance to both Britain and the northern colonies, the West Indies attracted thousands of vessels and mariners. For the competition among privateers, the navy, and merchantmen for recruits see R. Pares, "The Manning of the Navy in the West Indies, 1702-63," *Royal Historical Society, Transactions*, 4th Ser., XX (1937), 31-60.

well mann'd. A Naval Force, equal (some say) to that of the Crown of *Great-Britain* in the time of Queen *Elizabeth*."³⁷ It is impossible to miss the sense of pride that equated America's privateers with Drake and Hawkins.

II

Privateering activity, which ebbed and flowed with fluctuations of Spanish and French commerce, can be divided into two periods, 1739-1743 and 1744-1748. During the first phase only Spanish commerce was vulnerable to capture by American and British privateers. Because the French stayed aloof from the fighting, their merchantmen could not be taken as prizes, and the first phase of the conflict was therefore less active than the second. The numbers of yearly privateers and privateering berths indicate the smaller scale. Every colonial port from Boston to the British West Indies dispatched fewer vessels in the first half of the war period than in the second.

Americans responded enthusiastically to George II's proclamation in 1739 authorizing privateering against Spain. In addition to seeking financial gains, Americans wanted to retaliate for Spanish "depredations" against British shipping.³⁸ Residents of Newport exploded with "universal Joy" when they heard the king's proclamation; similar reactions occurred in other ports.³⁹ Sixteen colonial privateers entered the war in the last four months of 1739, and thirty-three were dispatched in 1740, the peak year in the war against Spain. (See Table V.) This boom created a demand for naval stores and ordnance that exceeded American supplies. "We have as yet fitted out but three Privateers," wrote Newport merchant John Bannister in the fall of 1739, "Occasion'd [by] the want of Warlike Stores which are not to be got but have great Reason to think those 3 will make it richly worthwhile."⁴⁰

Expectations of success against Spain bore fruit early in the conflict. Bannister's cruisers, for example, did very well. On January 11, 1740, the Newport entrepreneur wrote about one of his privateers:

I am 1/3^d Concerned in a Small Sloop Called the Virgin Queen[,] Charles Hall[,] whole Vessel and outsets cost us 2500[.] they attack'd the Town Porto Plata [Puerto Plata] on Hispaniola and took it[,] also the fort with 6 Cannon[,] they plunder'd the Town and afterwards Burnt it[. They] took a Prise in the Harbour [and] Carr^d her to New

³⁷ *Pa. Gaz.*, Aug. 30, 1744; *N.-Y. Wkly. Post-Boy*, Sept. 3, 1744.

³⁸ See, for example, *Boston News-Letter*, Mar. 5, 26, Apr. 16, 1730; *Pa. Gaz.*, Oct. 14, 1731; *Boston Evening-Post*, July 25, 1737.

³⁹ *Boston Gazette*, Aug. 20, 1739; *Boston Eve.-Post*, Aug. 27, 1739; *N.-Y. Wkly. Jour.*, Sept. 3, 1739.

⁴⁰ Bannister to Messrs. Jacob & Clark, n.d. [Oct. 1739], Bannister Copy Book, 35. Bannister was still unable to secure munitions the following summer (Bannister to John Jones, Aug. 22, 1740, *ibid.*, 111).

TABLE V
BRITISH COLONIAL PRIVATEERING ACTIVITY,
BY YEAR, 1739-1748

Year	Yearly Privateers		Privateering Berths	
	N	%	N	%
1739	16	3.4	1,031	2.8
1740	33	7.1	1,962	5.4
1741	29	6.2	1,645	4.5
1742	20	4.3	1,255	3.5
1743	25	5.4	2,009	5.5
1744	70	15.0	5,992	16.5
1745	102	21.9	8,928	24.5
1746	59	12.7	4,986	13.7
1747	57	12.2	4,452	12.2
1748	<u>55</u>	<u>11.8</u>	<u>4,144</u>	<u>11.4</u>
Totals	466	100.0	36,404	100.0

Note: Estimates for privateering berths suffer from missing data on crew size and vessel type.

Providence where the Effects was Condemn'd[. They] went out on a Second Cruise and in a few days took three prizes Vallued at thirty thousand pounds and was fitting for a third Cruse[.] the Cap^t has all ready remitted the Owners near ten thousand pounds and has left in [New] Providence about two thousand more to be sent up and expect daily to hear of his further good Success.⁴¹

News of Captain Hall's good fortune spread beyond Newport. "He has met with such extraordinary Success," commented the *Boston News-Letter*, "that he designs to spend the Summer in those Seas: He is now double mann'd. . . . Capt. Hall's Owners design to have his Statue cut out of a block of Marble to stand upon a handsome Pedestal with each Foot upon a Spaniard's Neck."⁴² Bannister's other privateers also enjoyed good hunting at Spain's expense.⁴³

Buoyed by his early triumphs, Bannister planned to increase his privateering investments in 1741. "Our former Success has put us upon fitting out another large Sloop 117 Tons which expect will Sail some time

⁴¹ Bannister to Messrs. Jacob & Clark, Jan. 11, 1740, *ibid.*, 50.

⁴² *Boston News-Letter*, Mar. 28, 1740. Colonists in New York and Philadelphia read about Capt. Hall's exploits in *N.-Y. Wkly. Jour.*, May 5, 1740, and *Pa. Gaz.*, Apr. 10, 1740.

⁴³ Captains James Allen, Joseph Powers, and Elisha Berry, sailing in Bannister's other private men-of-war, captured nine prizes and sacked the Spanish West Indian town of Aronque. See Bannister to Messrs. Sedgwick & Barnard, May 21, 1740, and Bannister to Capt. John Thomlinson, Mar. 26, 1741, Bannister Copy Book, 74, 126.

in April and are now upon Setting up another large vessel for Same employ; Provided there be a french war we shall have near 30 Sail out of this Port Privateering."⁴⁴ France remained at peace, however, and Bannister did not dispatch the sloop.⁴⁵ Without a French war, the volume of Spanish commerce could not support increasing numbers of British colonial privateers. Consequently, fewer privateers sailed in 1741 and 1742 than in 1740. Another factor was the buildup of the Royal Navy for the Cartagena expedition.⁴⁶ Public and private men-of-war were competitors for Spanish commerce, and large concentrations of the king's ships diminished the prospects of colonial privateers.

The situation changed dramatically when France entered the war. Privateering investments increased, and the press exuberantly described preparations to launch more cruisers.⁴⁷ The privateering investments of Robert Pringle reveal the impact of the war's expansion. Early in 1744 Pringle informed his brother in London that he was considering a privateering venture that combined Charles Town and London merchants: "Each Person to be £50 Ster. Concern'd & if it can be brought to Bear, I mean if there can be gott Fifty or Sixty Subscribers, it will be undertaken."⁴⁸ He was unsure, however, that the scheme could attract enough capital. The picture altered after France joined the conflict, and by July Pringle was confident of securing investors: "As we have now a War with France [I] doubt not of Getting Subscribers enough, & perhaps some Gentlemen in London may have desir'd to be Concern'd with us."⁴⁹ Similar activity by many other colonial investors made 1744 and 1745 the busiest years of the maritime war. Nearly 40 percent of the yearly privateers and 41 percent of the privateering berths were recorded in this period.

American privateers experienced diminishing returns by 1746 as they found that Spanish and French commerce could not yield numerous prizes indefinitely. In addition, the convoy system devised by the comte de Maurepas, French minister of marine, reduced American captures. Two large French convoys eluded the Royal Navy and colonial privateers in 1746.⁵⁰ This signaled the end of the privateering boom, and owners began in 1746 to seek buyers for their vessels. The June 26 issue of the

⁴⁴ Bannister to Thomlinson, Feb. 19, 1741, *ibid.*, 146.

⁴⁵ Bannister's new sloop was still in Newport the following August. Bannister to Hugh Vans, Aug. 19, 1741, *ibid.*, 188.

⁴⁶ Richmond discusses the Cartagena expedition in *Navy in the War of 1739-48*, I, chap. 2.

⁴⁷ *N.-Y. Wkly. Post-Boy*, Aug. 27, 1744; *Pa. Gaz.*, Aug. 30, 1744.

⁴⁸ R. Pringle to A. Pringle, Jan. 21, 1744, in Edgar, ed., *Pringle Letterbook*, II, 636.

⁴⁹ R. Pringle to A. Pringle, July 20, 1744, *ibid.*, 728.

⁵⁰ Admiral Sir Peter Warren was upset by these French successes; see Warren to Lord Sandwich, Oct. 4, 1746, and Warren to Charles Knowles, Oct. 6, 1746, in Julian Gwyn, ed., *The Royal Navy and North America: The Warren Papers*, 1736-

Pennsylvania Gazette announced the sale of the privateer ship *Marlborough*. This was not simply a transfer of ownership: the advertisement stated that the *Marlborough* would be sold “as a Merchant Ship.” Her ordnance would be sold separately.⁵¹ It is unlikely that the *Marlborough*’s owners would have held two sales if interest in privateering had been high. Other Philadelphia privateer owners also began to sell vessels and munitions.⁵² Two Virginia cruisers were auctioned in 1746.⁵³ Newport entrepreneur Samuel Vernon indicated in 1747 that privateering was declining in Rhode Island. “[I] am glad you are so well pleased with his [Vernon’s brother William’s] Sale of your Guns,” Vernon wrote to Thomas and Adrian Hope, “but [I] do assure you no Person would be able to dispose of such Parcel for half that Money, the Business of Privateering not being in so great Esteem with us now.”⁵⁴ By the summer of 1748, privateering activity had declined nearly 50 percent from the peak year of 1745.⁵⁵

III

British colonial privateers sailed Atlantic waters from Newfoundland to the Spanish Main but concentrated where the pickings were richest and accordingly took by far the greatest number of prizes in the Caribbean, as Table VI reveals.⁵⁶ The North American continental possessions of Spain and France did not generate as much trade as their West Indian colonies.

1752 (London, 1973), 336-337, 339. Richmond and Pares agree that convoys reduced French losses in American waters. See Richmond, *Navy in the War of 1739-48*, III, 64-66, 122, 148-149, and Pares, *War and Trade*, 311-325. John Charles Martin Ogelsby has also commented on the successful French convoy system in an informative discussion of the deployment of naval vessels in the Caribbean by Britain, Spain, and France. See “War at Sea in the West Indies, 1739-1748” (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1963), 206-207. The evidence summarized in Table VI (see below) supports this view.

⁵¹ *Pa. Gaz.*, June 26, 1746.

⁵² *Ibid.*, July 23, 30, Aug. 13, Nov. 12, 1747.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, Aug. 28, 1746. It is unlikely that these vessels continued as private men-of-war for their new owners since there are no cases of Virginia privateers after 1746 in the data file.

⁵⁴ Samuel Vernon to Thomas & Adrian Hope, Feb. 24, 1747, Letterbook of Samuel and William Vernon, No. 1, 1738-1750, 29, Newport Historical Society, Newport, R.I.

⁵⁵ New York was an exception to this trend as Manhattan merchants dispatched more yearly privateers in each of the war’s last three years than in 1744. Success in capturing enemy commerce best explains the New Yorkers’ persistence. As will be seen, New York was the most successful privateering port.

⁵⁶ Table VI includes only those cases in the data file for which the place of action is known. The file contains 939 prize actions involving British colonial privateers. Of this total, 882 (93.9%) have valid observations for the place of action. Of these 882, 682 (77.3%) occurred in the Caribbean, 80 (9.1%) in northern waters, and 89 (10.1%) in American waters, but it was impossible to determine if they happened along the continent’s coast or in the Caribbean. The remaining 31

TABLE VI
BRITISH COLONIAL PRIVATEERS' THEATERS OF OPERATIONS, 1739-1748

Year	<i>Caribbean Prize Actions</i>		<i>North American Prize Actions</i>	
	N	%	N	%
1739	3	0.4	0	0.0
1740	45	6.6	2	2.5
1741	19	2.8	3	3.7
1742	35	5.1	4	5.0
1743	33	4.8	0	0.0
1744	88	12.9	48	60.0
1745	145	21.3	4	5.0
1746	106	15.6	5	6.3
1747	118	17.3	6	7.5
1748	90	13.2	8	10.0
Totals	682	100.0	80	100.0
Combined Theaters	N	%		
Caribbean	682	89.5		
North American	80	10.5		
Totals	762	100.0		

In addition, the commerce of Mexico, Louisiana, Central America, South America, and Asia passed through the Caribbean.⁵⁷ Vessels sailing between France, Quebec, and Cape Breton or between Cadiz and Florida were not numerous enough to attract many privateers. Moreover, West Indian goods were worth considerably more than North American products. The rich staples of the Indies—sugar, molasses, cocoa, coffee, indigo, logwood—fetched better prices than fish and furs. Spanish treasure ships, though elusive, were also alluring. For these reasons, the West

(3.5%) took place in European waters. Table VI includes only the 762 actions that occurred in the Caribbean and along the North American coast. The prizes taken during the siege of Louisbourg were captured by the Royal Navy and colonial coast-guard vessels; therefore they are not included in Table VI.

⁵⁷ For comparisons of French West Indian and New France commerce see Thomas M. Doerflinger, "The Antilles Trade of the Old Regime: A Statistical Overview," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, VI (1976), 401, and Dale Miquelon, *Dugard of Rouen: French Trade to Canada and the West Indies, 1729-1770* (Montreal, 1978), chaps. 6, 7. Geoffrey J. Walker demonstrates the importance of Mexican and South American commerce to the Spanish empire (*Spanish Politics and Imperial Trade, 1700-1789* [Bloomington, Ind., 1979]). Because of their trade routes, Mexico and Louisiana have been considered as Caribbean colonies in this analysis.

Indian theater of operations accounted for 682 prize actions, nearly nine times as many as in more northerly waters.

The seas around Cuba and Hispaniola were the most popular of several Caribbean cruising areas, since most of Spain's colonial commerce passed that way.⁵⁸ (See Table VII.) Fleets from Veracruz on the Gulf of Mexico and from Portobelo and Cartagena on the coast of New Grenada made rendezvous at Havana to take advantage of favorable winds and currents in the Florida Straits and the Old Bahama Channel. At Havana, too, they enjoyed the protection of greater numbers and the presence of Spanish men-of-war.⁵⁹ French vessels sailed this area going to or from the sugar

TABLE VII
CARIBBEAN CRUISING AREAS
OF BRITISH COLONIAL PRIVATEERS, 1739-1748

<i>Cruising Area</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Mexico ^a	7	2.6
Cuba ^b	71	26.3
Hispaniola ^c	54	20.0
Caicos Islands	11	4.1
Puerto Rico and Virgin Islands	16	5.9
Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Windward Islands	44	16.3
Coast of New Grenada ^d	34	12.6
Other ^e	<u>33</u>	<u>12.2</u>
Totals	270	100.0

^a Includes general references to Mexico as well as cases referring specifically to Veracruz and Campeche.

^b Includes the Old Bahama Channel off Cuba's northeast coast.

^c Includes the Windward Passage.

^d Includes the northern coast of what are now Colombia and Venezuela; Panama east of the Canal Zone; and the islands of Salt Tortuga, Curaçao, Aruba, and La Orchilla.

^e Includes Caribbean locations from the Bahamas in the northwest to Surinam in the southeast. None of these areas was referred to in more than five cases. Nine cases from Bermuda are also included.

⁵⁸ It is difficult to state precisely where most British colonial privateers cruised in the Caribbean because colonial newspapers often reported merely that a prize had been taken in the West Indies. Of the 682 Caribbean prize cases, 192 (28.2%) listed only "West Indies" as the place of action. For an additional 220 Caribbean cases (32.3%) the place of action had to be inferred from the point of embarkation and/or destination of the prize or the port to which the prize was taken. Table VII is based on the 270 Caribbean prize actions (39.6%) that stipulated a specific West Indian location.

⁵⁹ Charles Gibson, *Spain in America* (New York, 1966), 102-103, 123; Walker, *Spanish Politics and Imperial Trade*, 4-9; J.C.M. Ogelsby, "Spain's Havana Squadron and the Preservation of the Balance of Power in the Caribbean, 1740-1748," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, XLIX (1969), 473-488.

TABLE VIII
NORTH AMERICAN CRUISING AREAS
OF BRITISH COLONIAL PRIVATEERS, 1739-1748

<i>Cruising Area</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Newfoundland Banks	32	40.0
Cape Breton ^a	11	13.8
New England—New York coast ^b	6	7.5
Carolina coast ^c	17	21.2
Florida	9	11.2
Other ^d	5	6.3
Totals	80	100.0

^a Includes Canso and Cape Sable.

^b Includes Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard Sound, and Sandy Hook, N.J.

^c Includes all prize actions from Cape Fear, N.C., to St. Simon Island, Ga.

^d Includes the Delaware capes, the Virginia capes, and two general references to "the coast of North America."

colony of Saint-Domingue on Hispaniola. Many British colonial privateers operated in the sea-lanes north of Cuba, the Windward Passage between Cuba and Hispaniola, and the Mona Passage off Hispaniola's east coast. Moreover, this area was the closest to British North American ports. The second major cruising area lay six hundred miles east of Hispaniola. Martinique and Guadeloupe were France's most important sugar colonies, and their commerce attracted American privateers that lay to windward and picked off merchantmen sailing to and from the French possessions. The Spanish Main, the southernmost theater of British privateering operations in the Caribbean, also lured private men-of-war to prey on vessels en route to Cartagena and Portobelo and to raid the coastwise commerce from Panama to Cayenne.

Compared to the Caribbean, the war in northern waters was a modest affair, though marked by a flurry of activity in 1744. (See Table VI.) Many of the prize actions there were defensive, as homeward-bound privateers escorting Caribbean prizes fought off Spanish cruisers along the coast. In 1742, for example, Boston captain John Rouse, commanding the *Young Eagle*, and two St. Kitts privateers—Robert Flower in the *Bonetta* and William Wilkinson in the *Mary*—were taking prizes to New England. Off Florida they encountered a Spanish fleet and were forced to defend themselves. Rouse and his consorts not only saved their prizes but even captured three Spanish privateers.⁶⁰ After 1744, French commerce in the Cape Breton area and fishing vessels on the Newfoundland banks became fair game for British privateers. Of forty-eight actions occurring in 1744, thirty-nine took place near Louisbourg or Newfoundland. After the fall of Louisbourg in 1745, prize actions in the north were limited mainly to

⁶⁰ *Pa. Gaz.*, Sept. 16, 23, 1742.

efforts to save French and Spanish prizes seized in the Caribbean or to recapture British vessels taken by enemy privateers. (Table VIII presents the North American cruising areas.)

IV

Heavily armed and manned American privateers infesting the Atlantic and Caribbean hurt the commerce of Britain's enemies. The number of captures is the clearest evidence of their impact. (See Table IX.) Determining the value of prize vessels and cargoes is difficult, but an informed guess can be offered: the 829 prizes taken by American privateers were worth about £7,561,000 sterling.⁶¹ This substantial amount was roughly equivalent to 30 percent of the total trade (exports plus imports) of France and its American colonies during 1739-1748.⁶²

TABLE IX
NATIONALITY OF PRIZES CAPTURED BY
BRITISH COLONIAL PRIVATEERS, 1739-1748

<i>Nationality</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
French	308	37.2
Spanish	226	27.3
Enemy of Great Britain ^a	195	23.5
British ^b	65	7.8
Neutral ^c	34	4.1
Pirates	1	.1
Totals	829	100.0

Note: The number of prizes should be viewed as an understatement. The press probably did not report every capture. Moreover, some newspaper accounts were too vague to be included in the data file.

^a Includes prizes of unknown nationality. The colonial press usually referred to these as "enemy prize" or simply "prize."

^b Comprises British vessels recaptured en route to enemy ports.

^c Includes Dutch, Danish, Portuguese, and (before 1744) French vessels.

⁶¹ This estimate is based on a sample of 153 prizes. The colonial press and vice-admiralty records listed values for 109 captures. An additional 44 prizes were appraised by estimating the worth of the vessel and cargo. The values of the vessels were based on McCusker's estimates for the cost of building vessels in Philadelphia. See n. 11. Price data to appraise the 44 prize cargoes are supplied in Arthur Harrison Cole, *Wholesale Commodity Prices in the United States, 1700-1861: Statistical Supplement, Actual Wholesale Prices of Various Commodities* (Cambridge, Mass., 1938), 21-31. The values of the 109 prizes are expressed in colonial currencies or pieces of eight and converted into sterling using the exchange rates in John J. McCusker, *Money and Exchange in Europe and America, 1600-1775: A Handbook* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1978), 310, 316, 320. They equaled £968,972. The average value for all 153 captures was £9,120.10 sterling.

⁶² Doerffinger, "Antilles Trade of the Old Regime," *JIH*, VI (1976), 400.

King George's War seriously disrupted French colonial trade. Commerce between France and the West Indies fell by nearly 50 percent from 1743 to 1745.⁶³ The activities of French fishermen on the Grand Banks also declined. Granville, a leading French port for the Newfoundland fishery, dispatched an average of seventy-six fishing vessels per year during 1730-1744 but an average of only five vessels per year from 1745 to 1748.⁶⁴ Trade between New France and the French West Indies also suffered. Exports from the islands to Quebec dropped 39 percent from 1743 to 1744. In 1745, Quebec's Caribbean imports were 72 percent below pre-war levels. Exports from New France to the Antilles followed a similar pattern, falling by nearly 60 percent from 1743 to 1744. Despite a modest recovery in 1745, the value of Canadian shipments to the Caribbean still registered a decline of 43 percent compared to 1743.⁶⁵

Spain's colonial commerce also suffered as British seapower caused Spanish merchants to suspend regular trade with America.⁶⁶ The major fleets that supplied the Spanish colonies with goods and returned with treasure did not sail during the 1740s. No *flotas* (the trading fleets that operated between Cadiz and Veracruz) or *galeones* (the fleets sailing between Cadiz and Cartagena and Portobelo) embarked during the conflict. Instead, the crown authorized individual merchantmen carrying registered cargoes (hence their designation as "register ships") to engage in the colonial trade. Though less predictable than regularly scheduled *flotas* and *galeones*, the register ships did not succeed in avoiding British predators. Nearly 60 percent of these vessels were captured, and Spanish exports to America declined. Nonetheless, much of the treasure from Mexico ultimately arrived in Spain. On three occasions treasure fleets eluded British naval vessels and privateers.⁶⁷

The home ports of American privateers are presented in Table X. New York, Newport, and the West Indian ports captured the great majority of the prizes, and the data also suggest that New York's private men-of-war were the most successful on a per-privateer basis. They furnished 22.6 percent of the yearly privateers (see Table II) yet seized 27.7 percent of the prizes. Only Boston, with a much smaller number of both privateers and prizes, matched this record.⁶⁸ The New Yorkers' success may have

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Jean-François R. Brière, "Granville and the Newfoundland Fisheries in the Eighteenth Century" (paper delivered at the annual meeting of the Canadian Historical Association, Vancouver, B.C., June 1983), 2-3.

⁶⁵ Jacques Mathieu, "La Balance Commerciale: Nouvelle-France-Antilles au XVIII^e siècle," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, XXV (1972), 493.

⁶⁶ This paragraph is based primarily on Walker, *Spanish Politics and Imperial Trade*, 207-216, and Pares, *War and Trade*, 109-114.

⁶⁷ Ogelsby, "Spain's Havana Squadron," *Hispanic Am. Hist. Rev.*, XLIX (1969), 479, 483, 485, 488.

⁶⁸ The number of prizes presented in Table X should be viewed with the same caution previously mentioned concerning Table IX. The historian of New York's

TABLE X
HOME PORTS OF BRITISH COLONIAL PRIVATEERS
THAT CAPTURED PRIZES, 1739-1748

<i>Port</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Boston	60	7.2
Newport	194	23.4
New York City	230	27.7
Philadelphia	64	7.7
Charles Town	29	3.5
West Indies ^a	152	18.3
Other ^b	14	1.7
Consorts from Different Ports	70	8.4
Unknown	16	1.9
Totals	829	100.0

^a Includes Bermuda.

^b Includes Cape Fear, N.C.; Norfolk, Va.; Frederica, Ga.; Portsmouth, N.H.; and New Jersey.

resulted in part from the use of larger, more heavily manned vessels than were employed by their Newport and West Indian counterparts; they fitted out more brigs and fewer sloops.

Poorly manned privateers missed opportunities. Since privateers wanted to capture enemy vessels, not sink them, large numbers of men were needed for boarding parties. The Charles Town privateer *Sea-Nymph*, for example, was unable to pursue a "richly laden" vessel because its crew was too small to mount an effective boarding party.⁶⁹ A privateer also needed to place a crew on each prize to sail it to a British port for vice-admiralty proceedings, and the prize crew had to be numerous enough to control enemy prisoners. Captain Furnell, commander of the Bristol, England, privateer *Sheerness*, was forced to allow five French merchantmen to sail away unmolested because his vessel was undermanned. When the *Sheerness* returned to port, only seven men were fit for duty; the rest had been assigned to prizes or had been disabled or killed during the voyage.⁷⁰ New York merchant Gerard Beekman believed that Capt. Samuel Bayard's successful 1746 cruise would have been even more profitable if Bayard had sailed with a larger crew: "I am of opinion he'll make a great Voiage

private men-of-war has indicated that Manhattan predators captured 321 prizes worth £617,615. This is a much larger figure than Table X indicates. On the other hand, the average value for these prizes was only £1,924, a much lower figure than the data presented in n. 61, which suggests that the press concentrated on larger captures. See Lydon, *Pirates, Privateers, and Profits*, 271. The paucity of West Indian evidence probably understates the islanders' successes.

⁶⁹ *Pa. Gaz.*, Mar. 6, 1740.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, June 6, 1745.

and Could have brought 3 more [prizes] had he had officers and men to man them.”⁷¹ Thus the size of a privateer’s complement was a key variable in determining the length and success of a voyage.

The number of captures constitutes dramatic evidence of the privateers’ destructive effect on French and Spanish commerce. In addition, because the sea-lanes were risky during wartime, marine insurance premiums increased sharply. Normal peacetime rates of 3 or 4 percent escalated to 34.5 percent in Cadiz and up to 40 percent in most French cities.⁷² The records of an important Rouen mercantile house—Robert Dugard’s Société du Canada—demonstrate the influence of escalating insurance rates and the catastrophic impact of losing vessels. Dugard’s company traded with New France, Louisbourg, and the French West Indies. During the peacetime years from 1729 (the company’s founding year) to 1742, the company’s assets rose from 22,001 to 620,182 *livres*. But the war brought disaster. Insurance premiums jumped tenfold between 1742-1743 and 1744-1745. With these increases, it became difficult to make a profit even from a successfully completed voyage.⁷³ Moreover, one-third of the company’s vessels were captured by predators.⁷⁴ Dale Miquelon, the historian of the Société du Canada, sums up the effect of Dugard’s enterprise: “The war with the English had destroyed a magnificent commercial undertaking just at the moment when it had ceased to require the reinvestment of every *écu* it earned and was expected to begin paying handsome annual dividends. No one had the heart to rebuild it.”⁷⁵

Unfortunately for American merchants, Spanish and French private men-of-war were also active in the prize war; the data file lists 635 cases of British and American vessels captured in the Caribbean and off the North American coast. French and Spanish losses were thus largely offset (at the national level) by their own privateers’ successes, and American merchants who shunned privateering were nonetheless involved in the sea war because their vessels risked capture. As Charles Town merchant Henry Laurens wrote to a Boston correspondent: “I am very sorry to observe your Ships from Boston having Suffer’d so greatly by the enemy, but ’tis no more than common nowadays to the trade from all parts of America & especially this Province. Our Ships are taken on one Side or the other constantly. Such as escape the Privateers on this side fall in with them in

⁷¹ Beekman to John Channing, Sept. 1, 1746, in Philip L. White, ed., *The Beekman Mercantile Papers, 1746-1799* (New York, 1956), I, 7.

⁷² Miquelon, *Dugard of Rouen*, 124. The *Pa. Gaz.* cheerfully informed its readers on Sept. 3, 1747, of this added cost to French merchants: “We are assured, that Premiums on Insurance on the *French* Ships from St. Domingo for France, are risen from 25 to 45 Guineas per Cent. a certain Sign how fearful the Trading French are of their Property, when the British Men of War keep the Seas.”

⁷³ Miquelon, *Dugard of Rouen*, 114-124.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 167-170.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 129.

the Channel so that very few arrive safe."⁷⁶ Britain's colonial commerce began to decline in 1741 and did not return to pre-war levels until after the peace of Aix-la-Chapelle.⁷⁷

V

Finally, the significance of privateering during the wars of 1739-1748 can be gauged by comparing the manpower employed in the maritime conflict to the number of British colonists who participated in other military operations. Americans were involved in three major campaigns against the Spanish and French. In 1741, combined American and British forces attempted to capture Cartagena. In 1745, a joint operation of militia from the northern colonies, especially Massachusetts, and ships of the Royal Navy captured Louisbourg. In 1746, American troops mobilized for an assault on Quebec. These were the largest military operations in which provincial forces participated. Each of the first two expeditions included 3,000-4,000 Americans, while nearly 8,000 recruits enlisted for the invasion of Canada.⁷⁸ The data presented in Table II demonstrate that more Americans served on privateers than in these campaigns. Berths on colonial private men-of-war exceeded 36,000, well over double the manpower devoted to the Cartagena, Louisbourg, and Quebec expeditions combined. Although it is likely that numbers of mariners sailed on more than one privateering voyage, the evidence still strongly suggests that more colonists fought against King George's enemies in America's private navy than in the king's own forces.⁷⁹

The popularity of privateering is evident and understandable. Desire for economic gain was a major cause of imperial conflict, as British merchants sought to expand their trade to Spanish America.⁸⁰ To mobilize manpow-

⁷⁶ Laurens to Thomas Savage, Nov. 11, 1747, in Hamer *et al.*, eds., *Laurens Papers*, I, 82.

⁷⁷ Charles Whitworth, *State of the Trade of Great Britain in Its Imports and Exports, Progressively from the Year 1697* (London, 1776), 44-52. Whitworth's statistics have been augmented from Jacob M. Price, "New Time Series for Scotland's and Britain's Trade with the Thirteen Colonies and States, 1740 to 1791," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., XXXII (1975), 322-325.

⁷⁸ Albert Harkness, Jr., estimates that about 3,500 Americans enlisted for the Cartagena expedition ("Americanism and Jenkins' Ear," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XXXVII [1950], 70-71). I. K. Steele places the number at 3,000 (*Guerillas and Grenadiers: The Struggle for Canada, 1689-1760* [Toronto, 1969], 49). The Louisbourg assault involved nearly 4,000 colonials; see Nash, *Urban Crucible, 170-171*. For the 1746 mobilization see Howard H. Peckham, *The Colonial Wars, 1689-1762* (Chicago, 1964), 109.

⁷⁹ The figures in Table II indicate privateering berths. Because some mariners probably made multiple voyages, the number of individual privateersmen was probably smaller than 36,404.

⁸⁰ For a discussion of the outbreak of war in 1739 see Jean O. McLachlan, *Trade and Peace with Old Spain, 1667-1750: A Study of the Influence of Commerce on Anglo-*

er and resources the imperial government relied heavily on financial incentives: Royal Navy officers were attracted by prize money, and volunteers enlisted for campaigns such as the Louisbourg expedition with an eye to plunder.⁸¹ Privateering offered American merchants the opportunity to earn substantial profits since successful voyages yielded returns of 130-140 percent on capital invested. American sailors could also better their earnings through privateering: prize shares averaged more than double the monthly wages offered by the merchant service and were nearly six times the monthly rate paid by the Royal Navy.⁸²

It would be an exaggeration to conclude that Britain would have lost the wars of 1739-1748 without assistance from American privateers. Nevertheless, the data summarized above show plainly and persuasively that the merchants who invested in privateering ventures, the captains who commanded the ships, and the men who manned them made a significant—and heretofore largely unrecognized—contribution to the war effort. Acknowledging implicitly that the Royal Navy was not equal to the task, imperial officials in London and the colonies strongly encouraged this form of American participation in the conflict, and Americans, seeking gain as well perhaps as glory, responded eagerly and effectively. “Prizes and privateers,” recorded Alexander Hamilton, were “the whole subject of discourse.”⁸³ Augmenting the empire’s forces at sea, privateers joined naval frigates in hot pursuit of Spanish and French merchant vessels from Newfoundland to the Caribbean. Their enterprise, which more than balanced the similar efforts of the enemy, helped maintain the empire’s commercial lifelines and promote Britain’s ascendancy in North America, not only in 1739-1748 but also, as can be shown, until the very eve of the American Revolution. Privateering did not decline, and was certainly not eliminated, as some historians have asserted,⁸⁴ but flourished profitably both for the merchants and men who engaged in it and for the imperial interests it served.

Spanish Diplomacy in the First Half of the Eighteenth Century (Cambridge, 1940), chap. 4, and Pares, *War and Trade*, chaps. 1-2. Pares and Baugh emphasize the role played by England’s “privateering interest” in calling for war. See Pares, *Colonial Blockade*, 6-7, 17, and Baugh, *British Naval Administration*, 22.

⁸¹ Baugh calls prize money the “chief attraction” of naval service (*British Naval Administration*, 112). Gwyn demonstrates convincingly the importance of prize money for Peter Warren’s personal fortune; see *Enterprising Admiral*. For the allure of plunder for Louisbourg recruits see Leach, *Arms for Empire*, 231, 242. Massachusetts continued to rely on personal gain to recruit troops for the French and Indian War; see Fred Anderson, “A People’s Army: Provincial Military Service in Massachusetts during the Seven Years’ War,” *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XL (1983), 522-524.

⁸² Lydon, *Pirates, Privateers, and Profits*, 253; Carl E. Swanson, “The Profitability of Privateering: Reflections on British Colonial Privateers during the War of 1739-1748,” *American Neptune*, XLII (1982), 55.

⁸³ Bridenbaugh, ed., *Gentleman’s Progress*, 172.

⁸⁴ Shepherd and Walton, *Shipping, Maritime Trade*, 81.