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# FROM ROPE TO RIVER: SYMBOLIC EXECUTIONS, COLONIAL DYNAMICS AND TRADE GOVERNANCE IN THE GOLDEN AGE OF PIRACY

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## Abstract

This article explores the symbolic aspects of the execution of Captain William Kidd during the Golden Age of Piracy, focusing on the visual messages conveyed. Examining the social-cultural milieu of the gallows in England *circa* 1700, it reveals the unique aspects of Kidd's execution and its implications for colonial dynamics and trade governance. By delving into the intended audiences and multifaceted messages behind these executions, the article sheds light on the intertwined dynamics of piracy, colonialism, and trade governance and their impact on the evolving global order.

**Keywords:** law of piracy; Captain William Kidd; early eighteenth century; public executions; Admiralty Sessions; gibbeting.

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## [A] INTRODUCTION

The dawn of the 18th century marked a complex chapter in the history of piracy, particularly in the cultural and social contexts surrounding executions. As the "Golden Age of Piracy" unfolded from the mid-17th century to the early 18th century, piracy activities increased alongside significant legal changes and anti-pirate initiatives launched by empire-building European nations. However, it is within the realm of the gallows that we can observe the visual and symbolic aspects that shaped public perceptions. The cultural milieu of the time positioned the gallows as a spectacle of justice and deterrence, framed by the shifting attitudes towards law and governance during the Age of Enlightenment. In this context, the execution of Captain Kidd holds particular significance, revealing how pirate executions became messages with varying intended audiences, leading us to question the changing dynamics of those targeted by these messages.

The trial of Captain William Kidd in 1701 was one of the most highly publicized piracy trials of the era. Formulated against a backdrop of international maritime commerce and colonial expansion, the trial

was a catalyst for a nascent legal structure grappling with piracy. The saga, unfolding from domestic, colonial and commercial imperatives, symbolizes the growing resolve to police the international seas and rein in maritime piracy—a journey spanning across geopolitical boundaries and revolving around legal loopholes, economic stakes and fierce political interests. Notably, Captain Kidd’s execution became much more than a mere imposing of justice; it was an embodiment of intricate socio-political communication, layered with symbolism and messages.

Capturing the essence of this historical turning point is a visual artifact unique to the 18th century—an illustration depicting a pirate hanging by Robert Dodd (1795).<sup>1</sup> While this illustration originates from a later period in 1795, it provides a glimpse into the symbolic nature of 18th-century pirate executions. It is through this contextual lens that we can unravel the intricate interplay of piracy, maritime law and politics within the early 18th century, revealing the cultural meaning attached to the body of the condemned—a potent symbol of power, obedience and the societal order being asserted.

## [B] GALLOWS THEATRE: SPECTACLE, PUBLIC MORALITY AND THE BODY POLITIC

As shall be discussed below, pirate executions included ceremonial elements specifically designed to impact the maritime community. However, they were also situated within the broader social context of the gallows.

The spectacle of public execution in the early 18th century possessed its own macabre theatre, where social norms, power relations and political leverage played out against the backdrop of the state’s justice system. The act of execution was not solely a punitive act or a display of violent death; rather, it was a carefully choreographed event aimed at etching the consequences of law-breaking into the public consciousness. In a society where literacy was not universal, this public spectacle of justice served as a potent form of communication regarding the tangible repercussions of transgressing the law.

Underlying this concept of performative justice was the customary notion that the body of the condemned was a symbolic figure in the corporeal body politic. Just as a healthy body relied on the proper functioning of its parts, the stability and wellbeing of society rested on the cooperation and adherence to societal norms by its members. By

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<sup>1</sup> The illustration reproduced here is from an engraving of the original made by Lieutenant Page.



*Robert Dodd, “A Pirate hanged at Execution Dock” (Royal Museums Greenwich).*

publicly destroying the physical body of the condemned, society sought to excise the “corrupt” element and thus restore the overall well-being of the body politic. The execution served as a reminder to citizens of their interdependence and their individual responsibility to maintain the integrity of the collective body. In this sense, the act of punishment was not just an act of retribution but also aimed at restoring harmony and balance to society (McGowen 1987: 665).

While the metaphor of the “body politic” was customarily invoked to justify capital punishment, it offers only a partial glimpse into the perceptions and experiences surrounding public executions, particularly by the time of Kidd’s execution. In 1651, Thomas Hobbes’ influential work, *Leviathan*, had challenged the concept of the state as a natural body by highlighting its artificiality, a philosophical shift that saw the metaphor fall out of circulation.

Moreover, the ability to witness these public displays of punishment was limited to a minority of the populace, as only a select number had the opportunity to witness one of the several hundred hangings that took place each year.<sup>2</sup> Also, the execution process itself was often crude and *ad hoc*, lacking strict solemnity or ceremonial flair. Instead, these public displays were characterized by a more pragmatic approach, with a “shabby orderliness” and a subdued iconography of punishment (Cockburn 1994: 161-162). The engraving by Dodd that illustrates this article is in keeping with this, depicting a small and subdued crowd.

Nonetheless, by the late 17th century, public executions started garnering larger crowds, indicating a growing appetite for the spectacle of judicial violence. But this increased interest in witnessing such events did not necessarily imply a profound reflection on the social virtues of lawfulness. While public executions involved the presence of clergymen (visible as the black-gowned figure in Dodd’s engraving) who sought the confession and repentance of the condemned, their involvement often served to further publicize the event rather than instil moral values. Clergymen capitalized on the popularity of public executions by publishing and selling accounts of gallows speeches delivered by those about to be executed. These publications aimed to serve as moral lessons and cautionary tales for the wider population, highlighting the consequences of straying from societal norms. However, they inadvertently contributed

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<sup>2</sup> Most hangings occurred in London, accounting for as many as 300 per year. Between 1560 and 1790 the number of public hangings across England remained consistent (Cockburn 1995: 158-159). See also Hay (1988: 48-49).

to the populace's fascination with and engagement in the spectacle (Cockburn 1994: 168).

Kidd's execution was presided over by the Ordinary of Newgate, Reverend Paul Lorrain who published numerous "Last Dying Speeches and Confessions" of criminals. It is notable that Kidd refused to confess to any crime, a fact consistent with his protestation at trial that he had been perjured against (England and Wales High Court of Admiralty 1701: 60). Lorrain, displeased by this recalcitrance, had to be content with Kidd's statement that he

desired all seamen in general, more especially Captains in particular to take warning by his dismal unhappiness and shameful death and that they would avoid the means and occasions that brought him thereto, and also that they would act with more caution and prudence, both in their private and public affairs by sea and land, adding that this was a very fickle and faithless generation (Dalton 1911: 212-213).

The behaviour of the crowd during public executions in the early 18th century was multifaceted and varied. While some individuals may have attended with a sense of moral superiority, believing in their own adherence to societal norms, others approached the event as a form of entertainment or even an opportunity to indulge in immoral behaviour. This diversity of motivations could attract a wide range of attendees, from curious onlookers seeking to witness the gruesome spectacle to thrill-seekers and individuals looking for a chance to partake in illicit activities.

Hangings, particularly in London, became occasions of social disorder. The mob reached enormous proportions: thirty thousand people witnessed an execution in Tyburn 1776; eighty thousand an execution in Moorfields in 1767 (Zirker 1964: ii). Streets thronged with spectators, mixed with a motley crowd of hawkers, often becoming scenes of drunkenness, riots and other criminal activities. The carnival-like atmosphere drowned the solemnity of the event, instead creating an ambiance of chaos and debauchery, contradicting its intended purpose. In 1725 Mandeville (1964 [1725]: 20) described the crowds at Tyburn as:

The Days being known before-hand, they are a Summons to all Thieves and Pickpockets, of both Sexes, to meet. Great Mobs are a Safeguard to one another, which makes these Days Jubilees, on which old Offenders, and all who dare not shew their Heads on any other, venture out of their Holes; and they resemble Free Marts, where there is an Amnesty for all Outlaws. All the Way, from *Newgate* to *Tyburn*, is one continued Fair, for Whores and Rogues of the meaner Sort.

This led him to conclude “it is not the Death of those poor Souls that is chiefly aim’d at in Executions, but the Terror we would have it strike in others of the same loose Principles: And, for the same Reason, these Executions are little better than Barbarity” (Mandeville 1964 [1725]: 36).

The changing dynamics of public executions, coupled with the growing disconnect between the spectacle and the wider society, laid the groundwork for shifting attitudes towards notions of punishment and justice in the coming Enlightenment. As the century progressed, public executions faced increasing scrutiny and criticism, leading to a major debate about their true efficacy in social reform and crime deterrence. Thinkers like Cesare Beccaria, who advocated for proportionate punishment and condemned public execution as cruel, gained ground. Their philosophies contributed to a growing dissent and formed part of a broader discourse around legal reform. Gradually, the nature of public ridicule and the spectacle of public execution began to be seen as brutalizing and demeaning, rather than serving as a salutary lesson. By the latter half of the 18th century, voices calling for the abolition of public executions had become more prevalent. This culminated in the decision to end public executions in the United Kingdom (UK) in 1868. The symbolic value that executions once held in society had eroded, replaced by a belief in the need for more humane and less sensationalized methods of punishment.

## [C] THE SILVER OAR: POWER, DETERRENCE AND PIRATE EXECUTIONS

If public executions afforded an opportunity to reinforce the state’s imposable law and order, pirate executions carried their own symbolic weight. They were often held at Execution Dock, a designated place on the Thames River in London, further signifying their association with maritime crime. The convicts were hanged on shorter ropes, initiating a slow suffocation rather than neck-breaking, embodying their transgression against maritime law. Bodies of the more notorious pirates were tarred and hanged in an iron gibbet to serve as a warning to sailors. This visual representation of the state’s power was intended as a deterrent.

In addition to the visual spectacle of the execution itself, the procession to Execution Dock was a carefully orchestrated event, laden with symbolic iconography. One prominent symbol of authority was the silver oar, carried by the Admiralty Marshal or one of his deputies. In Dodd’s illustration, the oar is visible in the hands of the mounted Marshal. Similar to a ceremonial mace, the silver oar represented the power and jurisdiction of



*John Deacon, Waterman's Oar (Victorian & Albert Museum)*

the Admiralty Court in maritime matters. It was also customary for the oar to be present in the execution of Admiralty Court processes such as the arrest of a vessel or cargo, and it was laid before the bench during Court hearings. One such example dating from around 1780 is displayed in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (Deacon *circa* 1780).

Records of prisoners tried for piracy in the Admiralty Courts describe the procession to Execution Wharf, accompanied by the Admiralty Marshal or one of his deputies, bearing the silver oar. This procession would also include the Deputy Marshal, two City Marshals on horseback and Sheriff's officers (Niekerk 2012: 142).

The distinctive pageantry of the Admiralty Court reflected its equally distinctive legal framework. Shaping its own identity, from as early as 1361, the Court operated independently from common law. This established a unique system of law and legal procedure that integrated elements of Roman civil law, European maritime codes, and customs into Admiralty law (Pritchard 1984: 43; Rubin 1988: 66-121; Durston 2017: 12). The Court initially handled piracy cases but was modified by the 1536 "Act for Punishment of Pirates and Robbers of the Sea". This Act created the Admiralty Sessions within the Court, which used common law procedures. It also resolved the challenges of complex evidentiary requirements of civil law which had hindered the prosecution of pirates.<sup>3</sup>

The rate of pirate executions leading up to 1700 remained fairly consistent and amounted to two or three a year. However, notable spikes in punitive measures occurred during James I's reign, including the execution of 19 pirates on a single day in December 1609. The turn of the 18th century marked a significant shift. Following a confrontation between the French ship *La Paix* and the English frigate *HMS Shoreham* in 1700, 24 members of the defeated French crew, including several Britons, were executed in Wapping. Captain Kidd's execution in 1701 fits within this pattern of intensified anti-piracy measures, aligning with the time when piracy was considered a significant threat to international trade and maritime security. This was followed by a notable decline in such executions after the early 1700s, with instances becoming increasingly infrequent and even years passing without any hangings (Durston 2017: 141).

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<sup>3</sup> Civil law characteristics remained discernible: 18th-century Admiralty Sessions were exemplified by thorough documentation processes that extended from examinations of defendants to witness interrogations. These records, much more extensive than the contemporaneous records of common law courts, were remarkable for their diverse non-legal content, including accounts of maritime history, atrocities aboard convict transport ships and more (Pritchard 1984: 45).



A unique feature of pirate executions was that after execution the bodies were often displayed in a gibbet, hung at low watermark. Gibbeting, a distinctive and expensive practice, involved displaying an executed individual's body in a bespoke iron cage fitted on a substantial, 20 to 30-foot gibbet post, often fortified to discourage theft (Dyndor 2015; Tarlow 2017). The cage was personalized by local blacksmiths and was linked to the post in a manner that permitted rotation—for maximal visibility. Historical records testify to the fiscal implications, with 1749 documents showing individual costs for the infamous Hawkhurst gang up to £24/1s. Despite this, authorities persisted with gibbeting, valuing its potent message of deterrence. However, its usage diminished after the 1752 Murder Act, when dissection was preferred for over 80 per cent of convicts (Dyndor 2015). There was no specified length of time in which a gibbet remained hanging; frequently they remained until the structure disintegrated (Tarlow 2017: 79).

However, the effectiveness of such a deterrence strategy is questionable. While the sight of rotting bodies along the Thames might have instilled a certain level of primal fear, it is uncertain that the messages of the gibbet successfully reached the intended audience (Hartshorne: 1891: 74-76). Certainly, the audience present at the gallows was largely civilian, not seamen, indicating a disconnect between the targeted deterrence message and its audience. Nevertheless, pirate executions had the potential to signify meaning to other audiences, suggesting that the act of executing pirates served multiple purposes. To understand who these audiences were, it is necessary to examine the wider context of pirate executions.

## [D] THE TRIAL OF CAPTAIN KIDD, LEGAL REFORM AND COLONIAL DYNAMICS

Examining the historical patterns of execution as related to piracy, it emerges that the hanging of Captain William Kidd in 1701 was part of a relatively brief period where piracy was punished severely. The spectacle of his execution and the multilayered messaging brings to light the shifting societal perspectives and the intricacies of English legal, domestic political and colonial frameworks of the time.

The sequence of events leading to the trial and execution of Captain William Kidd unfolded as follows. In 1695 Kidd, initially a lawful privateer, was given two commissions by King William III. The first was a Letter of Marque, authorizing him to seize vessels from France, England's enemy at the time. The second, a much rarer pirate hunting commission, designated him to capture pirates threatening trade in the Indian Ocean and the Red

Sea. Particularly, the latter aligned him with the interests of the British East India Company, at that point still an embryonic powerful entity striving to safeguard its trade monopoly from piracy and interlopers.<sup>4</sup>

The trouble began when Kidd seized the *Quedagh Merchant*, a ship hired by Armenians sailing under French passes but which belonged to a Moghul. Though Kidd believed this seizure was lawful under his commissions, shifting political tides would argue otherwise. Back in England, Kidd's Whig backers were embroiled in political conflict. At the same time, the British East India Company was pressuring the Government to act. Furthermore, colonial governance was being questioned, with New England colonies often seeming to foster lawlessness, necessitating a strong stand against piracy. Together, these events combined to reshape perceptions of Kidd's actions.

Kidd was arrested in Boston in 1699, accused of piracy and murder. Transported to London a year later, his trial was put to stage not merely as a judicial proceeding but a political manoeuvre underpinned by these considerations of domestic, colonial and commercial pressures. Kidd's conviction was virtually ensured: his claims about French passes were ignored and his backers stayed silent to preserve their reputations.

As discussed above, the visual messages inherent to Kidd's execution—an iconography that traversed the pre-execution procession (the silver oar), the execution itself (the visceral effect of the shortened rope), and the subsequent exhibition of his tarred body in the gibbet (which also imposed audible and olfactory sensory experiences)—all of these messages, notwithstanding their grotesqueness, can be considered to have in some way failed in their delivery. The broader socio-legal lessons intended by public execution were manifestly failing to make an impact upon the populace. Meanwhile, the targeted symbolism of pirate executions at Execution Dock remained disconnected from the social and cultural milieu in which piracy thrived. This then begs the question of who was the intended audience for this spectacle of performative justice?

In terms of geographical proximity, the English nobility formed the most immediate audience for Kidd's execution. In this context, the underlying objectives of the execution were closely intertwined with the political conspiracies between the Whigs and Tories. The Tories aimed to discredit the Whigs who had financially supported Kidd's expeditions by accusing them of colluding with pirates. The suspicions surrounding these allegations were further fuelled by the delayed arrival of the ship

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<sup>4</sup> Kidd's commissions are reproduced in Dalton (1911: 229, app A). The originals are held at The National Archives of the UK (HCA 1/15).

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*Rochester*, which was dispatched by the Lord Justices to bring Kidd back to England for trial.

The prolonged delay of the *Rochester* raised suspicions that the Whigs were attempting to avoid parliamentary scrutiny of their alleged collusion. In response, the opposition demanded that Kidd not be tried, discharged, or pardoned until Parliament reconvened. However, the King's reply, assuring the retrieval of Kidd, only served to intensify the opposition's anger. This eventually led to a resolution to permanently remove Lord Somers, one of Kidd's backers and the Lord Chancellor of England, from the King's presence and influence, due to his alleged involvement in the affair (Dalton 1911: 131). To refute such claims, the Whigs wanted to portray Kidd as a villain who had betrayed them. They argued that, instead of fulfilling his mission to hunt down pirates, Kidd had joined their ranks.

The fact that the scandal reached as far as the crown demonstrates the deep-seated interest numerous parties had in Kidd's execution. However, if domestic political intrigue undermined the fairness of Kidd's trial, then so too did colonial political dynamics.

England's trade policies with the American colonies were primarily governed by the Navigation Acts, a series of laws passed between 1651 and 1673. These Acts sought to ensure that trade between the colonies and England, as well as the wider British Empire, remained under English control. The Acts required the use of English or colonial ships for colonial trade and stipulated that certain goods, known as enumerated goods, could only be exported to England or other British territories. This system effectively limited the colonies' ability to engage in direct trade with other European powers and favoured the exports of raw materials from the colonies to England.

However, in practical terms, the enforcement of these Acts was often lax. Smuggling, including piracy-related activities, was prevalent as colonists sought to bypass restrictive trade regulations and benefit from direct trade with other countries. This illicit trade allowed the colonies to obtain goods not available or more expensive in English markets and contributed to the development of a thriving informal trade network, much to the detriment of English merchants. Historically, the offence of piracy carried severe punishment: death by hanging. Yet, achieving convictions proved challenging due to difficulties in obtaining reliable testimonies, corruption among officials, and the blurred lines between privateering and piracy. Consequently, successful piracy prosecutions were relatively low before the 18th century.

A year after Captain Kidd set sail with his commissions, his main supporter, Lord Bellemont, became colonial Governor of New York. This appointment, made by the King, aimed to enforce the Navigation and Plantation Acts more rigorously following the lax administration of Bellemont's predecessor, who had allowed piracy and smuggling to flourish. Also during this period, there was increased attention on legal reform led by the Board of Trade, which sought to address the challenges associated with prosecuting pirates who operated within the colonies. Sir Charles Hedges, Judge of the High Court of Admiralty, presented a draft proposal on 6 April 1698, known as "An Act for the more effectually Suppressions of Piracy" (Piracy Act). This Act replaced the outdated 1536 Offences at Sea Act and established Vice-Admiralty Courts in the colonies, bringing to an end to the logistical challenges of transporting defendants to England for trial.

It is against this backdrop that Kidd's arrest occurred in 1699. Whilst the Piracy Act was not presented to Parliament until 1700, Lord Bellemont, as a colonial governor, would have been aware of its imminent passage and the potential legal repercussions associated with piracy-related activities. Personal scandal and political considerations have often been cited as primary factors for Bellemont's betrayal of Kidd, however, the potential legal implications under the emerging piracy laws provide additional context. The Piracy Act expanded jurisdiction and introduced stricter provisions for prosecuting pirates and those who aided them. Section 10 specifically addressed the issue of "several evil-disposed Persons, in the Plantations and elsewhere, have contributed very much towards the Increase and Encouragement of Pirates" and subjected them to the same legal proceedings and penalties as the principals involved in piracy and robbery.

Furthermore, alongside the creation of Vice-Admiralty Courts, the Piracy Act returned civil law procedures to the fore, removing juries and displacing any role for local judges and colonists. Instead, the Piracy Act established a seven-man council comprising naval officers, government officials and merchants, who owed their positions to royal postings and thus were more amenable to Crown influence. These councils held full authority over piracy prosecutions, serving as investigators, indicters, judges and jury simultaneously. Through these reforms, Parliament sought to close the loopholes that allowed the colonies to collude with pirates.

Arguably, these reforms came somewhat late. By 1700, the plundering of pirates in the Caribbean had largely come to an end. In 1670, the Treaty

of Madrid, also known as the Godolphin Treaty, marked a significant shift in the approach towards piracy in this region. Signed by England and Spain, the treaty aimed to resolve long-standing territorial disputes in the Caribbean and quell disruption to colonial trade, caused by piracy in these waters. Before the treaty, in response to the exigencies of war, both nations had often given tacit approval, indeed issued formal Letters of Marque, to privateers who were effectively acting as pirates, attacking and seizing each other's vessels. With the treaty, both powers sought to mutually disarm and curb this practice by agreeing to suppress piracy, marking a clear delineation between state-sanctioned privateering and unofficial, illegal piracy. As a result, Caribbean pirate communities became scattered, and piracy became focused upon Eastern trade routes between Madagascar and India. By 1700, major acts of piracy on par with the naval forces of sovereign states, such as Henry Morgan's infamous sack of Panama in 1671 with his fleet of 1,800 men, had largely ceased (Norton 2014: 41).

However, as the era characterized by large-scale piratical events came to an end, so too did the previous fluidity between lawful privateering and unlawful acts of piracy. The distinction between privateers and pirates became more clearly delineated. This shift in attitudes is evident in the case of Captain Kidd, whose crimes, although of a considerably less significant scale, occurred during a period when the lines were tightly drawn and the boundaries were less forgiving. Thus, for Morgan, although his actions resulted in his arrest, they also paradoxically elevated him to the status of a hero, and by 1674 he was appointed as Governor of Jamaica. For Kidd, on the other hand, despite the possibility of his alleged crimes being acquitted in previous years, the outcome was ultimately a sentence of death.

## [E] THE EAST INDIA COMPANY'S INFLUENCE: TRADE GOVERNANCE AND COUNTERING OF PIRATE THREATS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

Given that piracy in the Caribbean was substantially reduced by the turn of the 18th century, it is necessary to examine other factors that drove the impetus for legal reform. One key catalyst can be traced to the efforts of the East India Company, which had expanded its sphere of influence to encompass the trade routes operated by the Moghul Empire in the Indian subcontinent. Not only did they seek to protect their own investments and trade ventures but also aimed to foster a collaborative approach with

the Moghul Empire, promising to guarantee the protection of Moghul ships from pirates.

However, this agreement fell into dispute following the *Gunji-Suwae* incident in August 1695, in which pirates led by Henry Avery and Thomas Tew seized the vessel owned by the Moghul Emperor. The incident had significant repercussions, as it not only involved the theft of valuable cargo but also included acts of violence and atrocities committed against the ship's crew and passengers. These actions sparked outrage, prompting a riot against the East India Company in Surat. The Emperor Aurangzib, infuriated by the looting of his vessel, imposed an embargo on all English trade until convoy protection could be guaranteed. In response to these escalating tensions and the potential threat to the India trade, the East India Company sought support from the British Government to apprehend the pirates and prevent such future incidents. It was as a direct result of this petitioning that Captain William Kidd came to be commissioned as a privateer in the same year.

Not long after Kidd set out on his ill-fated voyage in 1696, Avery was arrested. During the subsequent trial, the King's Advocate made it clear to the jury that a conviction was imperative to avoid war with the Mogul Empire, preserve national honour and protect England's trade. However, to the surprise of many, the jury returned a verdict of not guilty. The accused pirates were promptly tried for attacking another ship and were found guilty, leading to their execution, but the initial failure to secure convictions for the pirates brought the need for new legislative measures to the fore. When Kidd seized the *Quedagh Merchant* in 1698, these tensions erupted anew, fuelled by the scandalous fact that Captain Kidd had been the privateer commissioned by the Government on behalf of the East India Company. Aurangzib declared an embargo on European trade, and the East India Company redoubled its lobbying efforts (Nutting 1978: 208). By this point, the interconnected web of vested interests—political, commercial and personal—had become so intertwined that Kidd's defence claiming the *Quedagh Merchant* was sailing under a French pass proved futile in halting the forces aligned against him. In an unfortunate turn of fate, Kidd was ruined by the very system he had once served.

## [F] CONCLUSION

Overall, from the gallows to the river, the execution of William Kidd sheds light on the complex interplay between socio-legal dynamics, colonial expansion, trade governance and the pursuit of economic prosperity during the Golden Age of Piracy. Kidd's public execution was an orchestrated

spectacle that conveyed strategic messages to several audiences: it served to dissociate his Whig backers from scandal, it signalled an end to tolerance of corruption in the colonies and, beyond the borders, the spectacle was a clear message to other nations that Britain was determined to safeguard global economic interests. In essence, Kidd's execution was not simply about a pirate facing his due punishment, but a conscious enactment representative of broader geopolitical interests and nascent international law, hallmarked by Britain's growing empire and naval dominance.

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