

Blackbeard: The Birth of America

Samuel Marquis

Mount Sopris (Jan 24, 2018)

Softcover \$16.99 (384pp)

978-1-943593-21-7

Blackbeard: The Birth of America is a pleasure—a historical adventure that corrects popular assumptions about the fearsome privateer through captivating and cinematic scenes.

The name “Blackbeard” once struck fear into the hearts of men, but according to the new novel *Blackbeard: The Birth of America* by Samuel Marquis, the pirate was not some mere brute on the high seas. Rather, Edward Thache (aka Blackbeard) was a rebel, a Jacobite, a proud American, and someone swimming with republican virtues.

This is historical fiction full of lush details, most concentrating on Thache’s exploits in the absolutely fascinating setting of the early eighteenth century. In this narrative account, long before the Sons of Liberty was formed in Boston, privateers like Thache created a democratic ethos in the struggling colony of North Carolina.

Here, the more egalitarian sailors of Thache’s fleet are shown to despise the autocracy of the Hanoverian King George I and the petty tyranny of colonial officials like Virginia’s Alexander Spotswood. *Blackbeard* portrays Thache’s career from his earliest days as a “wrecker” (intentionally wrecking ships for profit) off of Spanish Florida to becoming the great outlaw of North Carolina. Throughout the book, an entertaining cat-and-mouse game between Thache and Spotswood ensues.

Narrative developments are more historically accurate than some of the habits of the text itself seem to be. At times, the dialogue reads as too modern or too predictive, as when Thache muses about the future of America and the British colonies in the New World—contextually unlikely words from a man who may have been a renegade from British politics but was certainly not an eighteenth-century liberal. Oratory is stilted, and some of Blackbeard’s pirates’ behaviors are anachronistic.

The elements of adventure in the story captivate. The novel is replete with cinematic scenes showing how Blackbeard and his men duked it out with corrupt Royal Navy captains, colonial administrators bent on stopping piracy, and other privateers trying to get their hands on Spanish gold off the coast of Florida. You can almost smell the brine coming off of the pages.

Blackbeard is a modern adventure story with a serious dash of history added in for good measure. Those looking for more fact than fiction will be pleased by information about British privateers in the New World and how they made their money. Thache is a compelling character, even if he is gifted with some highly historically suspect ideals. *Blackbeard* is a pleasure that corrects popular assumptions about the fearsome pirate.

BENJAMIN WELTON (April 17, 2018)

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