Finders Keepers: How Prize Laws Affected the Common Sailor in the Late 18th Century

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Introduction

After the American Revolution, Americans saw the Atlantic trade as the key to economic success, and thus attempted to re-enter this market. However, other countries blocked the US competition by hiring privateers, mercenaries whose targets were the merchant ships of other countries than their own. These privateers wreaked havoc in the Atlantic, leading to a time when every American knew prize laws by heart. Privateers are now a piece of the past, and we have long since forgotten them (Petrie 2).

Conclusions

These documents give historians a better understanding of maritime and Atlantic history by offering a more complete representation of the past. With these sources historians can better understand the effects of prize laws on the common sailor, and the impact these effects had on US economics and foreign trade in the years to come.

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