

Surprise! The Earliest Place Blacks Attained Equality with Whites Was on a Pirate Ship

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❑ **Surprise! The Earliest Place Blacks Attained Equality With Whites Was on a Pirate Ship**

In shaping their productions to conform to the racial stereotypes of white audiences during the era of Jim Crow, Hollywood filmmakers sanitized their films by ignoring the large numbers of black cowboys who developed the Wild West. History books and movie makers also forgot to tell American youngsters that pirate ships were the earliest place in modern society where blacks achieved equal standing with whites.



The Golden Age of Piracy is said to have lasted from 1680 to 1725. Without a strong naval presence protecting the colonies, a

horde of 10,000 or more pirates preyed on merchant ships along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. One of the most famous and successful of these pirates was Laurens de Graf. At the peak of his power De Graf had a vast fleet of ships and commanded 2,000 men. He was eventually pardoned by the French and given a minor title of nobility. Although few history books note this fact, De Graf was an escaped black slave. In fact, up to one third of all pirates of the period were black. Many blacks are believed to have served under Captain Kidd and Blackbeard.

At the time of De Graf's exploits, a very large majority of blacks in the New World were slaves. The small number of free blacks who were second-class citizens were not permitted to vote or work except as agricultural field hands or domestic servants.

But black pirates enjoyed many of the rights of whites. In fact, the deck of a pirate ship was probably the first place blacks attained equality with whites. Black pirates were able to vote for or serve as captain, share equally in the booty, and participate equally in all aspects of pirate life. Families of black pirates were compensated equally when the pirate became injured or was killed.

White historians and journalists of that period were not

A Note on Redrawing History to Include Black People

"Until the lions produce their own historian, the story of the hunt will glorify only the hunter."

— Chinua Achebe
Home and Exile
(Oxford University Press, 2000)

"The deck of a pirate ship was the most empowering place for blacks within the eighteenth-century white man's world."

— Kenneth Kinkor, who is a museum curator on Cape Cod, quoted in *The Commercial Appeal* (Memphis), May 21, 2000

anxious to tell of the exploits and freedoms of black pirates for fear of enticing black slaves to escape and find refuge with a group of pirates. In fact, to perpetuate this deception, De Graf was often described in the press as blond, blue-eyed, and white.

❑ **Prominent MIT Economist Says That Superior Education Explains Why America's Top CEOs Are Almost Exclusively White Males**

Over the past quarter-century, tens of thousands of African Americans have graduated from the nation's most selective business schools. If MIT economist Peter Temin's theory is correct that a merit system governs promotions within America's corporations, why is it that almost no blacks have reached the top executive ranks of America's largest corporations?

If racial parity were to prevail, 65 of the chief executive officers of the Fortune 500 list of America's largest corporations would be black. Until 1997 no black person had ever been named to head one of the corporations. Now, at long last, two blacks — Franklin D. Raines at Fannie Mae and Lloyd Ware at Maytag — head Fortune 500 firms. But at the moment, that's the end of the count.

"Temin writes that white males make the best managers not because of any innate superiority in business acumen but because they have had access to a superior education from preschool through business school, an experience that has befallen very few African Americans."

Why have blacks been so slow to integrate the corporate executive suite and why do white Protestant males continue to dominate the CEO position at American corporations? Peter Temin, the Elisha Gray II Professor of Economics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and one of the nation's leading experts on economic history, has taken on the issue. In a recent paper for the National Bureau of Economic Research, Professor Temin argues that racial discrimination is not the principal factor pre-