

Blackbeard's Treasure, for the Taking

by Peter W. Wood

Apologies are due. You hold in your hands the longest issue of *Academic Questions* we have ever published. That means that you are more likely to sample it than read all the way through. To forestall this, we have encrypted step-by-step instructions in the issue to the true location of Blackbeard's treasure. The clues are distributed among the five articles, five review essays, eleven reviews, and several other items.

For those who are not up-to-date on their pirate lore, "Blackbeard" was the *nom de guerre* of Edward Teach (1680-1718), the English buccaneer who prowled the West Indies for some twenty years supposedly amassing a fortune that has never been found. Teach (sometimes recorded as "Thatch") cultivated a fearsome appearance and ferocious tactics, but he could read and write and presented his considered views to the merchants from whom he demanded tribute. In view of his literacy, his defiance of presiding authorities of his age, and his name, Mr. Teach, Blackbeard

seemed an appropriate figure to recruit to the hunt for the treasures herein.

I don't have the space to count all the coins in so large a chest, but here are a few. We start with Lawrence Purdy's reminder that the Supreme Court decision in *SFFA v. Harvard* did not end once and for all the determination by colleges and universities to discriminate on the basis of race. Indeed, Harvard itself has sought ways to evade the decision. Next comes Erwin Epstein who brings his cutlass down on the hapless concept of "decolonialist ideology." That's the idea that if it were not for the intrusions of Western people, the world would live in beautiful harmony. The decolonialist conceit pervades American higher education, but Epstein is especially perturbed about what it has done to his field, comparative education.

Matt Manochio offers us a burlesque in mock-Elizabethan of that mockery taking place in Stratford, where the "Shakespeare's Birthplace trust" has decided that the Bard's hometown museum must be "decolonized" in an even more abrupt manner than that

described by Professor Epstein. In the interest of a “more inclusive museum experience,” the museum is replacing many of its galleries with a “new contemporary landscape” and banishing any instance of Shakespeare’s “language or depictions that are racist, sexist, homophobic, or otherwise harmful.” There are surely some gems here.

In our last issue, statistician William M. Briggs reviewed a book on statistics, Aubrey Clayton’s *Bernoulli’s Fallacy: Statistical Illogic and the Crisis of Modern Science*. I ventured to have AQ review a book on statistics not because I thought our readers were thirsting for it but because I knew someone who could make statistics as entertaining as Friday night on Broadway. Mr. Briggs did not disappoint, at least not me. He did, however, disappoint Dr. Ernest B. Hook (who possesses a wonderfully piratical name), whose rebuttal graces this issue, and is followed by Brigg’s surrebuttal. Let the games begin!

In the review essays, we return to more of the “colonialist” furniture. James Springer reviews a brace of books about “settler colonialism,” as opposed to drive-by colonialism, which hardly deserves the name. Robert Maranto tackles two books—two, self-aggrandizing and undistinguished books—to remind us of how dreary most works about higher education really are, and by contrast how scintillating AQ is.

My colleague Scott Turner sneaks in here. Scott is always worth reading, and in this case he draws an entirely unexpected parallel between Soviet science

in the age of Stalin and postwar American science as it came under the heel of the American state.

Bruce Frohnen, who is sole remaining ornament at Ohio Northern University after that sorry institution banished Scott Gerber, presents an elegant review of two books by libertarian lawyers—Jonathan Turley and Ilya Shapiro—that have rightly received a lot of attention. These are works about the eclipse of free speech on campus, and both are enhanced by Frohnen’s adroit contrasts.

The rest of this issue is taken up with the single coins of one-book reviews, but they shine like gold. TaNehisi Coates became a fixture with his impassioned ornately hate-filled *Between the World and Me* in 2015, which caught the first literary wave of Black Lives Matter vitriol. Coates was then left with little to say until he visited Israel and returned last year with a work of vitriolic antisemitism, *The Message*. Here it is reviewed by Edward S. Shapiro. In a spirit similar to Shapiro’s, Alexander Riley takes down Tricia Rose’s *Metaracism*, a work that attempts to “explain” by mere assertion.

Steve Sailer is an essayist you owe it to yourself to discover. I’ve known him for about twenty-five years and I lunge at every opportunity to read him. His work until now, however, has been fugitive—buried in hard-to-find magazines and far-from-mainstream websites. Someone got the bright idea of assembling *Noticing: An Essential Reader*, a collection of Sailer’s essays, and some-

one else (me) had the bright idea of Jason Richwine to review the volume.

That is the proverbial high note on which to end. But don't forget that Blackbeard's treasure awaits the diligent reader who can piece together all the clues. Pay no mind to those who say there is no treasure. They just want to keep it all to themselves.

Peter Wood is president of the National Association of Scholars and editor-in-chief of Academic Questions.
