

Topic Page: [Kidd, William, 1645 - 1701](#)

Summary Article: **Kidd, William**
from *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

1645?–1701, British privateer and pirate, known as Captain Kidd. He went to sea in his youth and later settled in New York, where he married and owned property. In 1691 he was rewarded for his services against French privateers. While in London in 1695 he was commissioned by the earl of Bellomont, recently appointed governor of New York, as a privateer to defend English ships from pirates in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. In 1696, Kidd set sail for New York and from there to Madagascar. Disease, mutiny, and failure to take prizes apparently caused him to turn pirate. Returning (1699) to the West Indies with his richest prize, the Armenian *Quedagh Merchant*, he learned of piracy charges against him. He sailed to New York to clear himself by claiming that the vessels he had attacked were lawful prizes. He was arrested and taken to London, where in 1701 he was tried on five charges of piracy and one of murder. The trial was complicated by the fact that four Whig peers who had backed him were politically embarrassed by his career. He was convicted and hanged. The barbaric cruelty and buried treasure of Captain Kidd are unsubstantiated bits of the legends about him. The Kidd legend has often been referred to in literature, for instance in Edgar Allen Poe's *Gold Bug* and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*.

See Seitz, D. C. , ed., *The Tryal of Captain William Kidd* (1935);
biographies by W. H. Bonner (1947), D. M. Hinrichs (1955), and R. Zacks (2005).

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