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Title: Historical Points of the Caribbean

INTRO

Everyone has someone they find annoying. Unfortunately, some annoying people can apparently stick around for hundreds of years in this *Weird World*.

On today's show, we're diving into Historical Points in the Caribbean.

From intense rivalries that last across islands, to fighting pirates you might have accidentally brought to existence, the Caribbean has its fair share of interesting stories.

Join me today as we take a *dive* into the waves of Caribbean history, and see how much it changed the trade world.

I'm Doug Sharpe and we're living in a weird world.

COLONIAL ZONE

Our story starts on the island of "La Hispaniola", within the Colonial Zone. It was the first headquarters of the Spanish Powers in the Americas, coupled with a big fortress to protect it. It was also known as the "City of Firsts", being the centerplace of many of the "first" structures and systems in the New World – like hospitals, universities, and cathedrals. (Unesco 1)

This city was so influential in the New World, it became the reference for many New World town planners, with its unique checkerboard grid pattern becoming staples in many different cities in the Americas. ([Unesco 1](#))

However, despite the economic control the Colonial Zone gave the Spanish, it did come with its fair share of trouble, especially with the other settlers beyond Santo Domingo.

Around the area that is now Haiti, were a couple of French hunters who were overstaying their welcome. The Spanish already had their hands full dealing with the indigenous Taínos in the island, plus they also didn't appreciate the French killing all their livestock. So, they were left with one option – kicking all the French out.

To enact their plan, the Spanish then went around the island, forcing the already struggling French hunters to move to the island of Tortuga, thinking they'll never have to deal with the French again. ([Wikipedia 1](#))

But, when the French were booted to Tortuga, they were left with little resources to live off of, eventually resorting to pillaging for survival. They specifically targeted any Spanish ships that were returning to Spain, loaded with tobacco, cocoa, and silver, so that they could sell it off in the developing trade world they now found themselves part of. ([Wikipedia 1](#))

With this incident, Tortuga was known as the birthplace of Pirates, which became one of the Spanish's major enemies. Yet, in the Caribbean trade game, pirates weren't the only upcoming threat to the Spanish.

With the growing colonial expansion in the Americas, many European countries saw the opportunities that arose, sailing out to build their own wealth. One of these countries, The British, were coming up on the horizon, looking to get a slice of the trade pie.

BRIDGETOWN

Right off the bat, the British did what the Spanish couldn't: setting up a successful trade town in Barbados -- which specialized in sugar --, and making it a powerful launching point for their imperial power. ([Unesco 1](#)) ([Soul of America 1](#))

Due to its location, the British established strong trade routes throughout the Americas, distributing resources and slaves across all of their colonies. Bridgetown, their main port town in Barbados, became so well-known that it was the only city outside of the current US visited by George Washinton, with two of his ancestors being early planters in the land. ([Wikipedia 1](#))

Yet, all of this was possible because Barbados was previously occupied by the Spanish, who had wiped out most of the indigenous population, and left, thinking there was nothing else they could do there. ([Soul of America 1](#))

Although the island was mostly deserted by that point, It was almost a blessing in disguise, as the British didn't have to fight the indigenous population to gain control of the island, unlike the Spanish before them.

With an easy entry, the British brought over a couple of their slaves, eventually founding Bridgetown and its Garrison, becoming a popular and successful trade town.

Still, that popularity came at a cost, as they were putting themselves out there for raids by other European countries, and the more dangerous pirate groups, who coincidentally had also been increasing in power and popularity, while visiting some islands in Barbados. ([Rogues 1](#))

Even so, the military forts of Bridgetown held strong. Strong enough to motivate the British to eventually rub shoulders with one of the other big contenders in the Caribbean Trade scene: The Spanish.

However, they didn't rush to fight the Spanish. The British knew if they went after the Spanish, they would eventually be overtaken by the pirates, no matter if they won the battle or not. The Spanish knew this too, so the Spanish and the British formed an unspoken temporary truce, not attacking each other, and trading with one another, while fortifying their ports to defend against the pirates.

Now, to get an idea of what the Spanish and British were defending against, let's flip over our eyepatches, pick up our curved swords, and take a look at the most interesting pirates that terrorized the Caribbean.

BRETHREN OF THE COAST

Remember when the Spanish kicked off a group of French hunters to the island of Tortuga? Well this band of hunters-turned-misfits ended up becoming a real thorn in the Spanish's side, turning Tortuga into a small pirate fort from where they launched their attacks. ([Wikipedia 1](#))

Since the island of Tortuga was just to the west of La Hispaniola, it had the benefit of being in the middle of the Caribbean trade routes. This meant the buccaneers could easily intercept most Spanish trade ships, further aiding their quest for revenge and survival.

United by a common enemy, this merry band of thieves named themselves the "Brethren of the Coast", developing their own code of conduct and way of life, accepting all those who needed a place to stay, and were willing to plunder. ([History 1](#))

This pirate fraternity attracted many would-be buccaneers from other countries as well, including England, Holland, and Portugal — just about anybody who wasn't Spanish. ([History 1](#))

Even though most of them received privateer "commissions" from England and France, most of them described themselves as buccaneers, which came from the French word of curing meat, "boucaner". ([History 1](#))

Considering where the small island they started from, the buccaneers grew into a considerable force, spreading throughout the Caribbean. However, they weren't as big as this next group.

REPUBLIC OF PIRATES

The Republic of Pirates in Nassau, Bahamas was well-known as a pirate rest stop, -- where famous pirates like Blackbeard, Sam Bellamy, and Stede Bonnet met -- and a good place to cash in on any loot plundered from the sea. ([Wikipedia 1](#))

Since Nassau was tucked away further from the rest of the Caribbean islands, this allowed the pirates to convene with each other, making plans on how to fight back against the rest of the European powers.

Still, even though the distance provided some relief to the pirates, calling Nassau a "rest stop" might be stretching it, since the French and Spanish attacked the town anytime they had the chance.

Even so, all the fighting for the island did stop the British from returning to reclaim Nassau for a while, possibly still benefiting from the spending the pirates did. All the pirates had to do was not fight each other.

To make sure this didn't happen, every pirate in Nassau was bound together by a "Pirate Code", which stated that each crew under the Republic would vote on the leadership of their own ships, while also not attacking any other pirate crews during their stay.. ([Wikipedia 1](#))

To further ensure the "Code" would be followed, the pirates unanimously voted on Magistrates, -- much like the British before them -- who would ensure the rules were being followed, and that the pirates who came in got along. ([Wikipedia 1](#))

One of these Magistrates ended up creating such a large name for himself, that his terror and influence is still talked about today. One known for the color of his beard and the warship he captained, this magistrate's name was Blackbeard, the most feared pirate of the sea. ([Wikipedia 1](#))

BLACKBEARD

Blackbeard was revered for the presence he held over the Indies and the Caribbean, sailing around the world to plunder any trade ship he came across, becoming a feared name across the seas. ([Qaronline 1](#))

His signature ship, "Queen Anne's Revenge", was mounted with more than 40 cannons, and over 300 bloodthirsty men, striking terror in the hearts of all those who laid their eyes upon the ship. ([Wikipedia 1](#))

However, Blackbeard didn't gain his nautical skills by lighting fuses in his beard and carrying around six pistols with him, but rather as a privateer -- basically hired sea militia -- to fight on the side of the British in Queen Anne's war, against the French and the Spanish. ([AP News 1](#)) ([Qaronline 1](#))

Despite having shown great leading potential and fighting capabilities, the Royal army tossed him aside right after the war ended. Fortunately for him,

while he sailed around nearby, the French slave ship "La Concorde" was full of sailors sick from scurvy and dysentery. This allowed Blackbeard to take over the warship, renaming it to "Queen Anne's Revenge". ([Qaronline 1](#))

Filled with spite for being tossed aside, Blackbeard built his crew up, spread his name, and terrorized nearly every part of the Caribbean and the Indies.

Yet, even for a pirate legend like him, death was slowly approaching. After Blackbeard held a blockade in Charleston, he learned that the British were going to start hunting pirates, but not without a compromise: Taking a Royal pardon, which would wipe away all his crimes, so long as he left the pirate life behind. ([Wikipedia 1](#))

Blackbeard, still wanting to be a pirate, left part of his crew to be pardoned in Charleston, and sailed away. Knowing he wasn't going to give up, Blackbeard was then chased by the British Royal Navy and the army of the Virginia Governor. ([Qaronline 1](#))

A couple of nautical miles up north, The Royal Navy fought Blackbeard by the North Carolina coast. Eventually, Blackbeard was bested in battle, with the British Royal Navy Lieutenant bringing back his severed head as a trophy. ([Qaronline 1](#)) ([Wikipedia 1](#))

Now let's get back to the Spanish, who had been setting up another island while the British dealt with the Pirates.

LA CABAÑA

After watching all the pirate wars going on in the Caribbean, the Spanish were terrified of losing another recently great point of trade, Cuba. The Spanish imposed massive trade restrictions on Cuba, preventing them from

trading with anybody that the Spanish didn't approve of -- which were mainly the pirates and other European countries. ([Fraunce 1](#))

Unfortunately for Spain, this backfired massively. The trade restrictions ended up making Cuba almost exclusively trade with pirates, and the Spanish's main rival, the British. ([Fraunce 1](#))

Realizing the great economic potential of the island, the British began developing a plan to attack the Spanish positions in Cuba and take over its main port city of Havana. ([Fraunce 1](#))

Havana was the Spanish's ticket to further greatness in the New World, after failing in Barbados. Not only that, since Cuba's location was in the middle of many active trade routes, they benefited from getting all the pass-by traffic that came into their ports, which Britain wanted a chunk of. ([Fraunce 1](#))

This desire culminated into a war, where Britain captured Havana, and proceeded to bomb the rest of the city until they surrendered. Seeing their favorite port blasted to smithereens, the Spanish made an agreement with the British, giving them Florida, so they could keep Havana, or at least what was left of it. ([Wikipedia 1](#))

Despite Havana's location being a hotspot for trade routes, the British were content with trading it for Florida, since it gave them the chance to expand their footprint in America, while keeping an eye on Nassau, which they wanted to reclaim later.

Still feeling the pangs of defeat, the Spanish spent a great deal of money in building the Fort of San Carlos of the Cabin, locally known as "La Cabaña". This fortress was so big, that by the time it was finished in 1774, it became the second largest colonial military installation in the New World. ([Wikipedia 1](#))

With the new fortifications, Havana fared well against any future threats, albeit at a huge expense for the Spanish crown.

Yet, this wouldn't be the last headache the Spanish had to deal with.

OLD SAN JUAN

Just like Havana, the harbor of San Juan, in Puerto Rico, became an important harbor town, and the starting point for many more Spanish expeditions, furthering their influence in the New World. ([Wikipedia 1](#))

Yet, also just like Havana, the influx of trade routes had attracted many unfavorable foes, like the pirates and the British. ([Wikipedia 1](#))

Still, the Spanish learned from their previous experience, and immediately got to work building multiple fortresses, without waiting for anybody to destroy them first. The main fortress they built was called "La Fortaleza", with the other, smaller one called "Fortín San Juan de la Cruz", also called "El Cañuelo". ([Discover 1](#))

These two fortresses hovered over the bay of San Juan, serving as a cross defense towards the sea. With this technique, any Pirate, British, or Dutch ship would fall victim to a volley of cannonballs, making the port an impenetrable fortress. ([Discover 1](#))

Still, despite the overwhelming defense the Spanish had at their hands, they decided it wasn't enough. The Kings of Spain ordered for a fort even larger than the one in Cuba, one they named "El Morro". ([Discover 1](#))

This fort was under construction for over 250 years, but ended up reaching 6 stories tall, filled to the brim with cannons, vantage points, and everything else you'd want in a fort. ([Discover 1](#))

El Morro was so imposing and effective at scaring away any enemy ships that saw it, the fortress ended up becoming a major deterrent for anybody -- like Britain and the pirates -- who even thought of challenging the Spanish. ([Discover 1](#))

Even so, by the time the fort was finished in 1790, the threat of pirates was already long gone, and Britain had their hands full with immense political duress, especially after having lost control of America. ([Wikipedia 1](#)) ([Open 1](#))

Now, the Spanish sat by their lonesome. They had control over the Caribbean, just like they wanted, with nobody to really contest them. At the end, one can say they finally got what they wanted.

Until the Dominican Republic, home to the Colonial zone -- their first establishment in the new World -- gained their independence in 1865. ([History 1](#))

This had been a big blow for Spain, but it wouldn't be the only thing they'd lose as San Juan, along with the fortress, was taken over by the US during the Spanish-American war in 1898. ([Discover 1](#))

Having lost most of its grip on the Caribbean, more and more Caribbean countries claimed their independence, further severing the Spanish from all the influence they had. Soon enough, Spain, along with Britain, became big pillars of Caribbean history, and relics of a bygone era. ([Atlas 1](#))

CONCLUSION

Throughout history, there's been many times where people had something great, then eventually shot themselves in the foot, by creating their own problems.

As we saw with the Spanish and the British, they both birthed the enemies that would become major enemies during their expansions. The British hired many privateers, which then turned to pirates, and the Spanish made everyone hate them, to the point they became pirates out of revenge. This is especially important today, where we've developed weapons stronger than cannons and cutlasses.

Even though pirates nowadays won't shoot cannons from large battleships anymore, they're still a prominent example of a problem that countries create themselves, either by lack of foresight, or due to making the wrong people mad.

With all this, we should keep in mind that we might just be creating our own issues, without really thinking about it. Just don't do what the Spanish or British did, and we shouldn't have to face another Golden era of Pirates.

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