The Rise of Elizabethan England, Slavery, and the birth of the "First" British Empire

- The Reformation Era divided Europe between Catholic and Protestant States. Catholic Spain dominated the world during the 16th century (1500s).

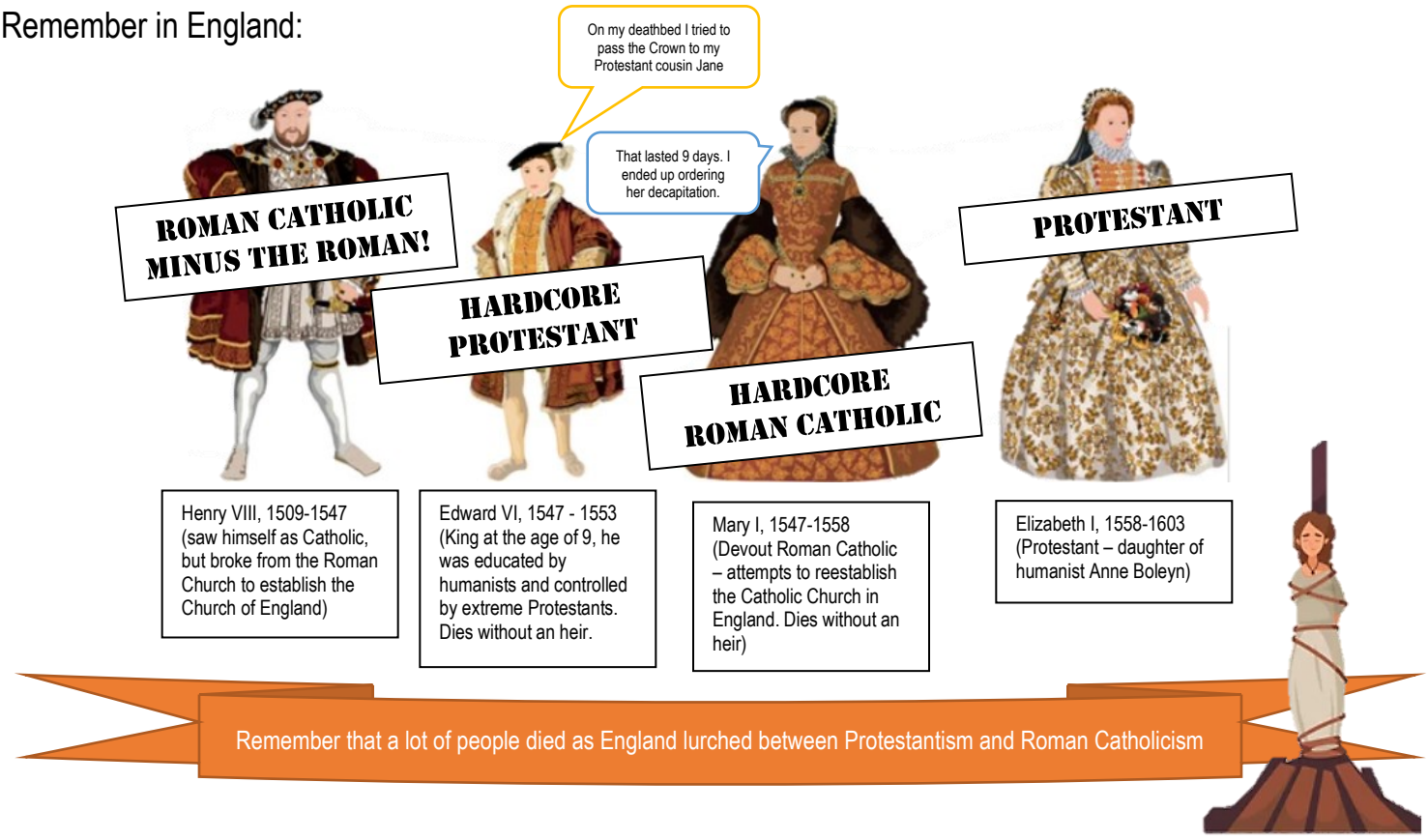
- Following Columbus, the Spanish Crown built a massive empire in Central/South America based on exploitation of resources (mainly gold & silver).

- Trying to establish their own empires, northern (except for France they were largely Protestant) European monarchies sent expeditions into “North America.” The French began their own search for a “Northwest Passage” to China. By 1504 French fishermen appeared off the coast of Newfoundland. Jacques Cartier led three voyages down the St. Lawrence during the 1530s.

    - Dutch, Swedish, and English expeditions were sent to what is now the New England coast.

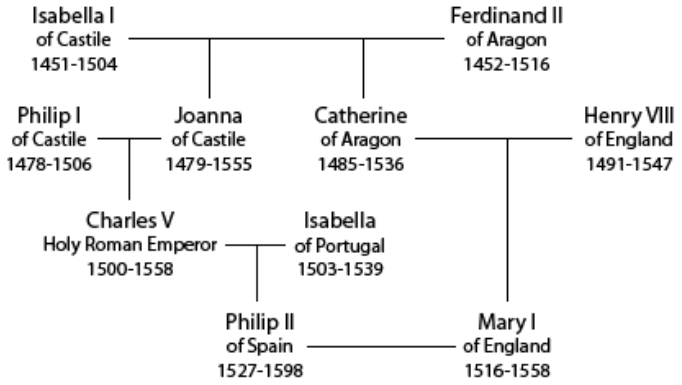
    - Zuan Caboto (John Cabot) explores the Newfoundland coast for England's King Henry VII in 1497, laying the foundations for the "First British Empire."

Remember in England:



- Spain reached its zenith of power under the reign of King Phillip II (1556-1598). Obsessed with Catholic unity (remember our discussion about the Reformation period and the fragmentation of the Christian Church in Europe), Phillip II began a series of efforts to reestablish Roman Catholicism as the sole church of Europe.

- Phillip II married England's Queen Mary I (1553-1558) ushering in a Catholic revival in England (undoing Protestant gains under Mary's half-brother Edward IV). Mary I dies childless and her half-sister Elizabeth (a Protestant) ascends the throne as Queen.



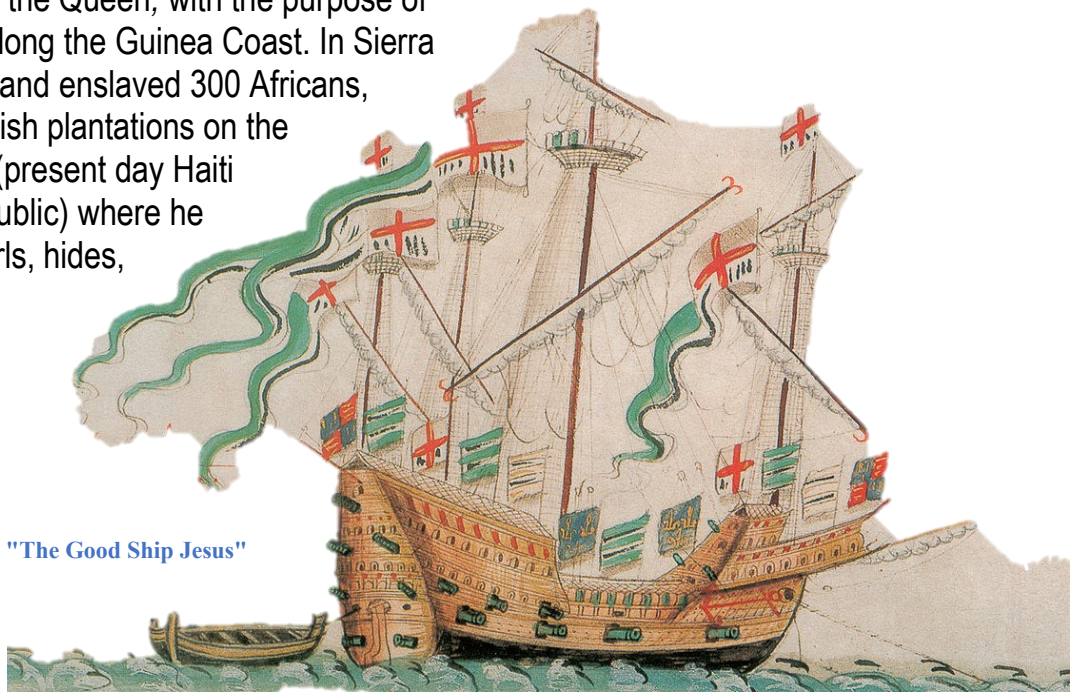
  - At this point England was a nation in decline – bankrupt, with an inadequate navy and little army.

  - Phillip II proposed marriage with Elizabeth I (which was flatly refused). Elizabeth meant to rule England alone and reestablish the Church of England (a Protestant church with the monarch as its Supreme Governor).

  - Puritans (Protestants that rejected the Church of England's appearance of a Roman Catholic Church – they wanted to strip the church of all its Roman vestments) challenged Elizabeth I's vision for an English Church.

- Elizabeth I authorized privateers (i.e. pirates John Hawkins, Humphrey Gilbert and Walter Raleigh) to raid and pillage Spanish ships, settlements and the slave-trade in the New World – this is the birth of the British Royal Navy.

- In 1562, a voyage by John Hawkins marked beginning of systematic English involvement in the enslavement of Africans. Rebranded a "privateer" by Queen Elizabeth I, Hawkins departed Plymouth in the *Jesus of Lübeck* (also known as "The Good Ship Jesus"), a vessel chartered for him by the Queen, with the purpose of capturing Africans along the Guinea Coast. In Sierra Leone, he captured and enslaved 300 Africans, taking them to Spanish plantations on the island of Hispanola (present day Haiti and Dominican Republic) where he traded them for pearls, hides, and sugar.



Slave Ship "The Good Ship Jesus"

- **News of the wealth generated through the enslavement of West African people furthered attracted Elizabeth I who sponsored additional expeditions by Hawkins, marking the entry of England into the slave trade.**

Did slavery already exist in West Africa?

Arab Peoples were enslaving African Peoples for many years before the arrival of Europeans.

African Nations – including the powerful Ashanti Empire – engaged in a form of indigenous slavery, but with marked differences from what Arabs and Europeans were perpetrating. Indigenous African slavery did not include the selling of people – people were enslaved through war, as well as debts that were owed. Enslaved people were included in their captive's family and were supposed to be cared for as such – they could not be sold to someone else. **They were deprived of their freedom, but they were not a commodity.**[1]

Learn more by watching *Slavery and Suffering - History Of Africa with Zeinab Badawi*

- The history of the expansion of British settlement in the Western Hemisphere, and indeed the First British Empire, is closely tied to the Slave Trade and racist ideas of a human hierarchy dominated by Europeans.

[1] Professor Augustin Holl, UNESCO's General History of Africa. *Slavery and Suffering - History Of Africa with Zeinab Badawi.*

- Sir John Hawkins and Sir Francis Drake were responsible for establishing the foundations of the English Slave Trade Triangle. The pair personally enslaved 1,200 people, likely killing three times that number in the process.[2]

- Phillip II directly challenged Elizabeth I, calling her a "heretic queen." In 1588 the Spanish Armada (fleet) was sent to England to invade and overthrow Elizabeth I. The English – commanded by John Hawkins, Francis Drake and Martin Frobisher – scattered the Spanish Armada by sending blazing fire ships into its midst. A great gale then blew the Spanish into Scottish waters – a devastating "blow." This act of weather was seen by many as a divine endorsement of Elizabeth's Protestant England. The Spanish never recovered from this defeat, and thus began the decline of Spain.

- **The reign of Elizabeth I saw the emergence of Protestant England as a world power.** The Queen rebuilt the navy, and began asserting English claims in the New World. Refugees from religious persecution (largely Puritans) fled Elizabethan England for colonies being planted along the eastern shoreline of North America. The religious perspectives of these settlers would have a profound impact on the states that would later emerge.

Largely Puritans, or other ultra-Protestant denominations of Christianity

Multiple denominations of Christianity (including some Roman Catholics)

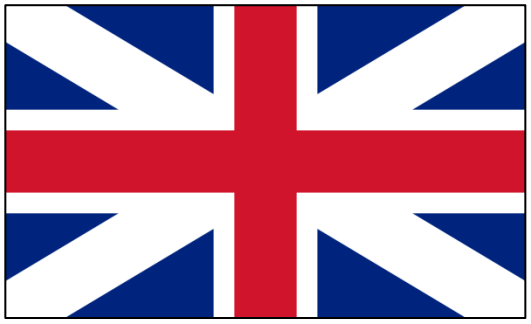
Largely Church of England Protestants

From the book The Making of America, published by National Geographic Society © 2002

[2] John Hawkins: Admiral, Privateer, slave trader. (2018, August 06). Retrieved February 17, 2021, from https://www.rmg.co.uk/discover/explore/sir-john-hawkins

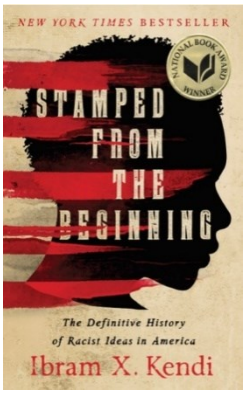
- Elizabeth I sent Martin Frobisher on a series of expeditions to the high Arctic of North America in search of a Northwest Passage to China.
    - First voyage returned with samples of ore he believed contained gold, causing Frobisher to found the Company of Cathay.
    - During his second voyage, Frobisher landed on modern-day Baffin Island, claiming it in the name of the Queen.
    - Frobisher's third voyage ended in financial ruin as the "gold" he mined out of the Arctic turned out to be worthless. All attempts to colonize ended in failure. Still, the explorer had sparked an interest in his Queen to establish a vast northern empire in the continent.
- British East India Company is founded by Royal Charter from Queen Elizabeth I in 1600.

- Elizabeth I's successor, King James I (1603-1625), continued a change in approach to colonization. According to *Traditions & Encounters* (McGraw Hill, 2006) "private investors played larger roles in English and French colonial efforts. Individuals put up the money to finance expeditions to America, and they reunited much more control over their colonies' affairs . . . Although English colonies were always subject to royal authority . . . they also maintained their own assemblies and influenced the choice of governors.



Under James I, England and Scotland are united under one monarch. The Union Jack is created to symbolize this Royal Union.

- The Virginia Company of London founds the first permanent English-speaking settlement at Jamestown, Virginia colony, in 1604. The company's charter is revoked, and Crown rule comes in 1624.



- Ibram X. Kendi writes in *Stamped from the Beginning* "In colonizing Virginia (and later New England), the British had already begun to conceive of distinct races. The word *race* first appeared in Frenchman Jacques de Brézés 1481 poem "The Hunt," where it referred to hunting dogs. As the term expanded to include humans over the next century, it was used primarily to identify and differentiate and animalize African people. . . Thanks to this malleable concept in Western Europe, the British were free to lump the multiethnic Native Americans and the multiethnic Africans into the same racial groups.[3]

[3] Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning*, (New York: Bold Type Books, 2017), 36.

- In August 1619, the first recorded slave ship arrived in English colonial America where Dutch pirates sold twenty Angolan captives to Virginia Governor George Yeardley.[4]

    - Yeardley's cousin, John Pory, became the colony's first speaker in the inaugural legislature. Pory also set the price of America's first cash crop – tobacco[5] – and recognized the need for labour to grow it. Kendi explains "There is no reason to believe that George Yeardley and the other original enslavers did not rationalize their enslavement of African people in the same way that other British intellectuals did – and in the same way that Latin American slaveholders did – by considering these African people to be stamped from the beginning as a racially distinct people, as lower than themselves . . .

- *Society of Merchant Venturers* (a private entrepreneurial and charitable organisation in the English city of Bristol) established a permanent settlement at Cuper's Cove, Newfoundland, in 1610.

- St. George's, Bermuda was founded by the *Virginia Company*, in 1612.

Mohawk Peoples in Bermuda

Captain Anthony White, the largest landowner in Bermuda at the time, enslaved 80 Indigenous People from North America (Turtle Island) and sent them to Bermuda. It is believed that these people came from the Mohawk Nation (Haudenosaunee Confederacy). They were sent to live on St. David's Island and put to work as farmers, boat builders, labourers and fishermen.

To this day, powwows and other important gatherings are held on the island.

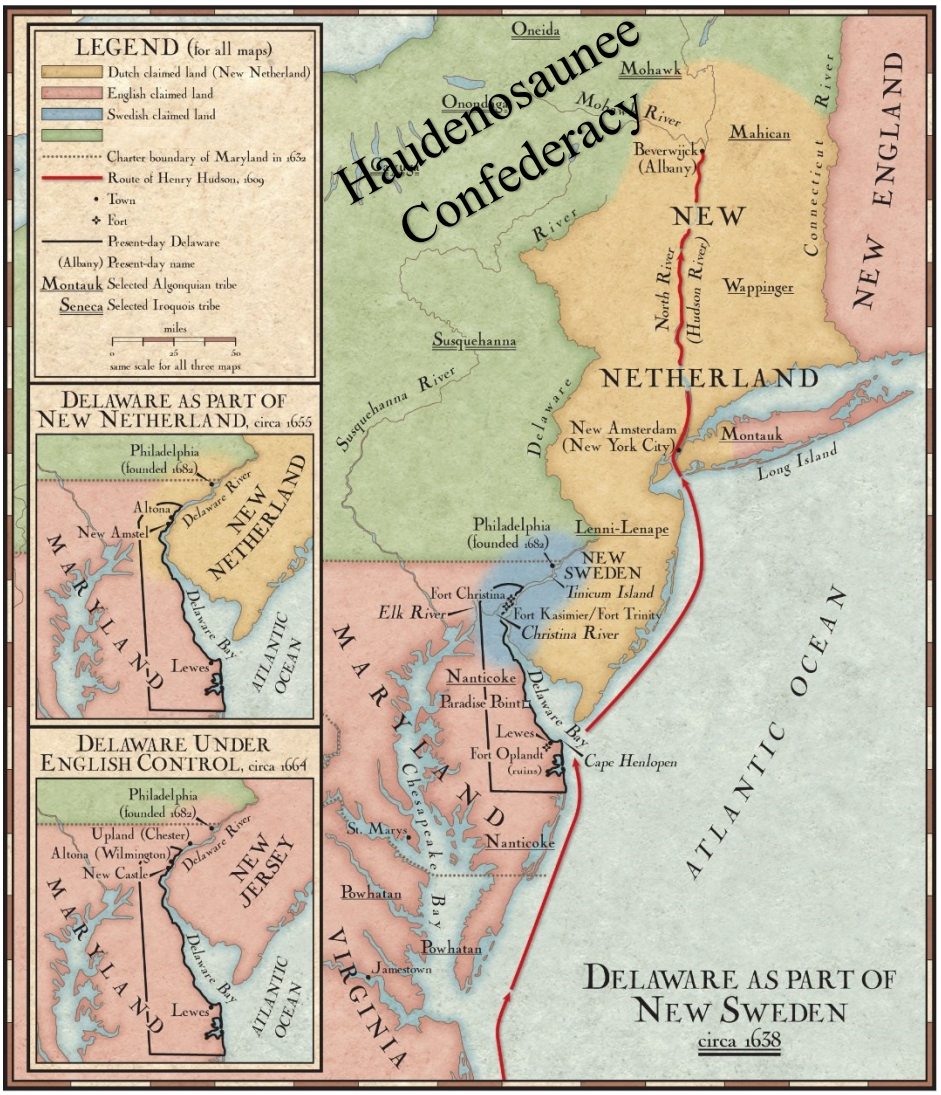
Photography by: Scott Tucker, Bermuda Magazine, 2018

[4] Ibid, 38.
[5] Tobacco is considered to be sacred by many Indigenous civilizations across North America.

- Maryland was founded as a haven for Roman Catholics (1634).

- In 1664, the English takeover the Dutch colony of New Netherlands, renaming it as the Province of New York. The English also acquired New Sweden, which they renamed Delaware.

    - The English Crown (King Charles II) assumes the Dutch position in the Covenant Chain Relationship (Treaty) with the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.



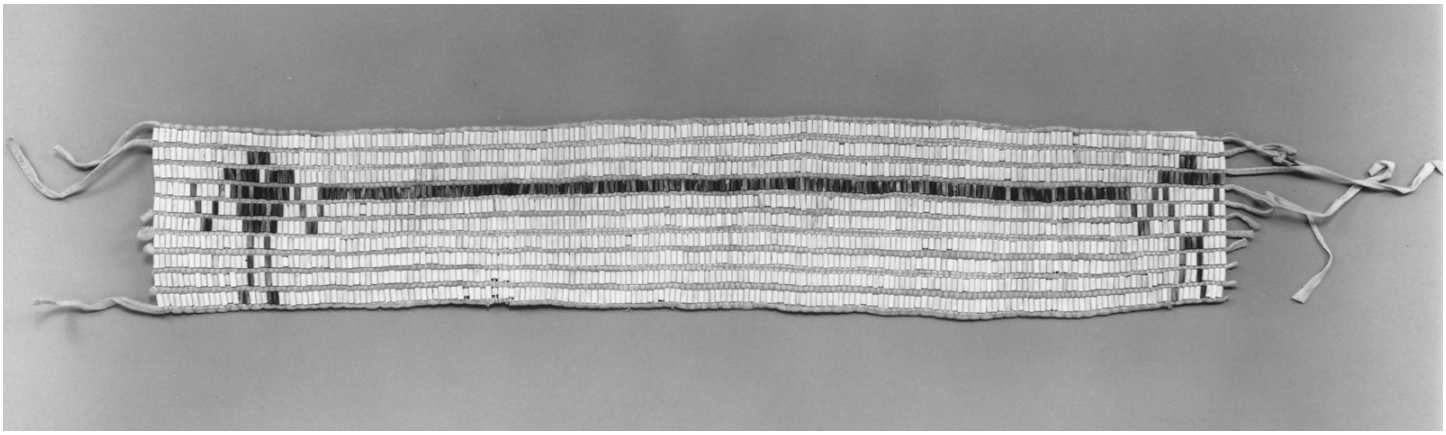
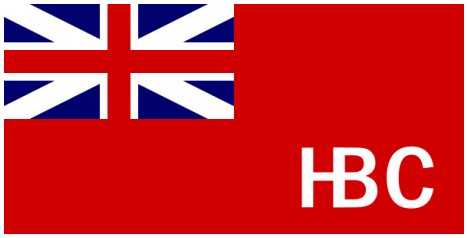


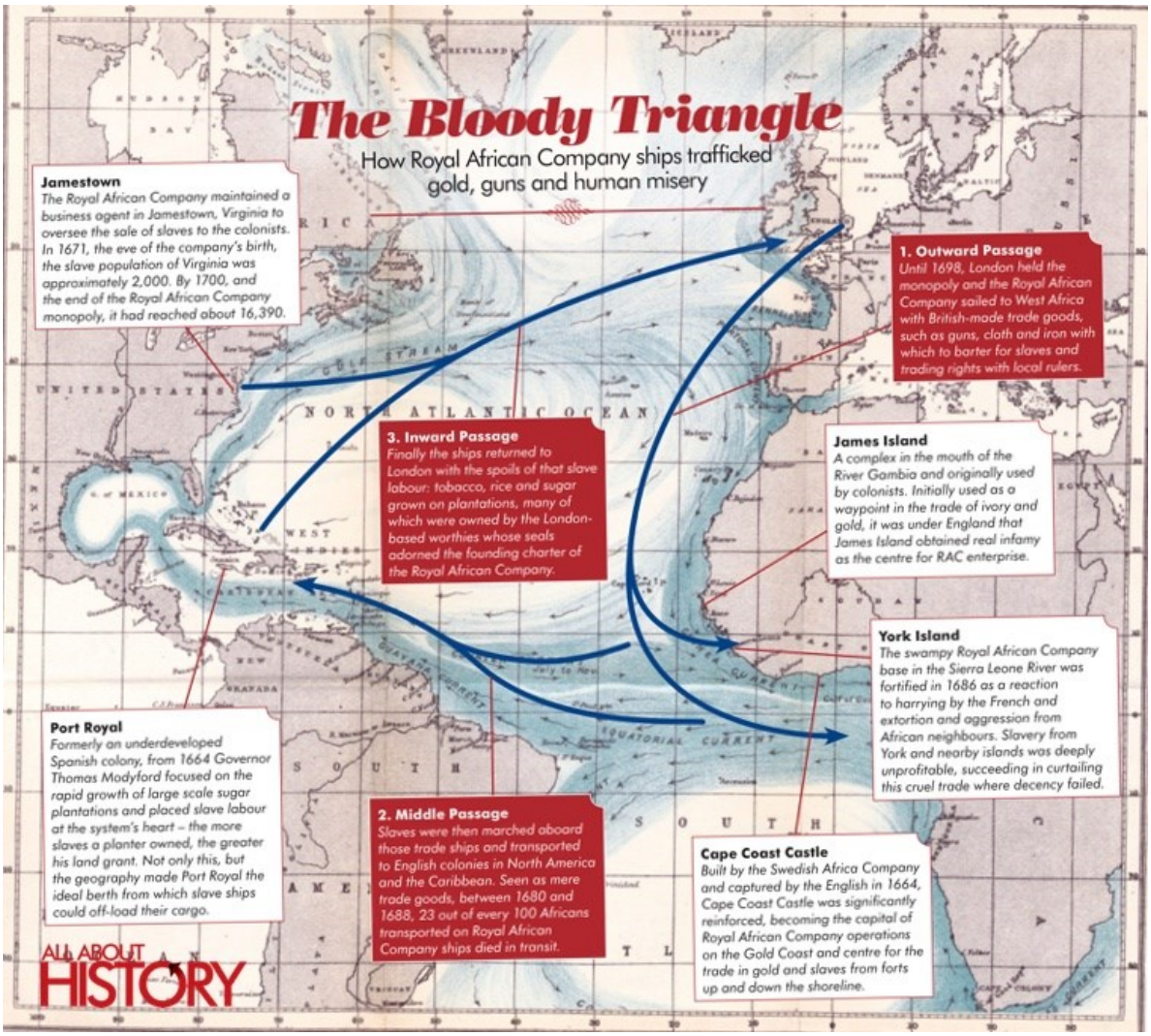
Image of The Friendship Belt, representing the Covenant Chain. The belt depicted above was associated with a treaty made with Lt. Governor William Denny of Pennsylvania on behalf of the Crown in 1757. The common symbol of peace and unity in wampum diplomacy is two figures holding hands, or interlocking their arms, thereby making a human chain. The imagery shows two figures, one of the King and the other of the Haudenosaunee. They hold the chain which represents clear and honest communications between them, as well as the open path of peace that connects the two. To the Grand River Haudenosaunee, the Covenant Chain obligated to defend the King's interest. Six Nations Legacy Consortium Collection.

- King Charles II incorporates by royal charter the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), granting it a monopoly on the fur trade with Indigenous Peoples in the area known as Rupert's Land in 1670.



- In 1672 the Royal African Company is established by the Duke of York (future King James II), receiving from King Charles II a monopoly of the trade to supply enslaved people to the British colonies of the Caribbean.

    - Its ships, protected by the Royal Navy, sailed out of London, Liverpool and Bristol to West Africa, transporting around 5,000 slaves a year in the 1680s. The companies not only enslaved people but branded the companies initials, RAC or DY (standing for Duke of York) on the slaves' chests to mark their ownership. Between 1672 and 1713 the RAC transported an estimated 100,000 enslaved African across the Atlantic.[6]



[6] Mary. (2020, July 17). The Royal African company and Edward Colston. Retrieved February 17, 2021, from https://sheroamsandrambles.com/2020/07/18/the-royal-african-company-and-edward-colston/