

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT: BRITISH EMPIRE OVERVIEW**[SAILOR]**

Captain!

[CORNWALLIS]

What do you see, sailor?

[SAILOR]

It's History Bombs, sir. The British Empire, In One Take!

[CORNWALLIS]They'll never take the British Empire!**[SAILOR]**

...I think he's misunderstood the concept.

[NELUFAR]

As the sails are being unfurled
On this complex journey all around the world,
One note: this video's just eight minutes,

[CHRIS]

Yeah that's not long – the form has limits!
Centuries of change, resistance and violence
All involving this rainy little island –
Starting in England for the first verse,
It's fifteen-eighty-one: cue Elizabeth the First.

[ELIZABETH]

I knight thee Sir Francis Drake,
Your ship sailed round the world for my sake,
Proclaiming the glory of England's name
And embarrassing our rivals, Portugal and Spain!

[FRANCIS DRAKE]

My honour your majesty – let the legends be told,
I stole more Spanish gold than our ship could hold –
On the Golden Hind I went to find gaps
To fill in our ever-growing global maps!

[CHRIS]

Exploring the so-called 'New World' by ship was big
business at the time. Great riches could be traded or
stolen from indigenous people and European rivals. But
that's not the whole story about Drake. Alongside Sir
John Hawkins, he was there at the very start of one of
the British Empire's worst atrocities: the enslavement of
millions of African people.

[DRAKE]

...In the powerful kingdoms of Africa,
We have seen Portuguese slave traffickers,
So there's money to be made if we could go on a raid –
We could start our own Atlantic slave trade!

[ELIZABETH]

England must get in on it too!
Drake and Hawkins, you know what to do –
Take enslaved people over the seas,
And sell them to Spanish colonies!

[CHRIS]

British slave trading developed rapidly with active
support from monarchs, merchants, the military, and the
public. More on this to come.

[NELUFAR]

At the same time, British colonists built permanent
settlements in a place they called America. Some
wanted land and wealth, others sought refuge from
religious persecution. But wherever they went, they of
course met people who were already living there...

[POCAHONTAS]

Indigenous princess, dressed to impress
Proud daughter of the Powhatan, east coast power clan
The British built Jamestown close to me,
I was kidnapped, but saw an opportunity,
Married a colonist to stop the war between our peoples
Went to London, met the King, saw St Paul's steeple,
Leader and a diplomat – what, they never taught
you that?
I brokered peace among us. My name? Pocahontas.

[NELUFAR]

In 1616 Pocahontas was an honoured guest in England,
but sadly the peace she achieved didn't hold. Colonists
killed millions of Indigenous people in wars, land grabs,
and pandemics like smallpox.

[CHRIS]

Meanwhile, British 'triangular trade' routes took enslaved
people from Africa, over the horrific 'Middle Passage',
to work on Caribbean plantations. But there was always
resistance.

[NANNY OF THE MAROONS]

Resistance that led to a victory
Sweeter than the sugar in a British cup of tea.
Nanny of the Maroons, I led a liberation,
Our community thrived when we escaped
the plantations.
A fighter and Obeah magic-maker,
I led Maroons in the hills of Jamaica,
And our tactics beat the British down
To sign a peace treaty with Nanny Town.

[NELUFAR]

The sixteen- and seventeen-hundreds saw resistance
to Britain's growing empire. During the Seven Years
War, the Bengali leader Siraj ud-Daulah fought to keep
independence against the expanding British East India
Company, but was defeated by Robert Clive at the Battle
of Plassey.

[CHRIS]

And by now there were thirteen British colonies in
America, who didn't get on with their rulers in London...

8.1 THE BRITISH EMPIRE (IN ONE TAKE)

[CORNWALLIS running after the protestor]
Stop, that's our property! In seventeen-seventy-three
The Americans are throwing British tea into the sea!

[WASHINGTON]
It's no longer 'proper tea'. This is a lot of fun –
Here comes the General! George Washington!
Earl Cornwallis, lemme give you the recap,
Your response to Boston is a storm in a teacup –
It's simple: taxes that the British levy
On American colonies are getting too heavy,
And we have no say in your Parliament.

[CORNWALLIS]
And this is how you want to make your argument?!
Washington, you once fought for the Brits
In the Seven Years War, but I see that it's
Too late to change you anymore –
Get ready for a Revolutionary War!

[WASHINGTON]
...which we will win against the British Crown –
You surrender to the revolutionaries at Yorktown!

[CORNWALLIS]
We've lost America! The empire is diminished!
Surely my colonial career is finished...
No wait, I'm fine! Off to fight another war,
In southern India, at Mysore.

[TIPU]
Cornwallis, this invasion is deeply insulting,
You've met your match in Tipu Sultan!
Our strong and diverse society
Will resist the onslaught of the E.I.C.!
My innovative rocketry will guarantee us victory...

[CORNWALLIS turning to camera]
Hmm, we'll see. They end up a colony.
Well that's that. Now I'm fed up of roaming.
Time to head back to my home in...

[WOLFE]
Ireland is not your home!

[CORNWALLIS]
Leader of the Irish rebels, Wolfe Tone!

[WOLFE]
That's right Cornwallis, don't look so surprised –
Ireland's the first place the English colonised,
Suppressed our culture and brought endless slaughter,
Gonna send the invaders back over the water!

[CHRIS]
The British responded with deadly force to uprisings like
the Irish Rebellion of 1798. Britain could manufacture
weapons at huge scale and speed during the Industrial
Revolution, partly due to the wealth that was pouring into
the country via the triangular slave trade.

[NELUFAR]
But in the United Kingdom itself, attitudes to the slave
trade were beginning to change...

[EQUIANO]
Olaudah Equiano is the name, I rose to fame
With a book on my enslavement, and how I came
To make a payment for my freedom – I'm a
self-made man –
I made England home, and then had bigger plans:
Abolition of the brutal slave trade!
With my writing and the speeches I made, hearts
were swayed.
Not bad for a boy kidnapped from Nigeria,
With eloquence and acumen highly superior.

[CHRIS]
While the British public argued over the morality of
slavery, the government looked for new territory to make
up for the loss of the American colonies.

[NELUFAR]
A British Navy officer called James Cook had mapped
a vast continent on the other side of the world. But like
America two hundred years before, there were people
already there...

[BENNELONG]
I'm Bennelong. I met British sailors
Who said my land was called Australia –
Which is not our name, and we've been here
Caring for Country for tens of thousands of years.
They kidnapped me so I could do translations –
I went to England, and mediated for our nation,
But when I came home, I left the colonists behind.
Their diseases and their violence troubled my mind.

[NELUFAR]
Hundreds of thousands of British convicts and civilians
went to Australia, where they devastated Indigenous
people through persecution and kidnappings, justified as
a mission to 'civilise' and spread Christianity.

[CHRIS]
The government was finally persuaded to abolish slavery
in 1833, but compensated former slave owners with
huge sums of money. This historic injection of capital
set the stage for even more expansion...

[VICTORIA, with a map of Victorian Empire territory]
Feel the euphoria for the reign of Victoria!
Check out my Great Exhibition of Britannia Gloria.
Ruled a quarter of the globe – no empire finer!
Got rich from the Opium Wars against China,
Forced most of Asia to buy our drugs,
And then we crushed the mutinous thugs
In India – no more East India Company!
I'm Empress now. It's our national destiny!

[RHODES]
Let's scramble for Africa! A continent of loads
Of land and diamonds for me – Cecil Rhodes.
The empire needs metals, ivory, rubber –
With our European rivals we've agreed among each other
Over who gets where, which resources and jewels,
Because we believe whites have a right to rule!

8.1 THE BRITISH EMPIRE (IN ONE TAKE)

[GANDHI]

But your plan to colonise had a surprise in store:
You were soon embroiled in the Boer War,
A white man's conflict on African soil
With British concentration camps, murder for the spoils.
I was in South Africa with Indian workers,
We organised a volunteer ambulance service,
Which the warring British found pretty handy –
Recognise me? I'm M.K. Gandhi!

[NELUFAR]

Gandhi's time in South Africa was crucial in forming his
methods for non-violent resistance. He later returned to
India to lead the struggle for independence...

[CHRIS]

The pseudo-scientific racism of Cecil Rhodes was
common among white elites of the time. The Boer War
had a terrible death toll. But an even bloodier conflict
arose between European rivals in World War One...

[INDIAN SOLDIER]

We answered the call from all over the empire,
To stand together under enemy fire,
For a promise of freedom, safety, respect,
Or believing the empire was ours to protect –

[WEST INDIES SOLDIER]

From India, Australia, Canada, West Indies,
Millions signed up, hoping that in these
Sacrifices, our common humanity
Could remake the world after war's insanity.

[CHRIS]

Millions of people across the empire made vital
contributions to both World Wars. But Britain was now
weakened, in huge debt, and needed help.

[WEST INDIES SOLDIER]

So many people took up Britain's invitation
To live and work here – we're the Windrush Generation.

[NELUFAR]

Still, many other citizens resisted being part of British-led
conflicts. Movements for independence grew across the
world, from the Easter Rising in Ireland to the Mau Mau
Rebellion in Kenya.

[CHRIS]

The empire's retreat involved massacres and torture by
British soldiers, and provoked civil wars that continue
to shape our world. No-one saw this more directly than
Gandhi...

[GANDHI]

British wars and trade were built on maps.
But when the empire began to collapse
The colonial lines they drew still remained,
Dividing people, and causing deep pain.
The India-Pakistan partition
Caused a million deaths and stoked nationalism
Which inspired my assassin. It's hard to find humanity
After centuries of imperial brutality.
The scars are deep, but many are covered.
Let us witness how people survived and suffered.
Instead of a myth of pomp and glory,
Let us look for, and listen to, the real stories.

[CORNWALLIS]

Oh. Is it over, then?