



Pirate Republic *Background Guide*



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Pirate Republic

Introduction:

Letter from The Chair:

Ahoy, Delegates!

Welcome to EagleMUNC VII! My name is Cameron Pott and I am excited to be the chair for your Republic of Pirates Committee. I am a senior in the Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences studying International Studies with a concentration in Economics and a minor in Hispanic Studies. My love for international affairs began when I moved to London, England when I was 13 years old, and has followed me to my undergraduate studies. I did not begin participating in Model United Nations until I joined EagleMUNC as a staffer my freshman year. For the last two years, I have been a Director of Political Affairs for the FIFA and IAEA committees at EagleMUNC V and the International Court of Justice and DISEC committees at EagleMUNC VI. Unfortunately, I missed the conference last year because I was studying abroad in Madrid, Spain. After graduation, I hope to begin working in consulting and eventually go back to school to earn a MBA.

Our committee will represent the coalition of pirate captains that terrorized the Bahamas and ruled the city of New Providence, Nassau from 1715-1718. As delegates, you will have to deal with the myriad characters present on the committee and navigate the New World to take as much treasure as you can before the British (or a fellow captain) drag ye down to Davy Jones' Locker! Please reach out to me if you have any questions. We have some fantastic events coming, so I cannot wait to meet all of you and dive into the Golden Age of Pirates together.

Arr!

Cameron Pott

Historical Background:

The War of Spanish Succession ended with the Treaty of Ulbrecht in 1714. This war was fought between the major European empires over who would take control of the Spanish empire after King Charles II died without an heir to take his place. The French, Austrians, and British all wanted a chunk of the empire, and used their significant naval and military powers to claim their share.¹ Once the war ended, however, thousands of sailors from the British Navy were out of work, with no prospects for a better life. Many of these sailors went to the Bahamas to become pirates, where the many remote islands and harbors to hide in, and a lack of governmental stability in the region meant that crime went largely unpunished.² These pirates would loot Spanish ships carrying gold, silver, slaves, sugar, tobacco, and other valuable goods between the Bahamas and Iberian Peninsula. Many merchant ships were unprotected, and even when they were, the more agile pirate ships could hide in the small harbors and islands of the Bahamas to escape large colonial Navy ships. At first, the British would condone these activities because they weakened the Spanish, but when pirates became emboldened and began attacking any ship carrying valuables, the British began cracking down on their illicit activities.³

Sailors chose a life of piracy because it often represented a better standard of living than working as a sailor on a merchant or naval ship. On these ships, there was a clear hierarchy of power; wages were suppressed by employers looking to raise profits, and the living conditions

¹ “Golden Age of Piracy | War of the Spanish Succession.” Accessed June 24, 2018.
<http://www.goldenageofpiracy.org/wars/war-of-the-spanish-succession.php>.

² “The Real Pirates of the Caribbean | Explore Royal Museums Greenwich.” Accessed June 24, 2018.
<https://www.rmg.co.uk/discover/explore/real-pirates-caribbean>.

³ “The Real Pirates of the Caribbean | Explore Royal Museums Greenwich.” Accessed June 24, 2018.
<https://www.rmg.co.uk/discover/explore/real-pirates-caribbean>.

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were brutal, with mortality rates upward of 30%.⁴ A dead sailor was preferable to a dead slave, because a dead man's wages did not have to be paid, but a dead slave was a loss of profit. These conditions contrasted heavily with the pirates' way of life. Pirates developed an egalitarian system where captains were held accountable by their crews, and decisions were made through popular vote.⁵ Although this lifestyle was just as dangerous and brutal as in the Navy, the crew was given power to make their own decisions toward seeking glory and treasure.

The first significant pirate attack of this era occurred in 1715, when a group of pirates led by Benjamin Hornigold and Henry Jennings raided ships recovering gold from a sunken Spanish galleon. These pirates were banned from spending this gold at their home island of British Jamaica because it was stolen, so they sought to establish their own society by settling the abandoned island of Nassau and building the city of New Providence, where they declared themselves governors.⁶ The native population of the island had been wiped out by disease and the Spanish slave trade, and the island's shallow bay allowed the pirates to keep their smaller sloops without the risk of large British man-of-wars coming to put an end to their crimes.⁷ The pirates only looted Spanish ships at first, and other pirates, merchants, and prostitutes came to the island to enjoy the treasures obtained in these raids.⁸ Eventually, the town grew so large and powerful that pirates began giving themselves mock titles like Magistrate and Commodore.⁹

⁴ "Golden Age of Piracy | Post Spanish Succession Period." Accessed June 24, 2018.
<http://www.goldenageofpiracy.org/golden-age-of-piracy/post-spanish-succession-period.php>.

⁵ "Golden Age of Piracy | Post Spanish Succession Period." Accessed June 24, 2018.
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⁶ "Golden Age of Piracy | Post Spanish Succession Period." Accessed June 24, 2018.
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⁷ "Golden Age of Piracy | Post Spanish Succession Period." Accessed June 24, 2018.
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⁸ "Pirate Havens | Republic of Pirates." Accessed August 9, 2018.
<http://www.goldenageofpiracy.org/pirate-havens/republic-of-pirates.php>.

⁹ "Pirate Havens | Republic of Pirates." Accessed August 9, 2018.
<http://www.goldenageofpiracy.org/pirate-havens/republic-of-pirates.php>.

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These pirates formed their Republic on Nassau without much interference from the British, who used their presence as a measure of security from the French and Spanish Navy. Some captains were presented with “letters of marque” which essentially made them unofficial soldiers of the British Empire. In these documents, a government would give permission to a privateer to seize the property of certain other nations, like the Spanish. A percentage of this was supposed to be paid to the issuer of the letter, but news of treaties or other official correspondence travelled slowly, so many pirates were able to operate in a quasi-legal, condoned state of being.¹⁰ Even when their activities were overlooked, pirates mostly avoided diplomatic interaction with Colonial powers because they feared hanging and other legal consequences.

The original leaders of New Providence, Nassau were named the Flying Gang, and contained many pirate captains that are household folk heroes today, such as Edward “Blackbeard” Teach, Charles Vane, “Calico” Jack Rackham, and Anne Bonny.¹¹ These famous pirates wanted to construct a new, more democratic society under the Pirate Code, which was an organizational response to the living conditions in the Royal Navy. Each ship had its own individualized Code, usually a written document laying out the rules for the ship and dividing plunder, injury compensation, and punishment for disobedient crew members.¹² Once all pirates had taken an oath and signed, the document was prominently displayed on the ship to encourage transparency in dealings. While many pirates were willing participants, some skilled navigators or artisans were forced into piracy; these unwilling participants would ask to either be “forced to sign” the document, or would only leave a mark on the paper that did not reveal their name, so

¹⁰ “Letters Of Marque - Pirate Life - The Way of the Pirates.” Accessed July 8, 2018.
<http://www.thewayofthepirates.com/pirate-life/letters-of-marque/>.

¹¹ “Golden Age of Piracy | Post Spanish Succession Period.” Accessed June 24, 2018.
<http://www.goldenageofpiracy.org/golden-age-of-piracy/post-spanish-succession-period.php>.

¹² “Pirate Code - Rules and Code of Conduct for Pirates.” Accessed July 8, 2018.
<http://www.thewayofthepirates.com/pirate-life/pirate-code/>.

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that they could claim innocence if the ship were ever taken by the Navy.¹³ While few of these Codes exist today, those still around often lay out rules for equal voting procedures; electing a captain; distributing treasure shares; food rations; punishments for stealing, abandonment, and assisting stowaways; and how to settle disputes.¹⁴ The Code could only be changed through negotiation and a popular vote of the signees in the crew. Many Codes dictated that women were forbidden from ships because they caused arguments and were seen as bad luck, although there were notable exceptions.¹⁵ Captured slaves were often given the opportunity to join pirate crews and were seen as equals regardless of race, with some former slaves even becoming captains themselves.¹⁶ The Republic of Pirates in Nassau had its own governing “Code of Conduct” which was similar to the Pirate Codes of ships.¹⁷ While crude, these governing documents were actually quite progressive in the rigid and hierarchal society of the 18th century.

Eventually, the Flying Gang became too rich, powerful, and daring as they began to attack ships indiscriminately with their growing fleet. At its peak, New Providence was home to over two thousand pirates and hundreds of ships and the British feared that they would attempt to build a new state and society outside of the constructs of colonialism.¹⁸ As more British ships were pillaged and Britain became the dominant power in the region, the government realized that piracy was hurting the lucrative triangular slave trade, and so in July 1718, Governor Woodes

¹³ “Pirate Code - Rules and Code of Conduct for Pirates.” Accessed July 8, 2018. <http://www.thewayofthepirates.com/pirate-life/pirate-code/>.

¹⁴ “Pirate Code - Rules and Code of Conduct for Pirates.” Accessed July 8, 2018. <http://www.thewayofthepirates.com/pirate-life/pirate-code/>.

¹⁵ “Pirate Lifestyle | Women in Piracy.” Accessed August 9, 2018. <http://www.goldenageofpiracy.org/pirate-lifestyle/women-in-piracy.php>.

¹⁶ “Pirate Lifestyle | Pirates and Slavery.” Accessed August 9, 2018. <http://www.goldenageofpiracy.org/pirate-lifestyle/pirates-and-slavery.php>.

¹⁷ “Pirate Havens | Republic of Pirates.” Accessed August 9, 2018. <http://www.goldenageofpiracy.org/pirate-havens/republic-of-pirates.php>.

¹⁸ “Pirate Havens | Nassau.” Accessed August 13, 2018. <https://www.goldenageofpiracy.org/pirate-havens/nassau.php>.

Rogers was sent to New Providence with three warships and two sloops to end piracy completely.¹⁹ He offered a King's Pardon to anyone who would give up piracy.

Topic 1: Trade

Throughout history, pirates have always depended on trade and trading routes as their source of revenue, and the Golden Age of Piracy was no different. The Flying Gang in the Caribbean funded New Providence by attacking ships trading along the network known as the "Triangular Trade," a convenient route reinforced by trade winds.²⁰ Merchants would transport slaves and goods from Africa to the Bahamas, where they would be exchanged for cotton, tobacco, and sugar to be brought back to Europe and manufactured into finished goods, which in turn would be brought back down to Africa to trade for slaves. Because of the difficulty in accommodating these different kinds of goods and in crossing the Atlantic, a single loop could take as long as a year depending on the season.²¹ Pirates in the Caribbean would hide in harbors along major trade routes, quickly board unprotected merchant ships, and either steal the ship itself or quickly unload the goods on board before scuttling the captured ship and escaping back to their hideouts in their own faster ships. They usually wanted to make these raids with as little violent contact as possible because they could not compete with the weaponry of trained soldiers.

The members of the Flying Gang must create an addendum to their Pirate Code that lays out a trade code for rules and regulations, both for capturing goods at sea and for trading them at port. Earlier pirates would only attack Spanish ships, but now that the English have begun to

¹⁹ "New Providence - Pirate History - The Way of the Pirates." Accessed July 8, 2018. <http://www.thewayofthepirates.com/regions-and-places/new-providence/>.

²⁰ "Triangular Trade - Facts about Piracy at Triangular Trade." Accessed July 20, 2018. <http://www.thewayofthepirates.com/regions-and-places/triangular-trade/>.

²¹ "Triangular Trade - Facts about Piracy at Triangular Trade." Accessed July 20, 2018. <http://www.thewayofthepirates.com/regions-and-places/triangular-trade/>.

dominate the Bahamas, the committee must decide which ships can be attacked and which must be allowed safe passage. Because almost everything exchanged in New Providence has been obtained illegally, the committee must also make decisions on which goods can legally be traded and which, if any, will be banned from the island. In making these decisions, captains will consider their personal access to different kinds of resources and how trade and goods valuation may affect their relative standing in the committee, as well as their personal or business relationships with other pirates or governmental powers. The committee must come to an agreement regarding their treasure, or face the unraveling of their new society. After all, a pirate's only desires are lots of loot and a good life.

Topic 2: Pirate Feuds

Pirates were notoriously fickle and bad-tempered, often getting in brawls over perceived slights or changing loyalties, both between formerly friendly captains, or the crews that they commanded. Pirates would fight over shares of loot, women, alliances, or even a simple insult. A range of personalities worked within the Flying Gang; some pirates were ruthless killers, while others were more partial to a sense of decorum. If a captain steps out of line or disobeys the Code, the committee must decide how best to punish him so that the offense does not occur again, but all members remain loyal to the Gang. Depending on the captain and the crime, punishments on ships could be extremely cruel or unusual. Common punishments included hanging, marooning, flogging, or the dreaded keelhauling, in which a sailor was forced by ropes to go under the keel of a ship, which could cause drowning or gruesome injuries from the

barnacles underneath.²² In general, it was in the best interest for a pirate to remain loyal to whoever had power at the time to avoid these horrible fates.

Topic 3: Woodes Rogers and the British Navy

Word has reached New Providence that the British will be sending over a ruthless pirate-killer named Governor Woodes Rogers to dispose of all pirates and make the Bahamas a secure place to do legitimate business. Rogers was a prolific sailor and former chartered privateer for the British Navy, legally robbing Spanish ships while the two countries were at war, but now he has his sights set on New Providence with the British on his side. The committee must make decisions on what should be done with regards to Rogers. The Flying Gang has enjoyed almost complete freedom until this moment, and they must decide if they wish to negotiate and give up some of this freedom, or risk losing their lives in a battle for New Providence. Rogers' new government will likely have very little respect for the Pirate Code or the leadership of the captains currently on the council, so the committee may decide to spend the considerable treasure and resources they have accrued to fortify Nassau, stand, and fight this new threat. However, Rogers' is coming armed with a small but powerful fleet of ships. There are also whispers within the committee that there may be one or more British sympathizers who will undermine and report any resistance efforts. Can the Flying Gang manage to root out traitors, maintain the lifestyle they desire, and compromise somehow with Rogers? Or will Nassau be overrun and the pirates all be hanged for their crimes?

²² "Pirate Life List - The Way of the Pirates." Accessed August 9, 2018.
<http://www.thewayofthepirates.com/pirate-life/>.

Topic 4: King's Pardon

Woodes Rogers has also announced that all pirates who give up their life of crime will be given a “King’s Pardon,” or full immunity from punishments for past crimes. Every delegate will have to decide for themselves whether they will take the pardon, or stand and fight, risking the alternative solution: hanging. Captains in particular will have to make their decisions clear, as they will have a strong influence on their crew members, many of whom would follow them to their graves. The committee will also have to decide what to do about any captains that are suspected of taking the pardon. They may be fined, injured, murdered, or perhaps used as a tool against the British... Whatever may happen, this offer is sure to tempt pirates who fear the British or are ready to move on from the glorious but dangerous life of piracy. Each captain must choose his side carefully.

Bloc Positions

The Pirates of the Flying Gang do not vote in blocs; each captain values his independence and individualism above all else. Pirates are inherently selfish, and so every decision is made through the lens of what is best for the captain and his crew. Although pirates did create friendships and alliances, they would often break them if it meant saving their own life, ship, or treasure. Every captain on the committee has some reputation for unique personality traits, glorious acts from their past, or skeletons in their closets, both metaphorically and literally.

The personalities represented on the committee range from violent and confrontational, to valiant and upstanding, to covert and conniving. Charles Vane is one pirate known for his brutality and violence. He would attack any ship that had goods on it and would often kill

captured merchants in cold blood, representing the lawlessness of the time.²³ “Calico” Jack Rackham was known as a womanizer who got his name because he was always wearing a pair of expensive Calico shorts.²⁴ “Black Sam” Bellamy was an adept strategist known for capturing ships and vast amounts of treasure, as well as his respect for the democratic Pirate Code.²⁵ Edward “Blackbeard” Teach was a fearsome warrior with a powerful fleet at his back.²⁶ Stede Bonnet, known as the “Gentleman Pirate,” was a former aristocrat who became a pirate solely for his love of adventure.²⁷ Every captain had various views on different issues along with a distinctive leadership style, leading to a clash of personalities that must set aside their differences to lead an emerging society.

One important issue that must be settled by the committee is what to do about the impending arrival of Governor Woodes Rogers to Nassau and the Caribbean islands. Pirates hold a range of attitudes towards the British and what they represent. Many are fearful of their power; others hold disdain, and some a mutual respect. Still others are rumored to be British sympathizers who could be informing Rogers on the committee’s actions. The committee must come to a consensus, or risk splintering and losing everything they have fought for.

²³ “Flying Gang | Charles Vane.” Accessed August 9, 2018. <http://www.goldenageofpiracy.org/infamous-pirates/charles-vane.php>.

²⁴ “Flying Gang | ‘Calico’ Jack Rackham.” Accessed August 9, 2018. <http://www.goldenageofpiracy.org/infamous-pirates/calico-jack-rackham.php>.

²⁵ “Infamous Pirates | Samuel Bellamy.” Accessed August 9, 2018. <http://www.goldenageofpiracy.org/infamous-pirates/samuel-bellamy.php>.

²⁶ “Infamous Pirates | Edward ‘Blackbeard’ Teach.” Accessed August 9, 2018. <http://www.goldenageofpiracy.org/infamous-pirates/edward-blackbeard-teach.php>.

²⁷ “Infamous Pirates | Stede Bonnet.” Accessed August 9, 2018. <http://www.goldenageofpiracy.org/infamous-pirates/stede-bonnet.php>.

Questions to Consider

Topic 1: Trade

- How will the Flying Gang establish trade laws within their Pirate Code?
- Will they choose to change or break the Code should circumstances change?
- How will the Flying Gang respond to the new presences in the seas?

Topic 2: Pirate Feuds

- What punishments should be put in place for Code-breakers or Pirates who won't get along?
- Is there any common ground the Pirates can use to get along or are their personalities too different from each other to work together?
- Is the Code strong enough to deal with the personalities of these Pirates?

Topic 3: Woodes Rogers and the British Navy

- How should New Providence respond to the arrival of the British?
- What is the biggest problem that Woodes Rogers poses to the Flying Gang?
- Is there anyway to work with Rogers or is he ultimately too large of a threat to the Pirates' way of life?

Topic 4: King's Pardon

- Will the captains take the King's Pardon, negotiate with the British, or stand and fight?
- What are the benefits to taking the Pardon and what are some reasons captains shouldn't take it?
- What should be done with captains who do take the King's Pardon?

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