

First French colonial empire

The early voyages of Giovanni da Verrazzano and [Jacques Cartier](#) in the early sixteenth century, as well as the frequent voyages of French fishermen to the [Grand Banks](#) off Newfoundland throughout that century, were the precursors to the story of France's colonial expansion. But [Spain](#)'s jealous protection of its American monopoly, and the disruptions caused in France itself by the Wars of Religion in the later sixteenth century, prevented any consistent efforts by France to establish colonies. Early French attempts to found colonies in [Brazil](#), in 1555, at Rio de Janeiro ("France Antarctique") and in 1612, at São Luís ("France Équinoxiale"), and in [Florida](#) (including Fort Caroline in 1562) were not successful, due to [Portuguese](#) and Spanish vigilance.

The story of France's colonial empire truly began on July 27, 1605, with the foundation of Port Royal in the colony of Acadia in North America, in what is now [Nova Scotia](#), [Canada](#). A few years later, in 1608, Samuel De Champlain founded [Quebec](#), which was to become the capital of the enormous, but sparsely settled, fur-trading colony of New France (also called Canada).

Although, through alliances with various [Native American](#) tribes, the French were able to exert a loose control over much of the North American continent, areas of French settlement were generally limited to the St. Lawrence River Valley. Prior to the establishment of the 1663 Sovereign Council, the territories of New France were developed as mercantile colonies. It is only after the arrival of intendant Jean Talon, in 1665, that France gave its American colonies the proper means to develop population colonies comparable to that of the British. But there was relatively little interest in colonialism in France, which concentrated rather on dominance within Europe, and for most of the history of New France, even Canada was far behind the British North American colonies in both population and economic development. Acadia itself was lost to the British in the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713.

In 1699, French territorial claims in North America expanded still further, with the foundation of Louisiana in the basin of the [Mississippi River](#). The extensive trading network throughout the region connected to Canada through the [Great Lakes](#), was maintained through a vast system of fortifications, many of them centered in the Illinois Country and in present-day [Arkansas](#).

Place d'Armes in Montreal. But Québec is the historic heart of French Canada.

As the French empire in North America grew, the French also began to build a smaller but more profitable empire in the [West Indies](#). Settlement along the South American coast in what is today [French Guiana](#) began in 1624, and a colony was founded on Saint Kitts in 1625 (the island had to be shared with the English until the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, when it was ceded outright). The *Compagnie des Îles de*

l'Amérique founded colonies in [Guadeloupe](#) and Martinique in 1635, and a colony was later founded on [Saint Lucia](#) by (1650).

The food-producing plantations of these colonies were built and sustained through [slavery](#), with the supply of slaves dependent on the African slave trade. Local resistance by the [indigenous peoples](#) resulted in the Carib Expulsion of 1660.

The most important Caribbean colonial possession did not come until 1664, when the colony of Saint-Domingue (today's [Haiti](#)) was founded on the western half of the Spanish island of [Hispaniola](#). In the eighteenth century, Saint-Domingue grew to be the richest [sugar](#) colony in the Caribbean. The eastern half of Hispaniola (today's [Dominican Republic](#)) also came under French rule for a short period, after being given to France by Spain in 1795.

French colonial expansion was not limited to the New World, however. In [Senegal](#) in [West Africa](#), the French began to establish trading posts along the coast in 1624. In 1664, the French East India Company was established to compete for trade in the east. Colonies were established in [India](#) in Chandernagore (1673) and Pondicherry in the Southeast (1674), and later at Yanam (1723), Mahe (1725), and Karikal (1739). Colonies were also founded in the Indian Ocean, on the Île de Bourbon ([Réunion](#), 1664), Île de France ([Mauritius](#), 1718), and the [Seychelles](#) (1756).

SPANISH COLONIES

The arrival of Europeans in the New World in 1492 changed the Americas forever.

Over the course of the next 350 years:

- Spain ruled a vast empire based on the labor and exploitation of the native population.
- Conquistadors descended on America with hopes of bringing Catholicism to new lands while extracting great riches.
- Religion and self-interest combined to create a potent mixture that drew hundreds of thousands of Spaniards across the ocean with hopes of finding riches and winning souls for God.

But along with the Spaniards came diseases to which the New World natives had no immunities. What followed was one of the greatest tragedies in human history as smallpox, influenza, and other communicable diseases ravaged the native populations, killing *millions*.

The Spanish never set out to destroy the people of the New World—after all, their goal was to use native labor for their own ends—and almost immediately a

debate arose in Spain concerning the rights of natives. This was the first time any European nation had consciously debated the rights and status of non-Christians.

The traffic of Europeans to the Americas was not a one-way street. The so-called [Columbian Exchange](#) brought European goods and ideas to the New World—including the horse, which was not native to the Western Hemisphere—and returned new plants and animals to the Old World, including potatoes, corn, tomatoes and other crops. The world was forever changed by the new horizons opened by Spain's intrepid explorers, despite the misdeeds of Spanish rule in America.

Spanish nobles who were primarily poor from the impoverished west and south of Spain, were able to conquer the huge empires of the New World with the help of superior military technology, disease and military tactics including surprise attacks and powerful alliances with local tribes.

Once an area had been conquered, it was partitioned grants of land. More importantly, the native people themselves were parceled out to the nobles, who were given title to the land and its people in return for a promise to teach the natives Christianity. This system was heavily abused, and Native Americans throughout the Americas were reduced to a condition of virtual slavery.

The population of native laborers soon became too small for the Spanish, so they began to import African slaves to work in sugar plantations and silver mines. The introduction of African traditions to the Native American cultures already in existence made for a social mixture richer than in almost any other part of the world.

Colonial society was hierarchical, based upon on the amount of non-Spanish blood a person possessed. A complicated system, called the *casta*, delineated over 100 separate names for groups containing certain levels of Native American and African blood. Jobs, government positions, titles to land, and almost everything else in the Americas functioned according to this system with those at the top getting preference over those lower on the list. Discrimination and repression were features of Spanish colonial rule throughout its history.

Spain's government in Madrid tried hard to govern the New World, despite its distance from Europe. The Crown was entitled to one-fifth of all mining profits, and this huge income helped Spain to become the largest and most powerful empire in

Europe by 1600. Religion was mixed with politics to create a hybrid system in what would become the American Southwest: Dominican, Franciscan, and Jesuit missionaries were often left in charge of large areas in what is now Texas, Arizona, New Mexico and, later, California.

With its goal of bringing the Catholic religion to the New World, Spain was also able to use the existing church governments for its own political uses. Today, religion and politics continue to mix in Latin America. The Spanish left a legacy of cruelty and exploitation in their wake, but they also managed to open the world and increase cultural exchanges to a level never before seen in human history.

IMPERIALISM

Imperialism became a divisive force among the peoples of the world.

Three periods in the modern era witnessed the creation of vast empires, primarily colonial. Between the 15th century and the middle of the 18th, England, France, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain built empires in the Americas, [India](#), and the [East Indies](#). For almost a century thereafter, relative calm in empire building reigned as the result of a strong reaction against imperialism.

The following are the causes for the rise of Imperialism.

1. Industrial revolution :

Industrial revolution in European countries resulted in a great increase in production. They could not find market in Europe as they followed "Protective Trade Policy". The purchasing power of the people was also low due to capitalism. It also introduced a great progress in the means of transport and communication. The telegraph system linked the whole world and reduced great distances. The development of railways speeded up the movement of goods between colonies and the mother country so it was easier to bring raw materials and to take the finished goods to the markets in the interior parts of the colonies in Asia and Africa.

2. National security :

The sense of National Security and self sufficiency among the European political groups instigated colonial imperialism. The Presidents or Prime Ministers worked towards colonial imperialism owing to the influence of business or some other interest.

3. Nationalism :

The later part of the 19th Century saw extreme nationalistic ideals in Europe. Many nations developed pride over their race, culture and language and started feeling

superior to other countries. They felt that acquisition of colonies would enhance the prestige of their nations. Imperialism became the fashion of the age. The Europeans felt that it was 'white man's burden' to civilise the backward and uncivilised native people of African and Asia.

4. Balance of Power :

The concept of Balance of power was one of the driving factors. European Nations were forced to acquire new colonies to achieve a balance with their neighbours and competitors.

5. Discovery of new routes :

The discovery of new routes of African and Asian continents promoted the spirit of imperialism. The discovery of sea routes paved the way for the traders and soldiers to exploit the abundant wealth of the countries.

6. Growth of population :

The population growth which resulted in unemployment and forced the Europeans to emigrate in search of new lands and careers abroad.

7. State of Anarchy :

There was no international organisation to enact and enforce laws for nations to maintain peace and security among countries before the First World War. This state of anarchy supported the colonial race.

ESTABLISHMENT OF BRITISH COLONIES

In the 16th Century, Britain began to build its empire – spreading the country's rule and power beyond its borders through a process called 'imperialism'. This brought huge **changes to societies, industries, cultures** and the **lives of people all around the world**. Throughout history, empire builders have **introduced new people, practices and rules** to their 'new' lands and used its resources for **their own gain**, at the expense of the indigenous people – the people that inhabited the land first. This process is called '**colonialism**'. This was no different with the British Empire...

The British Empire is a term used to describe all the places around the world that were once ruled by Britain. Built over many years, it grew to include large areas of North America, [Australia](#), New Zealand, Asia and Africa, as well as small parts of Central and South America, too.

The **16th Century** is often referred to as the '**Age of Discovery**' – new thinking about the world and **better shipbuilding** led to **more exploration** and the discovery of new lands.

England, in what is now **Britain**, wanted more land overseas where it could build new communities, known as **colonies**. These colonies would provide England with valuable materials, like **metals, sugar and tobacco**, which they could also sell to other countries.

The colonies also offered **money-making opportunities** for wealthy Englishmen and provided England's poor and unemployed with **new places to live** and **new jobs**.

But they weren't alone. Other **European countries** were also exploring the world, discovering new lands and building empires, too – the race was on, and England did not want to be left behind...

*It wasn't until 1707 that Scotland joined with England and Wales to become The Kingdom of Great Britain.

The first English colonies were in **North America**, at the time known as the '**New World**'. Creating colonies was no easy task for the English! In 1585, the famous explorer **Sir Walter Raleigh** tried and failed to build an English settlement at a place called **Roanoke** in **Virginia**. It wasn't until 1607 that **Captain John Smith** founded the **first permanent English colony at Jamestown** in Virginia.

Over time, the English would claim more and more territories. This sometimes meant **fighting with other European nations** to take over their colonies.

Over the course of the **17th and 18th centuries**, England gained major colonies in North America and further south in the **West Indies**, today known as the **Caribbean Islands**. Here, the climate was perfect for growing crops like sugar and tobacco, so they set up farms known as **plantations**.

Trading settlements were also created in **India** by a company called the **East India Company**. This company became so powerful, it allowed England to control of the trade of luxury goods like **spices, cotton, silk** and **tea** from India and **China**, and it even influenced politics.

The years **1775-1783** were a turning point in British history, as the nation lost a huge part of its empire in the **American War of Independence**. Feeling 'American' rather than 'British', and resentful of sending money back to Britain, 13 colonies in North America united and fought to be free from British rule. With the help of **Spain, France** and the Netherlands, they won the war, and **gained independence**, becoming the **United States of America**. This marked the end of what is now called the '**First British Empire**'.
