



THE BRITISH EMPIRE

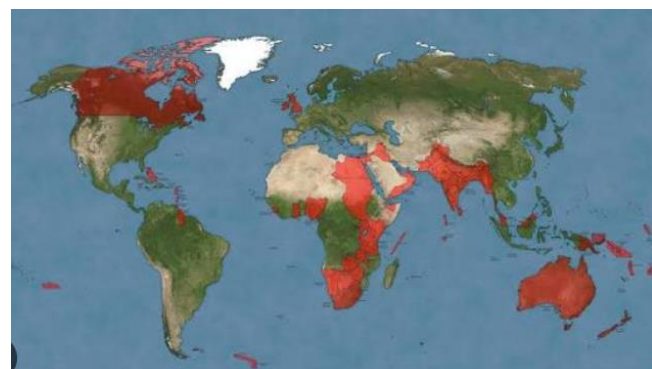


Summary

The British Empire was the largest empire in history. For over a century, it was the world's foremost power. The British Empire was first established as early as 1497, however, it reached its peak in the years between 1815 and 1914. This time is often referred to as the 'British Century.'

The process through which the British (and other nations of the time) began to spread power beyond its borders is called imperialism.

The British Empire was spread as far as New Zealand in the east and Canada in the west. It has hugely influenced societies, cultures, industries and the way that people live across the world.



Map Note: By 1920, the British Empire covered 35,500,000km², around 24% of Earth's land area.

Countries and Territories within the British Empire

Countries and Territories within the British Empire			Vocabulary
North America		North America was the location of the first British colonies. It was known as the 'New World.' From 1775, thirteen colonies in North America combined and fought to be free in the War of Independence. Their success led to the creation of the USA.	British Empire United Kingdom
Caribbean		Over the course of the 17th and 18th centuries, Britain gained major colonies on the islands of the Caribbean Sea. The climate was perfect for growing sugar and tobacco, so plantations were set up. Britain became very rich from this.	Empire
Africa		From 1881 to 1902, Britain competed with other European empire-builders in what became known as the 'Scramble for Africa.' By the early 1900s, huge parts of Africa, including Egypt, Kenya and Nigeria, were under British rule.	Circumnavigation Exploration
Asia		After losing huge parts of its colony in the American War of Independence, Britain turned its attention to parts of Asia in the 18th and 19th centuries, e.g. colonies were formed in the Middle East, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Hong Kong & Singapore.	Trade Colony
India		Areas of India were under British rule for hundreds of years. From the 1600s until 1858 these areas were run by the English East India Company. After 1858 until 1947 they became the British Raj. In 1876, Queen Victoria became 'Empress of India.'	Indigenous Ideology
Australia and New Zealand		Australia was a set of British colonies between 1788 and 1901. The first colonies were established as places where criminals were sent to live. Later, free settlers created colonies. From 1840 until 1907, New Zealand was a part of the British Empire.	Superiority Ideology
Antarctica		Antarctica was an area that many of the European colonisers did not begin to claim until much later. In 1908, the British government made a territorial claim including a large portion of Antarctica. British Antarctic territory remains to this day.	Sovereignty Geopolitical

Major Events

Beginnings

During the Middle Ages, the kings of England tried to conquer other countries.
As early as 1169, the Normans invaded Ireland.
In 1277, Edward I conquered North Wales.
In the Hundred Years War (1337-1453), Edward III and Henry V conquered large parts of France.
By 1500, much of the gained land had been lost.

The First British Empire (1497-1783)

Throughout this time, English seamen reached places that Europeans had not previously been. They set up colonies there so that they could trade the resources.
The first English colonies were in North America.
Britain fought wars to protect its empire, including the 7 Years' War with France. Many American territories were lost in the American War of Independence.

The Transatlantic Slave Trade

One of the more horrific parts of the British Empire was its position at the heart of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. For 400 years from the 15th Century, British slave traders are estimated to have bought or sold around 3 million slaves. Slavery made Britain incredibly wealthy.
Britain banned slave trading in its empire from 1807.

The Second British Empire (1783-1914)

Britain began to look towards other areas of the world, for example, Asia and Australia, to fulfil its imperial ambitions. Areas of India, the Caribbean and New Zealand were added to the Empire, which grew massively.
Britons at the time were proud of the Empire and its power, however, those living in colonies experienced inequality and loss of culture & religion.

The End of the British Empire

Towards the end of the 19th Century, a number of states became 'dominions', meaning that they remained part of the empire, but governed themselves.
During the First and Second World War, Britain relied heavily upon its empire in order to win. The countries who supported Britain began to take an increasingly independent view. Furthermore, the wars left Britain weakened and less interested in its empire than it had been previously.
By the late 1970s, the empire became reduced to a few pockets of territory around the world. Most people view the official end of the empire as the transfer of Hong Kong back to China in 1997.

Top 10 Facts!

1. At its height, the British Empire was the largest empire that the world had ever seen.
2. In 1922, it covered 24% of the Earth's surface and 23% of the world's population.
3. Of the 3 million slaves that British slave traders bought or sold, around 300,000 did not survive the journey across the Atlantic.
4. There were 26 years between Britain banning slavery and outlawing it altogether.
5. British India was the most populous colony – around 320 million people lived there in 1925.
6. Because there were territories all over the world, the British Empire became known as 'the empire on which the sun never sets.'
7. It included land on every continent.
8. Britain was widely considered to be the world's only superpower between 1815 & 1900.
9. The First World War damaged European economies. Britain was quickly surpassed by the USA as the world's leading power.
10. Handing back Hong Kong to China in 1997 is often seen to be the last action of the Empire.

pre-1497 CE: British rulers attempt to conquer new lands.

1497: John Cabot reaches Newfoundland in search of Asia.

1577-1580: Sir Francis Drake completes his circumnavigation of the world.

1600: The Formation of the East India Company.

1607: First permanent settlement of Americas at Jamestown.

1775-1783: American War of Independence.

1787: First shipment of prisoners to Australia.

1867: Canada given 'dominion' (self-governing) status.

1876: Queen Victoria is named the 'Empress of India.'

Post 1918: Attitudes towards imperialism begin to change.