

Summary: The British began to establish overseas colonies in the 16th century. By 1783 Britain had a large empire, with colonies in America and the West Indies. This 'first British Empire' came to end after the American Revolution. However, in the 19th century, the British built a second worldwide Empire, based on British sea-power, made up of India and huge conquests in Africa. Whilst some historians have seen Empire as the deserved result of Britain's technological and moral, superiority. Others have criticised Britain's 'cultural imperialism', suggesting that it was based on nationalism and racist dislike for other people.

Key concepts

1	<p>What is the British Empire? The British Empire was made up of the colonies, protectorates, mandates and other territories which were controlled by the United Kingdom.</p> <p>By 1783, Britain had established an empire which comprised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colonies in Canada, America and the West Indies. • Trading posts in India. • Naval bases in the Mediterranean - Gibraltar and Minorca
2	<p>Why did Britain want an Empire? Britain always wanted to be better than their rival countries such as Spain and France. They wanted to rise above their enemies and having an empire would show this. They were determined, which gave them their success. People in Britain wanted their own rights in a world they rule.</p>
3	<p>What was the impact of colonisation on Britain's colonies? Opinions vary but for the most part colonisation had a negative impact on the natives to the land. The British tried to westernise their colonies and completely change their way of life in order to 'civilise' them. Missionaries attempted to strip them of their religion and their traditions.</p>
4	<p>The scramble for Africa: The Scramble for Africa (or the Race for Africa), from the 1880s until the start of World War I, was a time of much colonial expansion in Africa. Many European countries started colonies in Africa during this time.</p>
5	<p>De-colonisation: Before World War II it was stated fairly, "The sun never set on the British Empire." After the War concluded, however, a worldwide process of decolonisation commenced in which Britain granted independence to all of its major colonies, beginning notably in India.</p>
6	<p>What is the legacy of Empire for Britain? The legacy of the British Empire is huge. After all, at one point the Empire covered a quarter of the world and contained over 400 million people in over 50 colonies, and lasted for hundreds of years. After WWII the British Parliament introduced the British Nationality Act. This meant former members of the Empire (now Commonwealth), were give British passports. And so, one of its biggest legacies is multicultural Britain.</p>

Key developments

<p>1783 - Britain established an Empire.</p>
<p>1857 - There was a rebellion in India (the Indian Mutiny). The government took over rule of India from the East India Company.</p>
<p>1881–1919 - The 'Scramble for Africa'.</p>
<p>1926 - The British government agreed the Balfour Declaration - that Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa were completely independent countries.</p>

Key words

1	British Common-wealth	An organisation of nations consisting of Britain and some of its former colonies; now independent, free countries, but retaining close cultural, trade and sporting links to Britain.
2	Colony/ colonies	Areas or countries controlled by another country; for example, Britain controlled a huge number of colonies, which made up its Empire.
3	Democracy	A form of government where the people of the country elect the leaders.
4	Depen-dencies	Another word for colonies.
5	Dominions	Another word for colonies.
6	Empire	A collection of different areas controlled by one "mother" country.
7	Indepen-dence	Freedom from control or influence of another.
8	Legacy	What someone or something is remembered for or what they leave behind that is remembered.
9	Missionaries	Religious people sent to convert natives of another country to a religion (usually Christianity).
10	Mutiny	Open rebellion against authority.
11	Partition	Dividing something into parts.
12	Racism	Believing that a particular race is superior to other races.
13	Self-Government	Government of a country or area by its own people.
14	Slave Trade	The trading of slaves between Africa, the Americas and Europe.

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