

QUESTION TIME

The British Empire 'The sun never sets on the British Empire'

What was it?

The geographic and political units formerly under British control, including dominions, colonies, dependencies, trust territories, and protectorates. At the height of its power in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the empire comprised about **one quarter of the world's land area and population** and encompassed territories on every continent, including the British Isles, British North America, British West Indies, British Guiana, British West Africa, British East Africa, India, Australia, and New Zealand.

History

16th. Century

The growth of the British Empire was due in large part to the **ongoing competition for resources and markets** which existed over a period of centuries between England and her Continental rivals, Spain, France, and Holland. During the reign of Elizabeth I, England set up trading companies in Turkey, Russia, and the East Indies, explored the coast of North America, and established colonies there.

17th. Century

In the early seventeenth century, those colonies were expanded and the systematic colonization of Ulster in Ireland got underway. Territorial acquisition began with a group of settlements in North America and West Indian, South Asian, and African trading posts founded by private individuals and trading companies. After ultimately successful wars with the Dutch, the French, and the Spanish, Britain managed to acquire most of the eastern coast of North America, the St. Lawrence basin in Canada, territories in the Caribbean, stations in Africa for the acquisition of slaves, and important interests in India.

18th. Century

In the 18th century the British took Gibraltar, established colonies along the Atlantic seacoast of North America and in the Caribbean Sea, and began to add territory in India. With its victory in the French and Indian War (1763), the empire secured Canada and the eastern Mississippi Valley and gained supremacy in India. From the late 18th century it began to build power in Malaya and acquired the Cape of Good Hope, Ceylon (see Sri Lanka), and Malta.

19th. Century

Until the early nineteenth century, the primary purpose of Imperialist policies was to facilitate the acquisition of as much foreign territory as possible, **both as a source of raw materials and in order to provide real or potential markets for British manufactures**. With the end, in 1815, of the Napoleonic Wars, the last of the great imperial wars which had dominated the eighteenth century, Britain found itself in an extraordinarily powerful position, though a complicated one. It acquired Dutch South Africa, for example, but found its interests threatened in India by the southern and eastern expansion of the Russians. (The protection of India from the Russians, both by land and by sea, would be a major concern of Victorian foreign policy). At this time, however, the empires of Britain's traditional rivals had been lost or severely diminished in size, and its imperial position was unchallenged. In addition, it had become the leading industrial nation of Europe, and more and more of the world came under the domination of British commercial, financial, and naval power. The British settled Australia in 1788 and subsequently New Zealand. Aden was secured in 1839, and Hong Kong in 1841. Britain went on to control the Suez Canal (1875 – 1956). In the 19th-century

European partition of Africa, Britain acquired Nigeria, Egypt, the territories that would become British East Africa, and part of what would become the Union (later Republic) of South Africa.

So during the Victorian Era, the acquisition of territory and of further trading concessions continued (promoted by strategic considerations and aided or justified by philanthropic motivations), reaching its peak when Victoria, at Disraeli's instigation, had herself crowned Empress of India in 1876.

20th. Century

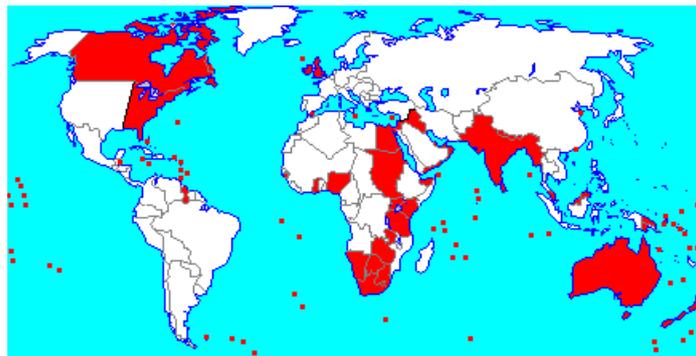
After World War I, Britain secured mandates to German East Africa, part of the Cameroons, part of Togo, German South-West Africa, Mesopotamia, Palestine, and part of the German Pacific islands. Britain gradually evolved a system of self-government for some colonies after the U.S. gained independence, as set forth in Lord Durham's report of 1839. Dominion status was given to Canada (1867), Australia (1901), New Zealand (1907), the Union of South Africa (1910), and the Irish Free State (1921).

Britain declared war on Germany in 1914 on behalf of the entire empire; after World War I the dominions signed the peace treaties themselves and joined the League of Nations as independent states.

Development of the 'Commonwealth of Nations'

In 1931, the Statute of Westminster recognized them as **independent** countries "within the British Empire," referring to the "British Commonwealth of Nations," and from 1949, the Commonwealth of Nations.

The British Empire, therefore, developed into the Commonwealth in the mid-20th century, as former British dependencies obtained sovereignty but retained ties to the United Kingdom.



The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

- England
- Wales
- Scotland
- Ireland, 1171, independent 1921, Republic 1938, leaves Commonwealth 1949
 - Northern Ireland
- Isle of Man
- Channel Islands (Duchy of Normandy)
 - Jersey
 - Guernsey
 - Alderney
 - Sark
- Gibraltar, seized 1704, ceded by Spain 1713
- Malta, 1800, independent 1964, republic 1974
- Cyprus, 1878, independent 1960, Turkish invasion, occupation of northern Cyprus 1974
- Egypt, shares of Suez Canal purchased 1875, country occupied 1882, protectorate 1914,

- independent 1922, Suez Canal occupied until 1956, Canal nationalized 1956
- Palestine, occupied 1917, mandate 1921, independent 1948 (Israel; Palestine to Jordan & Egypt, territories occupied by Israel 1967)
 - Iraq, occupied 1918, mandate 1921-1932, independent 1932
 - Aden, 1839, independent 1967 (South Yemen)
 - Afghanistan, First Afghan War 1838-1842, Second Afghan War 1878-1880, protectorate 1880-1921, Third Afghan War 1919-1921, Soviet Russian occupation 1979-1989
 - India, independent 1947 (Bharat, Pakistan [out of Commonwealth 1972-1989], Bangladesh 1971)
 - Burma, 1826 (Arakan) 1852 (Lower Burma) 1886 (Upper Burma), independent 1948 (Myanmar 1991)
 - Ceylon, 1795, independent 1948 (Sri Lanka)
 - Seychelles, 1810, independent 1975
 - Maldives, 1887, independent 1965
 - Mauritius, 1810, independent 1968
 - Malaysia, created and independent 1963
 - Hong Kong, 1841, to China 1997
 - Canada, dominion 1867
 - Newfoundland, 1583, to Canada 1949
 - United States, independent 1783
 - Bahama Islands, 1670, independent 1973
 - Bermuda, 1609, to Virginia 1612, separate 1684
 - West Indies Federation, federated 1956
 - St. Lucia, 1815, independent 1979
 - Grenada, 1763, independent 1974
 - St. Vincent, 1763, & the Grenadines, independent 1979
 - Dominica, 1763, independent 1978
 - Barbados, 1627, independent 1966
 - Jamaica, 1655, independent 1962
 - Australia, Commonwealth 1901
 - Papua-New Guinea, independent 1964
 - Fiji, 1874, independent 1970, leaves Commonwealth 1987
 - New Zealand, 1769, autonomous 1853
 - Tonga, protectorate 1900, independent 1970
 - Union of South Africa, 1910, Republic of South Africa, out of Commonwealth 1961-1994, rejoins Commonwealth 1994
 - Mosambique, former Portuguese colony, joins Commonwealth 1995
 - East Africa
 - Kenya, 1887, independent 1963
 - Tananyika, from Germany 1917, independent 1961 (Tanzania 1964)
 - Zanzibar, 1890, independent 1963 (Tanzania 1964)
 - Uganda, 1888, independent 1962
 - Rhodesia & Nyasaland
 - Northern Rhodesia, 1889, independent 1964 (Zambia)
 - Southern Rhodesia, 1888, revolt 1965-1980 (Rhodesia), independent 1980 (Zimbabwe)
 - Nyasaland, 1889, independent 1964 (Malawi)

- British Somaliland, 1884, to Somalia 1960
- Eritrea, 1941-1952, to Ethiopia 1952
- West Africa
 - Sierra Leone, 1787, independent 1961
 - Gold Coast, 1662, independent 1957 (Ghana)
 - The Gambia, 1661, independent 1965
 - Nigeria, 1861, independent 1960