# The development and decline of the British Empire

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Origins

Great Geographical Discoveries are the main causes of the colonization. The first European countries that started overseas explorations were Spain and Portugal. The groundbreaking event was of course Christopher Columbus' 'discovery' of North America in 1492. Five years later the contemporaneous king of Great Britain, Henry VII commissioned John Cabot to discover a route to Asia via North America. He reached the coast of Newfoundland, believing he got to Asia. No colony was founded. Eventually, he did not reach the given goal.

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Royal Navy

English Galleon Dainty (1588)
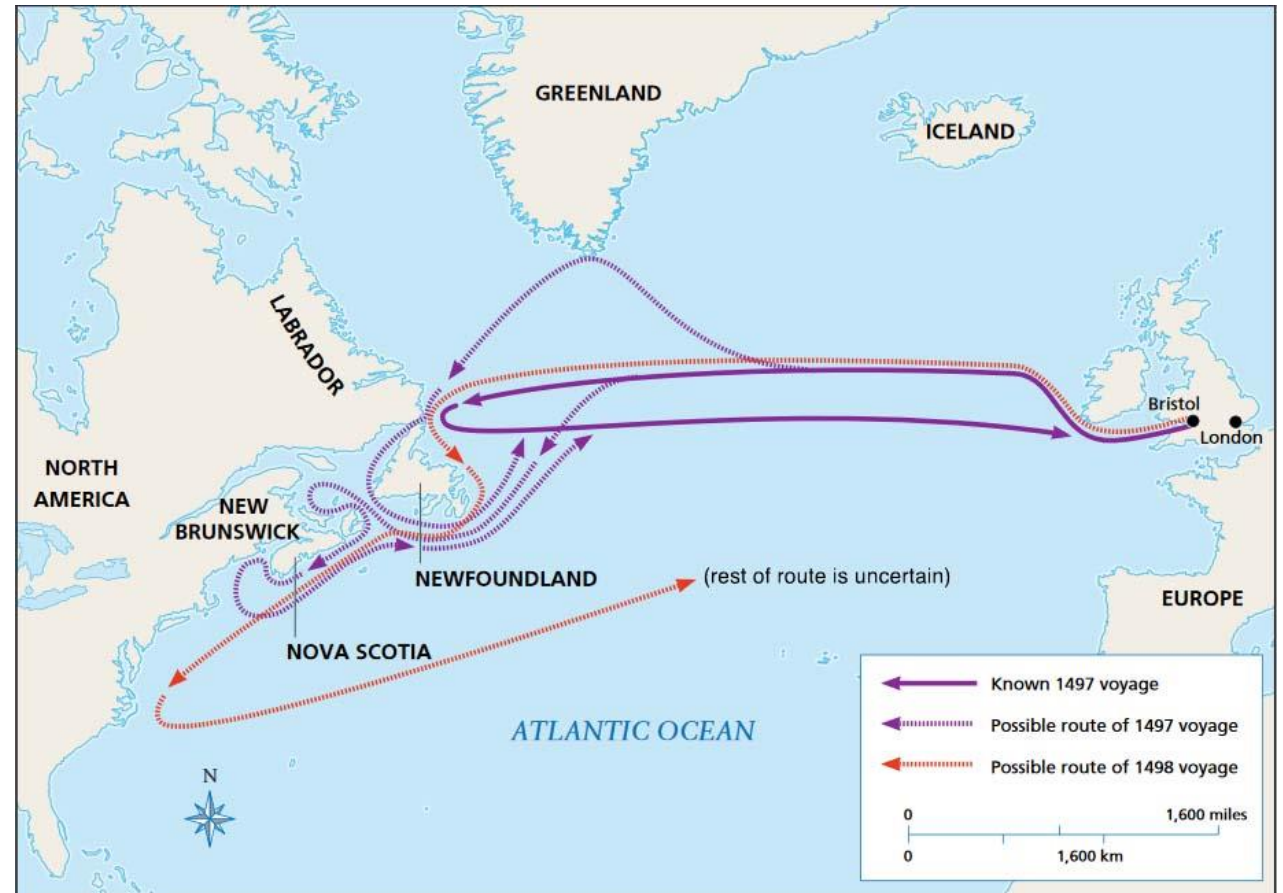
- The United Kingdom had had no fleet before the reign of King Alfred (871-901). It was needed to repel the Viking invasion. However, the one he founded did not last long. Naval activity continued to be defensive, local and temporary, until the extension of trade to Spain and Portugal, caused by losing Normandy to France in the 13th century.

- In XVI century the first reform of the fleet was made by King Henry VIII. By his death, there were more than 40 new warships built. In **1588** an unsuccessful Spanish invasion of Britain occurred. **The Spanish Armada** – fleet sent by King Philip II was defeated by British navy and the war was taken to the Atlantic Ocean.

- Royal Navy received its consistent headquarters in 1692 when the British Parliament took control over it. The British Fleet grew the most during the Elizabethan Era and Great Britain continued to be the hegemon of the worlds' seas until the World War II.

HMS Trent (2018)

XVII Century

- **East India Company** was an English company formed in 1600 for the exploitation and trade with India and East and Southeast Asia. Primarily, spices were traded, but over time more products were added. Starting as a monopolistic trading body, the company was involved in politics, expanding British imperialism in India. 1767-1858 the company ruled large areas of India, but following the Indian Rebellion of 1857, it lost its role. Eventually, the company dissolved in 1873.

- The first, permanent British colony, founded in 1607 was **Jamestown** in Virginia. The colony was formed by the Virginia Company, chartered by King James I in 1606, with the goal to colonize the eastern coast of North America.

- The biggest commercial rival of Great Britain at that time was The Netherlands. The tension between these countries grew and exploded after in 1651 the great Navigation Act was instituted, causing the **First Anglo-Dutch war** (1652-54).

- **Navigation Acts** (XVII-XIX) were laws designed by Parliament to expand British trade and limit trade between British Colonies and countries, that were rivals of Great Britain.

- In 1664, the English took over the Dutch colony of New Netherland, which included the state of New Amsterdam. The English renamed this New York. New Sweden (which is now called Delaware) was also taken over by the English. Florida, previously a colony of Spain, formally became a British colony in 1763.

French and Indian War (1754-63)

- French and Indian War, was a North-American phase of Seven Years' War (1756-63). The belligerents were: Great Britain and France in alliance with Native Americans.

Causes:

- The issue with upper Ohio Village – whether it was a part of France or British Empire (and open for trade with Virginians and Pennsylvanians).

- The territory was controlled by France of Roman Catholic faith, so British Protestant colonists saw this as a threat to their freedom of religion under English Law.

- British settlers broke trade between Native Americans and France.

Effects:

The war ended with British victory and signing of Treaty of Paris. Its provisions were:

- Great Britain received Canada and lands lying east of Missisipi River from France. Spain had to give up Florida as the condition of the return of Havana.

- France ceded Louiziana to Spain

- France had disappeared from North America as political and military power. Great Britain now had no colonial rival from Hudson's Bay to Florida Keys. The victory in described conflict was also a cause of Revolutionary War (1775-83).

CLAIMS BEFORE AND AFTER FRENCH AND INDIAN WARS

PACIFIC OCEAN

HUDSON BAY COMPANY

BRITISH

FRENCH CLAIMS

BRITISH COLONIES

SPANISH CLAIMS

SPANISH FLORIDA

ATLANTIC OCEAN

CUBA

PACIFIC OCEAN

BRITISH POSSESSIONS

SPANISH POSSESSIONS

ATLANTIC OCEAN

CUBA

link

American Revolutionary War

The conflict between Great Britain and its 13 colonies in North America, which took place in 1775-83. The war was a result of increasing tension between the residents of American colonies and the colonial government, which represents the British crown.
Causes:
- colonists' sense of community being shaped
- taxing the colonies after the expensive Seven Years War:
• Stamp Act – tax collected when issuing any official documents
• Townshend Acts – increasing duties on goods imported to the colonies
• Statutory guarantee of East India Company exclusive rights to trade in tea (and consequently Boston Tea Party of 1773)
Effects:
- Signing of the Treaty of Paris on 3rd September 1783 – Great Britain formally recognized the independence of the United States
- colonization of the western territories of North America – creating new states

In 1787 the first constitution in the world was signed – the Constitution of the United States. The act established America's national government and fundamental laws and guaranteed certain basic rights for its citizens.

Original Thirteen Colonies

New Hampshire
New York
Pennsylvania
Massachusetts
Rhode Island
Connecticut
New Jersey
Delaware
Maryland
Virginia
North Carolina
South Carolina
Georgia

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Types of colonies in North America

Royal Colonies	Proprietary Colonies	Self Governing Colonies
- colony administered by a royal governor - council appointed by the British crown -representative assembly elected by the people	- colonies granted to an individual or group by the British crown - the proprietor was given full governing rights	- colony with an elected government - elected rulers were able to make most decisions without referring to the colonial power
New Hampshire, New York, New Jersey, North and South California, Georgia	Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware	Plymouth Colony

Napoleonic wars (1799-1815)

- **Battle of Trafalgar** (1805) - a battle between the British Royal Navy and French and Spain fleets combined. Trafalgar is the name of a cape in the southern-west of Spain, by the Bay of Cadiz. The result was victory of Great Britain, which started the hegemony of British navy on the world's seas. It was also a major contribution to the rise of the British colonial empire. Besides, after the defeat, Napoleon decided not to invade the British Isles.

- **Continental System** – blockade designed by Napoleon to paralyze British export to Europe. The decrees of Berlin (1806) and Milan (1807) proclaimed: France and its allies were not to trade with Britain. The blockade caused little damage to the British economy, however, exports to the continent dropped from 55% to 25% between 1802-06. At the same time, there was an increase in trade with North America.

Congress of Vienna

The main goal of the congress, taking place in 1814-1815, was to restore Europe to the state it had been before the Napoleonic Wars.

As the result of it, Great Britain got to keep:

- Malta, Helgoland and Ionian Islands

- South Africa

- Ceylon and Mauritius

Here I want to point out how Britons used to also choose and occupy rather small, but politically and economically important territories, such as for example, islands with harbours.

Industrial Revolution

The Industrial revolution (1733-1913) was the time of the British Empire's biggest territorial growth.

Because of mass new inventions, production capacity in European countries increased, so there was a hunger for raw materials to satisfy demands. Western powers started to seek out territories with many raw materials to colonize them with little or no cost.

By the end of the Victorian era, 1837-1901 the British Empire was at its height and ruled over a quarter of the world.

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THE GREATEST EXTENT OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE

United Kingdom | British Empire 1901 (includes dominions) | Left British Empire before 1939 | Additions to Empire 1901-1939

Africa

In the XIX century every European country, motivated by nationalism, wanted to grab a part of Africa. Great Britain's first colonies in Africa were: Gambia, Sierra Leone and Lagos, at the Cape and Natal provinces in South Africa. Between **1880-1900** Britain gained control over territories that are now: Egypt, Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, South Africa, Gambia, Sierra Leone, north-western Somalia, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Botswana, Nigeria, Ghana, and Malawi.

Types of colonies:

Economic Companies	Direct Rule	Indirect Rule	Settler Rule
Companies took responsibility for all of the expenses related to establishing and administering the colonies.	Involves the establishment of a centralized foreign authority within a territory, which is run by colonial officials.	Governing the people through the use of traditional rulers and traditional political institutions.	European settlers imposed direct rule on their colonies.
Malawi, Zimbabwe, Zambia	Not used in British colonies	Nigeria,	Kenya

African independence movements:
- Boer wars - Caused by the discovery of rich diamonds near the Oranje River in the Kimberley District and the expansion of the British Empire.
- Mahdist war – Caused by the oppression of the British-Egyptian government under which people in Sudan suffered.

British dominions

Dominion is a systemic form existing within British Empire, being an intermediate form between a self-governing colony and an autonomic country. The Dominion status was the highest degree of autonomy of a territory dependent on Britain. They were created in areas, that were populated the most by the European settlers. Over time Dominions evolved into independent countries.

Dominion	From	Until	Further fortune
Canada	1867	today	A part of Commonwealth and Commonwealth realm
Australia	1901	today	A part of Commonwealth and Commonwealth realm
New Zealand	1907	today	A part of Commonwealth and Commonwealth realm
New Foundland	1907	1949	Resigned from indenpedence, in 1949 integrated into Canada
The Union of South Africa	1910	1961	Declared its independence in 1961 as RPA
Ireland	1922	1949	Monarchy was abolished in 1949
Union of India	1947	1950	Reshaped as Republic of India in 1950
Pakistan	1947	1956	Islamic Republic of Pakistan proclaimed in 1956
Ceylon	1948	1972	Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka formed in 1972

XIX/XX Century

At the decay of the 19th century, there was a major shift in the balance of power in Europe. Two new, unified countries were created – Italy and Germany. The second one aspired to become a world power. Germany started to appear as a rival to Great Britain, as they were extending their fleet. The Imperial German Navy existed between 1871 and 1919, being the second most powerful navy, after Great Britain. During the last decade of the 19th century, Naval Arms Race was taking place. As a result, in 1906 the British launched the Dreadnought – a type of warship that dominated the world's navies for the next 35 years.

Great Britain agreed on an alliance with France in 1904 and with Russia in 1907, finally creating the Triple Entente. Alliances were being formed for the needs of financial/military support, trade agreements or investments. They became a major cause of World War I.

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World War I

- During WW1 over 4 million people of colour were mobilised into European and American armies for both combat and non-combat roles.

- The treaty of Versailles, which formally ended the state of war between Germany and the Allied Powers in 1919, appointed the League of Nations. One of its tasks was to create **League of Nations mandates** – the system of protection of colonies, that were taken over from Germany and the Ottoman empire. The goal was to prepare those countries for independence. In the name of the League, the protection over those territories was exercised by: France, Great Britain, Belgium, Japan, the Union of South Africa, Australia and New Zealand.

Class A mandates – territories most ready to be independent countries

Class B mandates – territories not ready yet for independence, still underdeveloped

Class C mandates – the least developed territories

League of Nations mandates
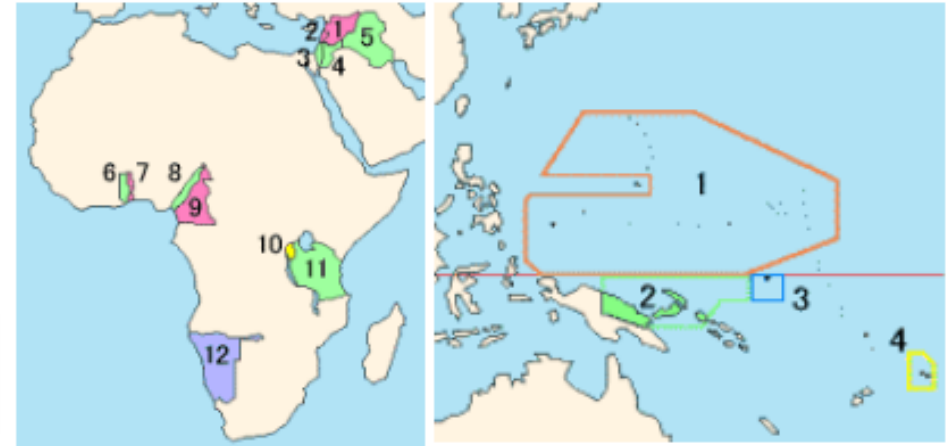
Class A, Mandates in Western Asia:
1. Syria
2. Lebanon
3. Palestine ●
4. Transjordan ●
5. Mesopotamia ●

Class B, Mandates in Africa:
6. British Togoland ●
7. French Togoland
8. British Cameroon ●
9. French Cameroon
10. Ruanda-Urundi
11. Tanganyika ●

Class C, Mandates in Africa:
12. South West Africa

Class C, Mandates in the Pacific:
1. Japanese Pacific Mandate
2. Territory of New Guinea
3. Nauru ●
4. Western Samoa

● - British mandates

British Empire during WW2

- The contribution of the British Empire in terms of manpower and materials was crucial for The Allies.

- Fall of Singapore, the major British military base in South-East Asia. As the result, the Singaporean Islands were given to Japan.

- Africa had a huge strategic importance in the war, as a lot of battles were being fought there.

- The Atlantic Charter (1941) - an agreement between the U.S. and Great Britain. The act defined the Allies' post-war goals including cooperation among nations and nations' self-determination. (The 8 resolutions on the picture.) That was also the moment when the hegemony on the seas shifted from Britain to the U.S.

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Decolonization

Decolonization is a process by which colonies become independent of the colonizing country. After WW2 European countries lacked the wealth and political support to rule overseas. Besides, the two biggest powers of that time, the U.S and the USSR were against colonialism. Also, WW2's soldiers from colonies did not want to be just a tool of white policy.

- 1947 - **India and Pakistan** gained their independence. A big contribution to this had Indian politician – **Mahatma Gandhi**. He propagated nonviolent resistance, consisting of symbolic protests or civil disobedience. However, he was against the partition of India and Pakistan.

- 1960 – the **Year of Africa** – the year, in which 17 African nations declared their independence. The ones liberated from Britain were **Somalia** and **Nigeria**.

- 1997 – the return of **Hong Kong** to China. It was the last territory to decolonize.

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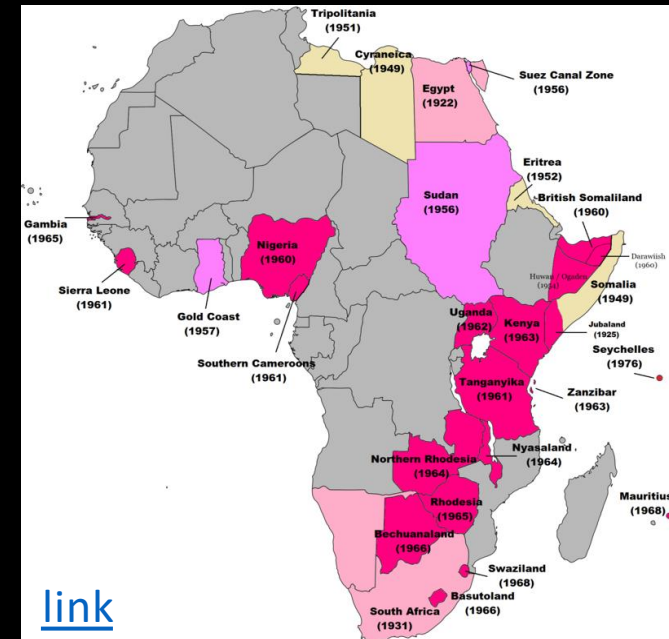
Why did the British Empire decline?

To conclude, the main reasons for the fall were:

- The creation of dominions and Commonwealth:

The nations, defined as dominions had already had autonomy and were managing their own affairs under British governors. By 1939 these states were recognized to have special status as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations.

- Nationalism:

Nationalism movements in Asia and Africa after WW2 led the colonies to independence.

- Both World Wars:

The wars left Britain weakened politically and economically and less interested in its overseas territories. Colonies, after contributing to war took a more independent view.

Effects of colonialism

Because of its extent, colonialism had a huge impact on the world, and its effects are still felt today. Although there were some positive results of it, the amount of negative ones is overwhelming.

- As the **good ones** I can name: increasing healthcare and education in the colonized territories, reducing illiteracy and bringing political development. European countries gained a lot more profits (mostly economical) – using the occupied areas' natural resources, cheap human labour and creating markets for products from Europe.

- **The negative effects**: Because of the exploitation of the African territories, the economic dependency syndrome on Europe was shaped and is seen to this day. Colonialism also divided nations, such as India and Pakistan, its policy, in general, was to worsen relations between countries. Traditions and nations' identities were being destroyed by colonists.
The biggest and actual problem rooted in colonialism is racism. It's displayed in many forms, not only direct physical aggression. People of colour face microaggressions – everyday intentional or not slights that communicate derogatory attitudes toward culturally marginalized groups. They often deal with cultural appropriation, which is adopting cultural elements of a group in a stereotypical and disrespectful way. POC are constantly being mistreated and they still do not have enough representation in the media.

Commonwealth

Commonwealth is an international organisation uniting 54 independent and another outcome of colonialism. The organisation was formed in 1931 by Great Britain and its dominions. Commonwealth's values are the promotion of democracy, human rights, good governance, individual liberty, egalitarianism, free trade, multilateralism and world peace. Nations under this organisation are connected by their history, culture and English language and have no legal obligations to one another. The head of the Commonwealth is Queen Elizabeth II.

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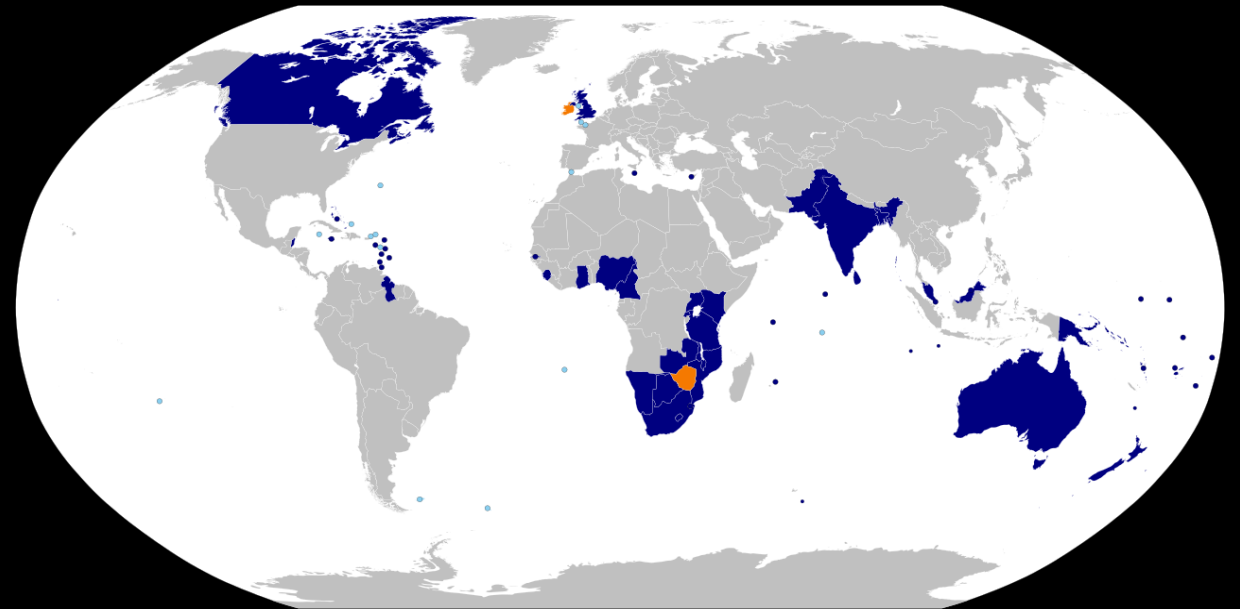
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