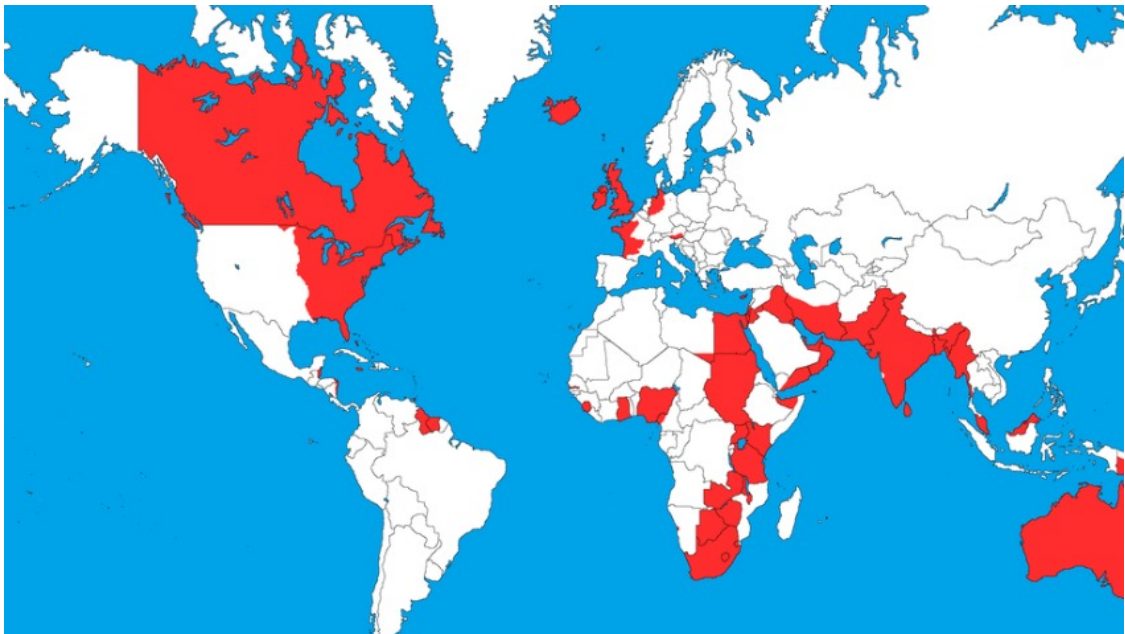




# Was the British Empire a force for good?

For several centuries, Britain ruled over an empire which covered land from all across the world. Next year, you will need to know about the British Empire.

This booklet is split into seven sections. Each section contains some information, and a page with questions for you to answer. Within the booklet, you will look at two main case studies of countries within the British Empire. By the end of this booklet, you should be able to answer the question 'was the British Empire a force for good?'



# 1. Why did the British want an empire?

## Key words:

**Empire** = A large group of countries or states under a single ruler.

**Colony** = An area of land taken over by foreign people – for example, places/countries in the British Empire were called ‘colonies’.

**There were many reasons for Britain wanted an empire, including:**

They wanted people to play cricket with
If Britain had colonies it would be easier to sell their manufactured goods
It rained too much in Britain so they wanted some sun
It was an opportunity for poorer people in Britain to make money
Cities like London were overcrowded
People in Britain wanted to experience different lifestyles and cultures
Britain wanted products they could not grow like cotton, tobacco and tea
Many Britons believed that they had a duty to spread Christianity
It would make Britain look more powerful
It would be good for other countries to share Britain's technological advances
Britain wanted to show its power by going to war
Britain didn't want its rivals like France and Germany to control these areas
Queen Victoria wanted to be called Empress of India

# 1. Why did the British want an empire?

Many countries were part of the British Empire at some point during its history. The British had different reasons for taking over each area. Some of the countries, and reasons for Britain taking control there, included:

## **America and Canada**

- The Americas seemed to promise freedom, wealth and power for the British people who went there. America was full of natural resources, and the British wanted to use them for their own benefit.
- Many people also went to the Americas to escape religious persecution in Europe.

## **Australia and New Zealand**

- In the 1700s, Britain had too many criminals and prisons were overflowing. Criminals were sent to America and New Zealand to build new towns and establish a new colony. They were forced to work hard for years, to serve their 'prison sentence'.
- Later, non-criminals were also encouraged to go to Australia and New Zealand – the countries were hot, spacious, and there were many opportunities for power within the new colonies.

## **India**

- India was full of natural resources such as silk and spices. Britain could transport these resources back to Europe, and sell them for a lot of money.
- The British army also benefited from Britain's power in India. Thousands of Indians became 'sepoys' – soldiers in the British army.
- In some of the colonies, including India, the main religion was not Christian. Britain, as a Christian country, wanted to convert non-Christians across the Empire. They saw it as a 'civilising' mission, and thought that Christianity would improve people's lives.

## **Egypt**

- Egypt was very well located – it was right in the middle of one of the world's main trade routes. By taking control of Egypt, Britain were able to use this trade route to buy and sell goods between Europe and Asia. Britain also wanted to prevent its enemies (such as France) from taking control there – Britain wanted to be the most powerful country in the world.



## 2. How did Britain conquer America?

1492	<p>Christopher Columbus' first voyage to America</p> <p>Italian explorer Columbus encountered the Americas. This was the beginning of Europe's ongoing contact with America.</p>
1494	<p>Treaty of Tordesillas</p> <p>This treaty split the 'New World' (the newly discovered Americas) between Spain and Portugal.</p>
1585-7	<p>Roanoke Colonies</p> <p>British sailor Walter Raleigh tried twice to establish the first permanent British settlement in North America. Both attempts failed, and nobody knows what happened to the second group of colonists.</p>
1607	<p>Jamestown</p> <p>A colony named 'Jamestown' was established in Virginia, North America. Jamestown was the colonial capital until 1699.</p>
1619	<p>Slavery</p> <p>The first recorded slaves coming from Africa to America arrived. They lived and worked near the Jamestown colony.</p>
1620	<p>Plymouth Colony</p> <p>Britain's second successful colony was founded by Puritans, a type of Protestant coming from Britain that disagreed with the religious beliefs in England.</p>
1622	<p>Jamestown Massacre</p> <p>Native Americans attacked the British settlers at Jamestown – revenge against the British taking their land. One quarter of the colony's population (347 people) were killed.</p>
1680 onwards	<p>Taxation without representation</p> <p>The English began to tax the American colonists heavily. The colonists began to grow angry and frustrated at their British leaders.</p>
1732	<p>Georgia</p> <p>The Province of Georgia is established. This is the last of Britain's original 13 colonies in America.</p>

## 2. How did Britain conquer America?

<p>In Nov. 1620 Puritans, strict Protestants, founded a settlement called New Plymouth. The name given to these first settlers was the 'Pilgrim Fathers' &amp; by spring 1621 half the colonists were dead &amp; half struggled on and, helped by local Indians, managed to grow food.</p>	<p>The example of Puritans led to more religious groups moving to the area. Between 1629 and 1640 more than 20,000 settlers arrived in Massachusetts. In 1664 the English took over the Dutch colony of New Netherland. The English renamed this New York.</p>	<p>The New Plymouth settlers worked hard and democratically elected a leader - William Bradford. It was not until 1625 that Bradford wrote in his diary that the settlement had begun to taste the 'sweetness of the country'.</p>	<p>It was not until 1648, as England was in crisis (the English Civil War), that the colonists paid off the final debts incurred by their journey to the New World (America).</p>	<p>Thanksgiving in the USA is a now a public holiday on the 4th Thursday in November. It's a celebration &amp; tradition that dates back to a feast held by some of the earliest settlers, the Pilgrim Fathers, in 1621 to 'give thanks' for an exceptionally large harvest.</p>
<p>In 1607 a new colony - Jamestown was founded in honour of King James. Early life in Virginia meant hunger &amp; death. However, with the support of some local tribes the settlers began to farm successfully.</p>	<p>In 1500 there were approximately 560,000 Native Americans in, future, 'British' territory. By 1700 there were fewer than 280,000. Diseases (e.g. measles and smallpox) that native immune systems could not deal with were devastating.</p>	<p>In 1609 Virginia settlers described the Native Americans as: 'Wild and savage people that live all over the forests. They have no law but native. They are easy to be brought to god [Christian ways] but would happily like better conditions.'</p>	<p>The British created religious and democratic rules (e.g. constitutions). However, some historians argue money was the motivator as crops such as tobacco, cotton &amp; sugar were grown &amp; then transported to Britain for huge profits.</p>	<p>In 1639 the first colonial constitution, agreed in Connecticut, put the welfare of the community above that of individuals. It stated that 'the foundation of authority is in the free consent of the people'.</p>

## 2. Questions

- a) What do you think was the turning point for Britain's power in America? In which year did Britain really gain power? Why? (Explain your answer!)

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- b) What evidence can you use to suggest that the British colonisation of America was a success?

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- c) What evidence can you use to suggest that the British colonisation of America was a failure?

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- b) Based on what you have read so far, do you think the British Empire is something to be proud of or not? Why? (Explain your answer using evidence!)

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# 3. How did Britain lose America?



Americans started to become very unhappy with their British rulers. There are 6 main reasons why the Americans were unhappy and wanted independence:

## **1. Seven Years War**

- Britain took part in a war with France, called the Seven Years War.
- The two sides were fighting over American land. The British won, meaning that they kept the land.
- Britain spent a lot of money on the war. They thought that Americans should pay this back in taxes, as Britain had been 'protecting' America.

## **2. Taxes**

- Britain continued to raise taxes, asking for more and more money from America
- Many Americans became unhappy with this, and Britain's control in general. They wanted freedom.
- In response to the high taxes, many American colonists started to rebel
- On March 5<sup>th</sup> 1770, British soldiers fired into a crowd of rebels. 5 American colonists were killed.

## **3. Trade**

- Trade in America was set up to benefit Britain. The British made a rule, for example, that only British tea could be sold.
- Tea was extremely popular - this rule meant that Britain would make a lot of money, and would prevent Americans from doing so.
- The Boston Tea Party: In December 1773, American rebels attacked British ships, throwing 342 chests of tea into the sea (about \$1 million in today's money)

# 3. How did Britain lose America?

## 4. Government:

- Americans had a government of their own, with the role of ruling and making decisions for America.
- However, many decisions were actually made by Britain. Although it looked like America had their own government, its actual power was very limited - Britain still had the most control.

## 5. Morale

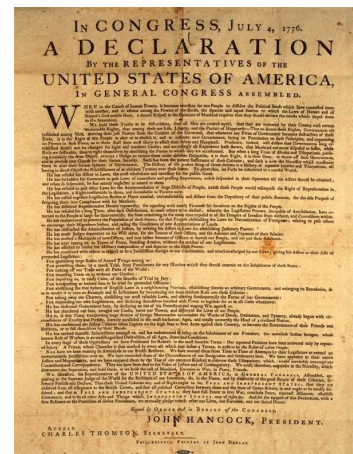
- **Morale** (determination and spirit of the American colonists) was increased as a result of organisations that worked together.
- ‘Sons of Liberty’ for example, was set up to discuss issues of taxation, and became a leading organisation in America’s fight for independence

## 6. Philosophy

- New ideas emerged in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. John Locke came up with the idea of ‘natural rights’ – freedom of speech, for example.
- People started to question the role of government, and Britain, and started to desire more independence and equality for Americans

To begin with, Britain had a much stronger army, and much more money.

However, America managed to defeat the British and gain independence. On the 4<sup>th</sup> July 1776, the Declaration of Independence was signed. This meant that America was free from British rule!



# 3. Questions

a) Sum up each of the reasons that America wanted independence in 15 words or less:

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3. 

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4. 

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5. 

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6. 

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b) What is the main reason why Britain lost the war? Explain your answer fully.

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c) What happened on the 4<sup>th</sup> July, 1776?

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# 4. What happened to the British in India?

## How did the British take over India?

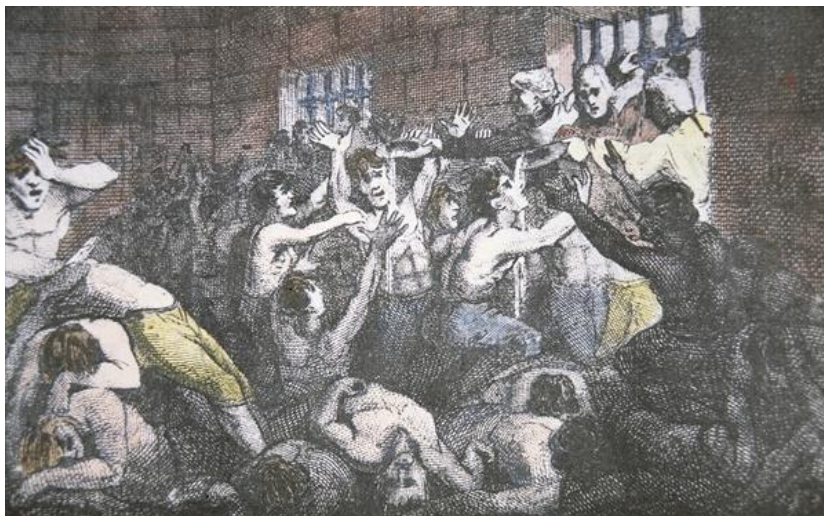
- The 'East India Company', a British company, had established a trading post in Calcutta, India.
- The company decided to strengthen the defences of Fort William, the main fort in Calcutta.
- Siraj ud-Daulah, the Indian leader of Bengal, was very angry at the increased presence of the British. He marched on Calcutta, ready to take it from the British.



This led to the 'Black Hole of Calcutta'. Over 100 British soldiers were trapped in a small underground bunker, and most ended up suffocating and dying.

Historians disagree on what *actually* happened that night. Some say it was a brutal attack by the Indians, whereas others say that the English were no better, and actually overexaggerated the events.

The sources on the following page describe varying views of what happened.



## 4. What happened to the British in India?

Source 1:

'The prisoners went mad with despair. They trampled each other down, fought for the places at the windows, fought for water... When at length a passage was made, twenty-three ghastly figures, such as their own mothers would not have known, staggered one by one out of the dungeon. A pit was instantly dug. The dead bodies, a hundred and twenty-three in number, were flung into it and covered up.'

**Thomas Babington Macaulay, "Lord Clive," *Critical and Historical Essays*, 1843.**

Source 2:

'The English captives were left to the mercy of the guards, the guards determined to secure them for the night in a chamber known by the fearful name of the Black Hole. The space was only twenty feet square... When they were ordered to enter the cell, they imagined that the soldiers were joking; they soon discovered their mistake. The captives were driven into the cell at the point of the sword, and the door was instantly shut and locked upon them'

**Thomas Babington Macaulay, "Lord Clive," *Critical and Historical Essays*, 1843.**

Source 3:

'Of one hundred and forty-six prisoners, one hundred and twenty-three were smothered in the Black-Hole prison, in the night of the 20<sup>th</sup> June, 1756. Few survived capable of giving any detail of the manner in which it happened'

**John Zephaniah Holwell (a survivor of the attack), *A genuine narrative of the deplorable deaths of the English*, 1758**

Source 4:

'Siraj ud-Daulah (the Indian leader of Bengal) can never be blamed for the fatal incident – he did not order the imprisonment and was not at all informed of it'

**Stanley Wolpert, *A New History of India*, 2009**

# 4. Questions

a) What was the East India company?

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b) What happened at the Black Hole of Calcutta? Describe fully, in your own words:

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c) Choose one of the sources. What does it say about the Black Hole of Calcutta? What does it say happened? Does it suggest it was a purposeful attack?

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# 5. What happened when Indians rebelled?

When the British took control in India, they made many changes. They wanted to 'modernise' India, and make it more like Britain. Some of the changes included:

## **Sacred traditions**

The British banned some sacred and traditional Indian customs. For example *sati*, where widows would kill themselves if their husband died. These traditions had existed in India for hundreds of years, and were a big part of national identity.

## **Education**

The British introduced English school systems to India, to teach the students English and other subjects that they were not learning. The students were also taught about Christianity, as most Indians were Muslim or Hindu at this point. The British wanted to convert the Indian people to Christianity.

## **Building**

Many new buildings, train stations, and railway lines were built, to 'modernise' India. These were often built through mountains or on top of Indian places that were seen as beautiful and 'holy'.

## **Religion**

Most Indian soldiers did not eat pork or beef, because of their religion. However, the British created a new, more advanced bullet, covered in beef and pig fat, which needed to be opened with the soldier's mouth.



## 5. What happened when Indians rebelled?

These changes angered the Indian population. Eventually, in 1857, rebellion broke out. A soldier who had been forced to open a bullet (covered in pig and cow fat) shot out at his British officers. Many other soldiers quickly joined in.

The rebellion spread across several provinces of India. Thousands took part, and about 2400 people died altogether.

The fighting was not limited to soldiers. Many women and children (on both sides) were also killed.

However, the Indian mutiny failed due to:

- Lack of organisation
- Lack of leadership
- The rebellion didn't manage to spread across all of India

The Indian soldiers were heavily punished for the rebellion, and many leaders were executed.





# 5. Questions

a) What changes did the British make in India?

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b) What do you think was the main reason that the Indians rebelled? Why? (Explain your answer fully!)

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c) Why did the Indian rebellion fail?

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d) Do you think that the Indian rebels deserved their punishment? Why/why not?

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# 6. What did the British Empire bring to the world?

The British Empire affected the world in many ways. Without its empire, Britain would not have tea, chocolate, curry, or coffee. The English language would be different. Countries all over the world would be different.

Some of impacts that the empire had can be viewed negatively, and some are far more positive.

Here are some of the ways that the British Empire changed the world:

<p><b>Slavery</b></p> <p>Africans were taken from their native land to America as slaves. They did not have a choice and once in America they were forced to work in horrible conditions.</p>	<p><b>Building</b></p> <p>The colonies benefitted from the legacy Britain left in improved infrastructure such as good roads, railway systems, canals, bridges and dams</p>	<p><b>Law and government</b></p> <p>Britain left its system of law in the countries it colonised. Many former colonies also continue to use the democratic (voted for by the public) system of Parliament introduced by Britain.</p>
<p><b>Christianity</b></p> <p>Britain spread Christianity to the countries it took control of. This led to many native countries losing their original religions.</p>	<p><b>Native Culture</b></p> <p>The Brits took the British culture with them to the colonised countries. This led to many native cultures disappearing. This happened to the Aborigines in Australia.</p>	<p><b>Theft</b></p> <p>Things belonging to the native people were stolen and brought back to Britain. For example, a lot of aborigines' art work was taken as well diamonds taken from India.</p>

## 6. What did the British Empire bring to the world?

<p><b>Raw Materials</b></p> <p>Britain benefitted from a plentiful supply of cheap raw materials that could be made into manufactured goods such as rubber, cloth, and woollen goods. This made Britain wealthy.</p>	<p><b>Land and Murder</b></p> <p>Land was taken from the natives and those who refused to give up their land were murdered.</p>	<p><b>Education</b></p> <p>The colonies benefitted from the introduction of a British education system and endure to the present day.</p>
<p><b>Wealth</b></p> <p>The wealth made from trade led to the rich becoming richer but the poorer people of Britain remained poor. The empire benefited the rich than the poor.</p>	<p><b>Clean water and sanitation</b></p> <p>Britain improved these important conditions in the colonies.</p>	<p><b>Diseases</b></p> <p>Brits took diseases with them to colonised countries. For example, the small pox wiped out many native Americans.</p>
<p><b>Language</b></p> <p>The English language is almost universal and spoken throughout the world, which makes for good communication between nations.</p>	<p><b>Foods</b></p> <p>Many of the foods we enjoy today came originally from the countries of the British Empire such as tea, cocoa, chocolate, coffee, rice, curry.</p>	<p><b>Soldiers</b></p> <p>The colonies provided soldiers to fight for Britain. For example, soldiers from colonies in the Empire helped to win both WW1 and WW2.</p>

# 6. Questions

a) List 3 negative results of the British Empire:

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

b) List 3 positive results of the British Empire:

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
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3. \_\_\_\_\_  
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b) Overall, what do you think is the biggest achievement of the British Empire? Why?

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