

Colonies and Colonialism: How Countries Expand Their Power

A colony is a land settled by a nation's people. People have established colonies for various reasons since ancient times, including adventure, resources, and religious pilgrimages. Colonization is the control over another land and its people without treating them as equal partners in government. Colonization has led to conflict and independence movements.

The Basics

The word "colony" [originally meant](#) settling in a new land outside of your original country and the people who did all that settling. We might one day, for instance, start a moon colony.

The colony is not a totally separate place. It still retains a connection to its "mother country," the original place where the people came from. The new outpost is therefore not an independent nation. It is still under the control of another place.

Reasons Colonies Began

There are various reasons why people left to start new colonies.

Their original home might have become too crowded. The resources, such as land and clean water, might have begun to be in short supply. Disease, a bad economy, and other reasons might also be involved. This happened all over the world from Asia to Europe to the Americas.

Small countries often start colonies. The Phoenicians were ancient people who lived north of modern-day Israel. They lived on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, a great place to sail out and trade all over. The Phoenicians started many overseas colonies including Carthage in North Africa. Carthage is famous for its later battles with Ancient Rome involving [elephants](#).

People might have wanted to find adventure and glory. Spanish and Portuguese "conquistadors" (conquerors) came to [settle the Americas](#) in the 15th and 16th Centuries for adventure.

They also might want to start a new community made up only of people like themselves, including those with similar religious beliefs. Others might disagree with them and this causes conflict. Utah, for instance, was settled by a colony of Mormons in the 19th Century.

And, new places might have had resources that could help the original country. For instance, many places in Africa have precious minerals, including diamonds, that are not found elsewhere.

Great Britain also [started colonies in America](#) because of its many resources, including land for farming, fish, wood (to build ships and houses, to use for fuel), and many more things.

Colonialism

A colony can be formed in many ways. If we ever do colonize the moon, it will not involve conquering an existing population. Unless there are moon people that we do not know about.

Over history, however, forming colonies involved clashes with the people already living there. These original inhabitants are [often conquered](#) and watched as their land is now controlled by others. This foreign land uses its resources for the needs of the country now in control.

Colonialism is the control of a group of people by a foreign power. This foreign nation maintains political, social, economic, and cultural control over the people's land. The colony does not have true self-government. The colony is in this way being exploited.

Colonialism can involve the control of defeated people such as [Great Britain controlling India](#). It can also include new settlers (such as American colonists) from the original country.

Decolonization

Colonies sometimes gain independence. They become free from the control of the colonial powers. The United States is a well-known example.

The ending of colonies can be an extended process. The colonial powers determine it is no longer in their interests and/or abilities to retain control. The process of giving up control of colonies and them becoming independent nations is known as "[decolonization](#)."

Old colonial powers can still retain economic and political control over the now independent nations. "**Neocolonialism**" means the old powers retain a form of colonial control.

Final Thoughts: U.S. Colonies?

The United States was once a colony. It eventually started its own overseas colonies.

Puerto Rico came under U.S. control after the [Spanish American War](#). People who live there are U.S. citizens but it is not a state, nor can they vote for the president.

Is Puerto Rico the [world's oldest colony](#)?