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## CASE STUDY 1 BACKGROUND: THE RISE OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE IN NORTH AMERICA

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### ⚙ **The rise of the British empire in North America** ↑

Britain's empire really began and grew first of all in North America and the Caribbean. As early as 1497 the adventurer and explorer John Cabot sailed to the northern part of present day Canada and called the new territories Newfoundland (you can guess why!). About 100 years later the adventurer Sir Walter Raleigh established the first settlements in Virginia. By the early 1600s this Virginia settlement was well established and Britain began to set up settlements in Bermuda and in the Caribbean. The Spanish dominated the Caribbean at this time. They had a huge empire in South and Central America. Their lands stretched as far north as Florida.

#### **Image 1**



The key at Beauclerk's Bluff in Florida, painted in 1787  
(PRO ref: MPD Beauclerk's Bluff)

Throughout the 1600s the British presence in North America grew. In 1620 the Mayflower landed in America. This ship took Puritan pilgrims to the New World (America) so that they could build new settlements and practise their religion the way they wanted to. In the 1620s the British established settlements in Barbados and then in 1655 they captured the rich island of Jamaica.

#### **Image 2**



Part of a British map showing the West Indies in 1757  
(PRO ref: CO 700 American North and South 31B)

The Caribbean was valuable because sugar was grown there. Like the Spanish, the British grew large amounts of sugar on plantations. They used a lot of slave labour. At first they used European slaves, captured in wars or sentenced as criminals. Over the next 150 years they increasingly used African slaves. You can find out more about the African slave trade in our [slavery snapshot](#) and in [case study 2](#) of this gallery.

#### **Image 3** ↑



Part of a British map showing the British colonies on the East Coast of North America in 1757  
(PRO ref: CO 700 American North and South 31B)

In the 1660s and 1670s the British established territories further north. From Virginia they established a series of colonies along the eastern coast of America. By the mid 1700s there were thirteen colonies. The Hudson's Bay Company was formed to explore the lands around Hudson Bay with its great wealth in furs, timber and other commodities. Here the British came into contact with Native Americans. They traded with them and made alliances. The French did exactly the same thing, and they built up large territories along the Saint Lawrence River. By the mid 1700s Britain and France were bitter rivals. From 1756-63 they fought the Seven Years War both in Europe and in America. By the end of the war Britain was emerging as the main force in North America. British forces captured Quebec and ruled the lands of Upper and Lower Canada.

#### **Image 4**



Plans from 1767 for a British citadel (fortress) in the city of Quebec, which the British captured from the French in 1763  
(PRO ref: MPG 420 Quebec Citadel)

Problems remained, however. Relations between the British government and the people who lived in the Thirteen Colonies got steadily worse in the 1760s and 1770s. In 1776 full-scale war broke out (the American War of Independence). The colonists were helped by the French and defeated the British, becoming the United States of America in 1783. Despite this disaster, British rule continued in the Caribbean and in Upper and Lower Canada. Over the next 100 years the various territories of Canada became the confederation that forms the state of Canada today.

### ⚙ **Links** ↑

**Canadian Heritage Gallery**

<http://www.canadianheritage.org/>

Large collection of resources and links to other sites on aspects of the history of Canada

**Canada McCord Museum**

<http://www.musee-mccord.qc.ca/>

Extensive collection of photographs and objects relating to the history of Quebec

**Colonial Williamsburg**

<http://www.history.org/>

Large site focusing on America in the colonial period

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# BRITISH EMPIRE

The rise of the British empire – North America

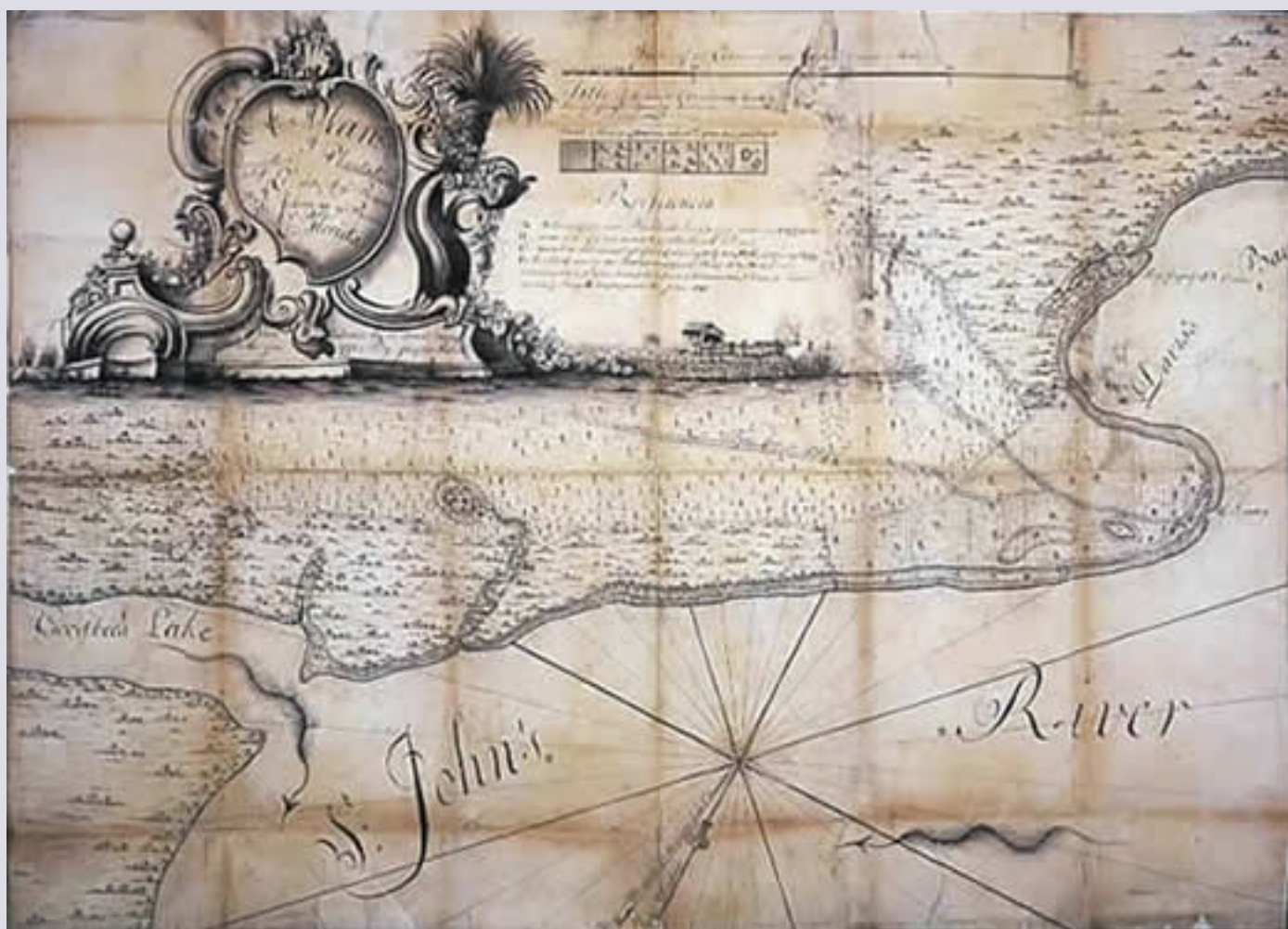


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## Background source one

The key at Beauclerk's Bluff in Florida, painted in 1787

(PRO ref: MPD Beauclerk's Bluff)



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# BRITISH EMPIRE

## The rise of the British empire – North America



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### Background source two

Part of a British map showing the West Indies in 1757

(PRO ref: CO 700 American North and South 31B)



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# BRITISH EMPIRE

## The rise of the British empire – North America

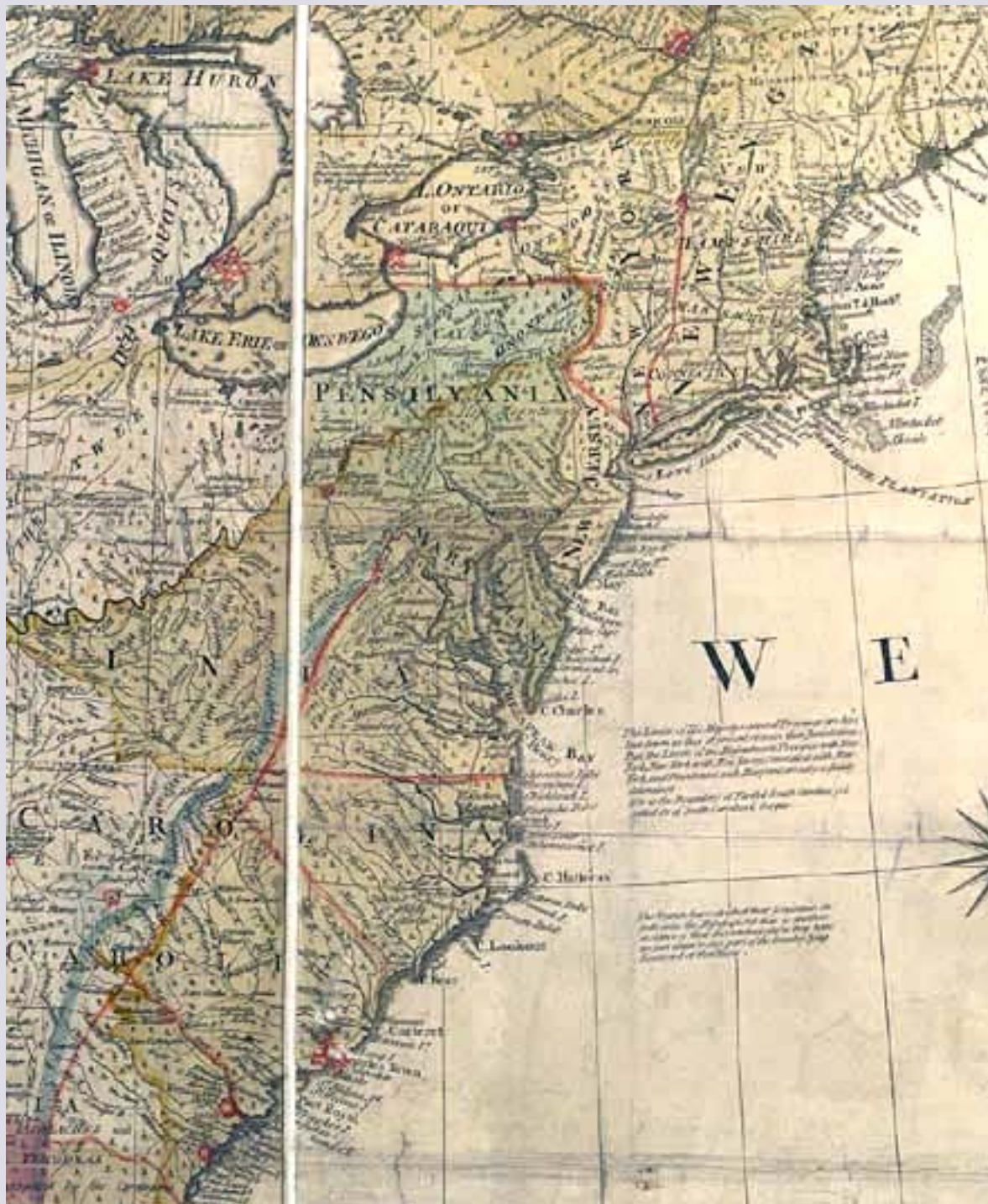


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### Background source three

Part of a British map showing the British colonies on the East Coast of North America in 1757

(PRO ref: CO 700 American North and South 31B)







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### Background source four

Plans in 1767 for a British citadel (fortress) in the city of Quebec, which the British captured from the French in 1763

(PRO ref: MPG 420 Quebec Citadel)



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