

British and French Comparison

Population sources

- British - Colonists were recruited from among middle-class farmers, artisans, tradesmen, indentured servants, convicted criminals or immigrants from other countries.
- French - Initially fur traders, merchants, and missionaries. In 1665 some 1100 French soldiers arrived and were given land. Neither Protestants nor peasant farmers were allowed to emigrate.

Settlement

- British - In the southern colonies in Virginia and the Carolinas, the colonies used a plantation model. The settlements of New England and the Middle Colonies – Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, and Delaware – in contrast, operated on a family-farm model. By 1700, the English colonies had a combined 100,000 inhabitants. Soon the colonists began growing tobacco, which they quickly produced in enormous quantities. Tobacco was very labor intensive: it took nine months of work each year to cultivate. Plantation owners therefore relied on indentured servitude and African slave labor to do the work.
- French - The first colony, Acadia, was founded in 1604, and Quebec was founded in 1608. By 1660 there were about 3000 people living in New France. While by the eighteenth century the French claimed most of the U.S. Midwest, Louisiana, and Canada, its colonists were never as numerous as the English and Spanish. At first, French settlement was based upon the fur trade and, to a lesser extent, fishing. French colonies in the Caribbean were established on a much different basis than New France: the French established plantation-based colonies there for sugar and food. The most important French colony was Saint Domingue, modern-day Haiti and Martinique (which is still a French overseas department today). As in the Dutch and Spanish colonies, French sugar plantations relied heavily on the labor of African slaves.

Government

- British - Distance from England and a frugal Parliament allowed colonists to set up local governments and representative assemblies and to tax themselves, as long as they did not take up arms against the Crown.
- French - Colonies were fully subject to the French king. There were no political rights or representative government, and public meetings could not be held without permission.

Population Growth

- British - Rapid growth due to liberal immigration policies. By 1627 Virginia had approximately 1,000 settlers. By 1754 total population in the English colonies had grown to 1.5 million; this included large proportions of German and French.
- French - Slow growth; by 1672 no more than 5,000 colonists had settled throughout New France. New France also had a large gender imbalance – in the 1660s, the ratio of men to women was six to one. Since the first groups of colonists were overwhelmingly men, the colonists did not reproduce as quickly as the English colonists did. Some men had children with Native American women; their children, called *Métis*, often became outcasts from both communities. The gender imbalance was eventually corrected, when Louis XIV sent boatloads of women to the new colony. In Canada the French population totaled just under 40,000 by 1734. In Louisiana, by 1763 there were approximately 10,000 settlers, including 5,000 slaves and Acadians.

Relationships with Native Americans

- British - As in New France, Native American populations helped the English settlers stay alive; Native Americans gave supplies to the new arrivals and taught them to survive. Unlike the French, however, the English did not treat the Native Americans well in return.
- French - Fur trade with the Native Americans gave the French a seemingly endless supply of furs. The trading relationship between the French and the Native Americans was an equitable one: the French needed the Native Americans to provide and cure the furs, while the Native Americans needed the French for European items like metal pots.