

## North American Colonial Forts

Forts are fascinating structures with a rich history and they served many purposes in colonial North America. Forts were not just about defense; they had various jobs, and they impacted the lives of the people who built and lived in them as well as those whose land they were built on.

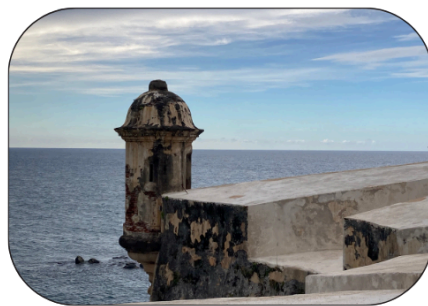


Fort Christian. - U.S. Virgin Islands

Forts were important for defense. **Defense** means protecting oneself, others, or a place from harm or danger. Early settlers in North America realized they needed to protect themselves and their communities. So, they constructed **forts**, strong structures that served as shields against threats and attacks. These forts were **fortified**, which means they were strengthened to defend against potential dangers.

Forts were also used as trading posts. A **trading post** is a place where people exchange goods with one another. Many of these forts were strategically located near rivers and important roads, making them perfect for trade. People from different backgrounds and cultures would come to these forts to **barter**, which means trading without using money. This impacted the colonies economically and culturally as ideas and goods were exchanged.

Forts were more than just places of defense and trade; they had other roles too. Some forts housed **missionaries**, individuals who traveled to different parts of the world to spread their religious beliefs. They used forts as bases for their missions and sometimes built churches and schools within the fort walls.



Castillo San Felipe del Morro - Puerto Rico

From the perspective of indigenous people, forts represented a change in their way of life. These structures were often seen as symbols of colonization and oppression. For some indigenous communities, contact with settlers and forts led to new trade opportunities, while for others, it meant removal from their **ancestral lands**, or the lands that belonged to someone's ancestors. The presence of forts also changed indigenous ways of life by introducing European goods, language, and religion.