I am analyzing some of the letters Sir James Douglas wrote to certain individuals during the very intense time of the Pig War in 1859. He wrote hundreds of letters but I have chosen only two of his letters as significant to the history of the Pig war. Although the two letters do not provide much context to the pig war we can dissect them and provide us with information on different themes. We understand what led to the Pig War. We also come to an understanding of the seriousness of the issue and how there could have been serious consequences. Within the document we learn about whom James Douglas was and his significance within the Pig war. This source gives us a clearer picture on the Pig War.

Reading the letters of Douglas we learn what the situation was between the United States and the British. We find out that both the United States and the British claim sovereignty over the island San Juan. Both countries are occupying the island and claim the island. We know this when Douglas refers this to Captain Hornby saying, “The conflicting jurisdiction of joint occupation.”[[1]](#footnote-1) This is a conflict between two great nations and could result in a full out war.

The letters are written with great seriousness. Douglas says powers beyond his authority had instructed him what to do.[[2]](#footnote-2) A powerful man such as Douglas being told what to do show us that the news of the pig war was not a small issue but a major and that the head officials in England were now commanding Douglas. Douglas addresses the seriousness by saying, “I hope they will not seek to force a quarrel upon us.”[[3]](#footnote-3) The possibility of war is very serious, especially between two great nations. This event could have sparked a full out war between the British and the Americans. Thankfully within this letter Douglas explains, “I have written to Courey to be cautious and not to push matters in his department to extreme.”[[4]](#footnote-4) Douglas writes this letter with great seriousness because he does not want a war to start.

These letters provides us evidence of who James Douglas was and his important role in the Pig War. We learn that James Douglas is on the British side of this war. Proof of this is shown when Douglas says, “ I informed you that the government of the United States had discovered the Acts of their officers in reference to the Island of San Juan.”[[5]](#footnote-5) Douglas talks as if the United States government is a different entity of government than his own. Therefore, we conclude that James Douglas is not on the American side but on the opposing side Britain. The fact that Douglas is British is important because we understand that this letter is written from a British perspective on the Pig War. We also learn that Douglas was a man of great authority. When Douglas writes his letter to Captain Hornby, a senior naval officer in the area at the time,[[6]](#footnote-6) he gives commands saying, “Compelled me to consent the first modifications of your orders, revoking the authority given you to prevent the landing of United States troops and the erection of military force by the detachment occupying San Juan.”[[7]](#footnote-7) This statement proves that Douglas is in charge of calling the commands for the British. He is a leader who has more authority then the Senior Naval officer. This leads us to assume that he is a government official with a lot of power and responsibility during the Pig War. From reading the letters we get a clear understand who Douglas was and his role in the Pig War.

Analyzing James Douglas’ letters shows us that it had an importance within the Pig War. We learnt what the main issue was between the two countries. These two letters contained evidence of the seriousness of the situation and gave instructions to help prevent the Pig war from escalating. Reading these letters we learn about who Douglas was, and the power he had. Although these letters do not contain a lot of information, they are significant to the events that happened during the Pig War. I wonder what the Pig War could have escalated too if James Douglas had not written these letters?

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DOCUMENT ANALYSIS: JAMES DOUGLAS LETTER’S

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History 1120 Introduction to Canadian History

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1. Library Archives Canada, R2465-0-2-E MG24-A35, Sir James Douglas- Correspondence, 1835-1864, Letter to Capt. Hornby, August 2, 1859, pg.8

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2. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid, pg.8-9 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid, pg.9 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid, Pg.7 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid, Pg.8 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-7)