

DBQ: Mercantilism

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Historical Context

Beginning in the 1600s with France, European countries applied a plan that their economists said would make them rich and powerful. This plan is called **mercantilism**. War is expensive. Trade is not necessarily expensive. What better way to dominate rival nations than by some system of trade that weakens them? (And if that fails, then resort to war.)

Task

In a well-organized essay, explain how the British government applied the theory of mercantilism and discuss the effect on the American colonies.

“Explain” means “to make plain or understandable; to give reasons for or causes of; to show the logical development or relationships of”

“Discuss” means “to make observations about something using facts, reasoning, and argument; to present in some detail”

Some Recommended Outside Information

- Triangular trade
- Smuggling
- Navigation Acts, enumerated articles, what colonists thought about controls on trade
- How New England, Middle, and Southern colonies made money

The Best Essay...

- Thoroughly develops all aspects of the task evenly and in depth
- Is more analytical than descriptive (analyzes, evaluates, and/or creates information)
- Incorporates relevant information from at least **“half plus one”** documents
- Incorporates substantial relevant outside information
- Richly supports the theme with many relevant facts, examples, and details
- Demonstrates a logical and clear plan of organization; includes an introduction and a conclusion that are beyond a restatement of the theme

Document 1

What is mercantilism?

Mercantilism, an economic system that stresses the goals of the national government rather than the individual [...] Mercantilism was the main economic system in Europe during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. This system required the national government to strictly control businesses to meet certain objectives, such as exporting (selling) more goods to other countries than importing (buying) goods from other countries. Within a country, trade barriers (such as taxes) were dropped. According to mercantilist philosophy, [using] the natural resources of a nation's colonies was a worthwhile effort.

Enotes.com. *What is mercantilism?* 03 Nov. 2009. <http://www.enotes.com/history-fact-finder/economics-business/what-mercantilism>

1. What are two ways mercantilism was supposed to make a country powerful?

Document 2

“[...] from thence forward, no goods or commodities whatsoever shall be imported into or exported out of any lands [...] in any other [...] ships or [...] vessels whatsoever, but in such ships or vessels as do truly and without fraud belong only to the people of England [...] or are built of and belonging to any the lands [of English people] and whereof the master and three fourths of the mariners at least are English.”

Navigation Act of 13 September 1660

1. If you were a merchant in the colonies in the 1660s, what is the only legal way to ship your goods by sea?

Document 3

“[...] That from and after [25 December 1733] there shall be [...] paid unto and for the use of His Majesty ... upon all rum or spirits [...] the sum of nine pence, money of Great Britain [...] for every gallon thereof. [...] and upon all molasses or syrups of such foreign produce or manufacture [...] which shall be brought into said colonies [...] the sum of sixpence of like money for every gallon thereof.”

Molasses Act, 1733

1. What are TWO items being taxed by the Molasses Act?
2. Why would New Englanders hate this law?
3. What would a British sugar plantation owner think of this law?

Document 4

“But in spite of all efforts the Navigation Acts could scarcely be enforced at all. It may be said that the whole people became lawbreakers, and often the customs officials and even the governors connived at their practice. Smuggling was universal. It went on regardless of the admiralty courts established in most of the colonies. "Juries found their verdicts against the most undoubted facts." The Molasses Act was certainly an economic and a political [mistake]; it not only made the people lawbreakers, it led them to hold Parliament in contempt, as not able to enforce its own laws.”

History of the USA: The Navigation Acts. 03 Nov. 2009. <http://www.usahistory.info/colonial/Navigation-Acts.html>

1. According to document 4, what was the main problem with the Navigation Acts?

Document 5

“[...] no sugars, tobacco, cotton-wool, indigoes, ginger, fustic, or other dyeing wood, of the growth, production, or manufacture of any English plantations in America [...] shall be [...] transported from any of the said English plantations to any land [...] other than to such other English plantations as do belong to his Majesty [...] under penalty of the forfeiture of the said goods, or the full value thereof, as also of the ship, with all her guns, tackle, apparel, ammunition, and furniture[...].”

Navigation Act of 13 September 1660

1. How does this portion of the Navigation Acts limit trade?
2. What is the penalty for smugglers?

Document 6

“Some things, however, the Parliament did purely to favor the colonies, -- it prohibited the raising of tobacco in England and kept Spanish tobacco out by high duties (duty = tax), it kept out Swedish iron by a high tariff [tariff = tax on imports], to the advantage of the colonies, and it paid a bounty on various colonial products.”

History of the USA: The Navigation Acts. 03 Nov. 2009. <http://www.usahistory.info/colonial/Navigation-Acts.html>

1. What are THREE ways the Navigation Acts actually helped the colonies?