

How significant was slave trade in the growth of the british empire

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I agree to some extent that slavery played a significant role in the growth of the British Empire in the years 1680-1763. This is because slavery allowed the British to import a high amount of goods that were in demand such as sugar and tobacco which generated profits for plantation owners especially as slave labour was cheap. The slave trade was mainly involved in two key aspects: the growth of the sea trade and maintenance of existing settlements.

Even though slavery was considered of great importance, there were other key factors involved with the expansion of the British Empire . Trading companies traded slaves and goods produced by slaves. The tax collected helped to fund the navy which protected trade and played an important role in war. So along with the trading companies; the Government; Royal Navy and War, were all factors that played an important part in the growth of the empire. Trade was one of the main key factors that allowed the British Empire to increase and grow steadily.

This trading routine was the beginning of the Empire and from all the joint stock companies formed, Britain allowed its Empire to grow in profits and increase in size. The slave trade played a major role in the growth of seaborne commerce mainly across the Atlantic seas. The use of slavery helped the British a vast amount by bringing in increased profits and goods that were on demand such as cotton, tobacco and sugar. There was a triangular trade where a three point voyage took place. This helped Britain gain prosperity and wealth and also a monopoly on the Atlantic. By 1720, they had ' transported 100, 000 Africans, exported ? 1 million worth of goods

and imported 30, 000 tons of sugar'. The growth of the British Empire was focused on seaborne trade. Therefore, they concentrated on the Atlantic trade. Britain would trade goods with African colonies for slaves. The slaves were then traded in the Caribbean and North America to work on plantations. The goods produced were returned to Britain. As a result, slavery played an important role in helping trade and the growth of the British Empire. Slave trade and trading companies are linked. Joint stock companies such as the Royal African Company and the East India Company were mainly the most dominant companies in trade.

The Royal African Company was the biggest British slave trade company. It began in 1672 after the failure of The Royal Adventurers of Africa due to interlopers and not rising up to its expected standards. It was created with the intention of making a huge profit from slave trade. The demand for slaves was high because it was considered that African slaves were used to the conditions of plantations in the Caribbean. Furthermore, because of high death rates and infant mortality, 'the supply of slaves needed regular replenishment'. Also slave labour was seen as the best form of labour as it didn't require the workers to be paid which meant larger profits for plantation owners. In addition slave owners were able to force them to work long hours in harsh conditions. As mentioned earlier, slave trade was highly profitable because by 1720, they had 'transported 100, 000 Africans, exported ? 1. 5 million worth of goods and imported 30, 000 tons of sugar'.

The Royal African Company became a monopoly and its profits and fortunes rose immensely from the other goods (like sugar) they imported too.

However, just like The Royal Adventurers, the company's James Walvin, Black Ivory: Slavery in the British Empire, Blackwell Publishing, 2001, pg 31 2 Kenneth Morgan, Slavery, Atlantic Trade and the British Economy 1660-1800, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pg 10 3 James Walvin, Black Ivory: Slavery in the British Empire, Blackwell Publishing, 2001, pg 31 Page | 1 Mahfuz Ahmad Chowdhury AA45161 History profits had been interfered by interlopers and they went out of business. Despite the Royal African Company ending, it put an end to foreign monopoly. By joining the slave trade, it helped British trading companies maintain its dominance.

The British had supremacy over Africa which simulated exploration for new raw materials and food articles. This dominance helped bring a vast amount of profits in and therefore help the growth of the British Empire. The trading companies were crucial to the growth of the British Empire especially after 1688. In 1688 'The Glorious Revolution' took place. The Dutch William of Orange replaced James II on the throne. This was very useful to the East India Company because they were unsuccessful in the East as their Dutch rivals were doing better than them.

But with the new king, 'a deal was done which effectively gave Indonesia and the spice trade to the Dutch, leaving the English to develop the new Indian textiles trade'. This proved to be a good deal for the East India Company because by 1720 they had generated more profit than the Dutch. In relation to slavery, the East India Company played a small role in the transportation and use of slaves. Despite not using slaves, they were successful. For instance in Bengkulu, the East India Company was 'regularly

sending between 453, 600 and 907, 200 kgs per year to London'. This is important in highlighting the fact that trade would have been successful without slaves. It also corroborates that trade was an important factor in the growth of the British Empire. Prior to 1688, the government also played a crucial role by passing laws to protect British overseas trade. A series of 29 laws were passed between 1645 and 1761 and were known as the Navigation Act. These were laws that 'forbade goods being imported into England if they were not carried in English or colonial ships'. In other words, the government was 'confining the benefits of empire to the state and its own subjects'. This meant Britain received trade from colonies even if other countries offered a higher price. As a result, the economy was boosted. By limiting ships and crews to being British, skilled seamen were created which then allowed the navy to become a powerful and dominant sea power. These acts were pivotal in the success of trade at the end of the 17th and beginning of the 18th century. Furthermore, the government set up its own bank called the Bank of England. The creation of the Bank of England led to a strengthening of the Royal Navy because of the virtuous cycle. People invested in the Bank of England with a promise of a return.

The government then spent that money on the navy. This protected the transportation of trade and trading ports during times of war. This was especially important as Britain was focused on slave trade across the Atlantic. Taxes collected from the trade were then used to pay investors their money back. In addition, trading companies made more profit. All of this had positive knock on effects on other industries such as agriculture, iron, carpenters and many more. From 1689 - 1714, the number of ships

increased from 100 to 131 and the number of cruisers increased from 8 to 66.

Not only did it protect trade which brought more wealth, it aided victory in major battles. For instance in 1707, the navy defeated the French at sea. Consequently, Britain went on to become the greatest navy.

Moreover, it opened up new trade routes and brought Britain more colonies. War is another key reason for the expansion of the Empire. The main war was the War of Spanish Succession which ended in 1713 with the Treaty of Utrecht. The treaty gave Britain land such as Gibraltar and Canada. These new colonies meant that Britain was able to export new products. The new plantations also meant that there was a higher demand of slaves which Britain provided helping to generate more profit. Crucially though, from the French, they gained the Asiento - a contract with Spain to supply its South American colonies with slaves.

A third major trading company was given a royal charter to trade in South America; the South Sea Company. It was known to 'help British wealth creation considerably and too boost British power'.⁸ The request from Britain for the Asiento in the treaty signifies the importance of slave trade to the growth of the empire. In conclusion, slave trade was crucial in the growth of the British Empire to some extent. But without trading companies, slaves couldn't have been traded. Nor could goods produced by slaves be exported.

In addition the government and its navigation acts helped trading companies reduce competition with other countries. The Navy was important in winning

wars and protecting trade. It helped gain the Asiento by winning the War of Spanish Succession.

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