Dutch Slave Trade Essay, Research Paper

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During the 17th and 18th centuries, mercantilism was the emerging economic policy through which the slave trade developed in Europe. In the Netherlands many historical events gave rise to a desire for domination of international trade. They were serious tradesman and were heavily involved in the profitable business of slavery. The Dutch, intelligent and self-ruling tradesmen took no time in displaying their dominance over rival countries, Portugal, England and Spain, in the Atlantic and Indian Ocean. They established their international superiority in trade and impacted today s society.

From 1609 to 1713, the Dutch Republic was going through The Golden Age. It was a time of economic wealth, and a higher standard of life compared to most European countries. However, the Netherlands had the highest cost of living out of all European countries. It was the period in which mercantilism expanded, and domination of trading power was necessity. England, France, and Portugal were also expanding their boundaries of trade, which will begin a long fight for mastery at sea. The Dutch was the trading capital of the world at this time; in which is represented in this quote, Although the Dutch tenaciously resisted the new competition, the long distance trading system of Europe was transformed from one largely conducted through the Netherlands, with the Dutch as universal buyer-seller and shipper, to one of multiple routes and fierce competitiveness. (Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. 24, pg. 890). The Netherlands operated in 7 provinces, known as the United Provinces, and the Dutch society was mainly consisted of bourgeoisie, sailors, and merchants. Because of the major trade industry in Holland, and that agricultural was secondary to the trading industry, the Dutch people were taxed extremely high for goods. However, a wave of culture flowed through Dutch Society, influenced by the economic profit that the Dutch gained from trade.

The production of sugarcane and cotton in the New World increased the urgency for laborers in the new colonies, in which led to the major importation of African slaves. These plantations and farms, in the New World sparked the golden business of slave trading, a business that will guide the Dutch to economic wealth. The Dutch entered the slave trade around the 16th century and beginning of the 17th century. The people in Holland rebelled against the Spanish rule in 1566, and around 1572, Spanish government closed Iberian ports to the Dutch to halt the revolts. However, this in turn led to the entrance into international trade. This will begin a long struggle for trading power with the Portuguese, Spanish, English, and French.

The Dutch didn t take long to make their presence felt. The quote from the book The Slaves describes their attitude coming into the trade, The Dutch, fiercely independent, and aggressive traders did not take long to establish themselves internationally. The Dutch were determined to control the trading power in West Africa. By mid 16th century, the Dutch had set up posts along the West African coast, and forts in present day Indonesia. The Dutch also controlled most of the Eastern Sea and had set up forts along the Caribbean and the coast of Dutch Guiana. The Dutch were very bright when it came to technological advances. One example of their knowledge was the invention of the canal and irrigation tactics. The Dutch intelligence in trade soon overcame the Portuguese in Africa. First off, the Dutch armed their boats and also trained the sailors. This system will prevent rivals and enemies to sink their ships or purge their cargo from the ship. The Dutch also raided particular forts, which gave them good geographic points on the map, and limited the power of their rivals. These forts were ports for trading routes, where ships may need supplies, and were also loading areas for slaves. One fort that the Dutch raided in the beginning of the 17th century was at Mina. Mina was a Portuguese fort, which had been their major trading fort since late 1400s. The Dutch captured Mina after few loses in battle, and then settled a new government, and necessary troops to defend it. The Dutch had also gave out charters to companies, in which they were allowed trading and settling in various locations around the world. The two major companies for the Dutch were the East Indies Company and the Dutch West India Company. These two companies will give the Dutch a more superior outlook on the trading business by establishing provinces in the New World and also Southeast Asia. These few tactics will help the Dutch tradesmen secure dominance over their rivals, the Portuguese in Africa.

The charter given to the East India Company allowed them to conduct business between the Dutch Republic and the Cape of Good Hope. The Dutch East India Company established and maintained the Dutch colonies in Southeast Asia during the 17th and 18th century. The company not only conducted trade but also took over small territories, including Portuguese holdings. The headquarters of the company is Batavia, where they controlled the spice trade in Asia and also won a monopoly in the Japanese trade. Though this company played a huge role in the spice trade, it only was a minor slave trading company with few ships going in and out of Africa. However, this company strengthened the Dutch s economy and trading power amongst the Portuguese, English, and French.

The Dutch not only gained trading power in Africa and the East Indies, but also in the Caribbean and Brazil. In the Atlantic, the Dutch West Company was created when it received its charter in 1621. The company was located in Dutch Guiana, Surinam, and islands of the Caribbean. The Dutch West India Company was given immense political and commercial powers, including the right to trade on the West Coast of Africa, in the West Indies, and in the New World. The Dutch West India Company also established provinces, including New Netherlands. The company also built many fortresses along the African coast, where many slaves were captured, and shipped off to colonies. The company prospered until mid 17th century, where it fell in a financial crisis.

These two companies, especially The Dutch West India Company played a huge role in the Atlantic slave trade. Many famous traders and explorers worked for the Dutch West India Company and the East India Company, including Henry Hudson. The reason why the Dutch and English had shipped a farther amount of slaves then the Portuguese is explained:

An explanation for this enormous jump was that the Dutch and English were more efficient and made the slave trade a responsibility of a corporation rather than the obligation of a few individual slave merchants. (Tanoura)

For this reason, the Dutch took control of the slave trade from the Portuguese, and was later exceeded by the English.

The slave trade progressed very rapidly when the first slaves were sold in New Amsterdam in 1646, from Brazil. A kind of systemized trade route was stimulated with a demand for slaves to work on plantations in the New World. First, the country needed to prepare the ship for the voyage, which may take months. They then begin their route the majority of the time, from Europe where ships set sail with merchandise to the West Coast of Africa. These ships then land on the coast, selling their goods in exchange for African slaves. This portion of the trip took the longest, lasting to almost 250 days, and on the average 100 days. The traders had to also obtain extra supplies for the trip across the Atlantic Ocean, which is otherwise known as the middle passage. The conditions in the ship were horrid. Many ships were stricken by disease, in which the unlucky were thrown in the ocean. These diseases were due to the minimum ventilation, light, food, and sanitation necessary to survive the trip across the ocean. The slaves were also chained to prevent revolts and committing suicides by jumping over-board. Traders even hired freed blacks to spy on the slaves, to prevent an uprising to occur. Nearly 1/4th of the slaves died during the journey across the Atlantic, which was an average of 2-3 months. The slave ship then had either two paths to take; one to the American colonies or to the West Indies.

When the ship reached fresh water and land, the slaves were cheerful, explained here:

It was reported that slaves danced with joy when they saw land and green trees again. For the managers of the slave ships, it was important that the slaves were in good spirits and looked healthy as they were prepared for the market. (Postma 168)

When the slave ships arrived in the West, they had to be checked of any diseases that the slaves may have. Sometimes this inspection took almost 2 months. For example, the Vergenoegen was denied entrance into Surinam because of diseases. Once the disease had resided the ship was allowed to enter the harbor, and to sell its human cargo.

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