**Navigation Acts**

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Navigation Acts

Between 1645 and 1761 British Parliament passed a series of 29 laws intended to tightly control colonial trade, shipping, and industry to the benefit of English interests. The American colonists largely ignored these acts, which were intended to ensure that the British colonies in North America remained subservient to the mother country. The initial act of 1645 forbade the import of whale oil into England unless it was transported aboard English ships with English crews. Subsequent laws passed in 1651, 1660, and 1663 provided the basis of the Navigation Acts. The First Navigation Act (1651) resembled the legislation of 1645 but was more far-reaching. It stipulated that goods could only enter England, Ireland, or the colonies aboard English (or English colonial) ships. Furthermore colonial coastal trade was to be conducted entirely aboard English ships.

The Second Navigation Act (1660) reaffirmed that goods could only be transported aboard English ships and established a list of "enumerated articles" that had to be shipped directly to England. The intent was to prevent the colonies from trading directly with any other European country. England required the colonies to sell their materials directly to English merchants or pay duties on goods sold to other countries. The list of articles included sugar, cotton, tobacco, indigo, rice, molasses, apples, and wool. In 1663 Parliament passed the Staple Act, making it illegal for colonies to buy products directly from foreign countries; European countries would first have to ship their products to England or pay customs fees. Through the Navigation Acts England tried to establish itself as the gatekeeper of colonial imports and exports. But the laws were difficult to enforce and the colonists easily circumvented them. Smuggling was rampant: In 1684 Parliament annulled the 1629 charter of the Massachusetts Bay Company. It charged that the colonists had violated English law by exporting tobacco and sugar directly to Europe and had thereby shown disrespect to the king. The laws nevertheless had little effect on the colonial economy, which grew at twice the rate of England's during the period. The acts continued to be passed until the eve of the American Revolution (1775-1783).



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