

Unit 1: The Colonial Period

DBQ 2: Economic Opportunities

Historical Context:

By the mid-eighteenth century the thirteen American colonies, which were later to become the United States, contained well over one million inhabitants. The vast number of colonial Americans made their livings as farmers. But differing climates, geography, and social practices made for great variation in the nature of work in different regions and in the level of economic success enjoyed by different American colonists.

◆ **Directions:** The following question is based on the accompanying documents (1–6). As you analyze the documents, take into account both the source of the document and the author’s point of view. Be sure to:

1. Carefully read the document-based question. Consider what you already know about this topic. How would you answer the question if you had no documents to examine?
2. Now, read each document carefully, underlining key phrases and words that address the document-based question. You may also wish to use the margin to make brief notes. Answer the questions which follow each document.
3. Based on your own knowledge and on the information found in the documents, formulate a thesis that directly answers the question.
4. Organize supportive and relevant information into a brief outline.
5. Write a well-organized essay proving your thesis. The essay should be logically presented and should include information both from the documents and from your own knowledge outside of the documents.

Question: *Americans often pride themselves that theirs is a “land of opportunity.” How much economic opportunity truly did exist in colonial America, and what factors affected the colonists’ opportunities to succeed?*

◆ **Part A:** The following documents deal with the types and extent of economic opportunities that existed in colonial America. Examine each document carefully, and answer the question or questions that follow.

Document 1

This is an excerpt from a popular college textbook explaining the causes of Bacon’s Rebellion of 1676. *Colonial America* was written by Oscar T. Barck, Jr., and Hugh Talmadge Lefler, and published by Macmillan Company (1967, p. 209).

... Bacon’s Rebellion ... was the first instance in the colonies “in which the common people rose not only against the royal governor, but also the rule of the privileged class.”

How does this document help to address the question of this DBQ? _____

(continued)



DBQ 2: Economic Opportunities *(continued)*

Document 2

This excerpt is from *An Account of Pennsylvania . . .* (1698) by Gabriel Thomas. Thomas was a Welsh Quaker who settled in Pennsylvania in the 1680's.

. . . poor people (both men and women) of all kinds, can here get three times the wages for their labor they can in England or Wales.

What factors might help explain why wage rates were so much higher in the American colonies than in England and Wales? _____

Document 3

This excerpt is from Gottlieb Mittelberger, *Journey to Pennsylvania* (1754), taken from the Harvard University edition of 1960, Oscar Handlin, editor. Mittelberger was a German schoolteacher who traveled to Pennsylvania in the early 1750's.

[Speaking of indentured servants] Many parents in order to pay their fares in this way . . . must barter and sell their children as if they were cattle. . . . No one in this country can run away from a master who has treated him harshly and get far. . . . Our Europeans who have been purchased must work hard all of the time. . . . Thus let him . . . who can do this by manual labor in his native country stay THERE rather than come to America.

Was America "a land of opportunity" for indentured servants? _____
Explain. _____

Can both Documents 2 and 3 be valid, or do they contradict each other? _____

(continued)

DBQ 2: Economic Opportunities *(continued)*

Document 4

These excerpts are from Andrew Burnaby, *Travels Through the Middle Settlements in North America* (1775). Burnaby was a young Englishman who traveled through the American colonies in the years just before the American Revolution.

The trade of this colony [Virginia] is large and extensive. Tobacco is the principal article of it. . . . Their manufactures are very inconsiderable.

Boston . . . in New England, is one of the largest and most flourishing towns in North America . . . it is supposed to contain 3000 houses, and 18 or 20,000 inhabitants. . . . The buildings are in general good; the streets open and spacious . . . and the whole has much the air of some of our best country towns in England. The country round about it is exceedingly delightful.

What view does Burnaby give you of the level of economic opportunities in colonial America? _____

Document 5

This excerpt is from Thomas Anburey, *Travels Through the Interior Parts of America* (1778). Anburey was a British officer during the American Revolution who, as a prisoner of war, was marched from Boston to Charlottesville, Virginia. He published his observations of America after returning to England.

[In Virginia] It is the poor Negroes who alone work hard, and I am sorry to say, fare hard. Incredible is the fatigue which the poor wretches undergo.

What might make you suspect an anti-American bias in Document 5? _____

Should we reject the validity of Anburey's statement? _____

(continued)



DBQ 2: Economic Opportunities (continued)

Document 6

These excerpts are from St. Jean de Crèvecoeur, "Letters From An American Farmer" (1782). Michel-Guillaume St. Jean de Crèvecoeur was a Frenchman who lived in New York from 1764 until 1780. His "Letters" grew from his travels in New York and Pennsylvania.

What then is the American, this new man?
... He does not find, as in Europe, a crowded society, where every place is over-stocked. There is room for every body in America. . . .
The rich stay in Europe, it is only the middling and poor that emigrate.
Here the rewards of his industry follow with equal steps the progress of his labor.
Some few towns excepted, we are all tillers of the earth, from Nova Scotia to West Florida.

What view does Crèvecoeur give us of the extent and types of economic opportunities that existed in colonial America? _____

Why were most American colonists "tillers of the earth"? _____

◆ Part B—Essay

Americans often pride themselves that theirs is a "land of opportunity." How much economic opportunity truly did exist in colonial America, and what factors affected the colonists' opportunities to succeed?