

## Shedding Grace Introductory Unit TAE

This unit is designed to follow the novel when it is used as a summer reading between American history courses that break between 1763 and 1789. It will smooth the transition and introduce the second course by identifying and pursuing some continuing threads.

### On-going themes that emerge from the novel

#### 1. Capitalism

*What is Capitalism? How did Capitalism destroy Mercantilism? Why was America fertile soil for Capitalism?*

Later follow the thread of the dominance of free market capitalism in 19<sup>th</sup> Century American history from Dartmouth College v/ Woodward through Gibbons v. Ogden and Charles River Bridge to the struggle to regulate big business in the latter part of the century.

#### 2. Slavery and the Roots of American Racism

*What was unique about American slavery? Were there connections between American slavery and capitalism? What is racism and how does it relate to slavery?*

Later follow the thread through the Constitution, First Amendment, Civil War, 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, civil rights movement, racism today vs. free speech.

When the American colonies were first founded most European countries followed an economic system called Mercantilism. Mercantilists believed that the power of a country was based on its wealth and that wealth was measured in gold. Countries got gold by exporting or selling more goods than they bought. This created what was called a favorable balance of trade and this meant that wealth accumulated in the country's treasury. In this mercantilist scheme war and world trade went hand in hand; countries readily admitted their intent to fight for foreign territory and to exploit it for their own economic benefit. The mercantilists stressed the idea that a country should establish colonies to buy its products and to provide it with raw materials. Commerce with the colony could be carefully regulated and restricted by the mother country to ensure for itself a favorable balance of trade. The colonies too would profit by having a protected market for their own products. England founded ten colonies along the Atlantic coast of North America and three more from territory taken from their commercial rivals, the Dutch. True to their plan they began to enact and to enforce a series of Navigation Acts intended to promote the production of raw materials needed for home industries and to prevent the growth of competing industries in the colonies.

By 1710 the British Customs Service had been created to enforce these laws. Customs districts were established and collectors and surveyors were put in all important colonial ports in order to see all cargoes loaded and unloaded. They were to collect all required duties and to see that bonds were given to guarantee shipment to proper ports in compliance with the navigation laws. The independent Americans, especially in New England, paid little attention to these laws and when customs agents attempted to prosecute them in colonial courts they often stood before judges who were themselves engaged in illegal trade and jurors who were also smugglers. They rarely got a conviction. Of the first 9 cases involving violations of the acts of trade in America, 8 were cleared and the one small fine collected was claimed by the colonial government which then sent the British a bill for calling the county court into session.

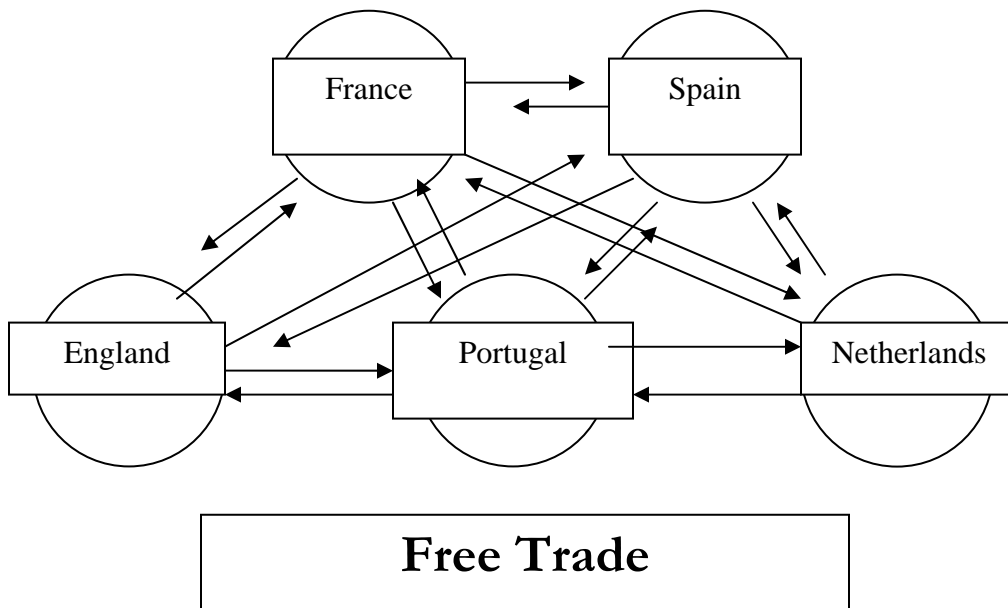
**Students will identify with the Americans and be amused by their scoff law attitude. It is important to challenge them on this and to stress that the innate human understanding of right and wrong is relative to the ethical cooperative group one recognizes. There are two issues under consideration here: is the law itself ethical; and is the scope of the ethical frame of reference broad enough to allow reason to guide the ethical judgment. Use the supplementary exercise on Frame of Reference if necessary to be sure students understand the concept. Use the following mercantilism strategy.**

# Mercantilism

All through the Middle Ages and at the beginning of the modern period, economists believed that wealth was fixed and economics was a zero-sum game in which increases in one area had to be matched by reductions in another area.

Given this rule, what problem do you see with the mercantile idea of establishing a “favorable balance of trade?”

**Trade surpluses in one country had to be balanced with deficits in another country. This was obviously impossible for everyone to achieve at the same time resulting in intense commercial rivalry and many wars in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries.**



What was the solution?

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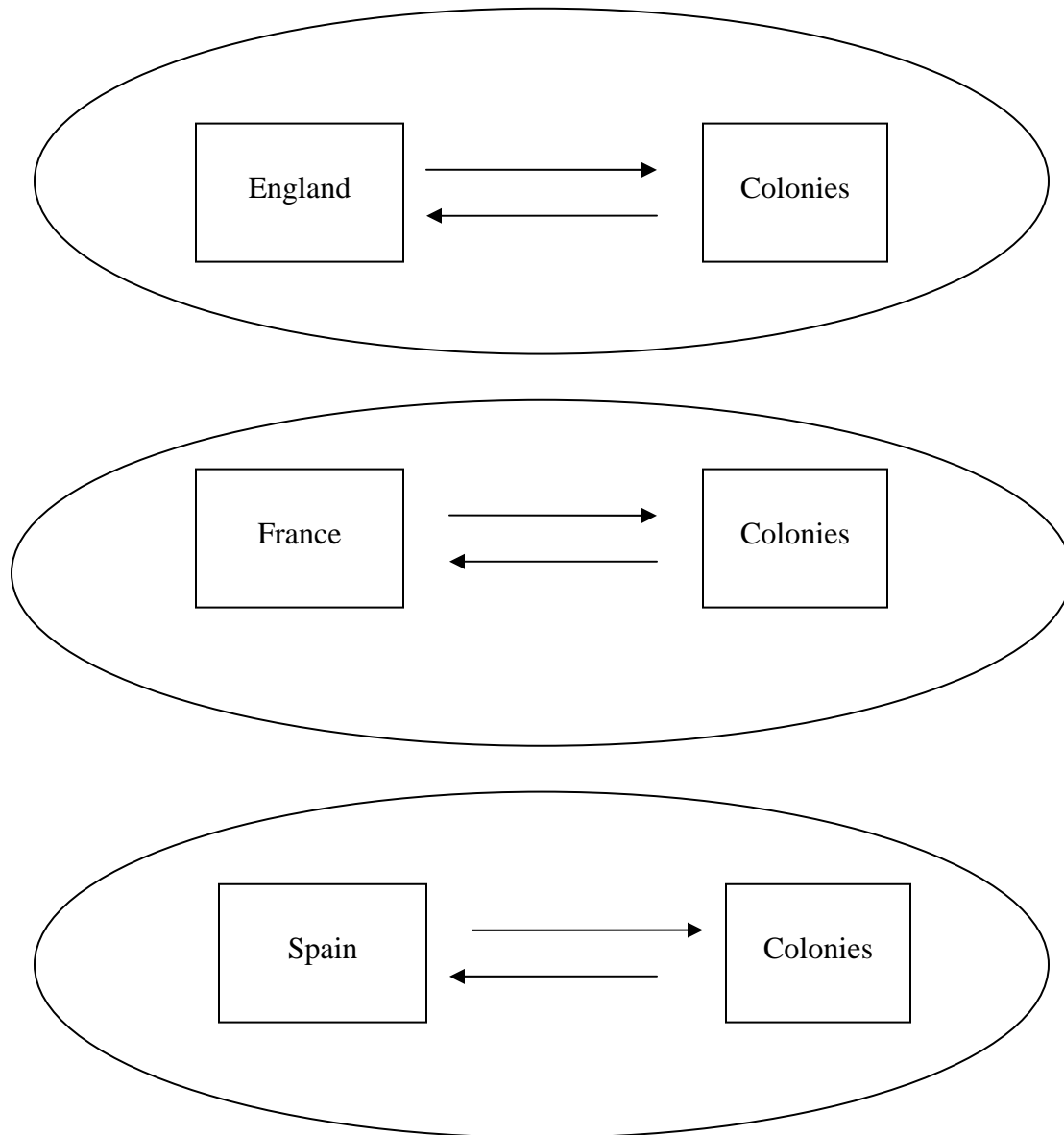
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# Mercantilism



In the Mercantile system each country controlled its own exclusive trading world by using colonies. By regulating prices, a favorable balance of trade could be guaranteed. This would seem to mean that the colonies would have to constantly “lose money,” if the mother country was always guaranteed a profit. But the Mercantilists believed that both the colonies and the mother country could make a profit. Can you explain how this could happen?

The answer to this is based on a condition economists call “absolute advantage,” and it’s a key reason why the system restricted the colonies to only producing raw materials.



In 1742 William Bollan was appointed King's Advocate and charged with studying the extent of illegal trade in Massachusetts. In a letter to the Board of Trade he made some remarks. Excerpts have been printed below. *Read them and tell how Bollan has assessed the problem and what his recommendation is for coping with it.*

**There has lately been carried on here a large illicit trade, (destructive to the interests of Great Britain in her trade to her own plantations, and contrary to the main intent of all her laws made to regulate that trade) by importing into this province large quantities of European goods of almost all sorts from diverse parts of Europe, some of which are by the laws wholly prohibited to be imported into the plantations, and the rest are prohibited to be imported there, unless brought directly from Great Britain...**

**... the persons concerned in this trade are many, some of them of the greatest fortunes in this country, and who have made great gains by it, and having all felt the sweets of it, they begin to espouse and justify it, some openly some covertly, and having persuaded themselves that their trade ought not to be bound by the laws of Great Britain, they labour, and not without success to poison the minds of all the inhabitants of the province, and matters are brought to such a pass that it is sufficient to recommend any trade to their general approbation and favor that it is unlawful; and as examples of this kind soon spread their influence on the other plantations around, it is too plain almost to need mentioning that if care be not soon taken to cure this growing mischief, the British trade to these plantations and their proper dependence on their mother country will in a great measure, ... long be lost...**

**...these illegal traders having already begun to destroy the vital parts of the British commerce; and to use as a memento to myself and the customhouse officers to do everything in our power towards cutting off this trade so very pernicious to the British nation.**

Letter from William Bollan to the Lords of the Board of Trade, February 26, 1742.

Bollan clearly sees the extent of illegal trade in New England and views it as a threat to the existence of the British colonial empire. His recommendation is to strictly enforce the law. This is a frame of reference ethical problem resulting from a conflict between two ethical cooperative groups who view the facts differently. Bollan has no appreciation for the American perspective. This kind of ethical judgment is commonplace and examining it should be the focus of the lesson. Ask students to extrapolate from Bollan's recommendation and predict the colonial reaction if it were to be pursued. Have student's give examples of similar kinds of conflicts in their own experience. The resistance of New England merchants to the mercantile system is very clear in the novel and students should be able to refer to it. Be sure they understand that New England didn't have any raw materials with an "absolute advantage" and were economically placed in a competitive position with Great Britain.

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Not all Englishmen recommended a hard line policy in regard to the Navigation Acts. The following excerpt from a memorandum of the Council of Trade advising the government of Prime Minister Robert Walpole suggested a radically different course of action in regard to New England smuggling. *Analyze it and tell why you agree or disagree with its conclusions.*

**...It has ...been proposed that the produce of the British Plantations in general be exported, under proper regulations, directly from the place of their growth to any foreign market to the southward of Cape Finisterre... (Promontory in N.W. Spain)**

**...The general objections to this proposal with respect to the Plantations, have usually been, that your Majesty's Colonies in America might thereby become independent of their Mother Country, that the Northern Plantations, more particularly New England, have already shown too great a desire of being so...**

**...we would propose that this permission should be restrained to British ships belonging to British owners dwelling in Great Britain, and duly navigated according to law, that such ships clearing from some port in Great Britain might be permitted to sail to your Majesty's Plantations to take in a loading there, consisting of the produce of the said Plantations and to carry the same to any foreign market to the southward of Cape Finisterre; provided they were obliged afterwards to return to some port in Great Britain and unload there before they were allowed to return again to any of your Majesty's Colonies in America. This proposal thus guarded, far from making the Colonies independent of Great Britain, would in our opinion tie them faster to us, inasmuch as by this means we should necessarily be the carriers of their product, which would naturally diminish their navigation and increase our own; and if the Plantations in general were restrained from exporting any commodities whatsoever in their own shipping to foreign markets in Europe, excepting fish, the dependence of our Northern Plantations who are at present very powerful in shipping, whose produce is much the same with our own, and whose trade and interest too much interfere with ours, would in all probability be more firmly secured to us; For as the law now stands the Northern Colonies do carry on a considerable trade to foreign ports in Europe with lumber, corn, and fish, which gives them too great an intercourse with foreigners and**

**puts them under a temptation of furnishing themselves with many commodities from abroad, which they ought only to receive from Great Britain.**

**Council of Trade and Plantations to the Duke of Newcastle, July 24, 1724**

Since human beings are urged to act ethically within their recognized cooperative groups, the effort to unite the colonies and the mother country into a single economic unit through self-interest is more ethical and more likely to succeed in creating stability than is a system based on divisiveness and coercion. Students should begin to understand that people think ethically within the parameters of group identification and that while these groups tend to cooperate internally, they identify outsiders as enemies to whom basic ethical obligations do not have to be honored. Expanding the range of one's recognized cooperative groups is a basic goal of ethics education. Students should be able to give examples of limited ethical perspective from the novel.

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Walpole was inclined to agree with the views of the Council of Trade and instituted a policy for non-enforcement of the Navigation Acts called "salutary neglect" which relaxed the actual execution of the laws without actually changing them. Walpole, whose motto was "let sleeping dogs lie," believed that this would placate the rebellious New Englanders and in the end actually encourage more trade with England. *Think about this and tell why it might have been wiser to change the law rather than to just look the other way while people disobeyed it.*

**Encourage students to relate concepts to their own lives; ask for examples from personal experience.**

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When the costs of running the empire drastically increased after 1763 the British government decided it was time to stop salutary neglect and begin to collect some taxes in the colonies. This, as you know, led to the passage of the famous Stamp Act and initiated the conflict between the colonies and mother country that would end in the American Revolution. After decades of being left alone, the colonists thought the Stamp Act was unfair. *Why do you think they felt this way?*

**Once again students will have little difficulty giving personal examples of why "changing the rules in the middle of the game" is inherently judged to be unethical.**



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The major debate that erupted over the Stamp Act led to the famous battle cry: “no taxation without representation” and can help us learn more about human ethics and how it works. Remember there are two conflicting frames of reference here viewing the same set of facts. The British agreed that taxation without representation was wrong, but argued that the colonists were represented even if no local representatives sat in Parliament. They called this “virtual representation.” *Read the following excerpt advocating this point of view and tell why you think the colonists rejected it.*

**The right of the Legislature of Great Britain to impose taxes on her American colonies, and the expediency of exerting that right are propositions so indisputably clear that I should never have thought it necessary to have undertaken their defense, had not many arguments been lately flung out both in papers and conversation, which with insolence equal to their absurdity deny them both. ... The great capital argument which I find on this subject is this; that no Englishman is, or can be taxed, but by his own consent...**

**...every Englishman is taxed, and not one in twenty represented: ...Manchester, Birmingham, and many more of our richest and most flourishing trading towns send no members to Parliament, consequently cannot consent by their representatives, because they choose none to represent them; yet are they not Englishmen? Or are they not taxed?**

**...If the towns of Manchester and Birmingham, sending no representatives to Parliament, are notwithstanding there represented, why are not the cities of Albany and Boston equally represented in that Assembly? Are they not alike British subjects? Are they not Englishmen? Or are they only Englishmen when they solicit for protection, but not Englishmen when taxes are required...**

Soame Jenyns, *The Objections to the Taxation of Our American Colonies*, London 1765

Jenyns judgment is framed by an ethical cooperative group that includes all of the British Empire. If within this context, Parliament accorded prime facie equality to the colonies in its deliberations and findings, virtual representation would be ethical. The colonists however frame their view by an ethical cooperative group that only includes the colonies and as such are inclined to reject this position out of hand. This is a classic frame of reference ethical dilemma.

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The colonists were not impressed by this position and put forth reasons why they felt the Stamp Act was unjust and why they were not obliged to pay it. *Read the following excerpt that mentions two of these arguments; briefly explain them in your own words and tell your opinion of them.*

**...The colonies claim the privilege which is common to all British subjects, of being taxed only with their consent given by their representatives, and all the advocates for the Stamp Act admit this claim. ...but they assert that the colonies are virtually represented.**

**The English subjects, who left their native country to settle in the wilderness of America, had the privileges of other Englishmen. ...Considering themselves, and being considered in this light, they entered into a compact with the crown, the basis of which was, that their privileges as English subjects, should be effectually secured to themselves and transmitted to their posterity. ...Charters were accordingly framed and conferred by the crown, and accepted by the settlers, by which all the doubts were prevented. By these charters, founded upon the unalienable rights of the subject, and upon the most sacred compact, the colonies claim a right of exemption from taxes not imposed with their consent. They claim it upon the principles of the constitution, as ...British subjects, upon principles on which their compact with the crown was originally founded.**

**... the Stamp Act is the first statute that hath imposed an internal tax upon the colonies for the single purpose of revenue, yet the advocates of that law contend, that there are many instances of the Parliament's exercising a supreme legislative authority over the colonies, and actually imposing internal taxes upon their properties that the duties upon any exports or imports are internal taxes ...that no distinction can be supported between one kind of tax and another, an authority to impose the one extending to the other. ...It appears to me that there is a clear and necessary distinction between an act imposing a tax for the single purpose of revenue, and those acts which have been made for the regulation of trade, and have produced some revenue in consequence of their effect and operation as regulations of trade.**

Daniel Dulany, *Considerations on the Propriety of Imposing Taxes*, New York, 1765

Reason works to justify the instinctive sense of right and wrong in all human beings. Until this is understood reason cannot be a reliable tool in guiding ethical decision making. Reason quickly becomes rationale for predetermined positions. This is a difficult lesson and bears repetitive consideration. Here we have an example of rationale. Language is a two edged sword in the search for truth and can be made to support any position. Debate and argument have traditionally dominated the ethical arena with little impact on human ethics.

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Debate raged in the British parliament about the wisdom of the government's American policy. Read the following exchange between George Grenville, who supported the Stamp Act and William Pitt who opposed it. *Which argument is more convincing? Why do you think neither man changed his mind?*

**Grenville:**

**... When I proposed to tax America, I asked the House, if any gentleman would object to the right; I repeatedly asked it and no man would attempt to deny it. Protection and obedience are reciprocal. Great Britain protects America; America is bound to yield obedience. If not, tell me when the Americans were emancipated? When they want the protection of this kingdom, they are always very ready to ask it. That protection has always been afforded them in the most full and ample manner. The nation has run itself into an immense debt to give them their protection; and now they are called upon to contribute a small share towards the public expense, an expense arising from themselves, they renounce your authority, insult your officers, and break out, I might almost say, into open rebellion.**

**Pitt:**

**...The gentleman boasts of his bounties to America! Are not those bounties intended finally for the benefit of this kingdom? If they are not, he has misapplied the national treasures...**

**...The gentleman asks, when were the colonies emancipated? But I desire to know when they were made slaves? But I dwell not upon words. When I had the honour of serving his Majesty, I availed myself of the means of information, which I derived from my office: I speak, therefore, from knowledge. ...I will be bold to affirm, that the profits to Great Britain from the trade of the colonies, through all its branches, is two millions a year. This is the fund that carried you triumphantly through the last war. ...This is the price that America pays you for her protection. And shall a miserable financier come with a boast, that he can fetch a peppercorn into the exchequer to the loss of millions to the nation!**

**William Pitt and George Grenville, January 14, 1766**

**This is a good example of how reason can generate arguments to support any cause. There is no end to this kind of meaningless exercise as is evidenced by contemporary political “spin doctoring.” Discuss the weaknesses of debate as a way to solve ethical problems.**

## Capitalism

Have students research the meaning of Capitalism and complete the following assignment as preparation for a class discussion

Complete the following sentence with 25 words or fewer.

**Capitalism is an economic system...**

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**Capitalism is an economic system... in which private individuals are free to produce and sell in a free market governed only by the laws of supply and demand.**

**Read a number of student definitions and make a list on the board of the key common concepts that appear in all or most of them. The list will include: freedom, free market, free trade, law of supply and demand, individual, profit. From this analysis segue into a lecture/discussion of how the pursuit of individual freedom by entrepreneurs in a free market is thought to benefit the society as a whole. Use Smith's concept of the "invisible hand" and be sure that students understand the way the laws of supply and demand are believed to regulate the free market.**

# Capitalism

Read carefully the following excerpts from Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations and then using the concepts of “supply and demand” see if you can figure out why Smith believed that mercantilist economic policies would ultimately weaken and impoverish countries that pursued them.

Adam Smith  
The Wealth of Nations  
Book IV, Chapter I (abridged)  
Of the Principle of the Commercial or Mercantile System

*Smith starts by stating the popular economic idea of the time.*

**To grow rich is to get money; and wealth and money, in short, are, in common language, considered as in every respect synonymous.**

## IV.1.1

**A rich country, in the same manner as a rich man, is supposed to be a country abounding in money; and to heap up gold ... in any country is supposed to be the readiest way to enrich it.**

## IV.1.4

**In consequence of these popular notions, all the different nations of Europe have studied, though to little purpose, every possible means of accumulating gold and silver in their respective countries...**

*Smith is going to show that this popular idea was a mistake. Read carefully.*

## IV.1.7

**That when the country exported to a greater value than it imported, a balance became due to it from foreign nations, which was necessarily paid to it in gold and silver, and thereby increased the quantity of those metals in the kingdom. But that when it imported to a greater value than it exported, a contrary balance became due to foreign nations, which was necessarily paid to them in the same manner, and thereby diminished that quantity.**

*When a country is successful at mercantile policies what happens to the total quantity of money in the mother country?*

**It increases.**

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#### IV.1.9

**That foreign trade enriched the country, experience demonstrated to the nobles and country gentlemen as well as to the merchants; but how, or in what manner, none of them well knew. The merchants knew perfectly in what manner it enriched themselves. It was their business to know it. But to know in what manner it enriched the country was no part of their business...**

*What do you think Smith is saying?*

**Mercantilism benefited the upper classes but by-passed the masses. It didn't enrich the country as a whole.**

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#### IV.1.11

**The quantity of every commodity which human industry can either purchase or produce naturally regulates itself in every country according to the effectual demand, or according to the demand of those who are willing to pay the whole rent, labour, and profits which must be paid in order to prepare and bring it to market.**

Be sure students understand the theory of supply and demand

#### IV.1.16

**It would be too ridiculous to go about seriously to prove that wealth does not consist in money, or in gold and silver; but in what money purchases, and is valuable only for purchasing.**

*According to Smith what constitutes real wealth?*

**Goods and services are real wealth. Money is fundamentally a medium of exchange.**

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#### IV.1.31

**It is not by the importation of gold and silver that the discovery of America has enriched Europe. By the abundance of the American mines, those metals have become cheaper. A service of plate can now be purchased for about a third part of the corn, or a third part of the labour, which it would have cost in the fifteenth century.**

**The cheapness of gold and silver renders those metals rather less fit for the purposes of money than they were before. In order to make the same purchases, we must load ourselves with a greater quantity of them, and carry about a shilling in our pocket where a groat would have done before...**

*According to the Smith's theory of supply and demand what happens to the value of money in the mother country when its total supply increases?*

**If supply increases, demand being unchanged, the value or price goes down.**

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*What effect does this have on the prices of commodities for sale in the home market?*

**If the value of money goes down the price of goods will go up. Discuss inflation with the class.**

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#### **IV.1.34**

**The two principles being established, however, that wealth consisted in gold and silver, and that those metals could be brought into a country which had no mines only by the balance of trade, or by exporting to a greater value than it imported, it necessarily became the great object of political economy to diminish as much as possible the importation of foreign goods for home consumption, and to increase as much as possible the exportation of the produce of domestic industry. Its two great engines for enriching the country, therefore, were restraints upon importation, and encouragements to exportation.**

*In order to achieve the favorable balance of trade it is necessary for a country to export more goods than it imports. What does this do to the supply of goods for sale in the home market?*

**The supply of goods goes down.**

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*What effect does this have on the prices of goods in the home market?*

**If the supply decreases, demand remaining unchanged, price will increase.**

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*Now explain in your own words why Smith believed Mercantilism was impoverishing the countries that practiced it.*

**Mercantilism saddles a country with a double whammy of inflationary forces. It increases the money supply while simultaneously decreasing the supply of goods available in the market. Prices will skyrocket, which they did, especially in Spain. Smith also points out that since only a very few rich people actually got the gold and silver surplus, Mercantilism drove the mass of people into poverty.**

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## The Grievances

The following are some of the many grievances listed in the Declaration of Independence and used by the colonists to justify the break with Great Britain. Basing your assessment on the key events as they are presented in Shedding Grace, how accurate are these assertions?

He (The King) has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people.

**This is a bit of an exaggeration. Colonial legislatures were dissolved, but only as a last resort.**

He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.

**True in the admiralty courts, but in the civil courts the colonials were able to really frustrate the British authorities. The novel is very strong on this.**

He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harass our people and eat out their substance.

**This refers to the expansion of the customs with the provisions of the Revenue Act. The colonials hated to have to pay for the bureaucracy that they saw as oppressive. The novel brings this out very well.**

He has kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures.

**There were troops in North America, but they were not garrisoned in cities and didn't routinely police civilian populations as this implies.**

He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil Power.

**This is essentially not true as the novel makes very clear. The colonial governors had the final say about quartering troops in their colonies and at least in the case of Massachusetts-Bay were very reticent about doing it. The British were very concerned about civilian control of the military.**

For quartering large bodies of armed troops among us:

**This is not true until the rebellion was out of hand and the colonies out of control.**

For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world:

**More accurately stated the mercantile system restricted trade only to other parts of the British Empire. This is a key cause of the Revolution because the Americans were pressing for free markets and of course that would mean the end of the British Empire.**

For imposing Taxes on us without our Consent:

**This is a very complicated frame of reference disagreement, which is touched upon in the novel. The issue is two fold: 1. one's definition of customs duties (regulatory v. revenue); 2. one's definition of representation (acceptance or rejection of the idea of "virtual representation.").**

For depriving us in many cases, of the benefit of Trial by Jury:

**True in the case of admiralty courts, but very misleading since it was trial by jury that resulted in biased verdicts against the British that led to the move toward the admirably courts in the first place. This is clear in the novel.**

For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences:

**This implies widespread use of the admiralty courts and corruption in the British legal system, which was used to persecute the colonials. This is not true. The term “pretended offenses” clearly shows the extent of the frame of reference problem.**

In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms:

Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury. A Prince, whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

**The novel implies that the leadership of the colonial cause never really wanted to reconcile the issues and wanted full independence right from the start and that they were “playing games” with the British. This of course is debatable.**

In Shedding Grace, Jonathan Hamrick struggles with the idea of race and the apparent contradiction between slavery and the meaning of justice.

*In 1944 the economic historian Eric Williams wrote a famous book called: Capitalism and Slavery in which he said: “Slavery... has been too narrowly identified with the Negro. A racial twist has been thereby given to what is basically an economic phenomenon. Slavery was not born of racism: rather racism was the consequence of slavery.”*

**Eric Williams, Capitalism and Slavery, London, 1944, Pg. 7**

***Drawing evidence directly from the Jonathan Hamrick’s own words, do you think he would have agreed or disagreed with Williams? Underline or make marginal notes as you read the following excerpts from the novel.***

### **From Chapter 11**

Butcher is a good man, he wrote again in his journal. He is a Black man. His mother was an African slave brought to Martinique; Levesque doesn’t know who the father was. I couldn’t help wondering, as I looked at his dark face and thick features, what kind of future we have wrought by bringing these Negroes here in so many thousands, and what would emerge from it in the centuries ahead. Perhaps in a world of equals this difference in color and temperament would vanish as it has begun to do in Joseph. But this is not a world of equals and he was not the result of equality, but rather of abject inequality and the dominance of the haves over the have-nots, white over black, man over woman. When I asked him his view on slavery, he told me he had none and said only, that’s the way it is.

What would a freed slave do, where would he go without being forever different and for that reason feared and scorned. And what of the freed slave himself, would he not harbor deeply scarring hatreds for his former oppressor and be urged to seek retribution?

I am becoming increasingly convinced that it is simply the color and strangeness of these people that prevents their eventual emancipation, since it is clearly not a failure in faculty. This almost insurmountable objection to integration, even among those who fervently advocate an end to slavery, seems rooted in an unshakable belief in the God given superiority of the white race, a superiority that is not as evident to me as I have come to know Joseph Butcher.

### **From Chapter 12**

I am struck by sadness at the thought of how routine and mundane this business can become, even for the former slave, Joseph Butcher, so much so in fact that I spoke to Captain Levesque today concerning my reservations. I asked him if slavery were nothing more than the exploitation of the weak for the purpose of low cost labor. He answered saying that the advantages of a slave labor system for society are not found in the cost of labor, as is often supposed, since as hired workers the Negroes would quickly be forced to the very bottom of the wage scale. The advantage lies, he maintains, in the reduction of poverty and crime that attends the inability of those with inferior intellect and ambition to find and keep work. Unemployment has been the bane of the free labor system, he argues, and it breeds drunkardness, crime and disorder. Slavery requires everyone to work and eliminates poverty. But this assumes the Black man to be inferior and his own first mate shows this clearly to be untrue. And it pains me to hear slavery presented as a good thing, not just defended as a necessary evil.

I challenged him by asking how we know that, when given the advantages and opportunities that Europeans have enjoyed for centuries, the African will not excel as well. He answered me saying that he knew of no slave that could rise above mediocrity in any endeavor. When I asked about Joseph he answered that Joseph was a free man. This remark remained with me for sometime as I thought over and over about it. Perhaps it is being free that inspires the accomplishment and the stultifying state of slavery that dulls the Negro's ambition.

"MR. HAMRICK, THIS CONTINUAL ASSAULT ON ME concerning the institution of slavery is becoming tiresome," Levesque said sharply and walked away.

Jonathan followed, undeterred, and repeated his question. "Captain Levesque, please answer me."

"I am not concerned with the philosophical implications, damn it," he barked and then quickly regained his composure. "Privilege and hierarchy are the results of the natural inequality among people. This has been so since the dawn of time, as has slavery. These people are slaves, slaves in Africa where they can only expect brutality, perhaps even to be cooked and eaten. They are fortunate to become slaves in an enlightened society. What more could a brute savage want? He is rescued from a life of pain and darkness and blessed by the word of God, receiving Christian teaching and enlightenment. He is delivered from uncertainty and violence and promised peace and security."

"Yes, but what does he give for it? His freedom! Is this not simply a one-way street of exploitation?"

"Freedom is earned through the capacity to be free and this means the ability to make free choices, which temper the selfish passions in favor of the welfare of the greater society. The African is no more than a grown child who cannot understand the abstract constraints of the law or the niceties of democratic compromise. He must be kept under the immediate surveillance of a surrogate parent or master."

"And yet you freed your slave, Joseph." Hamrick could see immediately that Levesque, for all his cock sureness and bravado, was also harboring at least some measure of doubt and that this was the wedge with which to exploit it. "Why did you free Joseph? Did you hate him and wish to see him set adrift among superior peoples and be destroyed?"

"It's not the same thing," Levesque responded, and knowing that this ploy was fruitless added, "Joseph is unusual. And besides I still watched over him."

"Do you watch over him now?" Hamrick prodded.

"He watches over me now," Levesque answered with a slight sigh and smile, and Hamrick heard the sound of pride in his words. "I love Joseph," Levesque went on willingly, "as though he were my own son, and I did no less for him than if he were my son."

"And you are proud of him are you not?" Jonathan asked.

"I am proud of him."

The reliance on racial inferiority as a justification for slavery was not sustainable and in Jonathan's mind left a cavernous inconsistency between the practice of slavery and his so cherished belief in individual liberty. "Why is Joseph different?" he pushed, "surely there are other competent Negroes."

The answer he got was more profound than he would, at that moment, realize. "Joseph is different because he is my Joseph."

#### **From Chapter 14**

JOURNAL, SUNDAY AUGUST 20, 1769: I sense myself falling into the trap of allowing this nightmare to become too ordinary and familiar, insinuating itself into my everyday way of life, as though these were not human beings, but just so many items on a bill of lading. It becomes habitual and automatic and precludes criticism when it is finally customary and traditional.

There is something of a daily grind about it. Each slave is examined and reexamined and when one is deemed suitable a negotiation begins, invariably with Ostehoudt telling Levesque that he is benefiting from the absence of other bidders, and the captain reminding the Dutchman that he is being paid in silver and gold. And so it goes day after day in the sweltering heat of this infernal place. And I am becoming numb to it and find myself silently slipping beyond rationale, hiding behind a mask of the mundane and routine by which a thing, even one as grotesque as this, finally goes on unquestioned, because it has always gone on and because it is the way it is, as Joseph says.

#### **From Chapter 17**

“WE DON’T NEED TO JUSTIFY SLAVERY, MR. HAMRICK, slavery exists in all cultures. How many white men do you know who came to our shores under indenture to some farmer or artisan and were then sold, or even gambled away, while under obligation of servitude?” Levesque reacted in a way that displayed his growing annoyance at Hamrick’s need to continually revisit the ethical impasse that may have vexed him, but was of no consequence to the captain.

“But don’t you see that to support slavery betrays the very principles that underpin everything we say we stand for?” Jonathan went on undeterred.

“And what is that?” Levesque responded brusquely.

“Freedom and equality!”

“Slavery,” Levesque paused for emphasis, “has nothing to do with freedom and equality.”

“If all men are created equal,” Hamrick responded, “then the Negro is not a man. Is that your contention?”

Levesque answered quickly and with conviction. “The Africans are men, but they are men in a condition of slavery. It’s a matter of accepted practice recognized by the laws of every nation. They are property.”

“They are living property you mean for whom the law violates every natural human instinct and inclination. To resist even the most outrageous cruelties is punishable under this law by execution. To simply run away, much less openly resist, results in mutilation and torture, and all of this done quite legally. Is this the law of which you speak, sir? There is no civil justice for a slave, sir. Slaves stand in a never ending state of war with their masters, a war which only blood and suffering can hope to resolve.”

“Perhaps you are right Mr. Hamrick,” Levesque shot back angrily, having listened long enough. “Perhaps it is a state of war and if this be so it is only a reflection of what all life is. Do you think these African tribes wage war on each other simply to supply us with slaves, to get our rum or our cowries shells? These people are savages, Mr. Hamrick; they are slaughtering each other by the thousands every day and will continue to do so forever, even if no European ship ever again touched their shores. And they simply kill their captives, massacre them and let their heads roll in the market place dust simply to proclaim their power and grandeur.”

“And so you imply that they should be happy then, to be living slaves who can only hope that if they work hard and are dutiful perhaps they will stay alive a little longer.”

“I’m sure they are all happy to stand, still breathing, on the auction block, and accept slavery over death.” Levesque retorted.

“And what of their children and their children’s children? By what right are they relegated them to a life of servitude? What choice will they have?”

“Mr. Hamrick, I confess that your lawyer’s knack for disputation has exhausted me and I beg to retire from this debate. Let me, however, end with one final comment. I think in the future it would be best for you to stay home in the counting house, as your colleagues do, and not look.”

JOURNAL, MONDAY, OCTOBER 9, 1769: It is a black and moonless night, which matches my mood these past days for I know that I cannot continue in this wretched business and need to fashion a way out. My father will be sorely grieved, but I can no longer ignore my conscience in this matter, although God knows I have tried. I can certainly see how easy it is to fall into the habit of rationale and how quickly the mind contrives reasons for pursuing what is in the end simply one’s narrow self-interest. As I walk blindly back and forth across the quarterdeck, now free of every trapping of that despicable human trafficking, I can still plainly see so many empty, forlorn faces, fading away from me into the night, never to be home with their loved ones again. And each a number neatly squared away in our accounting ledgers and bills of lading. I will profit mightily from their suffering and the thought of it truly shames and distresses me.

**Drawing evidence directly from the Jonathan Hamrick’s own words, do you think he would have agreed or disagreed with Eric Williams when he wrote: *Slavery was not born of racism: rather racism was the consequence of slavery?***

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## Racism

The Third Edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica, published in 1796 had the following entry.

NEGRO, Homo pelli nigra, a name given to a variety of the human species, who are entirely black, and are found in the Torrid zone, especially in that part of Africa which lies within the tropics. In the complexion of Negroes we meet with various shades; but they likewise differ far from other men in all the features of their face. Round cheeks, high cheek-bones, a forehead somewhat elevated, a short, broad, flat nose, thick lips, small ears, ugliness, and irregularity of shape, characterize their external appearance. The Negro women have the loins greatly depressed, and very large buttocks, which give the back the shape of a saddle. Vices the most notorious seem to be the portion of this unhappy race: idleness, treachery, revenge, cruelty, impudence, stealing, lying, profanity, debauchery, nastiness and intemperance, are said to have extinguished the principles of natural law, and to have silenced the reproofs of conscience. They are strangers to every sentiment of compassion, and are an awful example of the corruption of man when left to himself.

**After some general reaction and discussion have the students use at least three internet sources to look up a definition of racism. Then have them complete the following assignment.**

Define racism in 25 words or fewer.

**Racism is the belief that genetic differences result in the superiority of one race over another and justify discrimination which is defended as natural.**

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**Then discuss common concepts**

**Racial superiority**

**Discrimination based on the belief in racial superiority**

**The key concepts will fall into two categories: 1. a belief in racial superiority and 2. a willingness to practice overt discrimination of the basis of race. Ask the students if slavery and racism violate the ideals of the American Revolution. Jonathan Hamrick concludes that slavery definitely does, but is ambiguous about racism. This highlights the inherent struggle between freedom and equality in human ethics. Read the following from the Declaration of Independence.**

We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed, that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these Ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new

Government, laying its Foundation on such Principles, and organizing its Powers in such Form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

**Ask what it means. Students should understand that the government will protect everyone's freedom and equality.**

**Now read the First Amendment from the United States Constitution.**

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

**Discuss the dilemma. Achieving both freedom and equality at the same time is a very vexing problem. Segue this into a discussion of racism today, hate groups, hate speech, hate laws, etc. How far can you go to limit racism?**



