

Team IC22022 Summary of Findings

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Using the Naval Officer Shipping Lists dataset, our team investigated the effect of global and regional conflicts and legislation on the flow of trade in and out of the Chesapeake region from the years 1721 to 1771.

We researched the Tobacco Inspection Act of 1730, a Virginia law requiring the inspection of all tobacco exports in order to ensure tobacco quality. According to the law, any tobacco not meeting a minimum standard of quality was discarded. The Accomack and James River (Lower) Districts were most directly impacted; tobacco exports from both districts sharply decreased starting from 1730. Our group hypothesized that stricter tobacco regulations would cause a shift among Chesapeake colonies to direct their trade exports to the West Indies instead, a region with high demand for grain products rather than tobacco. However, our group was unable to find a significant change in grain exports to the West Indies from the Accomack and James River (Lower) Districts.

While tobacco was a major part of trade in the Chesapeake before 1740, crop diversification post-1740 marked trade in the Chesapeake. We also looked at imports of grain products, sugar products, and slaves to the Rappahannock District. Our dataset spanned the years between the 1730s and the late 1700s, which coincides with the peak of the Atlantic Slave Trade (1725 to 1825). The import of slaves significantly towered over the other goods in two peaks centered around 1752 and 1761.

We were also interested in how major international conflicts would affect trade. We focused on the King George's and French and Indian Wars. King George's War lasted from 1744 to 1748, so we tracked the exports and imports from that time period between Great Britain and the US. Similarly, for the French and Indian war, we explored imports to the colonies. For both conflicts across both time periods, we were unable to support our hypothesis that these events meaningfully impacted trade. Trade remained constant, possibly due to effective use of the convoy system, which helped trade safely continue amidst the violent conflicts.

Though our dataset was fairly comprehensive in span, there was a notable lack of consistency. The data tables given to us (in csv format) were categorized by colonial region and year, where each CSV file tracked every distinct good's movement for that year in that port. Value, amount, exchange rate, and either origin or destination for each good were often provided, but were sometimes inconsistent, difficult to understand, or inaccurate. Similarly, every port did not account for every year of trade, and the years that *were* provided did not track every possible good, leaving us to either interpolate values to leave holes in the data. Given these shortcomings and the brief timespan we had to work with, we acknowledge that our conclusions may not be thoroughly accurate or representative of the full picture of trade. Further work on our team's results to reduce these inconsistencies and compile a more complete dataset would lead to a better understanding of trade during this time.