

Why Was There So Much Illegal Trade With The United States?

1. The Mother Countries were unable to supply their colonies with the much needed plantation goods that they normally bought from the U.S.
2. It was easier to acquire these goods from the U.S. due to the close proximity of that country to the Caribbean, particularly after the U.S. acquired Louisiana, New Orleans and Florida. These new states provided ports closer to the Caribbean.
3. Dutch and Danish islands were used as trading centres or you could say transshipment points for the goods. You already know from the topic European Settlement and Rivalry that the Dutch colonies were mainly used as warehouses and trading stations.



Caribbean map showing Dutch and Danish islands

4. The colonists were determined to continue this trade despite the protests of their Mother Country. Why? Firstly, they had become accustomed to the direct trading between themselves and the then North American colonies and perhaps more importantly they were attracted by the lower price of direct trade versus the alternative of buying through their Mother Country.

5. The devastation caused by natural disasters such as the hurricanes of 1784, 1785 and 1786 resulted in acute food shortages. The West Indian Governments were forced to open their ports to the nearby U.S. or face starvation. You would imagine that that was not an option for the planters, many of who were already deep in debt, and could not afford the money to replace dying slaves when the situation could be avoided.

It was impossible for the Mother Countries to effectively police the expansive waters of the Caribbean. Imagine how expensive it would be to even try. In addition at this time, the French and Spanish were no longer the naval power that they once were. In other words, they did not have enough ship to spare for such patrolling.