

# The United States' Involvement in the Caribbean

## Introduction:

Before July 4, 1776, Britain owned 13 colonies along the eastern seaboard of North America. As sister colonies they traded directly with the British West Indian colonies up to that point. The North American colonies received molasses and tropical products such as ginger and pimento from the West Indian colonies. In exchange they gave them plantation supplies: chiefly horses and staves for the hogsheads and food items such as flour and saltfish. This was used to feed the enslaved workers on the estates. They also received corn, oil, rice and peas.



*The 13 British colonies in North America*

The cost of feeding the slaves was a daily expense that had to be borne. There were hundreds of slaves to be fed. This trade or barter kept the cost of production relatively low for the sugar producers.

On **July 4, 1776** the North American colonies declared that they were independent of Britain. Though they were not recognized as a free and new nation by Britain until 1783, the trade relationship that they shared with the British West Indies was immediately severed. Britain's attitude and response was one of hostility.

Meanwhile her West Indian colonies were suffering. All over slaves were dying of starvation. New foods such as breadfruit, ackee and mango were introduced but the slaves refused to eat them.

### **July 2, 1783**

On this date, Britain issues an Order-in-Council which allowed the newly independent U.S.A. to trade the essential items. The trade could only be conducted in British ships. The Order-in-Council was to be renewed every year. She did this mainly because she was receiving less revenue from her colonies.

The U.S. was not happy about these rules and Ordinances. They decided to turn to the French West Indies who had an attractive trade offer similar to the original one with the British West Indies. By the 1790's two thirds of the U.S. trade with the West Indies came from French colonies.

In **1791** the Haitian Revolution occurred. The United States decided not to trade with a country that was ruled by an ex-slave. She sent foodstuffs and weapons to the colonial authorities to help them stop the revolution.

In **1793**, the Assembly in France opened all ports to American shipping but Cuban ports were also now opened to the Americans. They had a choice. They chose Cuba. She was a little nearer and her slave society was more stable. By November of 1787, all Spanish ports were opened to trade with the U.S. by 1804 she did all of her trade in tropical products with the Spanish colonies. This continued up to 1870.