Twitter Thread by @AdamSmithWorks

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In yesterday's discussion of colonies, #AdamSmith was really good on a lot of issues—particularly on condemning murdering Indigenous people, despoiling colonies in search of gold that ain't there, and then pretending you're doing it all for God. #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

Today, Smithketeers, will not be such a feel-good day. You will not be heartened. You might want to pour a cup of tea. Or something much stronger. #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

Smith starts by noting that the colonies of developed nations where the "natives easily give place to the new settlers" get rich and cultured faster than anywhere else.

That phrase "give place to" cloaks a lot of horrors. (IV.vii.b.1) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

The reason colonies can do so well (for everyone but the Indigenous peoples, that is) is that settlers import the social, political, and technical know-how from the old country. (IV.vii.b.2) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

There's lots of land, which means you need lots of workers and are willing to pay them high wages.
Workers + land + money ➡ kids!
And more people ➡ prosperity. (IV.vii.b.2–3) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets



You know what else is great for economic growth? Being very far away from the old country. Land gives scope to grow and prosper, but distance gives independence. (IV.vii.b.6) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

[It’s probably some kind of wacky coincidence that Smith is publishing stuff like this in 1776. It’s not like independence and colonies were hot topics or anything. @iealondon>] (IV.vii.b.4) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

Spanish colonies were flashy successes at first because of all the plundering.
Other European colonies were less immediately splendid. Being less immediately splendid helped with the independence. (IV.vii.b.7) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

Smith finds himself in the awkward position of approving of the progress the colonies have made in spite of his opposition to the "cruel destruction of the natives". (IV.vii.b.7) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

It takes a minute—#AdamSmith gonna Adam Smith—but he gets to the real point of this section: No colonies have made more rapid progress than the English colonies in North America. (IV.vii.b.7–15) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

Why are the English colonies in North America doing so well? Land and liberty, y'all! (IV.vii.b.16) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets



English colonies have good institutions, like minimal engrossing of land, minimal or no primogeniture, moderate taxes, and a wide market for their goods. All those things help them flourish. (IV.vii.b.17–21) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

A quick word on taxes, because our @collegeboard #APUSH exams didn't prep us for this. Smith says colonies are expensive, and the English colonists have never contributed to the defense of England or to the support of its government. (IV.vii.b.20) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

Smith also says that tithes are unknown in the colonies and that their clergy are supported by small stipends or by voluntary contributions. (IV.vii.b.20) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

(He's probably right. He *is* #AdamSmith. But we, the SmithTweeters, had to recalibrate our thinking here for a bit.) (IV.vii.b.20) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

Know what else is great for prosperity? Not being under the control of the East India Company. Unlike other colonies, American colonies could directly export many commodities: grain, lumber, salted provisions, fish, sugar, rum, etc. (IV.vii.b.22–31) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

And sugar and rum take us to the triangular trade, which Smith passes over in one sentence. ■ You can learn more about it here. (IV.vii.b.32) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

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Smith provides (as Smith does) a long list of commodities the colonists were forced to send to England rather than trade freely. The goal was to keep the prices down so English merchants could profit. (IV.vii.b.34–36) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

Colonists were allowed to trade freely in raw materials but as soon as anything was manufactured, even for use *in the colonies*, things got dodgy. Like. Hats had to be bought from England. (IV.vii.b.42) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets



Wool (the English are very. protective. of. their. wool. industry) can only be processed at home, not in mills. (IV.vii.b.42) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets



These restrictions, says Smith, are an unjust violation of the most sacred rights of mankind.

Like. Sure. But MAN. He couldn't have said that about the triangular trade?! Especially since he compares these restrictions to slavery. (IV.vii.b.44) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

We just...we wish he'd done better. Even though we know he's already doing better than the vast majority of 18th-century thinkers. (IV.vii.b.44) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

In general, Smith says, the policies of Great Britain towards its colonies are less repressive than most. #LowBar
Politically, they're independent: local legislatures, representative government, non-tyrannical executives. (IV.vii.b.50–51) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

Now Smith is going to talk about the sugar colonies and about slavery.
Smith does not like slavery. He's opposed for moral and economic reasons.
But he does need to analyze it. (IV.vii.b.54) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

Sugar cultivation is carried on by slaves in all the European colonies. This may be because the work is so punishingly hard.
But the profit and success of these colonies depend on the good treatment of the slaves. (IV.vii.b.54) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

[As much, that is, as it is possible to say that any enslaved being is "treated well." He DOES call slavery an "unfortunate law"...but again. We wanted more.] (IV.vii.b.54) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

French planters generally treat their slaves better than English planters do because their government keeps a closer eye on them.
English planters, having more liberty, used it to be awful. (IV.vii.b.54) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

Free governments are bad for slaves in two ways. First, free governments depend on the support of the people. Including slave owners (who tend to be wealthy and powerful). This makes it hard to pass laws to protect slaves. (IV.vii.b.54) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

Second, governments can only protect slaves by arbitrarily interfering with the "property" of enslavers.

On both counts, this is where the focus on freedom in the English colonies is a bad thing. (IV.vii.b.54–55) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

Smith's verdict? The policy of Europe "has very little to boast of" in the establishment, government, or prosperity of its colonies.
They were begun in folly and injustice and led to the destruction of harmless peoples. (IV.vii.b.58–59) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

Even in colonies that weren't established for greed and conquest, it was "the disorder and injustice of the European governments, which peopled and cultivated America."

No points awarded for war and persecution. #Good (IV.vii.b.61–62) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets



Even the best of Mother Countries has done almost nothing to aid their colonies' success. The most they've been able to do is provide the people and the institutions they bring with them. (IV.vii.b.64) #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets

So we'd like to have had some ringing abolitionist rhetoric from Smith here, but that's not his project in this work. He IS making a solid case that colonies aren't good for ANYONE, really. We'll take it for what it's worth. More tomorrow! #WealthOfTweets #SmithTweets