Room to Govern

How loose British oversight shaped colonial expectations

8.C.1.1.A "Examine how the unofficial British policy of salutary neglect created an environment suited to self-determination in the colonies."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details showing what colonists could decide when British oversight was loose. Number two details showing how that practice shaped their later expectations.

Who Made the Decisions?

1. In the early 1700s, a ship carrying barrels of flour left Philadelphia for another Atlantic port. Britain claimed the right to regulate colonial trade through laws such as the Navigation Acts. Yet British officials did not always enforce those rules closely. Historians call this loose, unofficial approach salutary neglect. It was not a promise that colonies could govern themselves, and enforcement varied by time and place. Still, when officials were absent or looked the other way, colonists had more room to make choices about trade and local affairs.

2. Colonial assemblies used that room to govern. Voters, mostly property-owning white men, chose representatives in many colonies; women, enslaved people, and most others were excluded from voting. Assemblies voted on local taxes and decided how to spend money on roads, courts, and defense. A royal governor might object, and Britain still held ultimate authority, but governors often needed assembly funds to carry out their plans. By debating budgets and bargaining with governors, representatives practiced making decisions for their communities instead of waiting for detailed orders from London.

3. That practice shaped expectations. A representative who had helped decide how to raise money might resist a tax imposed without the assembly's consent. After Britain's costly war with France ended in 1763, Parliament sought more revenue and tighter control in its North American colonies. Many colonists protested new taxes, arguing that their own elected assemblies should have a say. Their earlier experience did not make all colonists agree on independence, but it helped some believe they could direct their own political future. Salutary neglect had opened space for self-determination without granting complete freedom.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How could loose enforcement of trade laws give colonists more control over their decisions?

2. How did voting on taxes and spending help assembly members practice self-determination?

3. Why did salutary neglect not give the colonies complete freedom to govern themselves?

4. How did the assemblies' earlier experience help explain protests against new taxes after 1763?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine that Britain orders a colony to raise money for a harbor beacon without an assembly vote. In three or four sentences, explain how salutary neglect could shape the assembly's response. Use two accurate details from the passage and explain one limit on the assembly's power.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 8 · 8.C.1.1.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details showing what colonists could decide when British oversight was loose. Number two details showing how that practice shaped their later expectations. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How could loose enforcement of trade laws give colonists more control over their decisions?	**When British officials did not closely enforce trade laws, colonists had more room to make their own choices about trade.**
2	How did voting on taxes and spending help assembly members practice self-determination?	**Assembly members made decisions about raising and spending local money and bargained with governors rather than waiting for detailed orders from London.**
3	Why did salutary neglect not give the colonies complete freedom to govern themselves?	**Britain still held ultimate authority, royal governors could object, and loose enforcement was not a promise of colonial independence.**
4	How did the assemblies' earlier experience help explain protests against new taxes after 1763?	**Having made decisions about local taxes, colonists expected their elected assemblies to have a say before new taxes were imposed.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The assembly might protest because its members have long voted on local taxes and spending. Years of debating budgets taught representatives to expect a voice in community decisions. They might argue that even a useful beacon should be paid for with their consent. Britain still held ultimate authority, so the assembly could not simply ignore its order.

Accept responses that connect a specific colonial practice under loose oversight to an expectation of local decision-making. The response must also recognize that Britain retained authority.