

## 1629-1655. New Amsterdam and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

While there are few remaining details, slavery was probably introduced into New Amsterdam soon after its founding by the Dutch West Indies Company in 1624. In either 1625 or 1626, eleven “bondsmen” were brought to the colony, including the Africans Paulo d’Angola, Simon Congo, Anthony Portuguese and John Francisco. Three African women from Angola were taken to New Amsterdam in 1628. In 1635, the Dutch West Indies company hired a special overseer to supervise the work of the “negroes belonging to the company.” Among other tasks, the men repaired the fort on the foot of Manhattan Island and cleared forest land for cultivation. Separate slave quarters were reportedly established along the East River north of the main settlement.

The legal and social status of the enslaved Africans was originally not clearly defined. They followed the same laws as the White population, could own property and testify in court, bear arms in emergencies, attend church and marry. By 1643, the Dutch West Indies Company recognized land claims by Africans in the area on Bowery Road just north of the main settlement. Records survive of 1641 weddings where Anthony van Angola married Catalina van Angola and Lucie d’Angola wed Laurens van Angola.

On the other hand, a 1638 ordinance banned sexual relations between the White population and “heathens, blacks, or other persons” and company policy excluded Africans from skilled trades. In 1644, a group of African men petitioned the Dutch West Indies Company for emancipation and were granted partial or “half-freedom.” The men and their wives were freed and received leases on land on condition that they pay the company an annual tribute in farm goods and continued to work for the company when their labor was required. Their children, however, remained enslaved. Many of the families in this group settled in farms around the periphery of the main settlement where they could act as a barrier between the European community and potentially hostile native people.

The leadership of the Dutch colony clearly recognized the value of the African population. In 1644, Governor Willem Kieft argued that “Negroes would accomplish more work for their masters and at less expence, than farm servants, who must be bribed to go thither by a great deal of money and promises.” The direct trade in slaves between the New Amsterdam colony and Africa began in 1655 with the arrival of a ship with 300 enslaved Africans. By 1664, the African population of the Dutch colony was about 800 people or ten percent of the total population of the colony. In New Amsterdam, 375 Africans made up about a fourth of the settlement’s total population. A 1664 tax list for New Amsterdam showed that approximately one out of eight citizens of the colony owned enslaved Africans with a number of large plantations, including ones owned by Captain John Lawrence in Hempstead and by Captain Thomas Willet’s in what would become Queens County.

**Sources:** Burrows, E. and Wallace, M. (1999). *Gotham, A History of New York City to 1898*. NY: Oxford, 31-33; Hodges, G. (1999). *Root & Branch, African Americans in New York & East Jersey, 1613-1863*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 13-33.

**Documents:** E.B. O’Callaghan, ed. (1856). *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New-York; Procured in Holland, England and France*. Albany, NY: Weeds, Parsons, v. 1, p. 99, 123, 215-216, 243; E. Donnan (1932/1969). *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*. NY: Octagon, v. III, 410-416.

#### CHARTER OF FREEDOMS AND EXEMPTIONS, 1629.

The Company will endeavor to supply the colonists with as many blacks as it possibly can, on the conditions hereafter to be made, without however being bound to do so to a greater extent or for a longer time than it shall see fit.

#### NEW PROJECT OF FREEDOMS AND EXEMPTIONS (circa 1630-1640)

Their High Mightinesses shall exert themselves to provide the Patroons with persons bound to service, who shall be obliged to serve out their bounden time, in all obedience, for their board and clothing only, which being done, on bringing to this country a certificate thereof from the Patroons or their Commissaries, such persons shall be here restored to their former state and freedom.

In like manner, the Incorporated West India Company shall allot to each Patroon twelve Black men and women out of the prizes in which Negroes shall be found, for the advancement of the Colonies in New Netherland.

The Company shall exert itself to provide the Patroons and Colonists, on their order, with as many Blacks as possible, without however being further obligated thereto than shall be agreeable.

In like manner, the incorporated West India Company shall allot to each patroon twelve black men and women out of the prizes in which negroes shall be found, for the advancement of the colonies in New Netherland.

#### REPORT OF THE BOARD OF ACCOUNTS ON NEW NETHERLAND, 1644.

And for the advancement of the cultivation of the land there, it would not be unwise to allow, at the request of the patroons, colonists and other farmers, the introduction, from Brazil there, of as many negroes as they would be disposed to pay for at a fair price; which negroes would accomplish more work for their masters, and at a less expense, than farm servants, who must be bribed to go thither by a great deal of money and promises.

#### ADVICE OF THE CHAMBER OF ACCOUNTS OF THE WEST INDIES COMPANY, 1647

Here it must now be taken into consideration, whether the Company itself ought to furnish all the slaves in Brazil, either selling them for cash for as much as they may be worth, or giving them on credit to the inhabitants at a regular rate, payable in produce and sugar. Experience teaches that slaves, in consequence of the scarcity of money in Brazil, do not fetch as much cash as the Company expends in goods, outfit and freight inclusive; so that the maintenance of the garrisons in Angola is mostly become a charge to the Company, and in consequence of giving credit for the slaves, without getting prompt payment in sugars or other returns from Brazil, the Chambers have very suddenly ceased and abandoned the sending of new cargoes; for not a ship has been sent thither by any of the Chambers now within the space of eighteen months. And though new capital were furnished for the purpose, there is no certainty that the Company would fare better in future, except yearly cargoes be again provided to be bartered in Guinea for two to three thousand slaves to be sold on their own account. The next means would be to open the Angola slave trade to individuals on these or similar conditions, to wit; that they convey cargoes in their own ships to Loando St. Paulo, there to be exchanged for slaves either by their own factors or by the Portuguese traders who may resort thither under our obedience, and export those slaves with the Director's knowledge, upon certain duty and toll in their own ships to Brazil and even elsewhere, to be sold or credited there to the Seigniors of plantations. And were this means deemed useful not alone to relieve the Company henceforth from this disbursement and risk, but also to induce private individuals anew to hazard some more capital for the advancement of agriculture, and by the benefiting of one country through means of the other, furnish the inhabitants and Traders with greater hope of profit; it is apparent that a greater number of slaves will be introduced by individual traders, who will spread themselves far and near, than has been as yet done by the Company, which has received only as many as the Blackamoors (*Mouhierse*) and the Portuguese brought them from Massangano, on which no certain calculation can be made; consequently the duties and tolls for the support of the garrisons in Angola would produce more than the profit the Company could calculate on from so small a number of slaves as hath been traded for some time past.

#### RESOLUTIONS OF THE STATES GENERAL ON THE OPENING OF TRADE IN NEW NETHERLANDS, 1648.

It is resolved that private inhabitants of New Netherland shall be allowed to export their country produce under suitable duty, in their own or chartered ships, to Brazil and Angola, on these following conditions: first, that the aforesaid ships, when in Brazil, shall not be at liberty to return back with sugars to New Netherland aforesaid, but shall let themselves be chartered directly hither. Secondly, that the permit to proceed to Angola above mentioned, shall only be provisionally granted, and that for the time that the dispensation shall continue in regard to the exportation of slaves, which was accorded on Thursday last. Thirdly, that those willing to go to Angola, shall, previous to their departure from New Netherland take out commission and permit from here, and also give security, similar to all other persons trading from this country.

New Netherland can never be a source of profit for the Company, until the population from our country be encouraged more than it has hitherto been, . . . in return to export, at certain duty, from Brazil to New Netherland and not elsewhere, as much merchandise, such as Slaves, by direction of the government, so that the sugar trade may not, by that means, be diverted, it being well understood that in loading and unloading, they shall be bound to bring the goods to the Company's store.

#### REMONSTRANCE OF NEW NETHERLAND ADDRESSED TO THE STATES GENERAL, 1649

There are yet sundry other Negroes in this country, some of whom have been manumitted on account of their long service; but their children continue slaves, contrary to all public law, that any one born of a free Christian mother should, notwithstanding, be a slave, and obliged so to remain.

#### ANSWER OF THE WEST INDIES COMPANY TO THE REMONSTRANCE FROM NEW NETHERLAND, 1650

The Company's negroes, taken from the Spaniards, being all slaves, were, on account of their long services, manumitted on condition that their children serve the Company whenever it pleased. Of all the children, no more than three are in service, viz., one, which Stuyvesant has with him on the Company's bouwerie; one at the house, the Hope; one wench with Marten Krigier, who hath reared her from a little child at his own expense.

#### SECRETARY VAN TIENHOVEN'S ANSWER TO THE REMONSTRANCE FROM NEW NETHERLAND, 1650

In regard to the letters of manumission which the Director was so good as to grant to the Negroes who had been the Company's slaves: They were set free in return for their long service, on condition that the children remain slaves; these are treated the same as Christians; at present there are no more than three of these children in service; one at the House of the Hope; one at the Company's bouwerie, and one with Martin Crigier, who, as everybody knows, brought up the girl.

#### MAGISTRATES OF GRAVESEND TO THE DIRECTORS AT AMSTERDAM, 1651.

We most humbly request your Honors to expend, in negroes or blacks, whatever means you, in your wisdom, will deem prudent; for your Honors can best do that, in consequence of your interest in this place, on condition of our paying you for the same whatever price you will order. We humbly conceive that your Honors will, thereby, have double profits; first, from what we shall pay for those negroes; secondly, from the tenths. . . .

#### THE DIRECTORS AT AMSTERDAM TO THE COMMONALTY AT THE MANHATTANS, 1652.

And in order that you may be the more fully assured of our good intention, we do hereby consent that the commonalty yonder shall have liberty to repair to the coast of Angola and Africa, and transport thence as many negroes as they will make use of for the cultivation of their lands, on the conditions and regulations which are sent here with to the Director.

#### PROPOSED CONTRACT TO IMPORT SLAVES INTO NEW NETHERLAND, 1652 (?).

This day, the undersigned Director and Council of New Netherland, thereunto authorized by resolution of the chamber at Amsterdam, on the one part, and the owners of the ship whereof is skipper, burthen about tons, on the other part, have agreed and contracted that a permit and commission in due form shall be granted to the aforesaid

skipper, to buy slaves, and further to prosecute such advantage as said owners shall deem expedient on the coast of Africa; in like manner to return here to the Mannhattans with the said slaves and their further cargo, provided nevertheless that they shall not be at liberty, in regard to the coast of Africa, to resort on the granted permit to the Gold Coast, and therefore not to go westerly further than Ardre or at most to Popo, on pain of the loss of the ship and goods laden therein, to which end the Directors and Council shall be at liberty to place a supercargo on board said ship, (whom the skipper shall be bound to entertain in the cabin) and if necessary to cause the people therein to be sworn; for which aforesaid permit and commission the aforesaid owners promise, on the return of the said ship and before her discharge, promptly to pay to the Director and Council aforesaid, or their deputies, a duty of fifteen guilders for each negro, without making any exception or objection thereto, Under bond of their persons and goods, none excepted, with renunciation of benefit ordinis divisionis et excussionis, having entire knowledge thereof.

Done NEW AMSTERDAM this

Remonstrance on the preceding proposed Contract

Honorable Wise, Prudent Lords, Petrus Stuyvesant, Governor General, and the, Councillors of New Netherland, Curacao and Dependencies thereof.

Honorable, the undersigned Burghers and inhabitants of this city of New Amsterdam, your Honors' liege subjects, most respectfully represent that they are inclined to a foreign trade, and especially to the coast of Africa, according to the concession of the hon'ble directors granted in the year 1652, as a special privilege to the inhabitants of this place, in order to fetch thence slaves and other wares might be disposed of here and elsewhere, whereby this city and the entire country would increase and prosper in merchandize, commerce, population and more especially in the tobacco trade, to the advantage not only of these inhabitants, but also of the Hon'ble West India Company which would behold, in time, a vast, populous, and rich commercial province spring up in these parts therefrom.

But it has appeared to them that those who would execute with skipper or merchant going to that country a draft of partnership, which is beset and pinched by such precise conditions, would risk their lives and goods, and at best gain nothing, or run the risk of having ship and goods confiscated. For, besides the entire of the Gold Coast being excepted in that concession, it appears that Cape Verde, Siera Leona, the Greyn (Pepper) and Qua Qua Coast are also excluded; for it is not permitted to resort further West, at farthest, than Popo Sonde. Moreover, the Gold Coast, which from Cape Apolonia to Cape des Rodes or Mount Berique is reckoned 60 leagues, can be extended much further, as will be seen, to any place where gold may be found. And as regards slaves; for each head 15 guilders must be paid, and then the payment for them in tobacco or beaver is again taxed when shipped to Fatherland, which imposes too heavy a burthen on this hazardous trade.

The Hon'ble Company, in the meanwhile, must perceive that our neighbors, the French, English, Swedes, Danes, and Courlanders, are by means of the Netherlanders who repair to them trading along the entire coast, even under their strongholds, without any profit being derived therefrom by the Company; Yea, they suffer rather very serious loss thereby, as is manifest from the example of Arent de Groot, who in the year 1638 built a fort at Cormantyn for the English, and of Heridrick Caerloff, the former fiscal, who built another at Cape Corse in the year 1650 for the Swedes."

Your Honors' subjects, passing by these strongholds, take another course and as faithful subjects, address themselves to you, humbly praying permission to trade free and unobstructed in ship or ships, along the whole of the west coast of Africa, that is, from Cape Verd to Cape Lopes de Gonsalve, in all bays, rivers and coasts, without any exception, according to the rules and orders, on payment, either here or in Holland, of such moderate duty as shall be agreed on. This doing, etc.

THE DIRECTORS AT AMSTERDAM TO DIRECTOR STUYVESANT, 1654.

After closing and dispatching the duplicate hereof which goes by the ship Swarten Arent [Black eagle] we have the petition of some private merchants, viz., Jan Sweerts and Dirck Pietersen Wittepaert, and in order to promote population and agriculture there, consented and allowed that they may go with their Ship the Wittepaert to the Coast of Africa, and having trafficked for slaves there, convey the same to New Netherland to be sold to the inhabitants there, provided that of the goods and returns proceeding from said slaves, and which shall be brought

back in the abovementioned ship, there shall be paid to the company the lawful duties fixed thereon, or otherwise the ordinary tonnage duty according to the regulation adopted for trade to the coast of Africa, at the company's option, as appears by the annexed extract of resolutions adopted on the 19th of this month. . . .

ORDINANCE IMPOSING A DUTY ON EXPORTED SLAVES, 1655.

Whereas the Director General and Council of New Netherland find that the negroes lately arrived here from the Bight of Guinea in the Ship Witte Paert, have been transported and carried hence without the Hon'ble Company or the inhabitants of this province having derived any revenue or benefit therefrom, the Director General and Council have resolved [and concluded that there shall be paid] at the general treasury [10 per cent of the] value or purchase [money of the negroes who shall be carried away] or exported [from here elsewhere beyond the jurisdiction of New Netherland. Dated as above.