

1657-1664. Documenting Slavery and Freedom in Colonial New Amsterdam (Donnan)

Towards the end of Dutch control over New Amsterdam (New York), most Africans in the colony continued to be owned and work for the Dutch West Indies Company. The governor of the colony, Peter Stuyvesant and company officials in the Netherlands corresponded about the need for additional labor and the importing of more enslaved Africans. Because of the labor shortages, Africans gained access to skilled trades. Other Africans worked as field labor or as domestic servants. Stuyvesant, who owned forty slaves, was the largest private slave owner. Many enslaved Africans now lived and worked on small farms across the East River in Brooklyn. During this period, the practice of offering Africans limited or half-freedom continued. **Source:** Burrows, E. and Wallace, M. (1999). *Gotham, A History of New York City to 1898*. NY: Oxford, 55-56.

1657. Letter from the Directors of the Dutch West Indies Company to Governor Peter Stuyvesant

We would have liked to send you now two masons and as many ship carpenters, if they could have been engaged at fair wages, but we had to defer it until the departure of the next ships, when you may certainly expect them. We are in doubt however, whether instead of ship carpenters you do not mean house carpenters, who we think are more required, because of the small shipping owned there by the Company. To engage such people is expensive for the Company and therefore trades as carpenting, brick-laying blacksmithing and others ought to be taught to the negroes, as it was formerly done in Brazil and now is in Guinea and other Colonies of the Company: this race has sufficient fitness for it and it would be very advantageous; therefore we recommend it to you most earnestly.

Letter from the Directors to Stuyvesant: Currency: Rensselaerswyck; Negroes; Cultivation of Silkworms; Lutherans. The 7th of April 1657. 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. III, 387.

1659. Bill Of Lading Of The Spera Mundi.

I, Jan Pietersen of Dockum, skipper under God of my ship named the Spera Mundi, now lying ready before Curacao with the first fair wind which God shall vouchsafe, to sail to New Netherland, where my correct unloading shall take place, acknowledge that I have received under the deck of my aforesaid ship, from you Frans Bruyn, to wit, five negroes, whereof one is a negress, all dry and well conditioned, and marked with the annexed mark. All which I promise to deliver (if God grant me a safe voyage) with my aforesaid ship at N. Netherland aforesaid, to the Hon'ble Director General Petrus Stuyvesant, or his factor or deputies on payment for the freight of the above described goods, at the discretion of the said director general, and for the performance hereof, I bind myself, and all my goods and my aforesaid ship and appurtenances. In witness of the truth, I have signed three Copies hereof with my name, all of the same tenor, the one being satisfied, the others be void. Written at Curaco the 24th day of August, Anno 1659.

Source: E. Donnan (1932/1969). *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*. NY: Octagon, v. III.

1659. Director Stuyvesant To The Directors At Amsterdam.

. . . .The Negroes purchased at Curacao for fl. 140 to 150 and paid for, cannot be sold here [at New Amsterdam] again at that price, either in Beaver or Tobacco, so that all the expenses and risk of going and returning are entirely lost. December 26, 1659.

Source: Elizabeth Donnan, *Documents Illustrative Of The History Of The Slave Trade To America*.

1660. Director Stuyvesant To Vice-Director Beck.

... Four Negro Boys and one Negro Girl have, as you advised, been sent to, and received by me per the Ship Sphera Mundi; 3 on mine and 2 on Commissary Van Brugge's account, their price being left to our discretion. Upon this subject I must say, that the assignment sent to me by Frans Bruyn is unsigned. However, in order to avoid any difficulty, I left this time the choice to the commissary who took the negro girl and one of the stoutest boys. But greater difficulties have arisen in this wise: one of the five died on the passage hither; some were sick or have become so after arriving. To prevent any misunderstanding in future, the sold negroes ought to be consigned to the purchaser by their names or marks.

As regards the price which was left to our discretion, in order to prevent any suspicion of self interestedness, I wish your Honor to inform me after the others have been sold, what price they brought.

I have observed by your dispatch to the hon'ble directors, dated 3 September, forwarded by the ship Sphera Mundi the 26 December last, that the negroes were sold to Mr. Corn's van Ool at 140 pieces of eight, viz., from 40 to 16 years; from 16 to 12 years, three for two; under 12 years, two for one.

We hope and trust that by complying with such price and terms, we shall avoid all suspicion of self interest. I am willing to take my share of the expence and risk of their passage hither, because I desired the negroes for my own service and the promotion of agriculture, not in the expectation of any gain, and therefore sent for young ones, in which regard the worthy inhabitants, christians, and those of the hon'ble company, ought, I think, to be preferred before Spaniards and unbelieving Jews.

You will see by the enclosed extracts from my letter covering yours to the hon'ble directors, what I have proposed to them. It is therefore desirable and somewhat necessary that a fixed price should be set on horses conveyed hither, or ordered from Curacao by private persons, as well as on negroes as far as practicable according to their ability and age, because the one as well as the other are most urgently required here for purposes of agriculture and its advancement, and finally would tend to the greater advantage, trade and prosperity of the hon'ble company and its subjects.

In regard to the negroes which the hon'ble directors ordered to be sent hither, they ought to be stout and strong fellows, fit for immediate employment on this fortress and other works; also, if required, in war against the wild barbarians, either to pursue them when retreating, or else to carry some of the soldiers' baggage; it being very apparent that we shall be constrained to wage a righteous and offensive war against them, for the peaceable possession once of the land, and the avenging of numerous suffered affronts and murders. An important service would be conferred on the company, on us and the country if there were among the sold negroes, some of experience who have resided a certain time at Curacao.

Source: Elizabeth Donnan, Documents Illustrative Of The History Of The Slave Trade To America.

1660. Letter from the Directors of the Dutch West Indies Company to Governor Peter Stuyvesant

We were sorry to hear of the death of so many horses, sent from Curacao in the "Eyckenboon," but as it has happened and there is no help for it, we must bear it in patience. We hope the remainder have regarded their former strength and sold at good prices, also that the ship may find a good cargo for this market, so that it may help to pay the hard earned wages of the crew. As to the slaves, arrived there in the same ship, they must be sold at public auction there, as we directed in our letter of the 9th of March, under the express condition, secured by a sufficient bailbond, that they shall not be exported from there, but be used for the cultivation of the soil, the country and in consequence also the Company may than perhaps reap the imagined and hoped for fruits.

Letter from the Directors in Holland to Stuyvesant: Blockhouse at Oysterbay; currency; negro slaves. The 20th of September 1660. Documents Relating to the Colonial History of the State of New York, v. III Albany NY: Weed, Parsons 1883, 480

1661. New Netherlands Petition for a Declaration of Free Status

To the Noble Right Honorable Director-General and Lords Councillors of New Netherlands

Herewith very respectfully declare Emanuel Pieterse, a free Negro, and Reytory, otherwise Dorothy, Angola, free Negro woman, together husband and wife, the very humble petitioners of your noble honors, that she, Reytory, in the year 1643, on the third of August, stood as godparent or witness at the Christian baptism of a little son of one Anthony van Angola, begotten with his own wife named Louise, the which aforementioned Anthony and Louise were both free Negroes; and about four weeks thereafter the aforementioned Louise came to depart this world, leaving behind the aforementioned little son named Anthony, the which child your petitioner out of Christian affection took to herself, and with the fruits of her hands' bitter toil she reared him as her own child, and up to the present supported him, taking all motherly solicitude and care for him, without aid of anyone in the world, not even his father (who likewise died about five years thereafter), to solicit his nourishment; and also your petitioner [i.e., Emanuel] since he was married to Reytory, has done his duty and his very best for the rearing....to assist....your petitioners....very respectfully address themselves to you, noble and right honorable lords, humbly begging that your noble honors consent to grant a stamp in this margin of this [document], or otherwise a document containing the consent and approval of the above-mentioned adoption and nurturing, on the part of your petitioner, in behalf of the aforementioned Anthony with the intent [of declaring] that he himself, being of free parents, reared and brought up without burden or expense of the [West Indian] Company, or of anyone else than your petitioner, in accordance therewith he may be declared by your noble honors to be a free person: this being done, [the document] was signed with the mark of Anthony Pieterse.

Source: Herbert Aptheker, ed. (1951/1973). *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*, vol. 1, Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1-2

1664. The Directors At Amsterdam To The Director And Council Of New Netherland, 1664.

Honorable, Prudent, Worthy, Beloved, Faithful, . . . We, likewise, have been not a little astonished at the insufferable and hostile action committed by a certain English privateer in attacking and seizing our ship't Waepen van Amsterdam, on her way from the coast of Guinea, which he carried, with her cargo of Slaves, into Virginia. And as you have sent Councillor Johan de Decker and Commissary Verlet thither to reclaim them, we are impatient to learn their return, not without apprehension that we shall hear by, the first opportunity that they either were too late, or else were put off with frivolous excuses and consequently will have gone back without having accomplished anything.

In our last which we enclose, you were informed that we contracted with Symon Glide, skipper of the ship Gideon, to export a goodly number of slaves from Loango on the Coast of Africa, and to convey them by way of Curacao to New Netherland; also that this city is a partner therein for one-fourth part, as may be more fully seen by the copies hereunto annexed.

As these Slaves are intended solely to promote agriculture in that country, which is the only means of making that state prosperous, so it is our express order and desire, that the aforesaid slaves shall be sold there only to our inhabitants on the express condition, that they shall not be exported out of our district, but specifically retained therein, to be employed in the cultivation of the soil so that the great expense which we have incurred may not be fruitless, but that we may, in due course of time, reap the fruits which we promise ourselves there from. The aforesaid ship with about 300 slaves may, according to our calculation, arrive yonder in the month of June or July next.

As your Honor will be greatly relieved by this supply, you will therefore use every effort that one-third part at least of the proceeds shall be forwarded hither in beaver, in order that we may be enabled to pay the freight, or the greatest part thereof at farthest, on the arrival of the aforesaid ship here, which we are bound to do by contract. Otherwise, we shall lose all ambition to continue such transmission of slaves. This we commend to your Honor's special consideration.

And although we have also ordered you, in the aforesaid despatch, to agree amicably with the city's officers about chartering the company's sloop for the conveyance of the city's slaves to the south river, yet we have subsequently resolved and determined that it should be effected here by the principals on both sides. Wherefore we have concluded to order and recommend you, in case the aforesaid sloop may be

employed for that service, distinctly then to write us your advice and opinion what and how much ought to be charged for her freight, adding the reasons in support thereof, in order to enable us to make proper use of them in the present conjuncture. AMSTERDAM, this 20th January, 1664.

Source: Elizabeth Donnan, Documents Illustrative Of The History Of The Slave Trade To America.

1664. Director Stuyvesant To Vice-Director Beck.

. . . Messrs, the directors, and the Commissioners of the Colonie on the South River, have entered into a contract with Simon Cornelissen Gilde, skipper of the Gideon, to transport hither a lot of negroes for agricultural purposes. These negroes will, we hope, have arrived before this letter reaches your Honor, or, at least, be embarked after its receipt. We shall therefore recommend that, being properly provided, they may be dispatched hither as speedily as possible. If it happen that Simon Gilde should arrive with the negroes at the island of Curacao three weeks or a month later than the charter party provides, say, the middle of August, the first installment might reach here before or by the middle of September from Curacao, and the remainder by the middle of October. In that event a fair price might be realized for them.

1664. Director Stuyvesant To The Directors At Amsterdam.

. . . This day fortnight arrived here your Honors' Vessel, the Musch [Sparrow], with forty head of slaves, sent to us by Vice Director Beck to procure provisions and all sorts of timber work, fix ox carts and a new rosmill. The negroes and negresses have all arrived safely and in health, but were, on an average, quite old, and as the skipper alleges, rejected by the Spaniards. The product of the greater part appears by the accompanying account of the public vendue. They would have brought more, had they not been so old. Five of the negro women, who were, in our opinion, unsalable, have been kept back and remain unsold. In like manner, six negroes also, to help to cut the required timber and to perform some other necessary work for the honorable company. 10 June, 1664.

Source: Elizabeth Donnan, Documents Illustrative Of The History Of The Slave Trade To America.

1664. The Directors At Amsterdam To Director Stuyvesant.

Honorable, Prudent, Valiant, Beloved, Faithful, We have heretofore advised you of our intention to let the ship Gideon go from Curacao to the Manhattans with her slaves. Having since then, and now for the first time, remarked the hostile and treacherous designs manifested by the English towards the, Company's rightful conquests on the coast of Africa, where they have already mastered Cape Verd and taken 3 to 4 of the company's ships or yachts, we have come to a different determination. As your Honor also will not be left unmolested by them, for we understand that they have likewise sent 3 ships with men thither to the assistance of their nation, and as the aforesaid ship with slaves might hereby be brought into difficulty, we have thought proper to send her first to the South River, to learn there from the city's director how matters stand at the Manhattans. On learning of the arrival of this ship there, your Honor must immediately commission some one to go thither, to be present at the allotment of the negroes, and to repair to the Manhattans with the share, or 3/4th the part that is to fall to the company; with this understanding, however, that if the above-named ship had not brought thither above 200 head, there shall be left to the city at least 60 head, as we find ourselves under obligation to accommodate them with that number Amsterdam the 24th of June 1664.

Source: Elizabeth Donnan, Documents Illustrative Of The History Of The Slave Trade To America.

1664. Director Beck To The Director And Council Of New Netherlands.

Curacao in Fort Amsterdam. The 21. July, Anno 1664

Honorable, Valiant, Wise, Prudent and right Discreet Gentlemen.

Gentlemen, My last to your Honors was dated 28 April, by the parts long before your receipt of this, but ardently desire to see her return here every day.

Since then a handsome Genoese (genueses) ship, named the St. Crous (sta. Cruz), arrived here on the 12th of June last from Cartagena, with One hundred and sixty thousand pieces of eight in specie, to be all invested in slaves through the factors residing here on behalf of the Genoese Company, who however up to this time have delayed doing any thing, by advice and order of their principals, in the expectation that they will have concluded a new contract with the company, and that more slaves may arrive here, so as to invest the entire capital which they have brought for that purpose in their aforesaid ship, in slaves and to carry them away at once.

On the 8th instant, arrived here safely by way of Guinea, Angola, and Cayenne, the ship Gideon, Simon Cornelissen Gilde, skipper, the bearer hereof, with over three hundred slaves. I was in hopes by means of these and the supply of slaves already here, to have enough to be able on the advice and order of the company, to accommodate the aforesaid factors for their abovementioned specie, as then was their intent: for they said, in case no seasonable advice or orders was received from their principals and the company, that they would then contract with me for as many slaves as were here at present, and might meanwhile happen to arrive, to be paid for on delivery, in order to dispatch their aforesaid ship, which was lying here at great expense. So they were expecting that they could have availed themselves on this occasion, for their vessel, of the slaves brought hither by the aforesaid Ship Gideon, when the abovementioned Skipper Simon Cornelissen Gilde brought me such ample order and instructions to the contrary, that I could not dare to change them as your Honors will please to observe by the annexed copies. Pursuant to said orders I am sending to your Honors herewith, by the aforesaid ship and skipper the number of slaves to be seen in the accompanying invoice and bill of lading to which for brevity's sake, I refer.

And since now, for the present, no more slaves are to be expected here, the aforesaid factors will have to content themselves with the slaves which have been previously brought hither on the company's account; and as many of the slaves brought here by the said ship Gideon are affected with scurvy, I have therefore retained the greater number of these here and embarked others in their place from among those brought in previous ships. When those are cured of the scurvy they can be delivered, in the place of the others, to the aforesaid factors.

Source: Elizabeth Donnan, Documents Illustrative Of The History Of The Slave Trade To America.

1664. Bill Of Lading Of The Gideon.

I, underwritten Simon Cornelissen Glide, skipper under God of my ship, named the Gideon, now lying in the Harbor of Curacao, ready to sail with the first fair wind (which God shall vouchsafe) for the Manhatans in New Netherland acknowledge to have received between the decks of my aforesaid ship, the number of three hundred slaves, consisting of one hundred and sixty men and one hundred and forty women all merchantable; which slaves I promise to deliver (if God grant me a prosperous voyage), with my aforesaid ship at the said Manhatans to the hon'ble director general Petrus Stuyvesant or his order, on payment of my freight for the aforesaid slaves, as agreed upon and conditioned by the charter party, and for the performance of what is hereinbefore written. I bind myself and all my property and my aforesaid ship with all its appurtenances. In witness of the truth I have signed three bills of lading, all of the same tenor, the one being filled, the others are void.

Written at CURACO, the 21st July, Anno 1664. Symon Cornelissen Gilde

Source: Elizabeth Donnan, Documents Illustrative Of The History Of The Slave Trade To America.

1664. Director Stuyvesant To Vice-Director Beck.

Honorable, Prudent, Wise, and very Discreet Sir, Our last letter to you was by the ship the White Horseman, skipper Hendrick Jansen Stuyvesant, dated the 7th May last....

Since then, viz., on the 24th May, arrived here in safety, God be praised the Company's ship Sparrow, skipper Jan Petersen Groot of Dockum by whom I received your Honor's letter of the 28th of April, to which the following will serve as an answer.

The slaves and merchandize arrived safely according to invoice and bill of lading

I have sold the negroes tha have been sent, at public auction to the highest bidder, for provisions, with the exception of six of the men, who are employed in the company's service on the works of the fort, and five negro women who, on account of their advanced age, could not find a purchaser, except at a very low figure. The remainder have been sold at prices mentioned in the annexed copy of the conditions of the sale; being, in our opinion, a tolerably fair price for such a lot. Had they been better, there is not a doubt but they would have produced a much larger amount, as may be inferred from the price of a few who were sold for 600 Guilders and upwards.

These negroes have afforded us great relief in the purchase of provisions for the garrison. Otherwise, we should have been constrained by the low state of the treasury, caused by the continued troubles, first with the barbarians, and now at present with the neighboring English, to purchase supplies by bills of exchange. . . .

In our former dispatch, duplicate whereof we here inclose, we stated among other things, if it should come to pass that Simon Gilde arrived at the island of Curacao, with negroes three weeks or a month later than intimated in the charter party, say the middle of August, therefore the sending of the negroes hither should not be postppned, etc. Having reconsidered this, we have, for divers reasons, whereof one is, that the Right Honorable the Regents of the city of Amsterdam are interested therein one-fourth part, thought it best and most justifiable, not to make the slightest alteration in the charter party which the directors have concluded with Simon Gilde. Wherefore we request and recommend your Honor to regulate yourself by the said charter party in the forwarding of the abovementioned negroes. But as we find ourselves burthened here by an unusually strong garrison, for the support of which, exclusive of the monthly pay, we require considerable provisions, for the purchase whereof we are not well provided; we, on that account, have need, yea great need of a few slaves, in order to truck them for provisions. Yet, for reasons already given, we deem it unjustifiable to send for the said negroes, contrary to the charter party concluded with Simon Gilde.

Yet requiring a large quantity of provisions both for this place and Curacao, as we have already stated and more fully explained, should an opportunity offer to purchase any, funds would be absolutely necessary. Wherefore we recommend this seriously to your consideration; and if Simon Gilde arrive in season, to send us as man negroes as circumstances will permit. If negroes be scarce, which however we should prefer to have for the good and advancement of the country, according to the Hon'ble Company's order, some other effects, either money or osnaburghs and other coarse linen, or any thing else that is not needed for the public service, might be spared and bartered for provisions. If negroes, your Honor will please to bear in mind to have them sent on in time that they may probably arrive here before, or about All Saints, and that they be suitably provided against the cold.
30 July, [1664.]

Source: Elizabeth Donnan, Documents Illustrative Of The History Of The Slave Trade To America.

1664. The Council Of New Netherland To The Directors At Amsterdam.

. . . Meanwhile, God be thanked, the ship St. Jacob arrived here in safety on the 13th instant, from the South River, and, two days after, the ship Gideon, which sailed from Curacao on the 21 of July with 300 slaves, 160 men and 140 women, whereof 9 died on the passage. This is a very poor lot; indeed the women so poor that we fear the most of them will remain on our hands, or must be let go at a very low figure, whereof more in our next. . . .

Pursuant to the contract which your Honors made with the directors of the city's colony, we have delivered by lot the fourth part of the abovementioned negro men and women, into the hands of Mr. Pieter Alrichs, commissary of Indian cargoes, and councillor of the colony of New Amstel, who has been here for some time for the purpose of purchasing oxen, cows and horses, to the number of 200 or thereabouts. . . .

The colony has received by lot for its fourth part, 38 men and 34 women. But, as there were among these, as well as among those that fell to the company, many above the age of 36 years, three of them must be counted for two. . . .

This serves mainly to advise your Honors of the arrival of the abovementioned negroes who, though a very poor lot, as already stated, yet in our most deplorable state, will wonderfully relieve us, so that we and your Honors' servants and inhabitants, find ourselves already obliged, and gratefully acknowledge your care in the sending of the said negroes. . . .

FORT AMSTERDAM IN NEW NETHERLAND, 17 August, 1664.

(By way of the South River, per the Eagle.)

Receipt for the above Negroes

[We the undersigned Director General and Council of New Netherland, hereby certify and declare that the bearer hereof, Symon Cornelissen Gilde, skipper, under God, of the ship Gideon, on the day after his arrival,] being the 14th of August, hath delivered here on shore for account of Messrs, the Directors of the Incorporated West India Company, Chamber at Amsterdam, Two hundred and ninety head of negroes, to wit, one hundred and fifty three men, and one hundred and thirty seven women, among whom in all were found by impartial men as selected according to the charter party, eighty nine which were judged to be above thirty six years old; of which delivery, the abovementioned skipper, Symon Cornelissen Gilde, demanding proper receipt to serve him agreeably to his charter party, with the abovementioned directors, we have executed for him two of the same tenor, one whereof being satisfied, the other is to be null.

Done AMSTERDAM IN NEW NETHERLAND, the 30 August, 1664.

Source: Elizabeth Donnan, Documents Illustrative Of The History Of The Slave Trade To America.

1664. Colonel Richard Nicolls To Cornelius Van Ruyven.

An order to Mr. Cornelius van Ruyen, concerning the Negroes, etc., of the West India Company.

Wheras there was a certaine Number of Negroes both men and women brought from the Curazo hither, the greatest part of which were sold to divers persons before the Surrender of this place, into my hands .under his Ma'ties obedience,, upon severall Termes and, Condicons as by their Bookes doth appeare, And I being not as yet satisfied, that the said Negroes are included in the Articles of Surrender, I do hereby Order and require that all payments in Goods or Beaver, that is, or shall be due, according to the severall Sales, made of the 30th of August and 1st of September, and those also of the 12th of September following, be without fraud or Rebate really paid in unto Mr. Cornelius van Ruyven, who is to keepe what hee shall so receive, in his hands for my use, untill the Accompts shall be better adjusted, and in the meane time, that no discount (as to the said Negroes) be Allowed of upon any pretence of the West India Companies Debts, or any other, till I shall give further Order therein.

Given under my hand this 26th day of October 1664 at JAMES FORT ON MANHATANS ISLAND.

Source: Elizabeth Donnan, Documents Illustrative Of The History Of The Slave Trade To America.