

Root & Branch

African Americans in New York & East Jersey

1613-1863

The

John Hope Franklin Series

in African American History and Culture

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To my wife,

Margaret Washington,

for the years of love

and sorrow

CHAPTER 1

Free People and Slaves

1613–1664

In June 1613, Captain Thijs Volchertz Mossel, an experienced Dutch explorer, and his crew of the vessel, the *Jonge Tobias*, journeyed from the West Indies up the coast of North America, into the harbor of the Hudson River and along the island of Montanges (Manhattan). When Mossel and his ship sailed away from Manhattan in May or June 1613, he left behind one crew member, Jan Rodrigues. Apparently their parting was caused by a dispute, although Rodrigues received wages of eighty hatchets, some knives, a musket, and a sword. While these commodities suggest that he had past experiences as a soldier, they may have been an advance on future services because it was common for sea captains to leave a man behind on new territories to sustain land claims. Mossel then returned to Amsterdam to claim monopoly rights to explore the Hudson River. A month or so later, in August 1613, a second vessel, the *Fortuyn*, captained by Hendrick Christiansen, landed on Manhattan Island. On shore he encountered Rodrigues, who informed Christiansen that he was “a free man.” Rodrigues then entered Christiansen’s service as an interpreter with local Rockaway Indians and facilitated a trade agreement between the Indians and Christiansen. In April, the *Jonge Tobias* returned. Angry with Rodrigues’s disloyalty, Captain Mossel called him a “black rascal.” A fight ensued in which Mossel’s crew wounded Rodrigues, but Christiansen’s crew was able to save him from further harm. After the two vessels departed, Rodrigues remained behind and fathered several children with Rockaway Indian women.¹

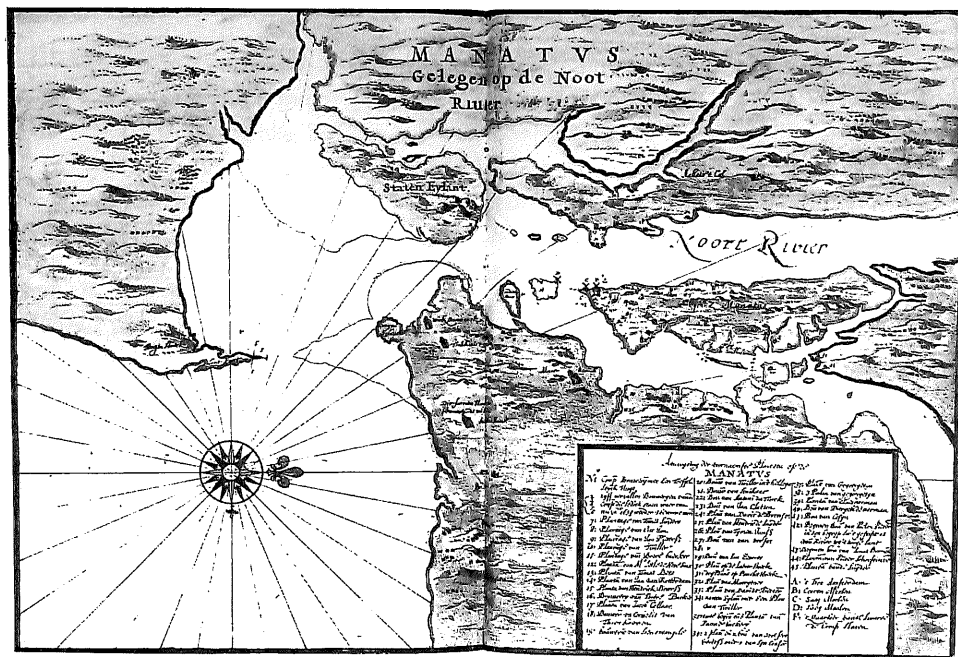
Africans had traversed the Atlantic basin for centuries. Doubtless there were some among the fishermen, pirates, and anonymous explor-

ers who visited the area before Rodrigues. The best known was Esteban Gomez, a black Portuguese pilot, who sailed up the Hudson River (and called it Deer River) in 1525. Gomez then departed with thirty-seven Indian slaves. Rodrigues was the first nonindigenous resident of Manhattan Island. As well the earliest known African American on the island, he is significant to this history for several reasons. First, his origins epitomize those of the cosmopolitan black seamen working in the Atlantic basin during the seventeenth century. Rodrigues’s mixture of West Indian and African heritages was common in the man known as the Atlantic Creole. As Ira Berlin has emphasized about such people, Rodrigues’s survival skills were impressive. He negotiated with avaricious ship captains and proved critically important for commercial relations with the local Indians by quickly learning local Native American languages and marrying into the Rockaway Indian tribe. Alone among these early explorers, he is known to have acculturated into both European and Native American life. Second, he declared himself a free man, though his employer regarded him as no more than a servant, a conflict that signaled the first of many such cultural collisions. Rodrigues was a prime example of the multiple talents displayed by the first generation of African immigrants to New Netherland.²

Building Freedom in New Netherland

Rodrigues was the sole nonindigenous resident on Manhattan Island for many years. Until 1621, any European settlement there remained an abstraction as competing investors vied for monopoly development rights in Amsterdam. That year the Dutch West India Company secured a contract to construct a settlement on the Hudson River. For the first few years, only fur traders, whalers, fishermen, and pirates visited the shoreline of New Netherland. In 1624, supported by the Dutch West India Company, which secured the patent on colonization, a group of Walloon pietist families arrived to undertake the task of colony-building.³ The Walloons set up small farms just beyond the compound of Fort New Amsterdam, where they raised livestock and cultivated maize and wheat. Beyond these early facts of settlement, the Walloons are significant because they refused to learn Dutch or attend Reformed services, and they formed a separatist, pietist society that lived and worshiped under the shadow of the Dutch. By not assimilating into the larger culture, the Walloons established a pattern followed by other white and, eventually, black congregants.⁴

Company soldiers and officials arrived in 1625. The following year



Manatus map of New Amsterdam. Drawn in 1639, this map was used as an advertisement to prospective settlers by showing the amount of land available on Manhattan Island. Shown on the map in the area around present-day Sixtieth Street and the East River is a site for the "company negroes," probably a work area. (Library of Congress)

pirates sold sixteen blacks who were captured from Spanish vessels to the West India Company in New Netherland. Two years later several black women arrived. These early African arrivals have attracted much scrutiny.⁵ Initially enslaved, these first migrants were later emancipated and created a free black community in New Amsterdam. By the 1640s, however, they were joined by other Creole blacks and Africans brought to the tiny port to become lifetime slaves. How that initial generation gave way to a slave society is the terrible history of the period of Dutch control, which lasted until 1664. The second, and no less important, saga is how free and enslaved Africans in New Amsterdam laid the seedbeds for an African American culture in the region.⁶

The disparate origins of the first generation of blacks in New Amsterdam are evident in their personal names, which combined African, Portuguese, and Dutch influences. Among the first group of blacks, who arrived in New Amsterdam in 1626, were men with African names:

Paul D'Angola, Simon Congo; Portuguese names: Anthony Portuguese, John Francisco, Big Manuel, Little Manuel, Anthony Portuguis Gracia, Peter Santomee, Jan Francisco, Little Anthony; and American names: Jan de Fort Orange. Mayken was the only woman among these first arrivals whose name survives. Spanish and Dutch naming practices provided slaves with a saint's first name while the second name identified ethnic and place origins. The use of two names did not automatically signal acculturation into European society, as Angolans regularly took patronymics at home. Moreover, several of the names proclaimed their bearers as Africans. Others, such as Jan Rodrigues, were members of the Atlantic community.⁷

By 1630, the tiny colony held roughly three hundred European residents, most of whom were Walloon, and the small assemblage of blacks. Twenty male and thirty female Africans, also captured from the Spanish, worked on a plantation at Pavonia, across the Hudson River. They were the first black residents of New Jersey. Other slaves belonged to settlers at the South (Delaware) River colony. Very little is known about the identity of the enslaved Africans in these short-lived colonies. (Wappinger Indians destroyed Pavonia in 1643.) It is likely, however, that the bulk of enslaved Africans at either station were Creoles captured by pirates from Spanish ships. Though it paid higher wages than in Europe, the Dutch West India Company attracted families from Holland to the colony by giving favorable land grants and by promising in 1630 to garner black laborers for "Patroons, Colonists and other farmers."⁸

From the earliest years, blacks were core laborers in the struggling colony. At first, they worked for the company. Overseer Jacob Stoffelson described their tasks as cutting timber and building "the Large House as well as the Guardhouse, splitting palisades, clearing land, burning lime," and harvesting grain. There are later references to their labors in resodding the exterior of the fort, constructing a wagon road, and rebuilding the fences to protect against the English. Paulus Heymans, a white man, supervised the company blacks from 1647 until his resignation in 1654. The Dutch West India Company built a house and a hospital for its slaves which lasted at least until the late 1650s. Their importance is attested in a request by Governor Peter Stuyvesant for additional slaves in 1660: "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." Later,

the governor indicated that a new shipment of slaves was necessary “to procure provisions and all sorts of timber work, fix ox carts, and a new rosmill.”⁹

Their legal status in the colony was unclear. They were not free; no laborer in the colony was. Very few Africans came to the colony voluntarily; most sweated as slaves for the company. At the same time, Holland did not recognize slavery at home, and chattel bondage had not yet emerged in the laws of any North American territory. Nor did race determine whether a person was free or in bondage. The Dutch West India Company kept both its white and black servants in bondage. The majority of white servants were engaged for as long as seven years, during which time they were little better off than the Angolan slaves.¹⁰ Further, the Africans came from societies in which slavery was a fluid institution. In African legal systems enslaved people were revenue-producing property. Africans accepted that their labor might be captured in a war or could be used as demonstration of loyalty to a ruler. At the same time, slaves in Africa could hold a variety of statuses. In Angola, in particular, slaves were torn from their own kin groups, who lacked land, and made dependents of landowners and corporate authorities. Although under Angolan traditions, slaves performed the most burdensome tasks, they could look forward to better conditions and were not always distinguishable from servants, who were nominally free. African slave captives could usually expect manumission themselves or freedom for their offspring. Carrying these attitudes into the New World, they probably regarded themselves as at least equal to “lower servants.”¹¹

That ambivalence was revealed in one of the first labor appeals in the New World. Five blacks traveled in 1635 from New Amsterdam to Holland to seek a settlement on their salaries of eight guilders per month, wages comparable to those of white laborers. They were apparently successful because in 1639 the company paid blacks for building the fort.¹² Another indication that the first arrivals were hardly docile was the frequency of their appearances in local courts.¹³ Few New Amsterdamers were as litigious as Anthony Jansen van Vaes, one of a handful of local blacks in New Amsterdam who arrived as a free person. Anthony Jansen van Vaes, “a mollato noted for his size and strength,” lived in New Amsterdam with his Dutch wife and was the first nonindigenous resident of Gravesend on Long Island. After several public controversies involving the couple, the company banned the Jansens from Manhattan but granted them two hundred acres near



Portrait of New Amsterdam, 1643. This generic image represented several Atlantic ports in the early seventeenth century but was particularly appropriate for the emerging slave society in New Amsterdam. (Print Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints, and Photographs, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)

Coney Island. Despite his official exile, Jansen later returned to Manhattan, acquired property, and worked as an independent merchant.¹⁴ A second free black also demonstrated the fluidity of race relations and statuses in the fledgling colony. Jan de Fries, baptized on August 25, 1647, was the son of a Dutch sea captain, Johan de Fries, and a black woman named Swartinne. After his father's death, de Vries inherited his property, held in trust for him by Paul D'Angola and Clara Criole, two former slaves of the captain. Despite the loss of some of his property to his father's creditors, Jan de Fries became a landowner on the outskirts of New York City. He was a member of the Dutch Reformed Church, in which he was married to Ariantje Dircks of Albany and in which they baptized their four children between 1682 and 1689. Later

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de Fries became an original patentee of Tappan, New Jersey, where his descendants lived for many generations. Although Governor Willem Kieft decreed in 1638 that Dutch settlers must refrain from "Adulterous intercourse with Heathens [and] Blacks," the presence of de Fries and Jansen in New Amsterdam indicates that intermarriage occurred in the tiny colony.¹⁵

The company demonstrated through legal actions that it considered the Angolans' status to be lower than that of white laborers. When Gysbert Cornelissen Beyerlandt was convicted of public disturbance and wounding a soldier in the fort, he was sentenced to "work with the Negroes" until he could be transported to the colony on the South River to serve the company there. Later Nicholas Albertsen was punished for deserting his ship and betrothed bride by having his head shaved. He was then flogged and sentenced "to work two years with the Negroes."¹⁶

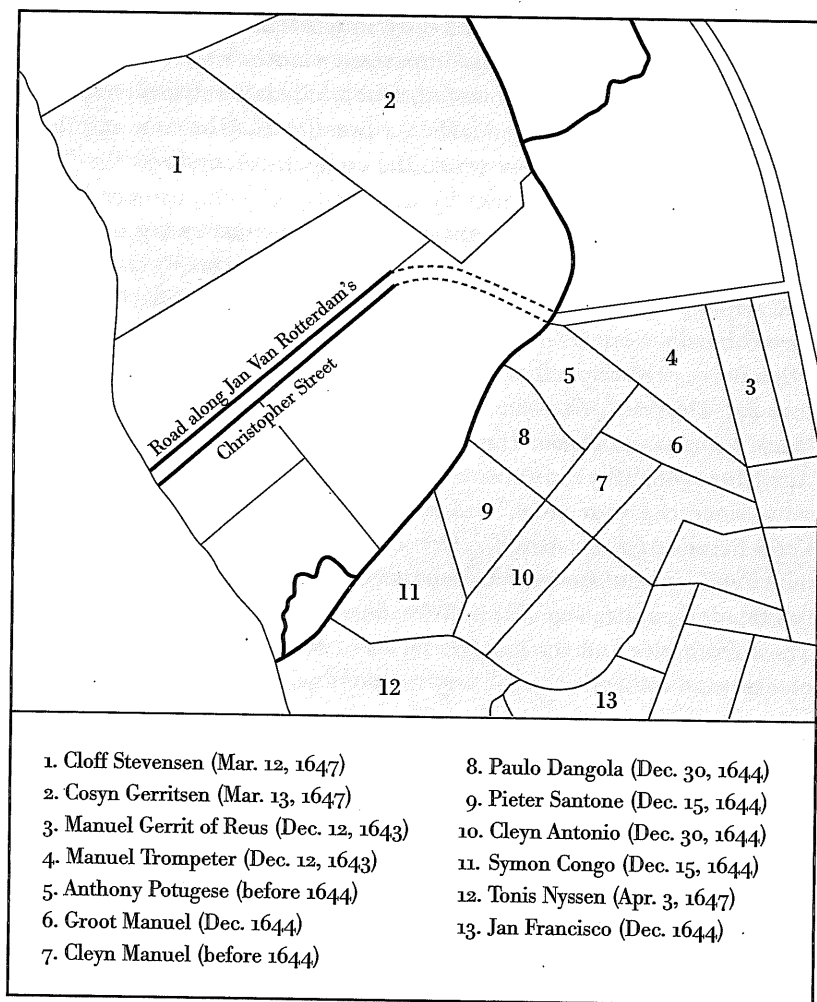
Their ambivalent status did not deter this first generation of African Americans from creating a community based on personal freedom, landownership, religion, and local institutions. New Amsterdam was a smaller version of the African and West Indian ports from which they had originated. In Luanda, Elmina, and Curaçao, they had grown up around local markets and seafarers' taverns where they had encountered Europeans working for slaving companies as sailors, artisans, and laborers. The presence of familiar cultural sites and people made community formation easier for the Africans. If landownership was rare in Africa, they quickly adapted to it in the New World.¹⁷

By 1639, black neighborhoods appeared on contemporary maps. One of several slave work sites known as Quartier van de Swarten de Comp Slaves existed on the East River opposite Hog Island (later Roosevelt). A free black community had already been established on the land north of the Fresh Water Pond.¹⁸ Beginning in 1644, the Dutch West India Company emancipated its laborers, but with the condition that their children would be enslaved. Historians have viewed this action as a desire by the company to be free of responsibility for aging slaves.¹⁹ Evidence indicates that blacks traded their labor, augmented by military service, for freedom. In the Kieft War of 1640, company slaves "armed with small ax and half-pike," fought against the Indians.²⁰ On February 25, 1644, Manuel de Gerrit and ten other Negroes with their wives gained freedom on condition that each of the men pay the government yearly thirty skepels (twenty-two and a half bushels) of maize, wheat, peas, or beans and one fat hog valued at thirty guil-

ders and that their children "already in existence or hereafter born, shall be slaves." Through this important clause, which colonists in New Amsterdam at first protested, Dutch officials ruled that slavery would descend through the mother, a practice that became standard in America. In the next few years, the company recognized the "long and faithful service" of blacks by manumitting them, usually with a form of quitrent attached to the grant, making customary the belief that former slaves owed obligations to their old masters.²¹

Company slaves were not the only ones to attain freedom. Other enslaved blacks were freed by their masters. Paul D'Angola and Clara Criole were privately emancipated by their master, the black sea captain Jan De Fries. Nor were all the emancipated blacks male. Three black females petitioned the company for their freedom in 1663; on April 19, 1663, Mayken received her liberty, "she having served as a slave since the year 1628."²² Ascento Angola, Christopher Santone, Peter Petersen Criole, Anthony Criole, Lewis Guinea, Jan Guinea, Solomon Petersen, and Basije Petersen successfully petitioned the court for full freedom, indicating that half-freedom was unacceptable to them.²³ These examples and the lengthy terms of service for all emancipated blacks were indications that any freedom would be hard earned and only after many years of service. Theirs were the first gradual emancipations.

Landownership glued the black community together. The Dutch West India Company recognized African land claims on the Bowery Road near the Fresh Water Pond by 1643. The first known landowner was Domingo Antony, who received his land on Manhattan Island, "towards the land of Tomas Sandersen," near the Bowery Road. Shortly after, Anthony Portuguese, Manuel Trumpeter, and Big Manuel acquired land nearby. One surviving deed demonstrates that these former slaves were given freehold rights similar to those of Dutch residents. Governor Willem Kieft granted Simon Congo land "by the west of the land of Jan Celes between this land and a thicket, having on the east side Peter Santome." The deed acknowledged Congo's complete "power, authority & order over the forewritten parcel of land to build on, to live on, in the use of, as he does with all others of his patrimonie lands and effects." In 1646, the government agreed to clear the land and "make it fit for the plow." Land rights were hereditary. The widow of Andries D'Angola, for example, held land situated between that of Peter Tamboer and Fonteyn Briel. She was one of twelve black women to own property during the Dutch era.²⁴



Farms of free blacks near the Bowery in the 1640s. (Based on information from the Museum of the City of New York)

The black community grew in the late 1650s, and the farms of free blacks dotted the Bowery from present-day Prince Street to Astor Place. On the future corner of Bowery and Houston was the farm of Christoffel Samsone; just beyond his were those of Manuel de Ros, then Pieter Tamboer, Fransico Cartagena, Assento, Claes de Neger, Groot Manuel, and ten others. By the time all Angolan land claims were recognized in the early English period, at least thirty blacks had become independent landowners on Manhattan Island.²⁵

A weekly market located near the crossroads of the roads to Fort Orange and New England was the centerpiece of this community. The market featured weekly sales of "Beef, Pork, Butter, Cheese, turnips, carrots, cabbage and other country produce" and annual fairs for cattle and hogs "on the beach by or near the house of Mr. Hans Kierstede," adjacent to the "Negro Lands."²⁶ Such local markets combined Dutch and African traditions. They were public spaces created as much by culture as by convenience or rational economics. Strangers and citizens—Indians, blacks, and Dutch—traded, sold, drank, gambled, and competed in games of skill.²⁷ In New Netherland, markets allowed commercial and symbolic exchange for African men and women. To Africans, the market, like the crossroads, was the home of the trickster god, where human experiences took on uncountable possibilities. Markets were meeting grounds where kinsmen, friends, and lovers could trade, drink, and dance. In such places cultures melded as people winked at social restraints.²⁸

It is noteworthy that the first blacks in New Amsterdam came from urban African cultures with active market economies. The Angolan capital, Luanda, was a cosmopolitan city with numerous markets. Andrew Battel, an English sailor captured by the Portuguese near Brazil in 1590, then transported to Angola, spent much of the next twenty years there. In the capital he described "a great market which met at noon each day. The market featured palm-cloths, victuals including flesh, hens, fish, wine, oil, corn, and copper and ivory." In Luanda, Dutch and Angolans learned to trade at the markets, first in commodities and later in human chattel.²⁹

Other institutions anchored the black community in New Amsterdam. In the late 1650s, the provincial council established a hospital near the Bowery to serve sick soldiers and Negroes in the employ of the Dutch West India Company. A cornerstone of the black community was the "negro burying ground," established in the late 1630s at the corner of Broadway and Chambers Street. Lasting until the late 1780s, the burial ground provided the black population of the city with a sacred center.³⁰

Hardly sacred but no less important were taverns, in which blacks and whites could revel with little supervision and which dotted the streets of the grubby little city. In these bars, lonely men could demonstrate their honor, dignity, and strength to each other, forgetting for a moment the alienation of the isolated port where they lived. In a case that illustrates the rough-and-tumble ambience of these groggeries, on

January 24, 1641, the court of assizes convicted eight blacks of killing Jan Premero, another black, in a tavern brawl. The prisoners pled guilty, were condemned, then drew lots to determine "who shall suffer death." The sentence fell upon Manuel Gerrit, the Giant, who was to be hanged until dead "as an example to all malefactors." As Manuel was standing on the gallows and the hangman turned off the ladder, "The above, negro, having two strong halters around his neck, both of which broke, whereupon all the bystanders called out, Mercy, which was accordingly granted."³¹ The incident is remarkable in several ways. First, it was a sign of the disorderly conduct present at local taverns, behavior that would prompt strict (if ineffective) laws a few years later. Second, the desperate need for labor ensured that but one of the prisoners would pay for the group's crime. Third, the use of magical proof showed how premodern judicial methods determined guilt. The Angolans were familiar with the use of lots to determine guilt. The traditional Kongo-Angolan method for determining guilt was to force the prisoner to ingest a beverage known as the "Bonde Drink." His status was determined by his ability to drink and then urinate the strong herbal juice. This method differed from the Dutch procedure, but both ethnic groups relied on supernatural forces to reveal a person's guilt or innocence. Agreement on judicial procedure existed, then, "below the level of consciousness," as a common assumption about divine intervention in a trial. Use of supernatural proofs would recur in future generations of Africans and Dutch.³²

In a pattern echoed over succeeding generations, Africans had to look beyond their home cultures to build families. Of 306 adult blacks imported into New Amsterdam between 1626 and 1664, 174 were male and 132 were female. This imbalance (reversed after 1700) indicates how the slave trade and the local economy hampered finding partners of the same race. While sex ratios perhaps improved by the 1660s, when the children of the first black residents achieved maturity, it is doubtful that enough children were born to ensure reproduction of black society in New Amsterdam. At least twenty-six marriages between blacks were performed in the Dutch Reformed Church between 1641 and 1664. Only one couple was identified as slaves; the rest presumably were free.³³

Between 1639 and 1655, blacks brought twenty-nine male and twenty female children for baptism in the church.³⁴ Africans, much like the many other ethnic groups in a diverse society, used selective adaptation of language, religious rituals, family formation, and landowner-

ship because they were necessary for survival and mobility. Dutch became the lingua franca as blacks embraced those customs that would benefit them the most. This conscious choice did not obliterate their origins; a telling fact is that all the witnesses to the baptisms of black children were other Africans.³⁵ In the uncertain social environment of New Amsterdam, Africans retained the cultural traditions of their past. Marriage certificates and deeds indicate the patterns of African extended families. In 1661, Emanuel Petersen and Dorothy Angola, both free Negroes, successfully "prayed for a certificate of freedom for a lad named Anthony Angola," whom they adopted as an infant and then raised and educated. Similarly, Domingo Angola applied in 1663 for the freedom of Christina, a baptized daughter of the deceased Manuel Trumpeter and Antonya, his wife. The Dutch authorities replied that Christina could go free provided either a replacement was found or three hundred guilders paid. Their appeal met a friendly response from the prosperous miller Govert Loockermans, who paid the three hundred guilders to free Christina.³⁶

Dutch magnanimity toward the Angolans had its limits. The Dutch magistrates clearly would not tolerate sexual difference. As in Puritan New England, homosexuality was mercilessly punished. In one case, the Dutch magistrates displayed a judicial ferocity toward black defendants that would become common in the future. The second conviction of Jan Creoli, a Negro, for sodomy on June 25, 1646, showed the harsh methods of justice used in the colony. Using the elaborate and fierce punishments enacted by the States of Holland, the court ordered the prisoner to be "conveyed to the place of public execution and there choked to death and burnt to ashes." The Dutch abused corpses to drive home their implacable justice. Manuel Congo, a ten-year-old lad "on whom the abominable crime was committed," was "tied to a stake, and faggots piled around him, for justice sake . . . to be flogged." Although very severe, the sentences were in accordance with Kongo-Angolan beliefs, where, as with the Dutch, law intersected with cosmology.³⁷

In short, this first generation of Africans in New Netherland made the best of their exile to this remote colonial outpost. They worked through any chattel obligation to the Dutch West India Company and used the Reformed Church for rituals of great personal and group value. They became landowners and created a small but vibrant community within Dutch culture. Their group identity best resembled the confraternities or brotherhoods found among Kongolese and Angolan

blacks living in Brazil. They largely governed themselves as an association, a method the company judged a useful means of self-control. Though their activities were not as visible as those of later black associations in New York, members did take on serious issues such as child rearing, punishment, and, though they were a small, elite minority, provided a supportive model for newly arrived, enslaved Africans.³⁸

The Religious Construction of Slavery

Enslavement of Africans became the future mode of race relations in New Netherland and, later, under English rule. Previous scholars have used economic interpretations to describe this passage in North America. Following the lead of Edmund Morgan, historians contend that shortages of laborers, desire for a docile labor force, and promotion of the international slave trade by imperial governments were the engines of developing slave societies. Certainly they were in New Netherland. The Dutch West India Company required inexpensive laborers to meet its own needs. Beginning in 1629 and repeatedly over the next thirty years, the company also made promises to import and sell slaves to allure prospective farmers from Holland. Eventually, traffic in humans became its own justification as the company sought profits in New Amsterdam and local merchants and farmers sought human chattel to work on their property.³⁹

Less understood is how slavery required torturous interpretations of Christianity, new understandings that would permanently alienate master and slave. David Brion Davis and Winthrop Jordan have revealed the theological roots of slavery, but they have emphasized political and ideological developments.⁴⁰ In the colonial period, religion was the deepest currency among individuals and between individuals and the state. In New Amsterdam, the influence of the Dutch Reformed Church was critical and complex. The conflict began with legal difficulties when the colony was founded. The Dutch West India Company lacked the legal power to legislate slavery and thus introduced chattel bondage without formal directives from the States-General in Holland. Just a few years before settlement, however, a major doctrinal synod offered theological justification for enslavement in the colonies. In 1618, at the Council of Dordrecht (Dort in English) in Holland, European Protestants gathered to hammer out a theology that would greatly affect the future of Dutch settlement and the texture of race relations in North America. This was the last general meeting of Reformed churches and included representatives from the Netherlands,

England, Scotland, the German states, and Geneva. The Canons of Dort affirmed predestinarianism, limited atonement, the irresistibility of grace, and the perseverance of the saints. An underlying agenda was to stem the rising power of Arminians, or defenders of the doctrine of free will. Religious conservatives worried that free choice gave individuals the power to determine their own salvation, rendering obsolete the church polity so carefully constructed by John Calvin. The orthodox faction, headed by Professor Franciscus Gomarus, and thus known as Gomarians, quickly routed the Arminians and reestablished a hierarchical theological order. The Gomarians condemned the Arminians as heretics and barred ministers and theologians who refused to accept the new orthodoxy.⁴¹

Decisions made at the Council of Dort strongly affected New Netherland. Politically, the new orthodoxy was important because the Gomarians favored the emerging plans for the West India Company and a settlement in America.⁴² The Council of Dort's orthodoxy confirmed a hierarchical election, predestined by God. Sinners, among whom followers of African beliefs were decidedly the lowest, could be saved only by accepting the will of God—as interpreted by the elect—and by the mystery of the faith.⁴³

A key, but unsettled, question was the conversion of heathens. Like their counterparts in Puritan New England, the Dutch Reformed in New Amsterdam doubted that pagans could be saved in this lifetime but had to content themselves that “by the same grace of God, they know and feelee, that in their hearts they beleeeve and loue their Saviour.” In short, Africans could never be truly Christian, but they could approach grace. All agreed that the path to emancipation lay in conversion to the Reformed Church. Manumission was a meritorious act in the eyes of God. Slaves or servants were encouraged to work out terms to purchase themselves from their masters. The church insisted that masters be responsible for slave baptism.⁴⁴ True Christians had to offer slaves access to Christian faith. Because the Council of Dort and the Dutch West India Company were so intertwined, such declarations amounted to government policy, which mixed a paternalist ideology of servitude composed of power, wealth with a desire to convert, and a belief in hierarchy.⁴⁵

Unceasing controversy arose over the legitimacy of baptism for slaves. The Council of Dort's deliberations on pagan baptism troubled relations between masters, clerics, and enslaved blacks for the next two centuries. The synod debated the fundamental question of whether

slaves should be baptized, incorporated into the master's family, and then freed. Baptism was a first step toward salvation, but true grace was impossible until after death. In a signal measure that gave immense power to slave masters, the synod gave Reformed laity the power to choose whether household servants would be baptized. The Reformed head of household, not the church or the parents of the child, who could also be unconverted adults, had the primary responsibility for baptizing slaves and heathens. That declaration gave colonial slaveholders in the New World patriarchal power over children, servants, and slaves. Considered in Dutch society to be the bedrock and saving grace of its culture, the patriarchal family was the crucible through which rude matter and beastliness could be redeemed. The fate of African Americans' souls, indeed of their mortal bodies, was thereby placed in the hands of the family patriarch, who regarded unrelated servants as legally dependent on him. The edict effectively created the personality of a pietistic, domineering slave master who fiercely regarded governance of slaves as family business, traits also present in the matriarch, who often had great power over the family's slaves.⁴⁶ As a result, each owner was left to make his or her own determination, meaning that Arminianism had, in fact, crept into the crucial issue of conversion. Eventually, this would cause sharp disagreements between government officials and clerics seeking to proselytize blacks and settlers hoping to secure valuable slave labor without threat of losing their investment.

Further confusion arose when a Swiss theologian, Giovanni Deodatus, argued that "those baptized should enjoy right of liberty with all other Christians" and should not be sold. Slaves arriving in the United Provinces were automatically emancipated. In contrast, in the New World, while there was no timetable for the proper age of baptism, or for freeing a Christianized slave, or for determining how that precept should be enforced, enslaved blacks could easily understand the equation between baptism and liberty. In a religious environment in which baptism was analogous to legal enfranchisement, the stakes were immensely high for both masters and slaves.⁴⁷

The Dutch West India Company was unsure about the legality of enslaving Christians permanently, however, and wanted all residents of the colony to accept Christ. Ostensibly, the Reformed Church was the sole permissible denomination in the colony. In the original terms of settlement in 1624, the Dutch West India Company announced that the Reformed Church should be the official theology of the colony,

though that dictum soon proved impossible to enforce. After the arrival of the Walloons, other European pietist denominations, including Lutherans, Swedish Reformed, Puritans, and others, settled in the colony. Many of them came from rural provinces of Holland or from other countries where popular attitudes maintained that Christianized slaves should be freed. The Angolans had probably converted to Roman Catholicism before their arrival in New Amsterdam. The Reformed faith did have a monopoly in one area: only the religious edifices of its church were allowed in New Netherland until the 1650s. Some dissidents quietly joined the Reformed congregation. To keep the peace and allow some observance of other creeds, the Reformed Church used a concept of the "hidden church" to allow other denominations to borrow time in the sanctuary. Because religion was the clearest avenue to freedom and civil equality, the first blacks in New Netherland sought membership in the state church.⁴⁸

Because the Synod of Dort permitted local ministers the right to refuse baptism and allowed clerics to own slaves and deny them Christian fellowship, slavery gained a *de facto* legality in New Amsterdam, thereby opening clerics to pressure from their parishioners to do little about the fate of Africans. The historical assessment of clerical attitudes about slavery has accentuated their racism and dependence on the Dutch West India Company and the inability of ministers to perceive any incompatibility between their beliefs and slavery.⁴⁹

One answer came from a lengthy treatise, *'t Geestelijk roer van't koopmans schip* (The spiritual rudder of the merchants' ship), published in 1638 by the Reformed minister Godefridus Cornelisz Udemans. An early Dutch pietist who attended the Synod of Dort, Udemans emphasized in his work the importance of scriptural meditation, humility, and repentance as steps in the development of Christian life. Immensely popular in the New World, his book was a famous companion for lonely seamen throughout the seventeenth century. It also commented specifically on the purchase and enslavement of Christians. Addressing his thoughts to both India companies, Udemans argued that Christians could be sold as slaves only if they were captured in a just war or purchased for a correct price from their parents or other competent masters, "as is related that this ordinarily occurs in Angola," a principal source for Dutch slaves. Udemans was an early proponent of the "fortunate fall," arguing that slavery benefited Africans by exposing them to Protestant Christianity and keeping them from "popish mischief."⁵⁰

Udemans's interpretation of the enslavement of Christians caused a split between the Dutch West India Company and its American colonists. The company, seeking to reconcile the Synod of Dort's mandates on pagan baptism with the allure of the slave trade, saw no contradiction in the purchase and sale of Christians. In contrast, pietist settlers, while eager to obtain slaves, remained anxious about converting their chattel and possibly losing them. For example, in a remonstrance against Peter Stuyvesant delivered to the company in 1649, settlers argued that "if they (the slaves) want to submit themselves to the lovely yoke of our Lord Jesus Christ, Christian love requires that they be discharged from the yoke of human slavery."⁵¹ Dutch families arriving in New Amsterdam surely recognized that this conflict worked against their self-interest. In the future, settlers would solve this problem simply by refusing to let their slaves anywhere near a church pulpit.

Initially, Dutch Reformed Church efforts to convert Africans in New Amsterdam depended heavily on the dominie, or minister, who was an employee of the Dutch West India Company. The first Dutch cleric, Dominie Jonas Michaelius, had helped create a Dutch Reformed presence in West Africa before coming to New Netherland, but he showed little interest in black souls in his new post, where he derided Angolan women as "lazy, useless thieving trash."⁵² After his departure, relations between the Dutch Reformed Church and local Angolans improved. In 1638, Dominie Everardus Bogardus of New Amsterdam wrote asking church authorities in Holland to send a schoolmaster "to teach and train the youth of both Dutch and blacks in the knowledge of Jesus Christ." In 1641 the elders and deacons of the New Netherland church reported to the Classis in Amsterdam that the "Negroes, living among the colonists, come nearer thereto, and give better hope," of conversion.⁵³

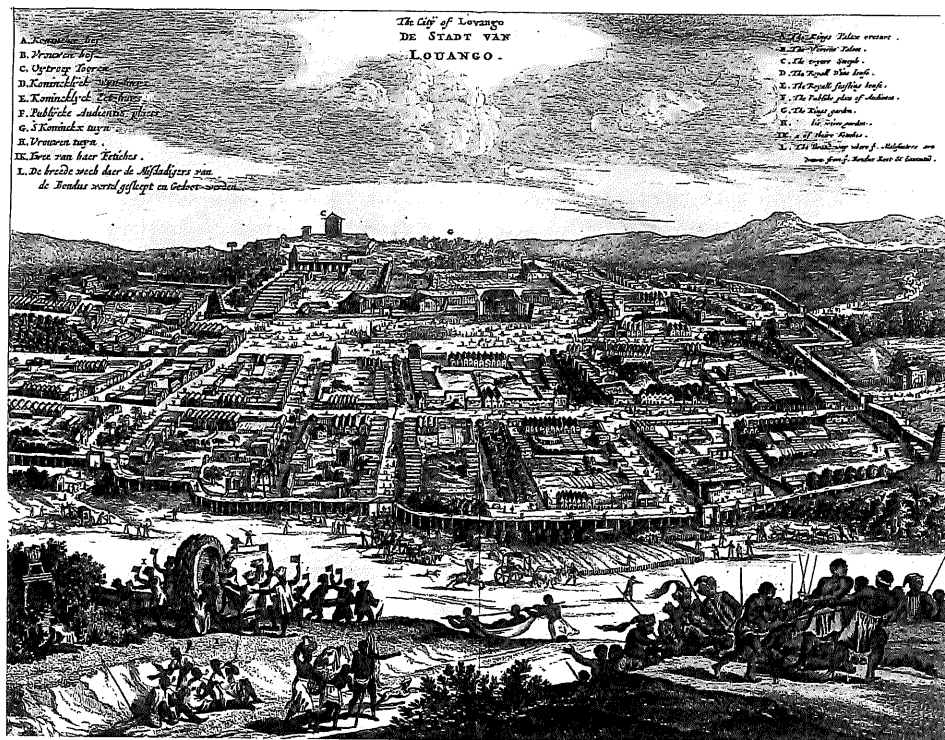
Given the social consequences of the Synod of Dort, it was unlikely that Reformed ministers would agree to baptize black children without some assurance that their freedom was in the offing. As the company imported more blacks as lifetime slaves and sold them to private owners, Reformed clerics became leery about performing a rite that had powerful social and legal consequences. Also, although clerical reports suggest that blacks were eager to be baptized, the requirements included a solid understanding of the basic beliefs of the Reformed Church and patience with the solemn, unemotional sermons. The orthodoxy issued from the Synod of Dort ensured a strict hierar-

chical order in which blacks were far down the ranks. Blacks owned by patriarchal masters had the tough task of convincing the family head of the necessity of catechism and church membership. Together, these reasons were early signs that Christian denominations would make only partial headway in converting African Americans.

Public anxiety over the black equation of baptism and freedom curbed the willingness of Dutch Reformed members to catechize their slaves. Dutch ministers shared that fear. For example, Dominie Henricus Selijns, who ministered to Governor Peter Stuyvesant's bouweries (farms), was very reluctant to baptize the governor's forty slaves. Church officials back home in Amsterdam instructed Selijns that slaves be carefully catechized and allowed to confess but not baptized until the parents abandoned heathenism for Christianity. Selijns responded that "the Negroes occasionally request that we should baptize their children, but we have refused to do so, partly on account of their lack of knowledge and of faith, and partly because of the worldly and perverse aims on the part of the said Negroes. They wanted nothing else than to deliver their children from bodily slavery, without striving for piety and Christian virtues. Nevertheless, when it was seemly to do so we have to the best of our ability taken much trouble in private and public catechizing. This has borne but little fruit among the elder people who have no faculty of comprehension, but there is some hope for the youth who have improved reasonably well." In future years, baptism of blacks occurred sporadically in rural areas in Flatbush and Gravesend in Brooklyn and Hackensack in Bergen County.⁵⁴

By denying blacks the sacrament of baptism, the Dutch removed an important ideological barrier to servitude. The effect of these theological rationalizations on blacks were twofold. Baptism remained an elusive talisman of freedom for blacks who seized upon divisions in the white community over baptism as hopeful evidence that its liberating beauties could be restored. The new policies also focused attention on the masters' convictions. Calvinist pietism was highly individualistic. Every master or mistress was to decide whether to catechize the family's slaves. In turn, every slave had to determine whether his or her master had ushered the way to Christian baptism or stood intransigent in the doorway.

As the Dutch curbed baptism of blacks to avoid the threat of emancipation, Africans became unrecorded spectators in the Reformed churches. The Reformed Church discouraged lay preaching and approached theological disputes in a distinctly paternalist manner, di-



City of Loango (Luanda), 1670. Luanda was the port of origin for many Creole and saltwater slaves in the mid-seventeenth century and one of the principal slave depots on the West African coast. (From John Ogilby, Africa, 1671. Photograph courtesy of the Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.)

minishing any black contributions.⁵⁵ Blacks' participation in religious affairs became limited to annual public rituals. The liturgical year in New Netherland was richly celebratory and preserved traditional pietism in the church. In particular, the Dutch observed Pinkster, their version of Pentecost, as a sanctified revival of the early Christian church. Pinkster was already known to Africans. Even before arriving in New Netherland, Africans were exposed to Roman Catholic instruction from missionaries. Kongolesse royalty became Catholic during the sixteenth century after conversion by Jesuits and Capuchin clergy, and so slaves exported from Luanda in the seventeenth century had been exposed to Christianity. Catholic missionaries in the Kongo regarded all aspects of the culture of the target country that were not directly

contrary to the fundamental doctrine of the church as immaterial and left them unchanged. Thus blacks in New Amsterdam coming from Angola had a syncretic rather than an assimilated understanding of Christianity.⁵⁶ This alchemy is visible in the anxieties European divines expressed over African use of the holiday. The Capuchin monk Denis De Carli baptized several Angolans on Pentecost Sunday, then watched with apprehension as "They fell a playing upon several instruments, a Dancing and a Shouting So Loud that they might be heard half a league off."⁵⁷

Pinkster was celebrated in New Amsterdam as early as 1628.⁵⁸ In the New World, Pinkster celebrants met on Sunday and Pentecost Monday and kept Tuesday as a holiday, creating a long weekend holiday for slaves. Pinkster was a time of interracial celebration when African and Dutch music and dance intertwined and wine and ale flowed freely. Sundays were also free times for slaves. New Amsterdam was not as determined as New England to keep the Sabbath holy. Although the Dutch did attempt to cease all work, amusements, and drinking during worship, the city magistrates refused to publish Stuyvesant's decree that the entire twenty-four hours of the Sabbath be holy, declaring it to be too severe and contrary to the rights of the homeland.⁵⁹

Opening New Amsterdam to the Slave Trade

Economics and local politics in the struggling colony pushed the Reformed Church to add further religious qualifications to the edicts from Dort about the fate of Africans. In 1640, the company repeated its earlier promise to provide patroons and colonists with as many blacks as possible. Both company and colonists seemed to agree on the desirability of buying slaves. As labor needs pressed heavily on the colony, Governor Peter Stuyvesant strove to make New Amsterdam the principal slave port of North America, again forcing the Dutch to face the contradictions of morality and economics. The paucity of free blacks in the colony and the difficulty in attracting single immigrants from home required the Dutch West India Company to find more coercive measures to increase the number of laborers. By now, the company recognized the value of enslaved labor. In 1644, Governor Willem Kieft observed that "Negroes would accomplish more work for their masters and at less expense, than [Dutch] farm servants, who must be bribed to go thither by a great deal of money and promises." Apparently local residents agreed. The next year, the colonists repeated their wish for

a greater supply of enslaved blacks. As younger families with small children settled in the colony, they became ready customers for newly imported slaves.⁶⁰

Reassured by Udemans's teachings and pushed by colonial needs for labor, the company increased its participation in the Atlantic slave trade. Over thirty years, the Dutch slave trade moved from random acquisition of blacks, often freemen, stolen by pirates from Spanish and Portuguese ships, to purchase of slaves from the West Indies and Brazil and direct importation from Angola and the Guinea Coast. The Dutch had entered the slave trade in Africa in the late sixteenth century, borrowing methods of the Portuguese in Lower West Africa. From 1504 through 1650, European slave traders in Africa bargained with local leaders and depended on native interpreters.⁶¹ Within that trade system, the West India Company and its black employees in New Amsterdam interacted in ways that afforded both acculturation and ethnic identity.

Kongo-Angolan resistance to Portuguese domination continued throughout the period, but desire for European goods ensured a vigorous slave trade that exported an average of ten thousand blacks from Angola annually. By 1600 the slave trade was easily the most important marketing activity of Luanda. African wars produced the bulk of these slaves. Luanda slave merchants operated a chain of towns across Kongo, east to the Malebo Pool, and south to Matamba and Angola. Because neither the Portuguese nor their Dutch successors were allowed into the interior, they obtained slaves through tribute from subject leaders who gathered them by direct warfare, recovery of runaway slaves, or punishment of tax delinquents. By far the most important method was direct trade with ethnic chiefs. The coastal-bound Portuguese and Dutch slavers were highly dependent on local traders.⁶²

Although New Netherland farmers continually demanded more slaves, the Dutch West India Company initially made only intermittent deliveries. The chief beneficiary was Governor Peter Stuyvesant, who employed forty slaves at the company farm north of the city. Stuyvesant, who earlier as a fledgling bureaucrat in Curaçao had argued for expansion of the slave trade to North America, oversaw the enlargement of human traffic from occasional to official as the company became the largest employer of a burgeoning slave force in New Netherland. At times, it leased slaves to private owners, a practice condemned by local residents, or sold slaves to English colonists in Virginia.⁶³

Despite their misgivings, the acute labor shortage in New Amster-

dam prompted private citizens to seek, often illicitly, the acquisition of slaves to labor in agriculture or for domestic use. A sign of the legitimacy of servitude in the young colony was local trafficking in slaves.⁶⁴ At the same time, settlers grew more accustomed to purchase of slaves from the international trade. The Dutch capture of Fort Elmina on the Guinea Coast in 1637 enabled them to acquire much of the Spanish slave trade in the New World.⁶⁵

The allure of the slave trade also deepened the split between the monopoly of the Dutch West India Company and local traders. Governor Willem Kieft had attempted to shore up commercial regulations and sustain the company as a strong central government in the early 1640s, but his departure opened the door to smaller merchants to prosper by commerce in humans. As the colony approached a degree of economic maturity, company desires for monopoly control met furious opposition from an emerging elite. Arising from humble circumstances and prospering through intermarriage, these merchants sold slaves along with other commodities in the coastal trade of North America. Traveling to the West Indies and the Chesapeake, these traders earned sudden wealth by combining the slave trade with other forms of local commerce. Their successes created a new middle class in the colony with strong roots in the slave trade.⁶⁶

Larger traders profited by access to the West African trade. The process of acquisition of slaves on the Guinea Coast resembled that in Angola. Elmina, the principal slave factory on the West Coast, was built by the Portuguese in 1482 and was surrounded by a town inhabited by company slaves and free blacks. The castle serviced a fairly large area with distinct yet related nationalities. Slaves came to New Amsterdam from up and down the West Coast of Africa from points as distant as Kongo and the Malaguetta Coast. The Ardra, Popo, and Whydah "nations" were important sources of slaves who possessed skills valuable in the frontier colony of New Netherland. Slaves cleared land and mined gold and worked as farm laborers, porters, craftsmen, herdsman, brewers, guards or soldiers, traders, household servants, and attendants. A second enslaved group included debtors, apprentice household servants, boatmen, and fishermen.⁶⁷

With the arrival of slaves from the Guinea Coast, the West India Company initiated sales to private citizens. That decision prompted an unexpected controversy that had international complications. In 1652 pirates arrived in New Amsterdam with forty-four slaves they had captured from Juan Gallardo Ferrera, a Spanish merchant. The

Dutch West India Company kept most of the adults and sold the rest to settlers, though the transactions violated long-recognized international agreements against kidnapping of freemen for use as slaves.⁶⁸ Gallardo traveled to New Amsterdam after relations between Spain and Holland improved to press his case for restitution and to reclaim his property. Greeted in New Amsterdam by his former slaves, who bore his initials branded on their skins, Gallardo identified thirty-seven blacks belonging to other Spanish citizens and himself.⁶⁹ Stuyvesant and the company owned ten slaves, which doubtless accounts for the governor's recalcitrance with Gallardo, but others now toiled for such individuals as "Jacob the Miller," who owned five, or were "in the possession of the Potter's son or daughter."⁷⁰ Rebuffed by Stuyvesant, who claimed that the slaves were legally purchased from a Captain Guert Tysen, who brought them to New Amsterdam as a war prize, Gallardo, after two years of frustration, took his case back home. The issue quickly escalated into an international controversy. In 1655, the ambassador of Spain complained to the States-General in Holland about kidnapping of blacks owned by Spanish citizens, a problem repeated again and again.⁷¹ This incident is also significant because it reveals the presence of Spanish blacks in the colony. Many of the Spanish slaves kidnapped and sold in New Amsterdam in the 1640s and 1650s were Catholic. There was room for them to practice their faith surreptitiously in New Amsterdam. Unable to accept Reformed doctrines, they were able to celebrate their beliefs though the Dutch concept of the "hidden church" that allowed toleration of banned religions without official recognition.⁷²

These intermittent arrivals left Dutch colonists unsatisfied. By 1654, local merchants convinced the Dutch West India Company to grant permission for slave trading with the Caribbean and Virginia, with a 10 percent duty on slaves resold to the Chesapeake. Dutch control of the slave trade in the French and English West Indian colonies and a near monopoly on trade with Barbados softened the loss of Brazil to the Portuguese in 1654. The Dutch acquisition of Curaçao in the West Indies gave them an important entrepôt for its slave cargoes. Not a plantation colony, Curaçao served primarily as a depot for the thriving slave trade. Nominally under the governance of Peter Stuyvesant, ruler of the New Netherland colony, Curaçao became a center of slave trading in the New World.⁷³

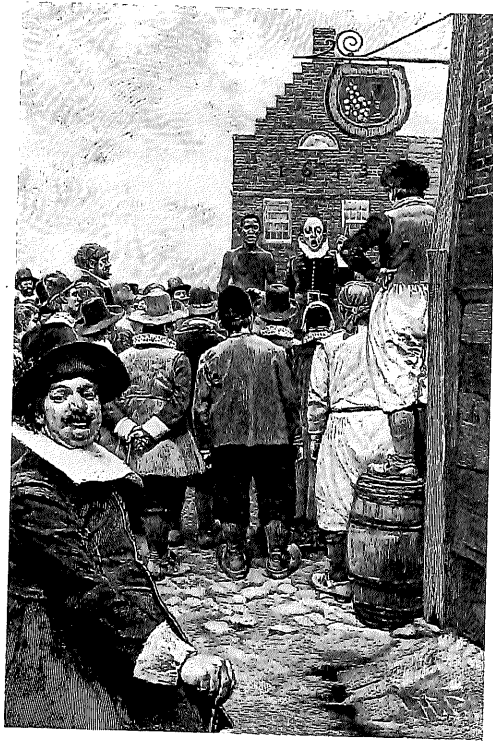
During the 1650s, despite the assurances of the directors of the

West India Company that slaves would be supplied regularly to New Amsterdam for use there or for exportation to the "English and other neighbors," Stuyvesant was frequently reduced to begging his vice-governor, Mathias Beck, to direct slave ships to New Amsterdam. Stuyvesant believed that with the loss of Brazil, company officials in Amsterdam might view New Netherland as a new entrepôt for slave trading and thus bring enormous profits to New Amsterdam and at the same time satisfy local colonists' demands for slaves.⁷⁴

After the Dutch West India Company permitted city merchants to trade in slaves as chattel, the number of enslaved Africans arriving in the city jumped sharply. Direct trade with Africa began on September 15, 1655, with the arrival in New Amsterdam of three hundred enslaved blacks. The ship master auctioned them off and netted above 1,200 florins for each slave. The following year three more vessels arrived after a stop in Curaçao. By agreement, two-thirds of each slave cargo came to New Amsterdam. Stuyvesant and local merchants sold many slaves to Virginia and Maryland, two English colonies that converted to unfree labor.⁷⁵

Despite Stuyvesant's difficulties with his vice-governor, New Amsterdam was by 1660 the most important slave port with the largest population of slaves in North America.⁷⁶ Regularly scheduled shipments authorized by the company supplied the colony with cargoes of slaves from the Guinea Coast, primarily from Elmina. Between 1660 and 1664, New Netherland received at least four hundred slaves, primarily adult males, from Curaçao. The slave ships were charnel houses, where deaths of the captives averaged almost three a day. One vessel in 1659 lost 111 blacks during the voyage from Africa to the New World.⁷⁷

Almost three hundred more slaves arrived in 1664 almost simultaneously with the English fleet sent to conquer New Amsterdam. The half-starved Negroes required, in Stuyvesant's estimation, over a hundred bushels of wheat weekly. Stuyvesant referred to the arrival as at "an unseasonable moment to our great embarrassment." They were, he lamented, old and rejected slaves from the West Indies.⁷⁸ Despite his anxieties, slave owners quickly bought them. The victorious English quickly did an audit to learn how the slaves had been dispersed. They learned that the 290 slaves were designated "to be employed solely in agriculture, which is the only means by which the State can be rendered flourishing . . . the slaves must be sold to our inhabitants on express condition that they will not be taken out of our district, but



Slave Trading in New Amsterdam. A late nineteenth-century depiction of slave trading in the 1650s after Peter Stuyvesant succeeded in establishing New Amsterdam as the leading entrepôt for slaves in North America. (Harper's Monthly Magazine, 1895)

kept specially there and employed in husbandry." This new plan was a harbinger of the important role enslaved blacks would play in the agricultural economy of rural New York and East Jersey.⁷⁹

Of the 290 slaves, 40 went to Peter Stuyvesant's *bouwerie*, and slave trader John de Decker took another 40 to sell in Albany. Many others probably went to Virginia, but records show that 19 adult males, 10 adult females, and 1 child were sold to prominent local Dutch burghers and Englishmen. These chattel labored in their houses as domestics. Anecdotal evidence suggests early signs of the tensions between masters and domestic servants. Writing to his brother Jan Baptist Van Rensselaer in 1659, Jeremias Van Rensselaer argued against sending his slave Andreis to Holland, noting that "it would be foolish to try to have him serve you in a free country, as he would be too proud to do that, I have noticed that in his manner." Van Rensselaer worried, "It is bad enough here to get him to do anything for anybody if I have not ordered him to do it . . . that sort of Negro is too treacherous." He urged his brother to buy a seasoned slave who "has always lived here with

the Dutch people."⁸⁰ Other slaves worked adjacent to the free black community. Nicholas de Mayer, Govert Loockermans, and Jacob Leisler obtained slaves to use in mills at the Fresh Water Pond adjacent to the "negro land." Some slaves labored on large plantations outside of the city, such as Captain John Lawrence's plantation at Hempstead, Nicholas Verleith's farm in Bergen County, and Captain Thomas Willet's land in Queens County.⁸¹

At the close of Dutch rule, slavery was entrenched in the colonial urban economy. A tax list for New Amsterdam in 1664 indicated that nearly one out of eight citizens in the colony owned slaves. Of the thirty slaveholders (out of 254 taxpayers), half were in the wealthiest cohorts of the population, but slaves were also owned by tavern keepers, mariners, a butcher, and a turner. The slaveholders were English, French, and German as well as Dutch.⁸²

By 1664, the African population was 800, or 10 percent of the population of the colony, and 375 in New Amsterdam, or approximately 25 percent of New Netherland's population of 1,500. This quarter of the colony's population was suffused throughout the society. Did the English then capture a slave society? By current definitions, New Netherland was not a slave society because slavery was an important part of the political economy but not the sole form of labor. In New Netherland and in the future New York, however, existed a slave society made up of Dutch farmers and their bondspeople, who would remain entangled for the next century and a half. The New York-East Jersey region differs from classical slave societies in the Chesapeake, Caribbean, and low-country Carolina in the ethnic diversity of slave owners. In other words, the English conquered a slave-owning culture within a larger society.⁸³

Conclusions

The effect of Dutch rule on the establishment and future of slavery and African American culture in the region was profound. In the half-century before English conquest of the colony abruptly ended Dutch control in 1664, African and European peoples selectively adapted to each other's laws and mores and established cultural relationships that lasted far longer than the few decades of Dutch rule. Studying the mutual existence of free and enslaved Africans in New Amsterdam provides answers to key questions about black life in the region. For example, historians have often referred to the creation of slavery in New Netherland and New York as an "unthinking decision." A closer look

shows that religious reasons shaped the conscious enslavement of Africans. Scholars have also described the rapid transformation of Africans into black Dutchmen, but the black experience was part of a diverse engagement among many peoples, which a Catholic priest famously called "Too Great a Mixture of Nations." Not only did blacks hold several ranks in the colony, but they also came from a wide range of places and interacted with Germans, Belgians, Swiss, Scandinavians, and English settlers as well as Dutch. One means for this interaction was religion. Africans encountered the official church, the Dutch Reformed, and Lutherans, Huguenots, Puritan, Swedish Reformed, and other pietist denominations. The mixture of peoples precluded consensus in the colony, ensuring that Dutch West India Company edicts often met with hostility from settlers and militated against agreement on a key issue like slavery.

Economic and demographic reasons also prompted the shift to slavery in the struggling colony. Single young Dutch men could be induced to migrate to the settlement, but after arrival in New Amsterdam, they quickly headed for the frontier to rent land or left for a more attractive colonial enterprise. Hoping that white laborers would quickly seek their own land if labor was available, as they had in Virginia, the company acquired more slaves.⁸⁴

New Amsterdam was, like the Chesapeake, a society in which enslaved and free Africans lived and worked. As Ira Berlin has argued, members of the first generation of Creole blacks were sophisticated bargainers for freedom. Their talents, he contends, enabled them to earn freedom and even a limited prosperity in a relatively fluid racial atmosphere.⁸⁵ Slavery existed in New Amsterdam virtually from the onset, in small numbers at Pavonia, and, gradually, in larger numbers among private citizens. What changed were not the skills of Creoles at arbitrating freedom but the economic needs and aspirations of the Dutch West India Company and its ambitious colonists. Acceptance of slavery as an institution among the Dutch and the "mixture of nations" in New Amsterdam were facilitated by theological compromises among Puritan denominations in Europe. The lessons taught by the first generation of Africans in the region did not die after they earned their freedom. Rather, the Creoles represented an early example of how Africans quickly learned to seek freedom from fissures in European-American theology, law, politics, and diplomacy. One skill that would reappear constantly was the African ability to play the imperial government, in this case the Dutch West India Company, against the colonists.

But the direction of the young colony, as it changed ownership, was toward a slave society. As the labor needs of white merchants, artisans, and farmers grew, the Dutch West India Company, aided by pirates, imported slaves into the colony. Governor Peter Stuyvesant envisioned New Amsterdam as the supply depot for the slave owners of North America, an ambition hampered only by the voracious needs of West Indian and South American colonies. The decision of the Dutch Reformed Church to cease slave baptisms and curtail emancipation was a significant foundation for the codification of slavery in New Netherland. Local interpretations by Dutch and other Calvinist slave masters of the teachings of the Council of Dort deeply affected the texture of their relations with enslaved Africans.⁸⁶ The English capture of New Amsterdam in 1664 transformed the governance of the colony but scarcely altered its society. Dutch-speaking New Yorkers remained prominent throughout the region for the next century and a half. Less visible were the tiny number of free blacks who continued as a small but significant free population in New York City, Long Island, and East Jersey.⁸⁷