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From Half-Free to Property: The Evolution of Slavery in Dutch New Netherland and English
New York, 1621-1712

by

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Introduction

On December 28, 1662, three female slaves petitioned the colonial government of New Netherland for their freedom and to live out their old age in the company of other free Blacks in New Netherland.¹ By April 1663, two of the women died, leaving Mayken van Angola pleading with Director General Petrus Stuyvesant and council to “take pity on her” and finally free her after thirty-two years of servitude.² On April 17, 1664, just months before the English conquest of New Netherland, Stuyvesant and council granted Mayken van Angola her full freedom “so that she can make her living in an honest way like any free black person.”³ Van Angola became part of the 75 free Blacks living in New Netherland by 1664.⁴ The fact that Mayken van Angola and other men and women of African origin were able to obtain freedom from slavery in New Netherland highlights the relative fluidity of slavery in the developing colony before the English gained control and codified the system.

Between 1626 and 1664, the Dutch established a system of slavery in New Netherland that was similar to slavery in neighboring English colonies. In the first half of the seventeenth century, slavery was uncoded and fluid in both the Dutch and English colonies of North America. Slaves could earn compensation for their work, marry in churches and, most notably, achieve freedom. While these privileges were not necessarily granted to all slaves, the possibility

¹ *Petition*, Dec. 28, 1662, New York Colonial Manuscripts, X, pt. 1, 296, New York State Archives, Albany, New York.

² *Petition*, April 19, 1663, New York Colonial Manuscripts, X, pt. 2, 71, New York State Archives, Albany, New York.

³ *Certificate*, April 17, 1664, New York Colonial Manuscripts, X, pt. 3, 170, New York State Archives, Albany, New York.

⁴ Thelma Wills Foote, *Black and White Manhattan: The History of Racial Formation in Colonial New York City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 40.

that some could gain their freedom illustrates how the strict form of chattel slavery that eventually overtook many of the English North American colonies was not foreordained, but instead a product of an evolving social hierarchy created to benefit wealthy white property owners.

By 1664 when the English gained control of what they renamed New York, most North American colonies were in the process of transitioning to a stricter, codified system. In part, this was a response to a greater supply of enslaved people in North America. As the transatlantic slave trade grew, more slaves arrived and stricter rules were needed to control the increasing population. Massachusetts was the first North American colony to codify slavery in 1641, followed by Virginia in 1662 and New York in 1665.⁵ The establishment of laws regarding the conditions of slavery was an important part of the process by which some societies with slaves eventually became slave societies.

Historian Ira Berlin detailed the differences between societies with slaves and slave societies in his work *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*. According to Berlin, a society with slaves recognized that the labor of slaves was “marginal to the central productive processes” and other forms of labor were just as important.⁶ In contrast, slave societies maintained slave labor as the central means of production and used

⁵ The 1641 Massachusetts Body of Liberties first codified slavery by stating that “There shall never be any bond slaverie villinage or Captivitie” unless the captives were taken from war or sold themselves into the system. For more on the Massachusetts Body of Liberties, see Donald S. Lutz, *Colonial Origins of the American Constitution: A Documentary History* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Liberty Fund, 1998), 70-88. The 1662 Virginia slave code made slavery hereditary when it established “that all children borne in this country shalbe held bond or free only according to the condition of the mother.” See “Enactment of Hereditary Slavery Law Virginia 1662-ACT XII,” https://www.nps.gov/ethnography/aah/aaheritage/Chesapeake_pop2.htm. New York officially legalized slavery in the 1665 Duke’s Laws, which stated that no one should be enslaved unless “judged thereunto by authority or such as willingly have should or shall sell themselves.” See “The Duke of York’s Laws, 1665-75,” *The Historical Society of New York Courts* (Albany, New York: New York State Library, 1809).

⁶ Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 8.

the relationship between master and slave as a model for all relationships in the society.⁷ Another significant factor Berlin discussed in distinguishing societies with slaves from slave societies was the fluidity in the status of a slave and the possibility of becoming free.⁸ Developing societies with slaves, such as New Netherland, did not recognize servitude as permanent. In contrast, slave societies codified the system which made achieving freedom almost impossible. In slave societies, the economy depended on slave labor.⁹

The Dutch maintained New Netherland as a society with slaves from 1626 until they lost the colony to the English in 1664. The period following the English conquest, from 1664 to 1712, represents a key moment of transition for slavery in New York. During this era, English New Yorkers, like their contemporaries in several other English colonies, began to transform New York into a slave society. New Amsterdam became New York City, and the urban center of the colony began to acquire characteristics of a slave society while the rest of New York colony remained a society with slaves. Three main characteristics came to define the difference between the Dutch society with slaves in New Netherland and the eventual English slave society in New York City. The first was the demographics of the slave population imported by each empire. In the seventeenth century, the Dutch had multiple holdings in the Atlantic, including northern Brazil and the Caribbean island of Curaçao, where most slaves worked before being sent to New Netherland. Initially, this provided the Dutch with a small number of laborers who had already been exposed to slavery to help build their North American colony. By the time the English took over, however, the demand for slaves in the colonies was growing so that direct

⁷ Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 8.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

importations from Africa became more common. The slaves who were directly imported from Africa were less experienced with the system than the previous generation and thus required greater control from the English to ensure their productivity. This closer regulation over the system contributed to the development of a slave society. Next, the economic use of slaves was crucial in establishing a society with slaves versus a slave society. Dutch colonists had a more intimate relationship with their slaves because they worked alongside one another to build the colony. The Dutch West India Company's initial ownership of half of the colony's slaves also allowed a more business-like relationship to exist between slave and master as slaves were often able to earn wages and explore other work opportunities after they had completed the Company's tasks. In contrast, the English inherited a colony that was beginning to rely more on enslaved labor so fluidity within servitude could not continue as it did under the Dutch. With more individuals owning their slaves, the privileges slaves once enjoyed as workers under the Dutch ceased. English private ownership set the precedent that servitude was for life. Finally, religious practices, which sometimes provided a path for manumission, played a role in defining the fluidity of slavery under the Dutch in New Netherland. Initially, slaves could convert to Reformed Protestantism in New Netherland, which often led to their freedom because of European proscriptions against enslaving fellow Christians. Towards the end of New Netherland's history, however, the Dutch began to eliminate this pathway to freedom. Once the English conquered the colony, they enacted a law to ensure that baptism was no longer a route to freedom. As the English made it nearly impossible for the enslaved to become free, they transformed New York City into a slave society.

This thesis is informed by several scholars who have helped me conclude that the increasing role of the English in the transatlantic slave trade in the last third of the seventeenth

century precipitated New York City's transformation into a slave society. Much credit is due to the work of Ira Berlin, Joyce D. Goodfriend, and Leslie M. Harris who have aided in my understanding of the circumstances slaves lived in under the Dutch and the English during the colonial era.¹⁰ Joyce D. Goodfriend's work on Dutch New Amsterdam was crucial in learning about the initial populations of slaves who were imported to New Amsterdam, the role of the Dutch West India Company in the development of New Netherland, and the debate within the colony regarding baptisms of slaves. Leslie M. Harris also provided insight into the populations and jobs of slaves in Dutch New Amsterdam. Harris's work presented a clear difference between the privileges slaves had under the Dutch and the harsher restrictions implemented by the English. Finally, my argument that the increasing scope of the transatlantic slave trade caused the English to transform New York City into a slave society could not have been reached without the work of Ira Berlin. Berlin's *Many Thousands Gone* served as the foundation for my conclusion that many of the English colonies were undergoing the same economic transformations in the late seventeenth century as they increased their focus on slave labor with more slaves readily available. Where my conclusion differs, however, is the timing of when New York City became a slave society. Berlin wrote that the middle of the eighteenth century saw the emergence of slave societies in the northern colonies.¹¹ Instead, I argue that the English began to transform

¹⁰ Ira Berlin, "From Creole to African: Atlantic Creoles and the Origins of African-American Society in Mainland North America," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 53, no. 2. (April 1996): 251-288; Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*; Ira Berlin, *Slavery in New York* (New York: The New Press, 2005); Joyce D., Goodfriend, *Before the Melting Pot: Society and Culture in Colonial New York City, 1664-1730* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992); Joyce D., Goodfriend, "Burghers and Blacks: The Evolution of a Slave Society at New Amsterdam," *New York History* 9, no. 2 (1978): 125-144; Joyce D. Goodfriend, "The Souls of New Amsterdam's African American Children: New Amsterdam" *Commonplace: The Journal of Early American Life* 3, no 4 (July 2003) <http://commonplace.online/article/the-souls-of-african-american-children-new-amsterdam/>; Joyce D. Goodfriend, *Who Should Rule at Home? Confronting the Elite in British New York City* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2017); Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2017).

¹¹ Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 178.

New York into a slave society in 1665 when they wrote the first laws pertaining to slavery in the colony. By 1712, New York City, with a fully codified slave system and status as a major destination in the transatlantic slave trade, had become a slave society.¹²

The study of a society with slaves in New Netherland and the transition of New York City into a slave society is significant in understanding that slave societies in colonial America were not inevitable. Elite property owners deliberately developed a social hierarchy and economic system that placed African laborers at the bottom with little chance to rise in status. In doing this, they created a system of slavery that was unique from earlier forms. North American slavery became based on race rather than religious, ethnic, or social backgrounds. This unique system of slavery in colonial America also contributed to the rise of white supremacy which continues to dominate social and political matters in the United States today.

Furthermore, this work is significant in understanding the lasting impact African and African American culture has had on New York. As early as the seventeenth century, African culture began mixing with European culture to develop a new African American and even New York culture. As common American history is often written from the perspective of those who held power, it is essential to highlight the contributions of those who often went unnoticed. This work highlights the efforts enslaved people took to gain their freedom, their contributions in building one of the most famous cities in the world, and their efforts to overcome the endless obstacles they faced within a white-dominated society.

¹² My argument is that New York City began developing into a slave society from 1665 to 1712. However, New York City and the larger colony of New York developed at different paces. The colony of New York initially lacked the commercial success and population that would stimulate its growth to a slave society. Berlin's work cites the second quarter of the eighteenth century as the beginning of New York colony's transition to a slave society, including New York City. See Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 177-184.

Dutch New Netherland

In 1624, the Dutch officially began colonization in New Netherland, which encompassed present-day New York City and surrounding areas in what is now New Jersey, Connecticut, and Delaware. The Dutch West India Company (WIC), which was initially founded in 1621 to aid the Dutch in their war for independence with Spain, had almost all rights to governing New Netherland.¹³ The charter also gave the WIC access to control trade in other Dutch Atlantic colonies, which they used to export commodities throughout Europe and the Americas. For a period during the seventeenth century, the WIC enjoyed great commercial success in the Atlantic world. New Netherland offered the fur trade, Brazil had sugar plantations, Bonaire provided salt, and Aruba supplied cattle and horses, while Curaçao developed into an entrepôt for an often-illicit commerce with the Caribbean and Spanish mainland colonies. Meanwhile, trading forts on the coast of Africa provided a steady supply of slaves. When the first permanent settlers arrived in New Netherland in 1624, they were in the vanguard of this multipronged effort by the WIC to become a powerful trading force in the Western Hemisphere.

The Slave Trade and Slave Demographics Under the Dutch

The Dutch had lucrative slave sites on the coast of West Africa where they purchased enslaved labor for their Caribbean Islands and mainland colonies. Initially, outposts at Mouri on Africa's Gold Coast and Goree just north in Senegambia, were major access points for unfree

¹³ Dennis J. Maika, "Why was the colony of New Netherland initially founded?" New Netherland Institute, accessed January 28, 2021, <https://www.newnetherlandinstitute.org/education/for-students/fun-re/what-was-new-netherland/why-was-the-colony-of-new-netherland-initially-founded-by-the-dutch-west-india-company/>. The Dutch and the Spanish were fighting the Eighty Years' War. For more on the Dutch revolt against Spanish rule, see Peter Limm, *The Dutch Revolt, 1559-1648* (Florence: Taylor & Francis Group, 1989).

laborers from the continent.¹⁴ In 1637, the Dutch captured El Mina, a major Portuguese slave trade center which increased their access to Africa's Gold Coast.¹⁵ As the Dutch became more powerful figures in the Atlantic slave trade, they moved south along the continent's coast and began obtaining slaves from Angola and the Congo as well.¹⁶

The first WIC ship to bring enslaved people to New Netherland arrived in 1626. Aboard were eleven African slaves with names such as Paul, Simon, Anthony, and Garcia.¹⁷ Their European names suggest that these slaves likely had previous contact with Catholic Iberians.¹⁸ Historian Ira Berlin defined this generation of slaves as Atlantic Creoles. Atlantic Creoles, unlike later generations of enslaved people from the interior of Africa, were accustomed to multiple languages, cultures, and religions and some were even previously enslaved in Western Africa either within their tribes or in El Mina.¹⁹ Atlantic Creoles proved to be extremely valuable to the WIC and the fledgling colony of New Netherland for their ability to easily communicate with Europeans and because their skills as builders helped the Dutch construct Fort Amsterdam on Manhattan Island.²⁰

¹⁴ Ira Berlin, "From Creole to African: Atlantic Creoles and the Origins of African-American Society in Mainland North America," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (1996): 264.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 261.

¹⁶ Cornelius Ch. Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and on the Wild Coast, 1580-1680* (Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida Press, 2017), 345.

¹⁷ Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 15.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Berlin, "From Creole to African," 254 and 261.

²⁰ The projects the Dutch employed the first groups of slaves to work on in New Netherland were similar to projects those previously enslaved in Africa had worked on. See Berlin, "From Creole to African," 261.

For most of New Netherland's existence, the number of slaves imported into the colony remained low as the Dutch were primarily focused on Brazil and their Caribbean colonies. The WIC rarely brought cohorts larger than fifty to New Netherland.²¹ For example, an August 1659 bill of lading stated that the ship *Speramundij* held "five Negroes, among whom is one girl all dry and in good condition" ready to send from Curaçao to New Netherland.²² In addition, in 1660, skipper Jan Jansen Eyckenboom brought "twenty healthy slaves or male Negroes" from Curaçao, while skipper Dirck Jansen van Oldenburch transported "ten healthy slaves or male Negroes" aboard his ship *Den Nieuw Nederlandtschen Indiaen* to New Netherland.²³ The quantity of slave imports remained steadily low until the eve of the English conquest in 1664 when the *Gideon* brought 291 slaves to New Amsterdam.²⁴

It was more common for the WIC to transport slaves from the Caribbean and Brazil to New Netherland rather than directly from Africa. The WIC acquired Pernambuco in northern Brazil in 1630, which was transformational for the Company's role in the slave trade. Pernambuco served as a halfway point between Africa and New Netherland, where slaves worked first for the WIC on its sugar plantations.²⁵ The time slaves spent in Brazil allowed them

²¹ Foote, *Black and White Manhattan*, 37.

²² "Bill of Lading or five slaves loaded at Curaçao for New Netherland," August 24, 1659, New York State Archives, New York (Colony) Council, Curaçao Records, 1640-1665, Series A1883-78. Volume 17, document 51a.

²³ "Bill of Lading for twenty slaves loaded at Curaçao for New Netherland," May 6, 1660," New York State Archives, New York (Colony) Council, Curaçao records, 1640-1665, Series A1883-78, Volume 17, document 61 and "Bill of Lading for ten sound male slaves or negroes, shipped in the *New Netherland Indian* from Curaçao to New Netherland," August 31, 1660, New York State Archives, New York (Colony) Council, Curaçao records, 1640-1665, Series A1883-78, Volume 17, document 69.

²⁴ Foote, *Black and White Manhattan*, 37.

²⁵ After years of failed attempts, the WIC finally won Pernambuco and its 150 sugar plantations in northern Brazil from the Portuguese in 1630. Recife, a small town and port, became the headquarters of the Dutch in Brazil. The Dutch held Pernambuco until 1654. For more on the Dutch conquest of Brazil, see Wim Klooster, *The Dutch Moment: War, Trade and Settlement in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2016), 49-53.

to become what historians refer to as “seasoned slaves.” Seasoned slaves were more accustomed to hard labor and better prepared to work under the system of slavery.²⁶ As a result, the Dutch in New Netherland sought seasoned slaves for their experience as workers. Just one year after acquiring Pernambuco, the WIC sent fifty slaves aboard *The Bruynvisch* from its new colony to New Netherland.²⁷ While larger in number than most cohorts before 1660, these slaves had already experienced slavery in Brazil and so the WIC believed these seasoned workers would be valuable in building the colony.

Initially, the WIC monopolized the slave trade in New Netherland. However, by the late 1640s, the WIC loosened its tight control of this business, and the colonial economy in general, and began allowing individuals to set out on their own voyages to obtain slaves.²⁸ For example, in 1654, the Amsterdam chamber of the WIC allowed Jan de Sweerts and Dirck Pietersz Wittepaart to take their ship the *Wittepaart* to the African coast to obtain slaves for the colony.²⁹ Both the WIC and shippers benefitted from this arrangement. The shippers paid the WIC for the privilege to import slaves into the colony but also gained wealth for themselves in the form of slaves. The *Wittepaart* voyage was quite favorable for New Netherland as it brought one of the largest groups of slaves the colony would ever receive—391 slaves arrived directly from

²⁶ Graham Russell Hodges, *Root and Branch: African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863* (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 30.

²⁷ “Intra-American Slave Trade - Database,” Slave Voyages, accessed January 4, 2021, <https://www.slavevoyages.org/american/database>.

²⁸ Goodfriend, *Before the Melting Pot*, 127.

²⁹ “Resolution of the Chamber at Amsterdam,” New York State Archives, New York (Colony) Council, Dutch colonial administrative correspondence, 1646-1664, Series A1810-78, Volume 12, document 11, page 1.

Africa.³⁰ Ultimately, these private journeys significantly increased the size of the slave population in New Netherland and expanded the Dutch presence in the transatlantic slave trade.

The WIC understood slave labor as a large investment and thus treated their laborers with a certain degree of humanity. For example, Petrus Stuyvesant, director general of New Netherland and Curaçao, set relatively high standards for the treatment of WIC slaves. He ordered “bonded blacks” to be “without severe or unchristianlike treatment.”³¹ When food was scarce, the WIC gave slaveowners in Curaçao specific guidelines for how to best care for the “employed Blacks” working in the saltpans.³² The special attention given to WIC slaves while in transit and in Curaçao influenced how they were treated in New Netherland. In New Netherland, WIC slaves were given housing, food and sometimes even wages.³³ WIC slaves were more like employees of the Company than a class of permanent race-based laborers.

Throughout the seventeenth century, the Dutch did not clearly define the status of its African workers. Significantly, in many of the surviving accounts from the era, the Dutch did not often use the term “slave.” For example, throughout *The Curaçao Papers*, a collection of documents relating the relationship between New Netherland and Curaçao, Africans were referred to as “servants” or “employed blacks.” These descriptors may have been used because a slave’s status was not permanent. For example, in 1643, the WIC debated granting six slaves

³⁰ Goodfriend, “Burghers and Blacks,” 127.

³¹ “Instructions [] from the honorable West India Company,” August 15, 1640, Charles T. Gehring, ed., *Curaçao Papers, 1640-1665* (Albany: New Netherland Research Center and the New Netherland Institute, 2011), 77.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Goodfriend, “Burghers and Blacks,” 130.

their freedom so that they could “seek their own profit from the cultivation of the soil.”³⁴ The resolution decided that

If they succeed therein, afterwards it can be practiced by the Company’s servants and employed Blacks. After properly weighing these and other matters, we decided to grant six of those requesting discharge from the Company’s service and ration, to become free planters... This discharge and freedom shall be granted at the end of the present month.³⁵

If the six freedmen were able to bring profit to the Company as free planters, the practice of discharging slaves for similar purposes could continue within the Company.³⁶ As the WIC saw it, manumission would cause little damage to the Company and potentially much benefit.³⁷ The WIC had established a system in which slavery was fluid, potentially temporary, and negotiable. The standards it set in its Caribbean colonies were used as the foundations for slavery in New Netherland.

Dutch Economy of Slavery

Prior to 1654, the WIC’s greatest focus was on Dutch Brazil. Pernambuco’s importation of slaves dwarfed those of New Netherland. Between 1630 and 1654, the Dutch transported an estimated 26,687 Africans to Pernambuco to work in sugar production.³⁸ Meanwhile, the WIC imported less than one hundred slaves to New Netherland between 1626 and 1654.³⁹ After the

³⁴ “Resolution drawn up at Fort Amsterdam on Curaçao,” February 26, 1643, in *Curaçao Papers, 1640-1665*, ed. Charles T. Gehring (Albany: New Netherland Research Center and the New Netherland Institute, 2011), 11-12.

³⁵ “Resolution drawn up at Fort Amsterdam on Curaçao,” 11.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

³⁸ David Eltis and David Richardson, *Extending the Frontiers: Essays on the New Transatlantic Slave Trade Database* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 99.

³⁹ Goodfriend, “Burghers and Blacks,” 131.

Dutch lost Pernambuco, the Company redirected its focus to New Netherland, envisioning New Amsterdam as a North American center for the slave trade. Between 1654 and 1664, the WIC imported a documented 800 slaves to New Amsterdam.⁴⁰ The greater availability of slaves in New Netherland helped to transform the economic foundation of the colony.

Because the Dutch West India Company governed New Netherland, it set the standards regarding slavery within the colony. Slaves were either owned by the WIC or privately by settlers. By 1630, half of the slave population in New Netherland was owned by the WIC.⁴¹ Company ownership was common in New Netherland for two reasons. First, the WIC's monopoly over the slave trade initially hindered settlers from setting out to obtain their own slaves. Second, in the early years of the colony, the settler population was low, and the economy was centered on the fur trade, a business in which slave labor was not vital.⁴²

The first group of eleven slaves experienced a more corporate relationship with the WIC masters than did slaves who were later privately owned by individuals. Those who arrived in 1626 were promised wages, a key piece of evidence that historian Vivienne L. Kruger used to describe New Netherland slaves as more comparable to indentured servants.⁴³ The first group was primarily brought to help build New Amsterdam's town center. Male slaves constructed Fort Amsterdam at the tip of Manhattan Island and were sent to defend other forts in the colony.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Foot, *Black and White Manhattan*, 37 and Goodfriend, "Burghers and Blacks," 127.

⁴¹ Berlin, *Slavery in New York*, 37.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Morton Wagman, "Corporate Slavery in New Netherland," *The Journal of Negro History* 65, no. 1 (1980): 38 and Vivienne L. Kruger "Born to Run: The Slave Family in Early New York, 1626-1827," Ph.D. diss, Columbia University, 1985. <http://newyorkslavery.blogspot.com>.

⁴⁴ Wagman, "Corporate Slavery in New Netherland," 35-36.

They also protected New Netherland from neighboring Native American tribes. In 1641, WIC director William Kieft was advised to provide slaves with weapons to fight the Natives in the Indian wars.⁴⁵ The WIC trusted their slaves to protect the people and places that generated their income.

WIC slaves worked throughout New Netherland and helped establish the colonial economy. In the colony's urban center, men often worked manual labor or skilled jobs while women worked in homes.⁴⁶ A 1658 letter from the New Netherland Director and Councilors even requested that slaves aboard the *Otter* be taught trades before arriving to the colony.⁴⁷ Slaves were trained in carpentry, bricklaying, and blacksmithing in an effort to build the city of New Amsterdam.⁴⁸ The Company also provided three slaves to collect garbage in the city.⁴⁹ The jobs required of WIC slaves in New Amsterdam often called for only one to two to be employed in a task at a time.⁵⁰ As a result, WIC slaves typically lived and worked alongside their masters who rented them in contrast to the large plantation systems that would permeate the South in the eighteenth century.

In the hinterland, which encompassed the rural areas around New Amsterdam, it was more common for slaves to be privately owned than be property of the WIC. Due to the distance from New Amsterdam, where the WIC kept its slaves, settlers in the hinterland committed to

⁴⁵ Wagman, "Corporate Slavery in New Netherland," 35-36.

⁴⁶ Berlin, *Slavery in New York*, 11.

⁴⁷ "Some extracts from the additional writs, arrived with the letter of Director and Councillors," July 23, 1658, in *New Netherland Papers*, trans. by Dingman Versteeg (New York: New Netherland Research Center and the New Netherland Institute, 2011), 55.

⁴⁸ Wagman, "Corporate Slavery in New Netherland," 35.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁵⁰ Kruger, "Born to Run," <http://newyorkslavery.blogspot.com>

owning slaves for long term work. After arriving in New Amsterdam, slaves were sent to work on Eastern Long Island, today's New Jersey, or upland near Fort Orange (today's Albany).⁵¹ Similarly to WIC slaves in New Amsterdam, hinterland slaves worked in small groups of about two to three, but in mostly agriculture-related jobs.⁵² However, as the needs of hinterland farms were diverse, enslaved males also served as carpenters, millers, wheelwrights, tailors, and masons.⁵³ Females served in domestic roles and as dairy women.⁵⁴ Since slaves were an expensive investment and the success of their agricultural enterprises depended on the productivity of their bound labor, private owners were cognizant of the need to take care of their human property.

Dutch New Netherland relied on free and unfree labor in order to survive as a developing colony. Dutch colonists worked alongside their slaves to build the infrastructure of the colony. In addition, the relatively small population of New Netherland, both European and African, allowed some slaves to be treated more like indentured servants and workers and receive a wage.⁵⁵ In mid-seventeenth century New Netherland, servitude was not permanent or race based. Instead, various forms of labor were used to build the vast area that was New Netherland. As a result, New Netherland remained a society with slaves.

⁵¹ A.J. Williams-Myers, "Contested Ground: Hinterland Slavery in Colonial New York," *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 33, no. 1 (2009): 94.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 98.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁵⁵ By 1630, the population of New Netherland was 300 with 270 of those colonists living in New Amsterdam. See Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 14.

Dutch Reformed Protestantism and Slavery

Throughout the first half of the seventeenth century, Protestant Europeans believed Christians could not be enslaved.⁵⁶ In 1639, the Dutch Reformed Church baptized its first person of African origins in New Netherland. Barent Jan Pieters's conversion to Dutch Protestantism raised a question regarding the appropriateness of his continued enslavement and subsequently presented religious conversion as a possible pathway to freedom for the enslaved in the colony.⁵⁷ Given the lack of legal guidelines related to slavery in New Netherland and beliefs about the incompatibility of Christianity and slavery, the Dutch Reformed Church represented a powerful institution for granting freedom to the enslaved in the colony.

Both religious leaders and slaves sought out opportunities for baptisms, but their motivations often differed. While religious criticism of the slave trade itself was minimal due to the massive role the WIC played in New Netherland, some Reformed officials chose to Christianize slaves as a means to justify a more humane treatment.⁵⁸ In New Netherland, the Reverend Everardus Bogardus undertook the work of baptizing slaves.⁵⁹ Bogardus used his experience taking care of the ill in Guinea to promote the idea that religion could save Africans from the alleged state of incivility they were living in.⁶⁰ Furthermore, he feared the possibility

⁵⁶ Patricia U. Bonomi, "Swarms of Negroes Coming about My Door": Black Christianity in Early Dutch and English North America," *Journal of American History* 103, Issue 1 (June 2016): 37.

⁵⁷ Berlin, *Slavery in New York*, 40.

⁵⁸ Gerald Francis De Jong, "The Dutch Reformed Church and Negro Slavery in Colonial America," *Church History* 40, no. 4 (1971): 424.

⁵⁹ Everardus Bogardus was sent to New Amsterdam to be minister in 1633. While minister of New Amsterdam, Bogardus married African men and women, baptized their children, and even served as a godparent to an African child. His actions helped increase the number of African baptisms in the colony until his departure in 1647.

⁶⁰ Joyce D. Goodfriend, "The Souls of African American Children: New Amsterdam," *Commonplace: The Journal of Early American Life* 3, no. 2 (2003). <http://commonplace.online/article/the-souls-of-african-american-children-new-amsterdam/>

that slaves who had been in contact with Iberians had been lost to Catholicism and he needed to reverse such negative influences.⁶¹ Bogardus's efforts helped others in New Netherland recognize the benefit of converting slaves as this helped the Dutch promote the Reformed Church in the colony. Slaves could be freed "after they had been reasonably well instructed in the Christian doctrine and [had given] good testimony as to their knowledge and life."⁶² Their children might be freed as well or be committed to serve the WIC until adulthood.⁶³ Regardless, Bogardus's baptisms had a profound impact on the number of free Africans in New Netherland. Between 1639 and 1647, Bogardus baptized 120 Black adults.⁶⁴ Baptized Blacks still had to pay dues to the WIC in the form of money and labor, a condition sometimes referred to as half-freedom. However, all free adult males in New Netherland were expected to provide for the Company at that time.⁶⁵ Economically, freeing Christianized slaves was possible because New Netherland was not centered on slave labor.

After the loss of Dutch Brazil in 1654 and the WIC's shifting focus to New Netherland, the Company began to take issue with the Church's baptisms of enslaved Africans and this pathway to freedom. A large portion of leaders within the Dutch Reformed Church had their salary paid for by the WIC or owned slaves themselves.⁶⁶ If the Church continued freeing slaves, church leaders and the colony could suffer economic losses. At the same time, not

⁶¹ Goodfriend, "The Souls of African American Children: New Amsterdam," <http://commonplace.online/article/the-souls-of-african-american-children-new-amsterdam/>

⁶² James A. Holden, Edward Tanjore Corwin, and Hugh Hastings, *Ecclesiastical Records: State of New York* (Albany: J.B. Lyon, state printer, 1901), 281.

⁶³ De Jong, "The Dutch Reformed Church," 431.

⁶⁴ Bonomi, "Swarms of Negroes Comeing about My Door," 42.

⁶⁵ De Jong, "The Dutch Reformed Church," 430 and Bonomi, "Swarms of Negroes Comeing about My Door," 42.

⁶⁶ De Jong, "The Dutch Reformed Church," 426.

coincidentally, the Dutch Reformed Church also began doubting the truth behind the colony's slaves' efforts to become baptized.⁶⁷ Reverend Henry Selyns wrote to the Classis of Amsterdam on June 9, 1664, that he would no longer be performing baptisms for Blacks "partly on account of their lack of knowledge and faith," and because "They wanted nothing else than to deliver their children from bodily slavery, without striving for piety and christian virtues."⁶⁸ Dutch Reformed officials suspected that the promise of freedom seemed to be the greater motivation for converting than the devotion to religion. By 1656, slave baptisms had come to a halt in New Netherland. Only one slave was baptized between 1656 and the end of Dutch control in 1664.⁶⁹

While baptisms for slaves had come to an end by the time New Netherland became New York, the legacy of freedom acquired through baptism greatly informed the social structure of the colony the English inherited. Forty percent of New Netherland's Black population acquired freedom between 1639 and 1664.⁷⁰ The English assumed control of a society in which a relatively large portion of the Black population was Christianized and freed. The English, too, would make efforts to baptize their slaves but under different conditions. The transitioning slave society in English New York would not grant any pathway to manumission from baptism.

The Slave Experience Under the Dutch

The lack of regulation regarding slavery and the fact that freedom was possible for slaves in New Netherland enabled slaves and free Blacks to exercise more liberties than in the later

⁶⁷ Berlin, *Slavery in New York*, 45.

⁶⁸ Edward T. Corwin, ed., *Ecclesiastical Records of the State of New York* (Albany: J.B. Lyon, 1901-1916), 1:548.

⁶⁹ Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 17.

⁷⁰ Bonomi, "Swarms of Negroes Coming about My Door," 43.

period of English New York. In New Netherland, slavery was more by custom than law.⁷¹

Without law attached to one's status, some slaves were able to advocate for themselves and others, challenge the system under which they lived, and gain a level of autonomy.

In the first half of the seventeenth century, North American colonies played a minor role in the transatlantic slave trade and a legal framework relating to slavery had yet to be established. This allowed slaves to acquire some privileges, which helped ensure their commitment to labor. For example, in New Netherland, slaves had autonomy over the earnings they received from the WIC.⁷² New England colonies also permitted their slaves to keep some of their earnings.⁷³ In the Chesapeake, slaves were sometimes given access to provision grounds where they were able to grow crops and raise animals to support their families as well as grow tobacco to sometimes sell for their own profit. In short, throughout the North American colonies of this era, the absence of a codified system that made the enslaved legally inferior enabled them to advocate for themselves and achieve some privileges.

In New Netherland, slaves challenged their status and were sometimes granted privileges, which suggests that there was a certain level of respect for the work they provided for the colony. For instance, some slaves petitioned for wages they were owed for fighting in wars for the Dutch.⁷⁴ The fact that slaves were trusted to help protect the Dutch settlement suggests they were not seen as a potential hostile population despite their enslavement. In addition, their ability to

⁷¹ Foote, *Black and White Manhattan*, 39.

⁷² Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 20.

⁷³ Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 56.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

petition for their wages indicates that slaves and New Netherland citizens were granted some of the same privileges, such as testifying in court, even against white settlers.⁷⁵

The WIC was open to negotiating with slaves for their freedom for two main reasons. First, the absence of legal restrictions regarding slavery allowed the enslaved to challenge their servitude. There were no laws stating that a slave had to serve for life. Second, the WIC was much more concerned with financial success than racial oppression. In a document of manumission of the slave Manuel the Spaniard, the WIC granted him his freedom as long as he continued to make payments to the company for the sum of “three hundred Carolus guilders within the term of three consecutive years, one hundred guilders on the 15th of February of each year during the three years and no longer.”⁷⁶ If Manuel failed to make these payments, his former owner, Philip Jansz Ringo, was permitted to reclaim him as his own.⁷⁷ Additionally, slaves were expensive to maintain and it would be a financial burden to care for numerous older or sick slaves. This was the case of Mayken van Angola who was eventually freed under the WIC. The Company recognized the expense of maintaining certain slaves and carefully chose who was freed if it benefitted them financially.

Free Blacks were still expected to provide for the WIC and New Netherland as a part of the conditional half-freedom they were granted after baptism. It could be an annual tribute of one hog, a contribution of 23 bushels of corn, or full pelts worth twenty guilders.⁷⁸ These expectations required free Blacks to have access to land to farm. The WIC gave former slaves

⁷⁵ Foote, *Black and White Manhattan*, 39.

⁷⁶ “Manumission of Manuel the Spaniard by Philip Jansz Ringo,” New York State Archives, New York (Colony), Secretary of the Province, *Register of the Provincial Secretary, 1642-1660*, Series A0270-78, Volume 3, documents 30b - 30c, side 1.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Foote, *Black and White Manhattan*, 40.

land on the outskirts of New Amsterdam so that they could provide for themselves and continue to contribute to the colony.⁷⁹ Patent evidence suggests that in the 1640s, New Netherland Director William Kieft granted land to at least seven freemen in Manhattan, including the widow of a former Company slave.⁸⁰

Socially, slaves were permitted to interact with the free community beyond daily labor tasks. Sundays were rest days to use as they pleased.⁸¹ Some slaves visited the markets where they traded, played games, danced, and gambled with colonists and Native Americans.⁸² Cultural diffusion became common as more Blacks became free. The Dutch festival of Pinkster became an interracial celebration as Blacks began to participate combining Christian and African cultures. These examples suggest that slaves were valued members of New Netherland's community rather than marginalized outsiders whose only purpose was to provide labor.

By the time the English took over the colony, free Black communities existed throughout New Netherland. While some Blacks acquired freedom through conversion to Christianity, others were strategically freed and granted parcels of land by the Dutch West India Company to ensure continued production without the burden of taking care of ageing slaves.⁸³ The "Land of the Blacks," which spanned across much of lower Manhattan, became populated by half-free former slaves beginning in 1643.⁸⁴ WIC Director William Kieft used free Blacks as a buffer to

⁷⁹ Goodfriend, "Souls of African American Children." <http://commonplace.online/article/the-souls-of-african-american-children-new-amsterdam/>

⁸⁰ New York State Archives, New Netherland, Council, *Dutch colonial patents and deeds, 1630-1664*, Series A1880, Volume GG.

⁸¹ Hodges, *Root and Branch*, 25.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Foote, *Black and White Manhattan*, 39.

⁸⁴ "Land of the Blacks," Mapping the African American Past, Columbia University, Accessed October 9, 2021. <https://maap.columbia.edu/place/30.html>

protect white colonists from hostile Indians nearby.⁸⁵ In addition, Petrus Stuyvesant granted land near his farm to some of his former slaves after the English conquest to try to maintain their loyalty and serve as protection. In a 1665 land grant, Stuyvesant ordered that “the Negroes listed below to take down their isolated dwellings for their own improved security...to establish and erect the same along the common highway near the honorable general’s farm,” and each was granted “a small parcel of land for house and garden.”⁸⁶ Stuyvesant’s effort to provide the freedmen with improved living arrangements suggests a desire to build a sense of trust amongst them so that both parties were protected as the English gained control over the colony.

Many North American colonies began going through social and economic transformations in the last third of the seventeenth century as slave labor became more readily available. For example, in 1662, Virginia passed its first slave code stating that servitude would be hereditary and “that all children borne in this country shalbe held bond or free only according to the condition of the mother.”⁸⁷ Although unknown to them at the time, the English would also make such changes to New Netherland’s society by eliminating privileges and the ability of the enslaved to acquire freedom.

English New York

In the second half of the seventeenth century England and the Netherlands engaged in a series of wars for commercial dominance in the Atlantic world. James, Duke of York, the

⁸⁵ “Land of the Blacks,” <https://maap.columbia.edu/place/30.html>

⁸⁶ “Petrus Stuyvesant's 1665 Certification of Land Grants to Manumitted Slaves,” New Netherland Institute. <https://www.newnetherlandinstitute.org/files/2814/0681/8946/Stuyvesantmanumission.pdf>

⁸⁷ “Enactment of Hereditary Slavery Law Virginia 1662-ACT XII,” accessed on March 27, 2021. https://www.nps.gov/ethnography/aah/aaheritage/Chesapeake_pop2.htm

younger brother of King Charles II and a significant investor in the Royal African Company, targeted New Netherland, with its growing prominence as a center of the North American slave trade, for conquest. On September 8, 1664, the English fleet that James, Duke of York, had sent to conquer New Netherland compelled Petrus Stuyvesant and the Dutch to surrender the colony. New Netherland was now New York.⁸⁸

Shortly after the English gained control of the colony, New York issued its first official law regarding slavery in the 1665 Duke's Laws. The law stated that no person should be enslaved unless "judged thereunto by authority or such as willingly have should or shall sell themselves."⁸⁹ This written legalization was the first step in a process that would culminate in a completely codified system of slavery, marking the beginning of the transition from a society with slaves to a slave society. Significantly, in 1679, as New York was coming to rely more on enslaved labor, the English sought to further define who was ineligible for enslavement.⁹⁰ Accordingly, they enacted a resolution stating, "That all Indyans here are free, and not slaves, nor can be forc't to be servants."⁹¹ During this period of transition to a slave society in New York City, the colony's officials made it clear that those who were enslaved would be Africans and their descendants.

⁸⁸ Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 26-27.

⁸⁹ "The Duke of York's Laws, 1665-75," *The Historical Society of New York Courts*.

⁹⁰ In 1679, only 34 out of 593 servants departing from Barbados were bound for New York. This may have been due to the greater need for servants in other English colonies, better terms of servitude elsewhere, or perhaps New Yorkers were already exhibiting a preference for enslaved laborers. See Goodfriend, *Before the Melting Pot*, 55-56.

⁹¹ New York State Archives, New York (Colony) Council, Council papers, 1664-1781, Series A1894-78, Volume 28, 174. Since the arrival of Europeans to mainland North America, Native Americans fought to maintain their land and security but often fell into a series of conflicts with the settlers. Eventually, colonists recognized the benefit of having Natives on their side for their own survival. The effort to ban the enslavement of Natives in New York may have been done to limit conflict between colonists and the powerful Iroquois Confederacy. For more on the relationship between Europeans and Natives, see Daniel Barr, *Unconquered: The Iroquois League at War in Colonial America* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2006).

The Slave Trade and Slave Demographics Under the English

In 1664, free and unfree Blacks comprised ten percent of New York City's population of 1,500 inhabitants.⁹² By 1703, there were 630 free and unfree Blacks out of New York City's 4,375 people, accounting for fourteen percent of the population.⁹³ The changing population allowed for a slave society to develop under the new rulers.

By the late seventeenth century, New York City became one of the most important centers of the slave trade in North America.⁹⁴ The Royal African Company (RAC), established in 1660, was instrumental in supplying New Yorkers with slave labor and facilitating New York's rise as a center of the North American slave trade. The Company initially held a monopoly on supplying slaves to English colonies in the Atlantic world and drew on slaves from both West and East Africa.⁹⁵ In West Africa, English slave trading factories spanned from Gambia in the north, along the Gold Coast in the Gulf of Guinea, and south to Angola and the Congo, while in East Africa English slaving ships stopped in Madagascar.⁹⁶ The greater scope of locations where slaves were obtained from meant a diverse enslaved population in New York.

Even though the RAC purchased slaves from similar locations in West Africa as the Dutch had previously, circumstances had changed during this era of the transatlantic slave trade. The enslaved had a much greater awareness of their fate and thus offered more resistance, which created concerns for authorities in New York. For example, slaves arriving from the Congo were

⁹² Berlin, *Slavery in New York*, 60.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁹⁵ Hodges, *Root and Branch*, 38.

⁹⁶ James A. Rawley, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A History* (New York: Norton, 1981), 155 and Hodges, *Root and Branch*, 38.

said to be filled with “a divine inspiration for resistance to bondage.”⁹⁷ Meanwhile, slaves arriving in New York from Madagascar presented another set of problems for New Yorkers. The diverse population of Madagascar, consisting of Indians, Arabs, Jews, Chinese, and other Asians, meant that their linguistic differences made it difficult for them to communicate with colonists and West African slaves.⁹⁸ The days of Atlantic Creoles and relatively easy communication and control were over in late-seventeenth-century New York.

Although the RAC had access to a great supply of slaves, it could not keep up with the demand and the company failed to supply the high-quality slaves New Yorkers were accustomed to receiving from the Dutch West India Company. There are two main explanations for the RAC’s inadequacies. First, the RAC had to obtain laborers for all the English colonies, not just New York. In fact, most RAC slave voyages landed in Caribbean ports and southern colonies first, where most of their human cargo was sold. When RAC ships finally arrived in New York City, the few remaining slaves aboard were those who had not been sold in previous ports.⁹⁹ New Yorkers sometimes received slaves who were considered unfit to work. In addition, the RAC failed to obtain the seasoned slaves so desired by Dutch settlers. Slaves destined for English North American colonies often spent too little time in Barbados, Jamaica, and Antigua to become “seasoned” slaves.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Hodges, *Root and Branch*, 39.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁹⁹ Steven Deyle, “‘By Farr the Most Profitable Trade,’: Slave Trading in British Colonial North America,” in *Slave Trades, 1500-1800: Globalization of Forced Labour*, ed. Patrick Manning (Brookfield: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1989), 202.

¹⁰⁰ Berlin, *Slavery in New York*, 61-62.

In response to the reputed poor quality of RAC slaves and following the Company's loss of its monopoly in 1689, New Yorkers set out on their own journeys to supply the colony with laborers. However, these shippers were often unprepared and inexperienced, which resulted in much poorer conditions for the slaves on their journey. Stops in the Caribbean were essential not only for sale but to restock ships. In one voyage in 1721, the *Crown Galley* left Madagascar with 240 slaves.¹⁰¹ The ship stopped for supplies in Brazil and then journeyed another eight weeks to Barbados during which 120 of the slaves aboard had already died.¹⁰² By the time the remaining slaves arrived in New York, 106 were sold but 11 were too weak for sale.¹⁰³ Private journeys did supply slaves to New York but sometimes failed to provide the strong and plentiful laborers that many desired.

During the last third of the seventeenth century several English North American colonies began the process of transitioning from societies with slaves to slave societies. A major factor in this transition was the increased volume of slave imports and the greater need to control this new population. In New York the colonial government replaced the WIC as the main body of governance and began to make changes to the system not only to better profit from slavery, but also to increase the distinction between the free and unfree.

New York Economy

The private, individual ownership of enslaved laborers, which had begun in earnest in New Netherland after the WIC relinquished its monopoly, accelerated under the English in New

¹⁰¹ "Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade – Database," *Slave Voyages*, <https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/database>. Accessed June 24, 2021.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Hodges, *Root and Branch*, 78.

York. Ownership provided some masters with the flexibility to rent their slaves to others when there was a lull in their own labor needs. In the early eighteenth century a central location on the east side of Manhattan, called the Meal Market, was established to better organize the day-labor business of slave rentals.¹⁰⁴ Through the Meal Market and other transactions like the buying and selling of individual slaves, New Yorkers strategized how to best profit from their investment in owning human property.¹⁰⁵

In English New York slave labor remained very similar to what it had been under the Dutch but with greater restrictions on the personal lives of the enslaved. Colonists wanted slaves to be young and seasoned to perform the manual labor on farms or the domestic services within the homes.¹⁰⁶ Female slaves were described as “machines of convenience” and were used for cleaning, cooking, and laundering while men were “machines of production” and used to build, repair and sell products just as they did under the Dutch.¹⁰⁷ Men who found themselves in the domestic role polished shoes, worked in the stables or drove carriages for their masters.¹⁰⁸ Although a male and female slave might perform their tasks near one another, the English, in contrast to the Dutch, did not permit male and female slaves to live in the same quarters, partly

¹⁰⁴ Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 31. New Yorkers often feared unaccompanied male slaves walking through the city looking to be hired for work. As a result, the City Council passed a law on December 13, 1711, allowing the Meal Market to be a place where slaves could go to be hired out for work. It was the first slave market in New York City. For more, see “Slave Market,” Mapping the African American Past, accessed March 12, 2021, <https://maap.columbia.edu/place/22.html>

¹⁰⁵ Deyle, “By Farr the Most Profitable Trade,” 206.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 202.

¹⁰⁷ Thomas J Davis, “These Enemies of Their Own Household: Slaves in 18th Century New York,” in *A Beautiful and Fruitful Place: Selected Rensselaerswyck Seminar Papers*, edited by Nancy Anne McClure (New York: New Netherland Publishing, 1991), 173.

¹⁰⁸ Davis, “These Enemies of Their Own Household,” 173.

due to the fear of a female slave getting pregnant.¹⁰⁹ A pregnant slave was perceived to be an economic hardship for owners because of the decreased amount of work she could do. While the Dutch sometimes allowed their slaves to travel freely to visit family, English slaves were not permitted to socialize to such an extent. As slavery was becoming more important to the economy during the transitional period of the late seventeenth century, the English sought to gain greater control of their unfree labor by eliminating privileges and freedoms.

In Ira Berlin's study of the transformation of societies with slaves to slave societies, he stated that a major factor for a slave society to exist was the discovery of a salable commodity.¹¹⁰ While New York did not have a single highly profitable crop, its ideal location and geography allowed it to have a diverse and highly profitable economy that benefitted from slave labor. The city and hinterland worked together to produce and sell various products to the international market. Farmers prepared butter, flour, and unprocessed grains to send to West Indian islands including Curaçao, Barbados and Jamaica.¹¹¹ Slaves also helped transform the surrounding hinterland into "a commercial farming district, which produced a variety of foodstuffs and other provisions for the city market and for export."¹¹² With New York as a prominent location for trade, colonists and slaves worked hard to provide for international markets and grow the colony's wealth.

¹⁰⁹ Berlin, *Slavery in New York*, 64.

¹¹⁰ Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 25.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

The Anglican Church and Slavery

Religion was of great importance to the English and some settlers and ministers wanted slaves baptized out of good faith and to spread Anglican Christianity. The English inherited a large population of unbaptized slaves in New York who were practicing their own African religions because of the decreased conversion efforts under the Dutch in the 1650s and 1660s.¹¹³ For the English, the key would be to convert enslaved Africans while making sure that baptism did not present a pathway to freedom. A solution to the dilemma of Christian slaves was achieved in 1665, just one year after gaining control of the colony, when the Duke's Laws proclaimed that "No Christian shall be kept in Bondslavery, villenage or Captivity, Except such who shall be Judged thereunto by Authority, or such willingly have sould, or shall sell themselves."¹¹⁴ Those judged to be slaves by authority, or the English elite, could be Christianized. Not too soon after in 1667, Virginia passed a similar act stating, "that the conferring of baptisme doth not alter the condition of the person as to his bondage or freedome."¹¹⁵ Across the North American colonies, the English eliminated the opportunity for baptisms to lead to freedom, which solidified their control over enslaved laborers.

The closer New York City got to a slave society, the more comfortable New Yorkers became with converting slaves. The fear that baptized slaves might have an increased sense of self-worth ceased as their enslaved status became permanent.¹¹⁶ Some also saw conversion as a

¹¹³ Hodges, *Root and Branch*, 54.

¹¹⁴ "The Duke of York's Laws, 1665-75," *The Historical Society of New York Courts* (Albany, New York: New York State Library, 1809).

¹¹⁵ June Purcell Guild, *Black Laws of Virginia: A Summary of the Legislative of Virginia concerning Negroes from Earliest Times to the Present* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 42.

¹¹⁶ Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 34.

way to preach obedience to slaves.¹¹⁷ Once it was clear that baptized slaves would remain in bondage, the Royal Governor Edward Hyde and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts began seeking out a person to take the job of baptizing slaves. In 1701, they chose city merchant Elias Neau to be the catechist.¹¹⁸ Neau, a former French Huguenot, had himself been captured and enslaved for a time in France.¹¹⁹ In his autobiographical account which detailed his experience being imprisoned for his religion, Neau wrote that he and the other prisoners were “always wet and dirty” and had trouble finding food.¹²⁰ Such conditions were not vastly different from the treatment slaves had aboard ships while being brought to the colonies. Neau empathized with slaves and drew on his experiences to convert them. His efforts had a lasting impact on the Christianization of slaves in New York for decades to follow.

Neau made the effort to not only educate slaves about the Church of England but also to incorporate aspects of their culture into his lessons. He used a call and response system in his teachings, which was a method often used in African cultures.¹²¹ He also held lessons in his home because some of his students believed that any location could be used as a place of worship.¹²² However, the use of Neau’s home as a classroom was purposeful for another reason. Some masters prohibited their slaves from attending Neau’s school because they believed

¹¹⁷ Hodges, *Root and Branch*, 60.

¹¹⁸ Bonomi, “Swarms of Negroes Comeing about My Door,” 45.

¹¹⁹ Goodfriend, *Who Should Rule at Home?*, 28.

¹²⁰ Elias Neau, *An Account of the Sufferings of the French Protestants, Slaves on Board the French Kings Gallies*, (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms Inc., 1699), 5.

¹²¹ Hodges, *Root and Branch*, 54.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 58.

conversion would make their slaves want to rebel.¹²³ By keeping these proceedings as private as possible, Neau attempted to limit backlash from slave owners who he believed to have neglected the souls of their slaves.¹²⁴

Initially seen as a valiant effort by the Church of England and the New York colonial government, the conversion of slaves ultimately did more to restrict their privileges rather than promote them. The free Black population came to a standstill as baptisms no longer led to freedom. The growing enslaved population became more permanent, and owners were confident in their slave's permanent status as a laborer. In promoting the English religion but not English equality, New York indicated that for African slaves, legal status was no longer porous.

The Slave Experience Under the English

The major difference between slaves' lives under the Dutch and under the English was the codification of slavery, which drew the line sharply between the Dutch society with slaves and the English slave society. Codification began in 1664 when the English issued a series of acts to better control the growing slave population. This process continued through 1712. Changes also occurred within communities that separated slaves socially from the rest of the population. Conditions deteriorated, privileges were eliminated, and animosity grew. The more the English tried to control the slave population, the more slaves resisted.

Slaves were aware of the increasing restrictions enforced by the English and acts of resistance became more common. Without the opportunity to earn an income of their own, slaves

¹²³ David R. King, "Missionary Vestryman," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 34, no. 4 (1965): 364.

¹²⁴ Bonomi, "Swarms of Negroes Coming about My Door," 52.

were more likely to steal money, clothing and food from their masters.¹²⁵ They often met at alehouses to exchange stolen goods with poor white laborers.¹²⁶ The theft and exchange of goods was a response to the perceived attack on their “customary rights,” referring to the privileges they once had under the Dutch.¹²⁷ In response, New York City and the colony of New York passed laws prohibiting anyone from buying or selling goods from slaves in 1681 and 1684, respectively.¹²⁸ Moreover, the 1702 Act for Regulating Slaves stated, “That no P’son or P’sons hereafter throughout this Province, do presume to Trade with any slave either in buying or selling, w’t’h’out leave and Consent of the Master or Mistress” and “all bargains and Contracts made w’t’h any slave, contrary to the intent of this Act, shall be utterly void.”¹²⁹ Slaves and poor white laborers alike were angered by these laws because the elite already owned so much of the wealth in English New York. Furthermore, whites now faced harsh consequences if they were found to aid runaway slaves. The 1702 Act stated that “if any person or persons whatsoever shall be found guilty of harbouring, entertaining or concealing of any Slave, or assisting to the conveying them away...shall be also liable to pay the value of such Slave to the Master or Mistress.”¹³⁰ This was an economic punishment poorer whites could not afford. White

¹²⁵ Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 37.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹²⁹ *The colonial laws of New York from the year 1664 to the revolution, including the charters to the Duke of York, the commission and instructions to colonial governors, the Dukes laws, the laws of the Donagan and Leisler assemblies, the charters of Albany and New York and the acts of the colonial legislatures from 1691 to 1775 inclusive ...* (New York: J.B. Lyon, state printer, 1894), 519-520.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

interactions with slaves became more scrutinized to eliminate interracial cooperation among the colony's poor.

The 1702 Act for Regulating Slaves contained six main points that permanently transformed New York City into a slave society. One condition of the 1702 Act stated that “it shall not hereafter be lawful for above Three Slaves to meet together at any other time nor at any other place,” unless it was requested by their masters for work.¹³¹ If they were found to violate this law, a slave could be “Whipt upon the Naked Back, at the Direction of any Justice of the Peace.”¹³² To further limit the likelihood of a slave uprising, the 1702 Act ruled that “no Person or Persons whatsoever do hereafter Employ, Harbour, conceal, or Entertain other Mens’ Slaves at their House, Out-house, or Plantation, without the Consent of their Master.”¹³³ This restriction differed greatly from the privileges slaves had been granted under the Dutch. It was common for slaves and white servants to work with one another and enjoy free time together. The English saw this as a security risk. Finally, the 1702 Act is notable because it explicitly referred to slaves as property. Part of the act defined slaves as “property of Christians” and that their masters were responsible for punishing their slaves since property cannot be tried in court.¹³⁴ This last part highlights another major difference between slave life under the Dutch and the English.

In a society with slaves, slaves were viewed as another form of labor and still as humans with rights. Moreover, they were more likely to be Christianized. In the slave society that English New York City was becoming, however, slaves were the property of Christians and did

¹³¹ New York (State), *Acts of Assembly, passed in the Province of New York, from 1691 to 1718* (London: J. Baskett, Printer to the King, 1719), 59.

¹³² *Acts of Assembly, passed in the Province of New York, from 1691 to 1718*, 59.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

not have the right to be tried in court.¹³⁵ Unlike the Dutch who allowed slaves to testify against whites in court, slaves under the English were almost never in court at all. If a slave misbehaved, the owner punished them himself.¹³⁶ Slaves were also aware that their bondage was permanent as opposed to temporary as some experienced in New Netherland. The 1712 “Act for the suppressing and punishing the conspiracy and insurrection of Negroes and other Slaves” virtually ended the practice of owners freeing their slaves by requiring the owner to pay £200 to the colonial government and £20 to the freed slave.¹³⁷ The English stripped slaves of basic freedoms, which helped the wealthy elite consolidate their authority and power over them.

The English were aware of their restrictive measures and how they compared to the Dutch. They also understood the importance of their property and worked hard to keep their slaves from running away. Nevertheless, slaves ran away more often in New York than in New Netherland. Those who succeeded in their escapes found themselves far in Native territories, unlikely to see their masters again.¹³⁸ A 1705 slave code aimed at preventing runaways stated that if a runaway slave was convicted, they “shall suffer the pains of death as in cases of felony,” proving that the treatment of slaves was certainly getting harsher under the English, as the Dutch had no such code in place.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 43.

¹³⁶ Jill LePore, *New York Burning: Liberty, Slavery, and Conspiracy in Eighteenth-Century Manhattan* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006), 80.

¹³⁷ “An Act for the suppressing and punishing the conspiracy and insurrection of Negroes and other Slaves,” *New York Slave Laws: Colonial Period*. Retrieved from <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/negroplot/slavelaws.html>

¹³⁸ Hodges, *Root and Branch*, 52.

¹³⁹ *The colonial laws of New York*, 582.

In their slave society, the English also attempted to control behavior they felt could escalate into disorder. For example, the colonial government tried to eliminate the celebration of Pinkster by enslaved New Yorkers. Pinkster was the Dutch Reformed Church's observation of Pentecost and emphasized experiential religion.¹⁴⁰ The focus on the experience as opposed to scriptures allowed for nonliterate Blacks to partake in the celebration and become acquainted with the religion even if they were not baptized.¹⁴¹ The festival soon became a combination of Dutch and African cultures as Blacks introduced their own music and religion into the celebrations.¹⁴² During Pinkster, whites drank and celebrated while Blacks played traditional African music and practiced African religious rituals.¹⁴³ Such events, which the English described as "frolics," led them to speculate what could happen if the event got too disorderly.¹⁴⁴ One fear was that slaves would start questioning their status and become more rebellious if they consumed alcohol.¹⁴⁵ As a result, the English began to outlaw slave celebrations altogether.¹⁴⁶

By the early eighteenth century, New York had all but eliminated any pathway to freedom slaves once knew. The codification of slavery in Duke's Laws made it evident that slaves were a separate class bound to labor for life. Defined as property, slaves lost the basic privileges they once had under the Dutch. Increased restrictions caused slaves to resist which consequently caused the English to pass even greater restrictions. The cycle continued as tension

¹⁴⁰ Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 41.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Hodges, *Root and Branch*, 50.

¹⁴⁵ LePore, *New York Burning*, 57.

¹⁴⁶ Hodges, *Root and Branch*, 48.

grew between white settlers and slaves. In 1712 and 1741, New York City went up in flames and the crime was pinned both times on the slave community. Although evidence against the slaves was scarce, it was plausible that slaves did attempt to destroy the city they had a significant role in building because the English had established such a restrictive system of slavery. Resentment and resistance were expected.

Conclusion

The Dutch utilized slave labor in New Netherland but under conditions in which the colony never became a slave society. The Dutch were relatively liberal in their treatment of slaves because they were still in the early stages of establishing their settlement. The minimal amount of time the Dutch spent controlling New Netherland limited the opportunity for it to develop into a slave society. The Dutch in New Netherland never secured a large supply of slaves as the Dutch West India Company was concerned with multiple colonial holdings in the Atlantic world. They initially prioritized Brazil and the Caribbean, which resulted in fewer slaves being sent to New Netherland. The small population of slaves became members of the community instead of marginalized laborers.

Although the Dutch did not see as great economic success in New Netherland with slaves as they did in South America and the Caribbean, they still benefited from this system of labor in their North American colony. By renting out slaves, the Company fostered a more corporate relationship with its slaves allowing them to have several privileges. The Dutch also sought to spread their religion to slaves and allowed conversion to result in freedom in the early years of the colony, which suggests their recognition of slaves as people, not property. Furthermore, the possibility of manumission because of baptism also highlights the fluidity of slavery in Dutch

society. Overall, the lack of a rigid racial hierarchy in New Netherland allowed for the Dutch to experiment with their use of slave labor and ultimately allowed greater privileges for the enslaved that were subsequently eliminated under the English.

The last third of the seventeenth century was a crucial transformation period in English New York which saw New York City begin its transition into a slave society. The English amassed a larger, enslaved labor population which, in turn, necessitated stringent controls since servitude was to be a lifelong status. New Yorkers created a codified system to better help them control this increasing slave population. Ultimately, the more restrictive English slave codes prompted the enslaved to resist and rebel in New York City.

As the English continued to obtain more slaves from both the Caribbean and Africa, they had to continue to dismantle the system that the Dutch had created. Slave baptisms increased again but only once an English law stated that slaves could be Christianized. Slaves lost the freedom to find work and make money on their own. They also were prohibited from meeting with one another in groups. The slave class was growing in number and the greater restrictions to control the population were fuel for acts of rebellion. The various slave codes the English passed established that slaves were not to be treated as people, but property. As a result, they did not have any privileges and received harsh punishments if they violated any laws. By the mid-eighteenth century, there was a great deal of fear between English New Yorkers and slaves. Unfortunately, the English only treated slaves harsher out of fear of rebellion. New York remained a slave society and constantly feared another slave uprising until slavery was finally outlawed in 1827.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ The 1799 Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery stated that any child born to a slave after 1799 in New York would become free when males were 28 and when females were 25. Any slave born before 1799 had their status changed to indentured servant. Thus, by 1827, slavery was completely outlawed in New York as slaves had reached the required age for freedom. See New York State Archives, New York (State), Dept. of State, Bureau of

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