

Dispatches from New Amsterdam  
On Slavery and Christianity

Black Church Member

We were married in the Church. Many of our friends were, too. We have been baptized and so have our children. We have studied the bible, confessed our faith, and been admitted to Church as members. We must be treated like all other Christians. That means: “love your neighbor, be peaceable, turn the other cheek, forgive and forget, show mercy.”

White Church Member

You have to be Christian to testify in Court – the Burgomasters and Schepens aren't going to pay you any attention if you're not a Christian.

A Member of the Court

In the opening prayer of court, we ask God to help us “tell right from wrong, truth from lies,” to make fair and just decisions “to rich and poor, friends and enemies, and inhabitants and strangers alike, showing favor to none and taking gifts from none.” We ask that God keep our “hearts from greed,” to help us listen patiently, to take our work seriously, and to use the power he has given us “for the benefit of the authorities of the church, the protection of the good, and the punishment of the bad.”

On the Value of Slaves

Dutch West India Company Official

Negro slaves are a vital part of the colony. There are about a hundred here right now, owned by the Company. They are experienced laborers and do important and necessary work. They speak Dutch, Spanish, and Portuguese. The women cook and clean for Church and Company officials. The men work on construction projects, such as building and repairing Fort Amsterdam. They also cut timber, burn lime, clear and fence the land, work the soil and harvest the crops.

Dutch West India Company Official

Our slaves are valuable. Our privateers captured them on Spanish and Portuguese ships. Keeping slaves healthy and strong is expensive. They need food, clothing, a place to stay, and care when they are sick and old.

Dutch Farmer

I own a large plantation on Long Island, and it is my slaves who do most of the farming. They clear and fence the land, turn and cultivate the soil, and plant the seeds, weed the rows, and harvest the crops. My customers love the fruits and vegetables that they grow, and those crops bring me a good income.

Dutch Merchant

My trade in furs, groceries and dry goods, tobacco, wines and negro slaves has made me a wealthy man. Slaves are an important part of my business: people need their labor and I can make a good profit on their sale.

## On the Rights of Slaves

Slave

I can own property, earn money for my work, sign legal documents, sue others and be sued, and testify in court.

Slave

Slaves who commit crimes usually don't go to jail. Instead, the owner or overseer does the punishment. Slaves have only been brought to trial a few times, and those were for crimes that could be punished by hanging.

Slave

Once a white man who was a convicted felon hurt two slaves. The court decided that his punishment would be to take their place on the chain gang.

## On the Court: Crime & Punishment

Dutch Settler

Cases are heard in the Worshipful Court of the Schout, Burgomasters and Schepens: one schout, two burgomasters and five schepens. The members of court are usually patient and often lenient. They try to give people the chance to work things out. The court's punishments include fines, imprisonment, whipping, locking in the pillory, banishment from the city or province, or death. The court can only carry out the death penalty with the knowledge and consent of the director-general and council. Usually the death penalty is reduced to flogging, branding or banishment, or all three.

A Member of the Court

In court we try to do "what is best for the public good." We want keep the people unified, and do whatever we can to maintain the peace.

Cases

Slave

I heard of a case in which a white settler damaged the property of a company slave. The only witnesses were two other slaves. The settler was convicted and had to pay a fine.

Dutch Settler

There was a case of a young soldier, the brother of a Company official, who murdered another man. He was arrested and released on bail. He was sentenced to death but then acquitted. I think he got off because his brother was a Company official. But others think he was justified in his attack, and that's why he was acquitted.

Dutch Settler

I know of a woman who got a young girl to steal household goods from a shop. The woman made money by selling those stolen goods. She was convicted and banished from

the colony. But her husband begged the court to let her return. She was allowed to come back, as long as she promised follow the law.

#### Dutch Settler

There was a Company cadet who was accused of receiving some stolen goods from a soldier. His sentence was stripping of his arms and permanent banishment from the colony. But the punishment was never carried out.

#### Dutch Settler

A man was arrested for theft. He admitted that he had been stealing and storing stolen goods for seven or eight years. He was sentenced to public whipping at the stake and banishment for twenty-five years. But because he was from a good family, the sentence was changed. First it was reduced to whipping in a private room, costs of the trial, and banishment for ten years. Later it was reduced even further just to banishment.

(Mocument created by Cory Munson)