Roots of Orange: A Comparative Study of the Cape Settlement and New Amsterdam

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Abstract

This paper argues that while there were differences in the formation of the Cape settlement and New Amsterdam, there are similarities that are of importance. In the course of arguing this point, the question of just how similar the Cape Colony was to the settlement of New Amsterdam is addressed.

Introduction

It was March of 1771. Captain James Cook’s ship, *Endeavor*, limped towards the Cape of Good Hope. Cook’s ship had been badly damaged after a near wreck off the coast of Australia. To make matters worse, his crew was suffering from malaria, scurvy, and dysentery after their time spent at Batavia, the capital and crown jewel of the far-flung empire controlled by the Dutch East Indies Company.¹ Luckily the Captain was able to guide his ship to safety, anchoring in Table Bay just offshore from the city of Cape Town.² Cook was greeted warmly by Governor Joachim van Plettenberg, who provided accommodations for the crew in what Cook described as “a great house.”³ The men who had fallen ill were brought ashore and slowly regained their strength due to the favorable climate and improved diet. Cook recalled in his journal that the

³ Bradlow, 36.
Cape produced meat, butter, and wine - the last of which rivaled what was produced in Europe. He also noted that the Cape boasted many luxury goods that could be acquired more cheaply than they could be in Europe. However, he did note that the naval stores, which were monopolies of the Dutch East Indies Company (also known as the V.O.C.), charged a much higher price for their wares.⁴

At the time of Cook’s arrival, Cape Town was, far and away, the largest Dutch settlement on the Cape. It was the site of nearly one thousand brick buildings, all with thatched roofs that were built surrounding the canal that ran through the city and acted as a main street. Cook’s journal is rather laconic in relation to other aspects of Cape Town except for his mention of northwest winds which frequently hindered ships from leaving the harbor. However, Cook did characterize the colony as “one great Inn fitted up for the reception of all comers and goers.”⁵

After Cook’s crew recuperated, and repairs to the Endeavor were completed, Cook set off for England.⁶ However, Cook’s emergency stop in the spring of 1771 was not to be his final trip to the Cape. He returned in July of 1772, during his second voyage, and again in June of 1776 while on his third venture. During Cook’s second voyage, the artist William Hodges painted a scene of Table Bay from aboard ship as the view from shipboard had become a common subject for artists on account of its natural beauty. Dutch artist Aernout Smit produced one of the earliest paintings of Table Bay which captures the settlement in its infancy (Image 1).⁷ Sadly, Cook’s 1776 visit was to be his last as he was killed in the Sandwich Islands (now Hawaii) 1779. On the trip back to England, his crew returned to Cape Town and discovered that news of Cook’s death had “brought dismay” to several of the Captain’s friends, chief among them being Governor van

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⁴ Bradlow, 36-37.  
⁵ Bradlow, 35.  
⁶ Bradlow, 37.  
⁷ Aernout Smit, Table Bay 1683, William Fehr Collection, Cape Town.
Plettenberg who “had a great personal affection for Cook.”\textsuperscript{8} While the journal of Captain Cook was intended to be a simple log of encounters and events, the theme of the corporate nature of the Cape appears in his depiction of the colony and his record of what transpired from 1771 to 1776. The cheaper food prices, and Cook’s feeling that Cape Town was an “Inn” all point to the commercialized nature of the colony and its true purpose. The monopoly and price increase that Cook noted in the V.O.C. naval store also point to the commercial focus of the colony.

Cape Town, though, was not the sole Dutch colony with this primarily mercantile focus. Nearly one hundred twenty years before Captain Cook first arrived in Cape Town, the Dutch established the settlement of New Amsterdam as the capital of the territory of New Netherlands in North America. New Netherlands stretched from the Delaware River to the Hudson River, and then to the Connecticut River—a huge expanse many times larger than the Netherlands itself.\textsuperscript{9} While New Amsterdam did not yet possess the geographic advantages Cape Town did to make it an inn, tapping into the fur trade proved quite lucrative, drawing Dutch investors in the colony’s early years. In 1621, the Dutch West Indies Company was created which operated as the state-sponsored monopoly in New Netherlands, much like the V.O.C. at the Cape. Eventually, as a attempt to make the fur trade more lucrative, the company gave up its monopoly in 1640 and encouraged private investment. After a tumultuous period characterized by wars with Native Americans and then the English, New Amsterdam saw a trade boom in the 1650’s in foodstuffs, fur, tobacco, and slaves, making the colony quite wealthy. The Dutch also attempted to emulate the English model of colonization in North America, in that they funded the voyage of religious minorities’ trips to the settlement in exchange for their labor upon arrival. Chief among these

\textsuperscript{8} Bradlow, 39.
\textsuperscript{9} Dennis J Maika, "New York Was Always a Global City: The impact of World Trade on Seventeenth-Century New Amsterdam," \textit{OAH Magazine of History} 183 (April 2004), 44.
groups was the Walloons, who established Fort Orange for the purposes of entering into the fur trade. This was a strategy employed by the company to strengthen Dutch claims to the land as the English had already established several colonies in North America, and a confrontation over land claims seemed probable. While the circumstances in New Amsterdam differed greatly from the Cape, at the core the main aim of the Dutch colonial efforts in these two regions were the same: to make money.

This paper argues that while there were differences inherent in the formation of the Cape settlement and New Amsterdam, there are fundamental similarities that are of even greater importance. These similarities are not limited to the period of Dutch rule, however, as the culture and practices established by the Dutch persisted into the era of British control and even after. In the course of arguing this point, the question of just how similar the Cape Colony was to the settlement of New Amsterdam will be addressed. On the surface, both colonies shared many similarities. First, their initially economic focus shifted to incorporate other goals. They were organized by the Dutch East India Company and the Dutch West India Company, respectively, both of which acted as state sponsored, for-profit, corporate monopolies. Both colonies eventually became incorporated into the British Empire, as the overseas fortunes of the Dutch waned. Other questions that will be addressed include how the Dutch approached the practice of colonialism; specifically, how the Dutch colonial corporations managed the Cape and New Amsterdam. Were there different attitudes, approaches, and goals of the Dutch East India Company, as opposed to its western counterpart? Also, in what ways did the Dutch approach interactions with the native populations? The scope of this essay will not adhere to a strict

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timeframe, nor will it be organized chronologically; instead a thematic approach will be used to explore these two colonies in part because, even though the Cape Colony was taken over by the British in 1795 and New Amsterdam much earlier, in 1664, the legacy of both of these colonies’ Dutch origins continued to be important. Analysis will begin with the Dutch presence in Africa and the so-called New World of North America. Most of the attention will be given to the period when the Cape settlement and New Amsterdam were under direct Dutch control then the legacy of the Dutch origins for both Cape Town and New York will be addressed.

This essay acknowledges the multitude of scholars who have explored the topic of colonialism in both the Americas and Africa. John Thornton’s *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World* discusses the methods and approaches European nations took when exerting their colonial power. One chief difference Thornton observes between European interactions in Africa versus the New World was the acquiescence to native political systems in Africa while, by contrast, Europeans operated without concern for existing political structures in the New World. In other words, Thornton claims that Europeans operated a “two wing system.”\(^1\)\(^2\) The African wing of Europe’s “triangle trade” was concerned primarily with acquiring goods, particularly gold and slaves; in order to finance individual voyages, European ships traded when they were able to and raided when they were not. On the other hand, Thornton describes the “Atlantic wing” or American wing as more concerned with extracting valuable natural products and looking for exploitable land in which to establish European systems of agriculture and mining. What is central to Thornton’s claims is the economic motivation at the heart of all European expansion.\(^1\)\(^3\)

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\(^2\) Thornton, 28.
Another author who has employed this comparative method is George Fredrickson in his book *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American & South African History*. Fredrickson begins his work with a brief overview of the Dutch in South Africa as well as the policies of the Dutch East India Company and its interactions with the native South African population. Fredrickson notes that the similarities between the United States and South Africa become more pronounced over time; his work outlines the earliest period of Dutch occupation, in both New Amsterdam and the Cape.\(^1^4\) However, this linear progression is too simple a model to do either city justice. Those in charge of Cape Town and New Amsterdam faced different circumstances and their responses to them were varied and contingent. At some points, the two colonies seem quite similar and at others differences were quite pronounced. The pattern was not divergent evolution but instead policy makers responding to various situations in order to achieve the goals of the colony.

Eric Jay Dolin’s *Fur, Fortune, and Empire: The Epic History of the Fur Trade in America* looks at America’s early history through the lens of the fur trade. Dolin argues that the “relentless pursuit of furs left in its wake a dramatic, often tragic tale of clashing cultures, fluctuating fortunes, and bloody wars.”\(^1^5\) Taking this economic approach Dolin makes the convincing argument that fur “determined the course of empire” and led, for instance, to the Dutch being expelled by the English from New Amsterdam in 1664.\(^1^6\) These claims attribute a great importance to the fur trade but Dolin is correct in his assessment of the importance of wealth in dictating Europeans’ colonial actions. In the case of the Dutch settlement of New

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\(^{1^5}\) Dolin, xvi.

\(^{1^6}\) Dolin, xvii.
Amsterdam, economics were central and, hence, are critical to understanding the history of Dutch motivations for colonization.

**Why the Dutch Sought Colonies**

Chronically on the edge of their ability to feed their population on account of a shortage of farmland the Dutch people looked elsewhere in order to obtain the resources the nation needed. Late in the Middle Ages the Dutch started to capitalize on the wealth the sea held. With the discovery that herring could be salted, preserved, and sold throughout Europe, the fishing industry boomed as much of the early wealth of the nation was made from herring fisheries. This was the first time in their history that the Dutch had a surplus commodity that they could trade for other goods that they themselves could not produce.\(^\text{17}\) Additionally, the wealth of the fishing industry led to the state financing warships to protect this newfound source of wealth. Merchant ships were taxed in order to finance the navy that, in turn, built the Dutch the ships they needed to eventually become one of the preeminent naval powers in the world.\(^\text{18}\) The geography and the culture of the Netherlands and her people forced the Dutch to focus on economic matters when they came into contact with other peoples.

While the Dutch were not the first or last among European powers to attain wealth through mercantilism and colonialism, their colonies had a singular economic focus. The herring fisheries were only the beginning, and served to whet the appetite of the Dutch people for international trade. Eventually, Dutch merchants traded in more valuable goods, such as silk and spices, which were much more lucrative than salted herring. The desire for more lucrative trade

\(^{17}\) Masselman, 12.  
\(^{18}\) Masselman, 13.
led Dutch merchants farther and farther in search of wealth.\textsuperscript{19} A poem written by the Dutch writer Vondel in 1639 captures this spirit of Dutch entrepreneurship and wanderlust: “Wherever profit leads us, to every sea and shore, for love of gain, the wide world’s harbours we explore.”\textsuperscript{20}

**Dutch Goals in New Amsterdam**

This quest overseas in search of trade led the Dutch to establish a multitude of colonies at the turn of the seventeenth century. The Dutch were following the successes of Iberians in both the Americas and the East. New Amsterdam was established in 1625 as small trading post at the mouth of the Hudson River with a population reaching 1,000 by 1656 and 1,500 by 1664.\textsuperscript{21} During this period, New Amsterdam was under company rule, which created a community with unique characteristics. The Dutch West Indies Company was one of the largest European trading companies in the seventeenth century. With headquarters in Amsterdam, it was primarily concerned with managing the African slave trade from which it derived most of its wealth. The colony of New Netherlands was just one of the company’s many holdings, however; the company’s directors maintained close supervision of New Amsterdam. For the life of the colony there was a military garrison and an African slave labor force under direct company control.\textsuperscript{22} The directors were subservient to the main company office in Amsterdam and, even with the limited nature of seventeenth century communication, regularly deferred to the headquarters in Amsterdam. Even though company administrators were tasked with overseeing much more than

\textsuperscript{19} Masselman, 15.
\textsuperscript{22} Goodfriend, 9.
simply the economic aspects of the colony, economic success was the company’s main concern.23

While the company’s main concern may have been economic, what can be said of the Dutch settlers at New Amsterdam? When the English invaded the New Netherlands in 1664 a group of Dutch men petitioned the director-general of New Amsterdam asking him to surrender the city without a fight due to the might of the English. Looking at the occupation records for the 222 men who petitioned the director-general in 1664, one finds a remarkable diversity in occupation among the residents of New Amsterdam, although the petition the three largest groups as merchants (10%), maritime occupations (10%), and retailers (6%). Occupations such as soldiers, farmers, and skilled tradesman pale in number to those involved in maritime trade.24 These figures suggest a large number of merchants among the population of New Amsterdam in 1664, although only the occupations of those men who petitioned for capitulation are represented. This may seem like a problem, as those with property or wealth would naturally want to capitulate to the invaders in an effort to protect their assets from the destruction of warfare. Yet with a total European male population of 315 in 1664 the petition represents a majority of the European male population. So while the company was certainly concerned with maritime trade the occupation data suggests New Amsterdam’s settlers were focused on trade as well.

While the tax records and occupation data show New Amsterdam was a small trading town under company rule with a large merchant population, there was another factor that characterized the makeup of the colony. In 1626 the colony had been established for a year and a half. The site that had been chosen for the colony was described as by one settler as quite

23 Goodfriend, 8.
24 Goodfriend, 19.
agreeable saying, “we would not wish to return to Holland, for whatever we desire in the paradise of Holland, is here to be found.”\textsuperscript{25} The Dutch originally settled on Manhattan Island but later established New Amsterdam at the mouth of the Hudson River. The selection of this location was due to the sheltered harbor and Hudson River which made transportation inland much easier.\textsuperscript{26} The colony instantly became quite prosperous in its first year and a half. To show the company their success they sent a ship back to Amsterdam to inform the administrators that they had a successful harvest. This ship was carrying 7,246 beaver skins, 853 otter skins, 48 mink skins, 36 wildcat skins, 33 minks, and 34 rat skins. This ship load, when seen conjunction with the 4,000 beaver skins sent in 1624, and the 5,000 more which would be sent in 1627 shows to what degree the Dutch were committing themselves to the fur trade.\textsuperscript{27} If the number of pelts left any question as to the colony’s purpose, the seal of the colony was emblazoned with the image of a beaver in the center (Image 2).\textsuperscript{28} The beaver is ringed with a wampum belt which was a prized trade commodity among Native American societies. When compared to other company seals, such as the Massachusetts Bay Company seal, the Dutch seal makes no reference to religion or Native Americans; it is simply concerned with material trade goods (Image 3).\textsuperscript{29}

**Dutch Goals at the Cape**

The Dutch settlement at the Cape had similarly humble origins and economic focus. Crucially, though, the Dutch colony of Cape Town did not have the established network of trade that the fur trade offered New Amsterdam. Instead, what it lacked in a single lucrative trade good

\textsuperscript{25} Quoted in Dolin, 34.
\textsuperscript{26} Dolin, 33.
\textsuperscript{27} Dolin, 34.
or superb harbor, it more than made up for in its advantageous location. The Dutch history in the Cape was built on the failure of the Portuguese and destruction of the Spanish trade empires. In 1585, the northern Dutch states rebelled against Spanish rule under Phillip II and his attempt to re-impose Roman Catholicism in the region. The southern states in the region--Belgium, Luxembourg, and French Flanders--remained Catholic while the northern states rallied around the leadership of Holland and formed a new independent nation. Called the War of Independence, the Dutch fared well at sea against their Spanish enemy. The Dutch fleet, under the command of Admiral Jacob van Heemskerk defeated the Spanish Armada in 1607 at the Battle of Gibraltar. The naval success provided Dutch merchants a shield to expand their trade network. Just as Dutch fortunes seemed to be on the rise, the Portuguese overseas empire was foundering after Portugal was annexed by Spain in 1580. The Dutch pushed Portugal out of many of its holdings in the Indian Ocean through a combination of strong-arm diplomacy and force when necessary. Access to Table Bay was one of the many spoils of war the Dutch won from the Iberians, which became valuable for its geographic location.

As Captain Cook recorded, the Cape was “one great Inn fitted up for the reception of all comers and goers.” The Cape was originally used by the Dutch as a needed rest stop for their ships making two-year roundtrip from the Netherlands to India and Asia and back; hence, the Cape colony was frequently the only stop these ships would make both coming and going. In 1652, the Dutch East Indies Company sent a group of Dutch colonists to the Cape with the orders to establish a small trading post on the shores of Table Bay. The plan was similar to the

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31 Welsh, 11.
32 Welsh, 13.
33 Bradlow, 35.
establishment of New Amsterdam in that the goal was for the settlement to remain small and obtain the goods their ships required from the native South Africans, known as the Khoikhoi, ideally through trade. The chief goods the Dutch were interested in, at this early stage, were firewood, bread, vegetables, and wine—all of which, it was reasoned, could be produced more efficiently or purchased for a lower price in South Africa than in the Netherlands. However, due to the number of ships passing through the Cape, and the refusal or inability of the KhoiKhoi to supply the meat and agricultural products the sailors required, the company decided to expand the trading post colony.\textsuperscript{34} The process of acquiring farmland for the colony drove the KhoiKhoi out of the region and the conflicts that arose out of this decision plagued the colony for the rest of its history. This newly conquered land was put into production by the Dutch colonists and, as Cook recorded, produced meat, butter, and wine which rivaled what was produced in Europe.\textsuperscript{35}

Additionally, just like New Amsterdam, the dominant aspect of Cape Town under Dutch control was the ever-present shadow of company rule. However, the nature of the colony was slightly different from the New Amsterdam colony, which focused on exploitation of the fur trade while Cape Town focused on reducing the cost of Dutch voyages to India and Asia. While this may seem like a minor difference in the economic strategy of the two colonies, it led to very different approaches being taken by the two companies. Upon first landing in 1602, the Dutch quickly plant all manner of fruit trees at the Cape. Unlike the poor conditions present in the Netherlands, the climate of the Cape proved advantageous for arboriculture. These fresh fruits and vegetables were vital for crews who, like Cook’s crew, suffered from scurvy and malnutrition after the many months spent at sea. Due to the limits in technology for preserving

\textsuperscript{34} Robert Ross, \textit{Concise History of South Africa} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 21-22.

\textsuperscript{35} Bradlow, 36-37.
food, the Cape became a vital refreshment station for ships traveling between Europe and the East.\textsuperscript{36}

The geographic location and differing climate from northern Europe allowed the V.O.C. new options in agriculture for reducing the cost of their voyages. Dutch ships required a large amount of provisioning in order to make their long trips to Asia and one of the chief foodstuffs that they required was olive oil. Given the climate and nature of the Netherlands, the Dutch were unable to produce this resource for themselves. With the Ottoman Empire solidly in control of large sections of the Mediterranean coast, where olives could be grown, the Dutch turned to the Portuguese in order to provide their fleet with the oil it needed.\textsuperscript{37} However, the Portuguese were not staunch supporters of the Dutch due to their strong-armed tactics that pushed the Portuguese out of many of their holdings in Asia.

This lack of a good source of olive oil led the V.O.C. to attempt to establish olive plantations at the Cape. However, the venture ultimately resulted in failure as the established olive producing regions in Europe produced oil much more efficiently and cheaply than the Dutch farmers at the Cape could.\textsuperscript{38} Also the V.O.C. provided no incentives for farmers to produce olives, and as a result, the Dutch farmers stuck to raising cattle and foodstuffs they were more accustomed to cultivating.\textsuperscript{39} Even though the venture by the V.O.C. failed to challenge Iberian or Mediterranean olive growing industries, this failed ploy demonstrates the purpose of the Cape colony. The settlement’s primary goal was to make money. Whether it was through reducing the cost of Dutch voyages east or by charging English, French, or Danish sailors for

\textsuperscript{36} Callaghan, 39.
\textsuperscript{37} Callaghan, 40.
\textsuperscript{38} Later in the Cape’s history a very profitable wine industry emerged due to the Mediterranean climate present on the southwestern coast of the Cape. See Ross, 6.
\textsuperscript{39} Callaghan, 44.
provisions, lodging, and ship repairs it is clear the colony was established with economic goals in mind.

While the failed venture of olive growing at the Cape demonstrates that the Dutch did not achieve success with every aspect of the colony, other European powers saw the Cape as a source of riches. This perception was reinforced by the conflicts that arose over control of the region. Passing from Portuguese to Dutch and then into English hands, it was believed that whoever controlled the Cape had a monopoly on the maritime trade between Europe and Asia.40 While the Dutch discovered that securing the Cape did not guarantee a trade monopoly, the perception of the Cape as the gateway to eastern riches persisted in the mind of Europeans. This perception was enhanced by European failures to discover the fabled North-West passage to the East through North America, and the difficulty in navigating the Straights of Magellan around the southern tip of South America. An example of the value that European powers placed on the location of the Cape can been seen from French actions under Henry IV and his plan to acquire the Cape from the Dutch. In 1608 Henry IV issued an edict calling for the “conquest of the lands at the Cape of Good Hope and surrounding area, giving permission to this effect to assemble the crew required for this voyage, to carry out attacks and found settlements in these places.”41 The French were latecomers to the colonial scene in the East. They competed with the English and Spanish in the Americas and Caribbean but never seriously threatened Dutch, English, or Portuguese power in Asia. Henry IV’s edict demonstrates the view that the Cape was the lynchpin to eastern trade. This edict, in conjunction with the continual struggle by European

41 *Henry IV 1608 Edict.* Quoted in Delmas, 123.
powers to secure control of the Cape, betrays Europe’s main desire for the region and shows the wealth the colony could generate through its role as a way-station for ships headed to the East.

**Dutch Interactions with Native Peoples**

While the Dutch settlers in both New Amsterdam and Cape Town operated in different manners, their approach to the native populations surrounding their settlement bears several similarities. In New Amsterdam the original Dutch settlement at the mouth of the Hudson River brought prosperity to some native communities and ruin to others. The nature of the fur trade made Dutch partnerships with Native American communities vital. The Dutch settlers were too few in number and the generally too inexperienced to meet the demands for the European fur market. Additionally, the nature of the fur trade made the implementation of slave labor impossible resulting in the small number of slaves brought to New Amsterdam. Farther south in England’s North American colonies, the plantation agriculture system “allowed” the English to dispossess Native Americans of their land and to use African slaves for labor. The fur trade, by contrast, required Native American expertise and the preferred method of acquiring beaver furs was through trapping. Trapping was undertaken by small groups of men who traveled to an area and check on traps that had been previously set. This made the implementation of slave labor impractical as the wilderness the beaver called home left ample opportunities for slaves to escape. The Native American communities were often settled closer to beaver habitats and due to their experience in trapping or hunting beaver long before Europeans arrived, the Dutch resorted to trade with Native American groups rather than conquest as did the French, further north, in what now is called Canada but was claimed as New France by the French. 

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42 Dolin, 26-28.
While the Dutch at New Amsterdam engaged in trade with some Native American groups, other native communities were destroyed. The destruction of native communities seems to be tied to their proximity to the Dutch settlement as the two bands living on Manhattan were driven inland. The Rechgawawanc occupied the northern portion of the island while the Canarsee dwelt on the southern portion. Both groups were branches of the Algonquin family and spoke similar dialects. The two groups were destroyed in Kieft’s War, which lasted from 1643 to 1646 and marked the high point in Dutch aggressions toward Native Americans. By 1664, when the colony fell to the British, there were no nearby Native American groups that posed a threat to the colony.

However, outright destruction of native groups was not characteristic of the Dutch settlement at New Amsterdam, well aware of their reliance on trade with Native Americans in order to make a profit. While many authors have argued that the fur trade was destructive towards native societies, this was not always the case. While staying with an Algonquin tribe in Canada, the French Jesuit priest Paul Le Jeune recorded the opinion of his host on the fur trade: “’The Beaver does everything perfectly well, it makes [can be traded for] kettles, hatchets, swords, knives, bread; and in short, it makes everything’… showing me a very beautiful knife, ‘The English have no sense; they give us twenty knives like this for one Beaver skin’.”

The fur trade provided both sides goods that they would have otherwise had a difficulty acquiring. For this reason, both sides believed they were getting the better deal from the ongoing trade. Native communities quickly realized the wealth they could obtain by dealing with Dutch fur traders and became fully invested in the trapping of pelt bearing animals. However, this new

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43 Goodfriend, 10-11.
44 Reuben Gold Thwaites, *Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France, 1610-1791*, vol. 6 (Cleveland: Burrows Brothers Company, 1897), quoted in Dolin, 28-29.
source of wealth forever changed Native Americans’ relationship to the beaver. As Paul Le Jeune’s host noticed, the beaver became a currency Native Americans could spend for European goods. For all intents and purposes, the Native Americans were customers of the Dutch merchants in the region and for this reason the Dutch violence towards Native Americans was rather rare. Incidents did occur, such as when a Dutch trader traveling the Connecticut River in 1622 took a Sequin chief hostage until a ransom was paid. Yet the majority of Dutch interactions with Native Americans were peaceful and operated within well-established native trade practices. The fur trade was as much diplomatic as it was economic and the Dutch, who felt threatened by the English expansion, were always eager for more allies. However, the scope of the fur trade led to a massive decline in the population of pelt bearing animals. This in turn created unforeseen problems with river ecosystems as beaver dams throughout the region were neglected.

In comparison, the Dutch actions toward the Khoikhoi at the Cape originally started out in a similar manner as they did with the Native Americans around New Amsterdam. As the main aim of the Cape settlement, in its early days, was to replenish the food stores of ships, they attempted to trade with the Khoikhoi for beef as well as other goods. Yet, unlike the Algonquin groups settled around New Amsterdam, the Khoikhoi proved unable or unwilling to provide the amount of food the Dutch wanted. This unwillingness to sell cattle to the Dutch stemmed from the fact that Khoikhoi people saw cattle as a status symbol. The result was the Dutch responding in the same way that they responded to the Rechgawawanc and the Canarsee: Two short wars against the Khoikhoi drove them from the lands surrounding the Cape and allowed the

45 Dolin, 28-31.
46 Dolin, 36.
47 Ross, 10.
Dutch access to their lands, quickly put into agricultural production. However, after these short wars the Khoikhoi were not resigned to their fate and responded to Dutch aggression by launching guerilla attacks on the lands surrounding Cape Town, long after the Dutch thought themselves rid of Khoikhoi. In 1770 almost 400 Khoikhoi attacked farmlands in the Cape and, though eventually defeated, they succeeded in clearing all European settlers out of a large section of land north of the Cape.  

**Slaves and Slave Labor**

These wars with the Khoikhoi also resulted in the Dutch acquiring a large number of slaves and laborers, dependent on the Dutch for their existence. Due to the agricultural focus of the Cape colony, these slaves were often used for farm labor. Captain Cook’s diary makes note of the institution of slavery in that he attributes the quality food products to “the Dutch and their slaves.” Cook also remarked that if slaves were not continually “imported,” the Cape would have been one of the least populated regions in the world. These slaves Cook referred to were primarily imported from Madagascar. The need for the Dutch to import slaves shows the level of destruction the Dutch brought to the Khoikhoi, and the length they would go to to secure the Cape settlement’s profitability. The Rechgawawane, Canarsee, and Khoikhoi all stood in the way of Dutch profits and progress, therefore they were destroyed by the Dutch colonial governments. This destruction is an aspect of Dutch colonialism that should not be forgotten even though the New Amsterdam fur trade was for the most part peaceful. Peaceful trade between the Dutch and native communities only took place when native societies acquiesced to the Dutch economic system.

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48 Ross, 22.
49 Bradlow, 36.
50 Bradlow, 35.
Slavery was also brought to New Amsterdam by the Dutch, as the Dutch West Indies Company was a major player in the African slave trade. The company had always maintained a small garrison of soldiers, as well as slaves, which were primarily used for work on infrastructure projects or in the fields during the appropriate seasons. Due to the small population of New Amsterdam, slaves were increasingly used in the colony as the company allowed for the private ownership of slaves in addition to their own garrison. These slaves were almost exclusively Africans, who had been captured working aboard other European ships or imported by the company. While slaves were present at New Amsterdam the nature of the fur trade limited their usefulness and for that reason a limited number were brought to New Amsterdam.

In 1664 when the English gained control of the New Amsterdam colony there were 350 African slaves and 75 “free blacks” among the population. The English recorded a total population of 1,500 people. These numbers mean that Africans made up a quarter of New Amsterdam’s population in 1664. So while the fur trade may not have been an industry to which slavery was readily applicable, the Dutch were heavily dependent on slave labor in New Amsterdam—likely to offset their very small labor pool. Similarly in the Cape, with the expulsion of the Khoikhoi, the option of relying on trade for agricultural products evaporated. The Dutch were then forced to supplement their small labor pool with captured Khoikhoi slaves as well as further importation of labor from Madagascar and, later, the Dutch East Indies. In both colonies the lack of a surplus of Dutch settlers necessitated the use of slave labor. Eventually, both colonies relied on West African slavery to remain profitable and maintain the infrastructure of the colony.

52 Goodfriend, 13.
In New Amsterdam in 1698, looking at the wealthiest individuals in terms of property, the top 10 percent of New Amsterdam was comprised of 25 men. Out of these 25 men at least 14 were slave owners, or 56 present. Dutch reliance on slave labor carried over into the period of English rule and became characteristic of New York’s early history. In 1698 the number of slaves is estimated to be almost 700 or 14 percent of the city’s population. A law passed by the Common City Council of New York in 1683-1684 barred people of African descent from driving any cart or being employed as a carman, resembling a Dutch law in the Cape restricting skilled labor professions to whites. The history of racially discriminatory legislation in New York, inherited from New Amsterdam, resembles Cape Town’s laws in that both areas limited the occupations open to former slaves.

**Conclusions**

The Dutch actions at the Cape as well as in New Amsterdam highlight several underlying similarities between the two colonies. The first is that, due to the dearth of resources in the Netherlands, the Dutch were drawn from early on to seek the resources they required overseas. Starting with the fisheries off their own coast and then expanding to tap into the fur trade in the Americas and the spice and cloth trade in the East, it was the lack of resources that drove Dutch colonialism. This scarcity in their homeland was pervasive through Dutch culture and colored their goals in their colonial ventures. Unlike the English, who strove to establish colonies for their surplus population, or the Spanish who conquered large territories in the quest for gold and silver, the Dutch attempted a different method. With small colonies and outposts the initial aim

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53 Goodfriend, 63.
54 Goodfriend, 64.
55 Ross, 156.
of the Dutch was to trade with locals for resources that could be sold for a profit back in Europe, not unlike the French. The desire to increase their wealth through trade and small settlements is apparent both at New Amsterdam and Cape Town.

Differences between the Cape and New Amsterdam arose because the fur trade industry and the production of agricultural products were different. This differentiated the two colonies. Yet, similarities are present again when one looks at Dutch interactions with native populations. John Thornton’s model presented in *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World* seems to be contradicted by the Dutch colonial experience. The interaction with the Khoikhoi and the Algonquin goes against Thornton’s claim that Europeans worked with native political systems in Africa while they operated without concern for existing political structures in the New World.⁵⁷ The opposite pattern seems to emerge as the Dutch attacked, enslaved local Khoikhoi, and stole their cattle while they were forced to trade with Native Americans for the pelts they desired. Eric Jay Dolin’s argument in *Fur, Fortune, and Empire: The Epic History of the Fur Trade in America* seems to hold up as the fur trade was the life blood of New Amsterdam, just as the trade route to the East provided the wealth for the Dutch at the Cape.⁵⁸

The final similarity between these two colonies, ironically, is the degree to which Dutch culture survived after Dutch political control was lost to the British Empire. This conquest occurred in 1664 for New Amsterdam and 1795 at the Cape; however, the settlers of Dutch descent did not disappear. Furthermore, Dutch culture persisted and the English, realizing the strength of Dutch culture, decided to allow it to remain in place both in New York but especially in the Cape Colony. Differences arose in magnitude when one looks at the number of English settlers. New England was conquered much earlier than the Cape and this resulted in a larger

⁵⁷ Thornton, 28.
⁵⁸ Dolin, xiv.
number of English settlers in America than in the Cape. Yet even though the Dutch political institutions were replaced, the cultural institutions actually gained strength as Dutch settlers now saw themselves as oppressed by English rule. While the Dutch influences on the Cape were stronger than in New York, up until the turn of the eighteenth century people of Dutch heritage comprised a slight majority of New York City’s population.\(^{59}\) This survival of Dutch culture had a profound impact on the history of both regions as well, the most visible the emergence of the Afrikaner identity and language, which led to their political hegemony in South Africa until the implementation of a full democracy in 1994.\(^{60}\) While New York City’s Dutch origins remained less visible over time, its commercial character resembled that of Cape Town, the commercial center of South Africa. Both cities, therefore, retained their “orange” roots in Dutch colonialism.

\(^{59}\) Goodfriend, 77.
\(^{60}\) Ross, 182.
Bibliography


Smit, Aernout. *Table Bay 1683*. William Fehr Collection, Cape Town.


Images

Image 1:

Aernout Smit, *Table Bay 1683*, William Fehr Collection, Cape Town.


Image 3: