The Enlightenment, Christianity and the Suriname Slave

GERT OOSTINDIE

Explaining abolition has long been a central concern in the historiography of the Americas.* Not so for the Dutch Caribbean, where the ending of the slave trade was imposed by the British and where slave Emancipation came late but apparently undisputed. Perhaps the belatedness of Emancipation was the most remarkable fact about it. The Dutch government accepted the inevitability of the ending of slavery only in the 1840s; and even then little progress was made. By 1861, two years before Emancipation, the Dutch historian Wolbers scorned the lukewarm abolitionists for having forsaken the noble cause. Slavery was still a reality. Yet the abolitionists now slumbered, self-congratulatory for once having contributed to the good cause and deaf to "the shrill cries of the tortured slaves [as] it became so tedious to hear time and again of those negroes living so far away."¹ Subsequently historians have consistently remarked on the absence of a passionate public debate on abolition in the Dutch world. David Brion Davis summed it up with the cursory remark that Dutch Emancipation was "businesslike."²

The question then seems to be not as much why the Dutch abolished the slave trade and slavery but rather, as Seymour Drescher rightly reformulates the issue in a recent paper, why so late and in so laggard a manner.³ Why was Dutch society, with its presumed conscience-stricken tradition of questioning the gathering and deployment of wealth, so little responsive to the abolitionist cause?⁴ Short of an immediate answer, suffice it to question here the notion of a chronic Dutch Emarrassment of Riches, and moreover to point out that the Dutch were not unique in their apathy. In the context of the times, the British rather than the other participants in the Atlantic slave system were the exception to the rule. And Britain provided the momentum in Dutch abolition by simply imposing the end of the slave trade at the closing of the Napoleonic wars; there was no serious public debate on this issue in the Netherlands.⁵ So arguably a study of Dutch decision-making could be confined to a study of the mid-nineteenth-century decades, as indeed most scholars have opted to do. Emancipation may
then be explained in the context of international pressure and the economic insignificance of the Dutch Caribbean to its metropolis. The timing may be related to the eventual emergence of a modest abolitionist lobby and, indeed businesslike, to rising income from the Dutch East Indies and the simultaneous substantial decrease in the number of slaves in the Dutch West Indies, a fortunate concurrence which helped the Dutch government to settle the compensation for the West Indian slave-owners.\(^6\)

This perspective is justified. Even so, one wonders about the development, if any, of Dutch colonial ideologies regarding slavery. Both Davis, in his monumental trilogy, and Gordon Lewis, in *Main Currents of Caribbean Thought*, virtually ignored Dutch and Dutch West Indian ideologies.\(^7\) This paper attempts to partly fill this gap through an analysis of the contemporary literature on the major Dutch Caribbean colony, Suriname. In discussing current justifications for slavery and particularly representations of the Suriname slave, I focus on the influence of the Enlightenment, Christianity, and the nature of "progressive" thinking.

The present overview cannot disclose a rich corpus of writings. This reading therefore largely confirms established notions about the paucity of Dutch and Dutch Caribbean dialogue. Even so, the prolonged absence of any serious abolitionist debates did not imply that the various discourses were static. As time progressed, and as some spokesmen thought of themselves as more humanitarian and forward-looking while others tried mainly to postpone Emancipation, they all developed definitions of slaves and of slavery, and attempted to open new fields of appropriation of the Suriname slave.

**SLAVERY AS A NON-PROBLEM IN THE DUTCH WORLD**

When the Dutch established commercial relations with Africa in the late 16th century, they were coming from a society where blacks were virtually unknown. Like the British who were equally unfamiliar with blacks, it took them only a few decades to establish a set of mostly negative representations of the African. Initially they attributed less importance to "blackness" and inherent inferiority as such, focussing on the presumed savagery of the African instead, with paganism and licentiousness as defining features.\(^8\) The subsequent involvement in the Atlantic slave trade and New World plantation economies soon induced Dutch spokesmen to use the whole panoply of justifications, including
heredity and innate abasement. Analysis of Dutch writings on these topics does not disclose arguments absent in discourse elsewhere in the Western world. In varying admixtures, blackness, paganism, brutality and sexual lasciviousness came to define the representation of the African, thus helping to justify the slave trade and slavery.

There was no denial of the humanity of the African; blackness however became associated with the curse of Noah falling against Ham and his descendants. The inferiority of the blacks was therefore somehow of God's making, and made it only logical that blacks served whites as slaves, even if slavery as such was not the natural condition of mankind. Enslavement by the Europeans moreover provided the Africans with an opportunity to escape the abasement and cruelty of their uncivilized continent; after all, most slaves sold to the slavers were bounties of war who otherwise would have been killed or abused by their African conquerors. Occasionally mention was made of enslavement as an avenue for Christianisation; yet in the Dutch world this argument never made it to the mainstream as it did in Catholic Europe. Finally an occasional author such as the medical doctor Gallandat, in his manual for slave traders, voiced the more down-to-earth justification:

I will only remark here that there are many occupations which would seem unjustified if they would not be of particular advantage. An argument here may be the Slave Trade, which should be acquitted of all unlawfulness solely because of the benefit it furnishes to the merchants.

Even if the profitability of the slave trade did not come anywhere near the exaggerated expectations, the slave trade continued, and all Dutch colonies in the Americas came to depend on slavery. Both institutions could count on the full support both of the Dutch state and of the religious authorities. By the late eighteenth century, some French and English anti-slavery tracts had been translated into Dutch, yet apparently these did not spark a following. An exhaustive study of Dutch literature discovered only a handful of authors speaking out against slavery up to the early 1790s.

How should we account for this lack of interest, which gives the Dutch a poor showing not only in comparison with the unique British case, but even with the French and the Danes? Some tangible factors may have kept Dutch public opinion from reconsidering. The West Indies' importance to the metropolitan economy was dwarfed by the East Indies, where slavery was insignificant. Perhaps this could have helped the Dutch to discard the institution; in practice, however, it
apparently led them to neglect the Caribbean colonies most of the time. The contrast with Britain is evident. Moreover, and probably working in the same direction, there was no black presence of any importance in the Netherlands.\textsuperscript{13} This too may have helped to postpone serious debates over slavery: the very subject was beyond the Dutch frame of reference. Finally, whereas in the eighteenth century Maroon wars had occasionally brought the colony into the spotlight, the nineteenth century was tranquil in terms of marronage and slave rebellions. Consequently, little reminded the Dutch of the reality of slavery in their realm.

But what about vital metropolitan interests or ideologies at stake? As Davis demonstrates, the international anti-slavery ideology derived from various sources.\textsuperscript{14} The often anti-clerical Enlightenment philosophers were crucial in opening the debate. However, the abolitionist movement derived much of its operational strength from fresh interpretations of Protestant Christianity. From the late-eighteenth century onwards, abolitionism gained further momentum through its inextricable connection with new notions of human progress, industrial capitalism, and economic liberalism.

These impetuses were weak in the Netherlands. The Dutch eighteenth century has traditionally been depicted as uneventful, and its cultural ambience as boring; the Dutch Enlightenment supposedly was flat, barely radical, and never far from the mainstream of the Dutch Christian tradition.\textsuperscript{15} A recent scholarly volume on the Dutch Republic in the eighteenth century succeeds in presenting a more nuanced picture—yet in spite of its debunking objectives, the overall impression remains such the same.\textsuperscript{16} In this context, it seems characteristic that in the 16 essays on the Dutch eighteenth century and Enlightenment, the issue of slavery is not raised even once. This oversights reflects the marginality of the issue in contemporary thought. At the same time, it demonstrates how little subsequent scholarship tends to take attitudes towards slavery as a significant yardstick to measure modernity in the Dutch world.\textsuperscript{17}

The establishment of the Batavian Republic (1795–1806) seemed to break with conservative political traditions. Yet the programme of its "radical" leadership fell short of radicalism regarding the colonies. There was no intention of genuine colonial reform. Even if the radicals had earlier applauded the American Revolution, they were not prepared to see the Dutch colonies as anything but subjected sources of metropolitan wealth. Slavery was virtually ignored. The initial 1796 and 1797 proposals for a new constitution did not even mention the slave trade or slavery itself. Prompted by a few radicals, the National
Assembly subsequently did appoint a committee to advise on these matters. The committee's report however was anything but abolitionist, and the 1798 Constitution did not consider abolition. In spite of its strong commitment to the French Revolution, the radical "Patriot" government did not even consider duplicating the short-lived French abolitionist policy. 18

If the Enlightenment did not provide a source of antislavery ideology, neither did religious dissenters. The Protestant Dutch Reformed Church with its dominance in Dutch society and politics remained silent until the 1850s. The influence of Catholicism was negligible. A substantial proportion of the Dutch population—if not of its political leadership—had remained Catholic after the hard-won struggle for independence from Catholic Spain in the mid-seventeenth century. Yet full Catholic emancipation was accomplished only in the late nineteenth century, and in this process the Catholic leadership had found no advantage in championing anti-slavery policies. 19 As neither denomination created significant dissenting offspring, the religious potential for abolitionism was far weaker than it had been in Britain. 20

What about industrial capitalist ideology? In its "Golden" seventeenth century, the Netherlands had been a pioneer capitalist state. Commenting on recent debates emphasising the role of a progressive capitalist mentality in the emergence of abolitionism, Drescher indicates precisely that the Dutch society should have been a case in point, but it failed to live up to the theory. 21 The implications of the Dutch case for this theoretical discussion are not my concern here. Yet it may well argued that the pioneering quality of Dutch capitalism had long passed by the early nineteenth century. In striking contrast to its major competitors, during the eighteenth century the commercial and industrial sectors of the Dutch economy actually declined somewhat in comparison to agriculture. 22 Moreover, the question remains whether the early Dutch mercantile capitalist spirit may be put on a par with the later British industrial capitalist esprit. In the Netherlands, significant new industrialisation came late, and so did the emergence of a class of clearly industrial capitalist orientation. If we may interpret liberal British support for abolition partly as an expression of optimism regarding Britain's industrial future, the lack of such support in the Netherlands may also reflect a profound pessimism on the perceived decline of the nation's economy.

Either way, much of what was becoming accepted modern ideology in England, and subsequently in France and the United States, remained far from the Dutch elite's mentality and from colonial ideology. Adam Smith, in Wealth of Nations (1776), may well have
argued for the economic inefficiency of slavery, hence suggesting that real progress even in the colonies was to be expected from the substitution of free labour for slavery; it took another half century before an isolated Dutch observer wrote on slavery in even remotely similar terms.23

In the first decades of the nineteenth century therefore, the intellectual climate in the Netherlands was hardly conducive to raising "modern" arguments against the established practice of slavery. Only by mid-century had the Dutch elites decided to finally abolish the peculiar institution. By then even the Dutch, struggling to modernise their state and to regain the prestige that had once characterised their nation, had succumbed to the "peer" pressure of more advanced European neighbours.24 In the modernising outlook, the project of regaining respectability and rejoining the concert of progressive nations of necessity implied the dismantling of Dutch West Indian slavery.

THE COLONIAL PERSPECTIVE

For the authors writing on the major Dutch West Indian colony, Suriname, the absence of a significant metropolitan discourse on slavery implied that there was no urgent need to justify the institution. In a way, this makes the literature more interesting. Not that it was of such remarkable quality. Lewis has argued that Caribbean society "was marked throughout by a spirit of cultural philistinism probably unmatched in the history of European colonialism," and that the "planter way of life [was] at once crassly materialist and spiritually empty."25 Suriname certainly seems a case in point. In the late 1770s, the Essai historique decried the colony's intellectual levels, while another author concluded that a man of letters was an exotic plant in Suriname.26 In the last decades of the eighteenth century, some "Enlightened" inspiration filtered through to Suriname, resulting in the formation of European-style debating clubs and projects to raise the deplorable educational standards of the colony. Yet slavery did not rank high—if at all—on an agenda which was primarily of a utilitarian character.27

With the significant exception of two major historical studies published by Hartsinck in 1770 and Wolbers in 1861, the bulk of the relevant literature was written by men with direct and often ongoing experience with Suriname slavery.28 Their writings expressed with some clarity the ambivalence of people dependent on persons to whom they had to deny their humanity. Their perspectives, however racist,
testified to a continuous need to come to terms with daily realities. With some justification, Suriname planters blamed metropolitan observers for not having the slightest idea of what life in the colony was all about. If only they knew what blacks were like . . .

What were they like, according to the colonial authors? Of course, the bottom line is that their opinions of the slaves were low. Even so, one observes an increasing differentiation, and an apparently sharp reorientation in the early nineteenth century. The original ideology as expressed in Herlein's Beschryvinge van Zurinamen (1718) held sway up to the early nineteenth century at least.29 "The blacks are more often malicious than of good character, [they are] resentful and obstinate, therefore they need to be castigated frequently." In terms of religion, nothing positive can be said: they are "heathen Slaves from the dynasty of Cham, [living] in a confused amalgam of feelings, buried in darknesses of ignorance, and curved alleys of innumerable fallacies." Experience had taught that it was of no use to Christianise these people; Herlein quoted a failed convert who explained "that her [Afro-Suriname] Religion is far more agreeable to the senses than the Christian [doctrines]; because those People [the Christians] are more pleased by fundamental arguments than by feelings of amusement which they despise [ . . .]." This slave was thus implicitly used to demonstrate the higher, and for blacks unattainable level of principle and abstraction found in the creed of the Dutch Reformed Church. Otherwise Herlein did not go into any detail to justify the slave trade or slavery, as he admitted some did; he did not fail however to provide citations from the Bible allowing for the use of heathen slaves Certainly the Suriname slave was no passive subject, as unfortunate uprisings had revealed. But with consistent and "righteous" rule ("neither too cruel, nor too lenient"), the slaves did accept their status.30

Over the next century and a half, some interpretations remained the same, others changed. "Righteous" or "just" rule continued to be thought of as the single most important planters' maxim—implying that the slaves would never rebel against slavery as such, but only against perceived infringements of a shared code of behaviour.31 The axiom apparently lost some of its respectability only by the nineteenth century, even if it remained an implicit assumption in proslavery writings. Few antislavery works addressed the theme explicitly, underlining that the abolitionist ideology was informed more by European discourses than by an awareness of Suriname realities, however defined.

Well-known stereotypes were replicated when it came to describing the Suriname slaves. Warren, in 1667, had them "naturally treacherous and bloody," Hartsinck, in 1770, was told that slaves were
mostly "very lazy, treacherous, cruel, given to theft, drinking and women." The best eighteenth-century planters' manual had them cheerful, proud, haughty, and resentful. Yet however denigrating or hostile, no author denied the essential humanity of the slave; the Christian dogma of the common origins of all mankind was upheld. Fairly soon, the rather casual justifications of slavery came to incorporate a time perspective. As Pistorius explained, Christian charity demanded "that we treat as humans the slaves, who are human beings too, and share with us the same Divine Being as their Creator, even though it has not yet pleased him to shine the holy light of the Gospel on them as he does on us."  

Yet when would the time be set for allowing the slaves to enjoy the fruits of Christianity? The colonists were notorious for disallowing any attempts to Christianise the slaves. Early on, Moravians had been given permission to spread the Gospel among the Amerindian and Maroon populations, but arguably an interest in pacifying these potentially dangerous outsiders served as the prime motivation here. Slaves were not included in the project. Reverend Kals, in the 1730s, had cried out in vain for spreading the Gospel and even his argumentation included the economic gains to be made. Sporadic metropolitan urgings to undertake Christianisation equally fell on deaf ears. In Suriname, one knew that attempting to christen the slaves was to cast pearls to swine. Hartsinck underpinned the superiority of creole over African slaves by affirming that the former were "more civilised, and are willing to confess that it was God who created all things and rules." Nonetheless, they "acknowledge that, being petty and sinful creatures, they cannot have access to that God." The slaves therefore inevitably stuck to their own superstitions. Fermin, a physician, argued for a measure of charity in dealing with "a folk that, even if born in slavery, nonetheless consists of humans just like us." Some slaves did qualify for Christianisation, he thought; but as this in his view would have to result in manumission, spreading the Gospel was not a viable strategy in Suriname. Besides, slavery provided the colonists with a rare opportunity to make fellow men happy.

Others were more outspoken. Blom summed up eighteenth-century wisdom by simply stating that all efforts at Christianisation were doomed to failure and should be discouraged:

The best Negroes for work are those living according to the Law or Religion of their ancestors, and who have not learned anything from us but working. They are never too stupid to work with the pickaxe and the shovel; and they way they live quietly, and are useful for a plantation.
Therefore, in a paradox not unfamiliar elsewhere in the Americas, the slaves' "paganism" was accepted as a major justification for slavery; at the same time it was argued that Christianisation, the one route to freedom, was premature. In addition, there was the more down-to-earth argument that without slavery, this colony could not exist.

**PREPARING FOR EMANCIPATION**

Throughout the eighteenth century, authors had commented on the nature of slavery in Suriname and on the character of the slave without a trace of doubt regarding the justification of the institution. Abolitionism was not even on the agenda. But in the nineteenth century, the abrupt ending of the slave trade and the growing awareness that slavery itself was under crucial attack impelled proslavery authors to be more explicit. As by the 1840s planters, travellers, politicians and lobbyists finally engaged in polemics, the debates also gained in authenticity. Old arguments were elaborated in a proslavery discourse which ended up struggling for postponement of the inevitable. The debate also provided an opportunity to establish what slavery had accomplished so far. The planters' lobby came to emphasise the civilising mission of slavery, mostly avoiding the question as to why slavery, by their own standards, so far had failed to do so. The most significant new element in their policy was a remarkable reversal in attitudes towards Christianisation—even if partly inscribed in the strategy of playing for time.

At the turn of the century, Stedman had confronted planter society with bitter accusations about its dehumanisation; it was not the slaves who should be described as animals. Even if rather than urging abolition he advocated amelioration of slavery, his views on "Africans" were relatively favourable. However, as Price and Price in the preface to their publication of the recently uncovered original 1790 manuscript demonstrate, the editor of the *Narrative* as it appeared in 1796 made sure to substitute denigration for appreciation. The bowdlerised edition of the *Narrative* therefore likens Maroon civilisation to African cultures and advances the alleged crudeness of both as an argument against premature abolition of the slave trade.37

Only a decade after the publication of the mutilated *Narrative* the slave trade was outlawed, but the same arguments served subsequent authors well to demonstrate that the abolition of slavery itself was premature. The barbarity or animality of the slaves remained a common
theme. The planters' organisation *Eensgezindheid* characterised the slaves as "Pagans and uncivilised people, mostly devoid of good mores or virtues: everything is inclined to barbarity." Hence, the necessity to rule by force. Similar arguments were still advanced as late as mid-century. Yet by then the mainstream argument was precisely that slavery should be held responsible for keeping the blacks from attaining full humanity.³⁸

The core attributes of the slaves as seen by most nineteenth-century authors were laziness and unreliability on the one hand, lasciviousness and the absence of an orderly family life on the other.³⁹ Abolitionists tended to blame these deficiencies on slavery, whereas proslavery ideology moved from the position that these were somehow innate characteristics to the affirmation that only further education through slavery could improve the slaves' ways. Whatever the explanations, the convergence was evident. The opinion of the slaves' actual capacities remained low on both sides. Hence most authors continued to think of immediate Emancipation as an irresponsible act.

In the search for ways to prepare the slaves for freedom, Christianisation came to be seen as the central means of socialisation. This was a remarkable shift, for as late as 1830 the missionary record was still confined to a century of mostly unsuccessful proselytising among the Amerindians and Maroons. The choice for Christianisation therefore was a significant innovation. At the same time, the change of policy was anything but straightforward. The initial pleas for spreading the gospel were strictly confined to the so-called "slaves' friends."⁴⁰ In the first "modern" critique of Suriname slavery, juxtaposing ideas echoing Adam Smith and a plea for Christianisation, Van Heeckeren scoffed at the planters' "incomprehensible obduracy" against the christening of the slaves. By the late 1840s the Moravian missionary Tank conceded that his brethren finally had access to a growing number of plantations. Yet his comments were biting: often the Moravians were only used "as an instrument, to keep the Negroes in submission and under coercion, as if one foresaw that the means of the whip once will be thought of as insufficient."⁴¹

This indeed is what the planter literature suggests. In the first decades of the century, christening the slaves was at best something for the future; even if subsequently such a policy became more accepted, many continued to deny its feasibility.⁴² The slaves continued to be depicted as barbaric; as "such an exceptional kind of people that in spite of the whip which never allows their backs to heal and in spite of the heavy labour, they will concede to the most aggressive whims if only the director allows them every two or three months an occasion for
dancing"; as sharing with the Indian the feeling that happiness equals doing nothing at all; as ignorant and animal-like; as ungrateful, stubborn, devoid of pride, childish, superstitious, and mendacious; as wild, too uncivilised to aspire for freedom, and actually benefitting from slavery under civilised Europeans; as mentally inferior and averse to civilisation; as "both morally and physically less sensitive [and] in everything exceptionally less accomplished than most Whites"; as lazy and childish; as understanding freedom as a condition of working little or not at all; as destined to relapse into an animal-like life if emancipated; as generally devoid of intelligence and virtue; as lascivious and prone to idleness; as "through a lack of education, lazy and indolent"; and as bound for degeneration after emancipation, as the examples of the free coloureds, the Maroons and the emancipated slaves of the British and French West Indies demonstrated. And so on, and so forth.44

One of the problems for the abolitionists was that they actually shared many of these assessments; the above collection of characterisations draws on both proslavery and antislavery writings. Devoted to high principles of natural freedom for all, the abolitionists nevertheless were skeptical about the use the freed slaves would make of Emancipation. They therefore came to stress the benefits of Christianisation not only for the slaves' spiritual salvation but also, and perhaps even more, as a means of changing their ways and thereby helping the plantation economy survive once slavery was abolished. The advantages of christening the slaves would be twofold. First, the continuous natural decrease of the slave population confronted the plantations with a slowly eroding work force. All agreed that the alleged lascivious life of the slaves—polygamy and venereal diseases were recurring themes—caused low levels of fertility. Christianisation implied imposing the norm of the monogamous nuclear family; hence, christening the slaves would result in improved demographic performance of the slaves and, after Emancipation, of the freed population. This policy was first voiced in 1828 by J. van den Bosch, a prominent advisor to the Dutch Crown sent out on a trouble-shooting mission to the colonies. It soon surfaces in many other works.45

Second, the upcoming Emancipation faced the planters as well as the colonial state with the agonising prospect of the freed slaves withdrawing their labour from the plantations—after all, they supposedly suffered from a stubborn leisure preference. Christianisation again would be useful here, helping the slaves to accept their fate and educating them to substitute a genuine work ethic for their actual indolence, thereby facilitating the transition from work dictated by the
whip to work guided by intrinsic motivation. As the "modern" analyst Van Heeckeren stated, Christianisation would not only improve family life and hence reproduction, but equally substitute "compliance with their fate [and] a better grasp of their duties" for their present "stupidity and beastly life style."46

The initial burden of Christianisation fell on the German Moravians, who since the 1730s had dedicated much effort and many brethrens' lives to missionary efforts in the colony. The results had been meagre, but they inspired confidence. As a Dutch Minister of Colonial Affairs summed it up in 1842, "they preach to the negro not only religion and morality, but also impress industry and obedience to the worldly authorities, and what is more, set the example."47 The Moravian brethrens indeed had attempted—up to the mid-century in vain—to enhance their acceptability by emphasising their "neutrality" in worldly affairs: neither in theory nor in practice did they oppose slavery. As late as 1848, the Moravian leader in Suriname reassured planters that their policy was guided by the axiom that

When the poor slaves patiently accept the roads whence God leads them, and when they do not complain about this and are complacent, then God will bless them for it and look upon the services that they perform obediently for you gentlemen [the planters] as if they therewith served Him.48

From this perspective, the prolonged planter resistance against Christianisation indeed testifies to an extremely short-term policy and an unwillingness to tolerate anything which might interfere with the established routines of plantation life.49

In the 1850s, the Moravians—or, in a few cases, Catholic missionaries—finally had access to all plantations. In theory, religious zeal, abolitionist ideology and sensible demographic and economic policy all converged in the effort of christening the slaves. In practice the results were often discouraging, confirming the suspicions of the stubborn proslavery party but equally, and more painful, the subdued apprehensions which the "slaves' friends" had felt all along. Teenstra, one of the leading abolitionists, roundly admitted to serious doubts as to the results of the Moravian missionary efforts; the slaves had hearts of stone, and generally were "very insensitive" and "not accessible for impressions of beauty and virtue." Two years before Emancipation, the abolitionist historian Wolbers wrote squarely about "the rigidity of their hearts, [...] the propensity to idolatry, [and] the frivolity that still so often surface in the Negroes."50
Indeed, in these last decades of slavery and those of the transition to free labour, Christianisation and the imposition of Western norms of respectability, family life and work ethic proceeded with less success than was hoped for.\textsuperscript{51} This period must have been agonising and disillusioning to many abolitionists, who had claimed the slaves would quickly internalise their standards of respectability. Applying the same yardsticks of civility, the ancient proslavery party must simply have found its pessimistic forecasts confirmed: the slaves had not yet been prepared for freedom.\textsuperscript{52}

**POST-EMANCIPATION AGENDAS**

Slavery never became a major issue in the Netherlands; neither did abolition, and one may want to argue that even Suriname itself seldom figured prominently in the Dutch public arena. Absentee owners might for a century or more have had part of their capital invested in Suriname slaves without even once raising a question regarding its moral justification, and get away with it without being frowned upon. Apparently, as late as the mid-nineteenth century the stain of slavery was easily overlooked.\textsuperscript{53}

In the end, the Enlightenment and the rise of "modernity" affected the Dutch attitude towards slavery and blacks remarkably little. The mainstream authors of the proslavery eighteenth century maintained that all mankind originated from the same God. Blacks were humans too, only inferior, indolent, unreliable and lascivious. In the nineteenth century, as abolitionism slowly gained the upper hand, both sides continued to think in much the same terms, only substituting more consistently the evolutionary "uncivilised" for "inferior." The most significant pre-Emancipation change was the embracing of Christianisation, a policy previously deemed useless. At first sight, it is difficult to perceive an ascendancy of Enlightened or modern ideologies here. In its contents, the new wave was a confirmation of traditional Christian values. But we may discern "modernity" in the application of this package deal of religious and social values to a new subject group: the novel approach was directly inscribed in a larger policy aiming at assimilating the future free population to European norms regarding work ethics and family life.\textsuperscript{54} The fact that initially the christening of the slaves was mostly relegated to a German missionary society again symbolises the lack of commitment in Dutch political circles, and even more so in public opinion.
Emancipation in 1863 was followed by a ten-year period of state supervision (Staatstoezicht), again following the British example, but stretching the period of bondage into the 1870s. Metropolitan and colonial observers measured the results by the same yardstick and were not pleased. The effort to transform the former slave population into a rural proletariat catering on a regular basis to the needs of the plantations failed in Suriname as it had elsewhere. By the late 1880s the plantation sector had come to rely primarily upon indentured labour from British India and the Dutch East Indies, and sugar production had plunged far below the output during slavery and the Staatstoezicht. Moreover, the attempt to discipline the former slaves' family life and to wipe out "paganism" seemed hopeless. The resilience of Afro-Suriname culture shattered the expectations of previous optimists, and only served to confirm the pessimism of others, both "progressives" and "conservatives."

These results could well have contributed to a subsequent rise of Dutch evolutionary, "scientific" racism regarding blacks as it did elsewhere.\(^5\)\(^5\) That this was hardly the case should probably be explained by the fact that the Netherlands did not partake in the fin-de-siècle scramble for Africa, and more particularly to the remoteness of Africa, Afro-America, and blacks from the public mind.\(^5\)\(^6\) Meanwhile, Dutch colonial rule in Suriname continued the new policy of assimilation, attempting to socialise an increasingly pluralistic population to Dutch standards of respectability.

NOTES

* This article is a revision of a paper first presented to the 24th Conference of the Association of Caribbean Historians, in Nassau, The Bahamas, 1992. Seymour Drescher, Pieter C. Emmer, Sidney W. Mintz, Richard Price, and Tracey Thompson kindly criticised the earlier version. The writing of this paper was facilitated by a Fulbright Research Fellowship, awarded by the Council for the International Exchange of Scholars, Washington, D.C.

1. J. Wolbers, Geschiedenis van Suriname (Amsterdam, 1861,) 746.


5. From 1804 to 1816, as a consequence of the Napoleonic wars in Europe, the British occupied the Dutch colonies. The British abolition of the slave trade (1807) applied to the occupied territories as well. This abolition was sanctioned in 1814 and again in 1818.

6. A useful summary of abolition may be found in Emmer, "Anti-slavery," Alex van Stipriaan, *Surinaams contrast: Roofbouw en overleven in een Caraïbische plantagekolonie, 1750–1863* (Leiden, 1993), provides the most comprehensive economic history to date of Suriname slavery; see also his "The Surinam Rat Race: Labour and Technology on Sugar Plantations, 1750–1900," *Nieuwe West-Indische Gids/New West Indian Guide* 63 (1989), 94–117. From a metropolitan perspective, Suriname was an attractive proposition up to the late 1770s; in the subsequent period up to and beyond Emancipation, the colony fell short of most expectations. In both periods, and increasingly so, the Dutch East Indies commanded far more metropolitan attention and capital. In 1830, the Netherlands imported roughly the same amounts of sugar from Java (the major island of the Dutch East Indies) and Suriname; in 1850, imports from Java were five times higher, in 1860 fourteen times. Gert Oostindie, *Roosenburg en Mon Bijou: Twee Surinaamse plantages, 1720–1870* (Dordrecht, 1989), 458.


8. Van den Boogaart provides a thoughtful analysis of these initial representations. He concludes that blackness to the Dutch was not a core attribute or as such a symbol of depravity, but rather a more neutral distinguishing feature. For the British, according to Winthrop D. Jordan,
White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550–1812 (Chapil Hill, 1968), blackness was one of the five core attributes in the perception of the African, the others being heathenism, savagery, beastliness and voluptuousness. See Ernst van den Boogaart, "Colour Prejudice and the Yardstick of Civility: The Initial Dutch Confrontation with Black Africans, 1590–1635," in Robert Ross (ed.), Racism and Colonialism: Essays in Ideology and Social Structure (The Hague, 1982), 38, 53–54. Indeed, an early eighteenth-century account of Suriname, however negative its imagery of the slaves, also found the blacks "rather pretty," and included an engraving of two good-looking slaves, one of each sex. J.D. H[erlein], Beschryvinge van de volk-plantinge Zuriname [...] (Leeuwarden, 1718), 94.

9. The association of black with pagan symbols and white with Christianity was halfheartedly overcome in the sensationalist reception of the African convert Jacobus Capitein, a student at Leiden University and author of a Latin tract confirming the "Ham ideology" and justifying slavery even of christened Africans. Capitein was honoured in a poem underpinning the "white-washing" of his soul by the workings of the gospel; Gert Oostindie and Emy Maduro, In het land van de overheerser II: Antillianen en Surinamers in Nederland, 1634/1667–1954 (Dordrecht, Cinnaminson, 1986), 12. On the wider symbolism of blackness, see Davis, Problem of Slavery in Western Culture, 447–449 and Slavery and Human Progress, 37–41. On the curse of Ham, see Slavery and Human Progress, 42–43, 86–87.


13. Slave trading in the Netherlands was forbidden as early as the late sixteenth century, and the number of slaves accompanying their masters from the colonies to the metropolis was never more than a trickle. This number probably reached a peak in the third quarter of the eighteenth century. Even then, no more than some 20 slaves per year entered the Netherlands, with a roughly equal number leaving; probably there was a significant overlap. Similar migration from the main Dutch Caribbean island, Curacao, was insignificant. Evidence of blacks in the Netherlands is circumstantial only. The status of slaves brought to the metropolis remained a matter of dispute up to Emancipation (Oostindie and Maduro, Land van de overheerser, 7, 13–17, 155–164). In 1870, a colonial author explicitly linked the virtual absence of blacks in the metropolis to Dutch ignorance regarding the West Indies ("Suriname en zijne vooruitzichten," De Economist 2 [1870], 777). By contrast, by the 1770s current estimates put the black population in England as high as 20,000; James Walvin, Black and White: The Negro and English
Society, 1555–1945 (London, 1973), 46–47. The figure may have been more in the order of 10–15,000; see Seymour Drescher, Capitalism and Antislavery: British Mobilization in Comparative Perspective (Houndmills, 1986), 27–30. Even so, of course, the contrast with the Netherlands is enormous. In the 1760s and 1770s, France reacted with xenophobia to an apparently growing but still very modest black presence by simply forbidding free blacks and slaves to enter the country (Cohen, French Encounters, 111).


17. E.g., Wijnand W. Mijnhardt in his contribution, "The Dutch Enlightenment: Humanism, Nationalism and Decline," states that "Montesquieu or Rousseau had little to offer that was relevant to the Dutch situation, except for topoi about the natural equality of humankind or the inalienable rights of the people [. . .]" The question whether contemporaries related these topoi to the issue of slavery is not raised. See also Paasman, Reinhart, 209–216.

18. The Batavian Republic lasted from 1795–1806 and leaned heavily on revolutionary France. The Dutch radicals were superseded by direct French rule in the so-called Kingdom of Holland (1806–1810) and next by straightforward annexation (1810–1816). During most of the 1796–1816 period, the British held the Dutch colonies in "protective" occupation. In 1814, the Dutch ceded the colonies of Berbice, Demerara and Essequibo to Britain, which united them later as British Guiana. The French revolutionary government abolished slavery in its colonies in 1794, a decision which was revoked by Napoleon in 1802. On the colonial policies of the Dutch "patriots," see G.J. Schuttle, De Nederlandse patriotten en de koloniën: Een onderzoek naar hun denkbeelden en optreden, 1770–1800 (Groningen, 1974), particularly 146–149. A first proposal for gradual abolition, co-authored by a French colonial official and a Dutch planter in Demerara, was included in the Dutch translation of Stedman's 1796 Narrative; John Gabriel Stedman, Reize naar Surinamen, en door de binnenste gedeelten van Guiana (Amsterdam, 1799–1800), 4, 148–185. The proposal went largely unheeded.

19. In 1726, the proportion of Catholics in the Netherlands was 34%; in 1775, 36%. Owing to the inclusion of two southern, overwhelmingly Catholic provinces, this proportion rose to 38% in 1809, fluctuating between 35 and 40% up to the 1970s. In 1809, members of the dominant Dutch Reformed Church accounted for 55% of the population; the share
of other Protestant dominations was 4.5%. Protestant dissenters did not present a considerable numerical threat to the Dutch Reformed Church before the 1880s—that is, beyond the period under discussion here. All figures taken from Hans Knippenberg, De religieuze kaart van Nederland: Omvang en geografische spreidng van de godsdienstige gezinden vanaf de Reformatie tot heden (Assen, 1992), 23, 61, 170. Even though the Netherlands was known for religious tolerance, the Dutch Reformed Church was the only officially recognised church, and a highly privileged institution. Well into the nineteenth century, active membership was a condition for participation in the national elites.

20. Under pressure by British Quakers, a numerically insignificant but intellectually important movement within the Church, the Réveil, petitioned for abolition in 1842; yet organised action was postponed until the 1850s. Réveil spokesmen in the 1840s found the Quakers too radical, and also shied away from cooperating with liberal abolitionists (Siwpersad, Nederlandse regering, 73–6, 217–20).

21. Drescher, "Capitalism and antislavery," comments on the ongoing discussion between David Brion Davis and Thomas Haskell inaugurated in the American Historical Review, 90 (April, June 1985) and 92 (October 1987).


23. G.P.C. van Heeckeren van Waliën, Aanteekeningen, betrekkelijk de kolonie Suriname (Arnhem, 1826). Jacob points at a late-eighteenth century enlightened vision of industrial progress in the metropolis, but she does not suggest a link to the issue of slavery (Margaret C. Jacob, "Radicalism in the Dutch Enlightenment," in Jacob and Mijnhardt, Dutch Republic, 238–239).


25. Lewis, Main Currents, 327, 109, and passim. See also Davis, Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 184–197 and Slavery and Human Progress, 80 ("As early as the mid-eighteenth century [...] slave societies were acquiring the image of social and cultural wastelands blighted by an excessive pursuit of private profit.").


27. Neither did colonial reform; see Robert Cohen, Jews in another Environment: Surinam in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century (Leiden, 1991), 94–123. Arguing against the bad reputation of Suriname slavery became a major theme in the literature of the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Characteristically, no author took the pains to contradict Voltaire's indictment of Suriname slavery in Candide (1759),
even if this would have been an easy target in denouncing "Enlightened" antislavery discourse; see Gert Oostindie, "Voltaire, Stedman, and Suriname Slavery," *Slavery and Abolition* 14 (1993).

28. Jan Jacob Hartsinck, *Beschryving van Guiana, of de Wilde Kust, in Zuid-America [...]* (Amsterdam, 1770). Wolbers, *Geschiedenis*. Hartsinck was a servant to the Dutch West India Company; his two-volume *Beschryving van Guiana* is based on archival sources, literature and information supplied by Suriname planters and officials. The abolitionist historian Wolbers wrote his voluminous *Geschiedenis van Suriname* on the basis of archival research in the Netherlands. No female authors wrote on Suriname in the eighteenth or nineteenth century.

29. An expression of the still recent Dutch encounter with Africans, Herlein occasionally deployed the term *Mooren* (Moors) in addition to *Negers* (Negroes), *Slaven* (slaves) and *Swarte* (blacks). The ambivalent *Mooren*, including Southern Mediterranean people, disappeared completely in all later writings on Suriname. In the Netherlands, it continued in use longer.

30. Citations from Herlein, *Beschryvinge*, 96, 105, 94 and 86, respectively; this section is based on 90–121. All translations from Dutch in this article are mine; I have tried to approximate the original text as far as feasible. On a theoretical level, the axiom of just rule had already been formulated early in the sixteenth century by philosophers such as Grotius and theologians like Udemans. This axiom rested on abstract juridical, respectively Christian principles rather than pragmatic grounds.

31. E.g., plantations regulations of 1759 and 1784; J.A. Schiltkamp and J. Th. de Smidt (eds.), *West Indisch Plakaatboek. I. Suriname: Plakaten, ordonnantien en andere wetten, uitgevaardigd in Suriname 1667–1816* (Amsterdam, 1973). Pistorius, *Beschryvinge*, 91. Hartsinck, *Beschryving*, I, 381, 404, 415; II, 907, 918. Philippe Fermin, *Nieuwe algemene beschryving van de Colonie van Suriname* (Harlingen, 1770), 145–147; and his *Tableau historique et actuel de la Colonie de Surinam, et des causes de sa décadence* (Maastricht, 1778), 345. Anthony Blom, *Verhandeling van den landbouw in de Colonie Suriname* (Amsterdam, 1787), 352–355. John Gabriel Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revoluted Negroes of Surinam* [Richard Price and Sally Price, eds.] (Baltimore, 1988). Hartsinck (Beschryving, I, 374) cites a leader of the 1763 slave rebellion in Berbice as saying "That the Christians were rude to them; that they would not endure Christians or Whites in their country anymore, and that they wanted to be the rulers of Berbice; that all plantations were theirs, and that the Christians should cede these plantations to them." Yet apparently he did not think this rebellious statement to be representative; elsewhere, he reiterated the "just rule" axioms.

33. Pistorius, Beschryvinge, 98. My italics.


35. Hartsinck, Beschryving, II, 903. Fermín, Nieuwe beschryving, I, 143, 124, 148. Traditionally, Jews, Christians, and Muslims had shared the position that religious conversion did not imply (immediate) manumission (David, Slavery and Human Progress, 22).


37. Stedman, Narrative [1888], Lxi–Lxiv.


39. In terms of slave revolts and marronage, this century was far more tranquil than the previous. The emphasis on the brutality and fierceness of the slave waned accordingly. The Haitian Revolution left only a few traces in literature on Suriname.

40. Or, before that, of foreign observers. Commenting on his visit to Suriname in the late 1770s, the French official Malouet blamed the Suriname planters for not christening their slaves and therefore not feeling inhibitions against abuse; this criticism of the planters' policies implied the conclusion that, because of the absence of Christianity, the slaves were "reduced to animal instinct."; V.P. Malouet, Collection de mémoires et correspondances officielles sur l'administration des Colonies, et notamment sur la Guiana française et hollandaise (Paris, [1802], III, 114. See also Paasman, Reinhart, 157–165.

42. E.g., Verzameling, 19–20 and Eerste rapport der Staatscommissie, benoemd bij Koninklijk besluit van 29 november 1853, no. 86, tot het voorstellen van maatregelen ten aanzien van de slaven in de Nederlandsche koloniën: Suriname (s Gravenhage, 1855), 294, 302.


44. The earlier pragmatic justification—slaves are the only ones able to do the arduous work on tropical plantations—continued to surface, e.g. A.F. Lammens, Bijdragen tot de kennis van de Kolonie Suriname [...] tijdvak 1816 tot 1822 [G.A. de Bruijne, ed.] (Amsterdam, Leiden, 1982 [orig. 1822, 1846]), 191–192. P.J. Benoît, Reis door Suriname: Beschrijving van de Nederlandse bezittingen in Guyana [...] (Zutphen, 1980 [orig. 1839]), 63. Lans, Bijdrage, II, 16–17, 22–27, 30–31. There are interesting parallels here with the enlightened elites' perceptions of


48. H.W. Pfenniger, in Van Emden, *Onderzoek*, 73. Similarly, Tank, *Circulaire*, 95. Wolbers (*Geschiedenis*, 720) commented: "In order not to lose everything they had to give much to the slaveOwners; in order to pour the poor slaves a few drops of the plentiful cup of the Gospel, they made the sacrifice of remaining silent, where keeping silent was sometimes really hard." In exactly the same vein, the above-cited Moravian missionary Tank affirmed that the Moravians had always taught the slaves to accept their status (Tank, *Circulaire*, 95). On an earlier Moravian's socialisation in this conformism, see Johann Andreas Riemer, *Missions-Reise nach Suriname und Berbice [...]* (Zittau, Leipzig, 1801), particularly 90–94. For a general discussion of the relation between missionary Christianity and the slave-based social order in the Caribbean, see Lewis, *Main Currents*, 199–205.

49. The contrast with the massive remarkably "successful" Moravian mission in the eighteenth-century Danish Virgin Islands is noteworthy; C.G.A. Oldendorp, *History of the Mission of the Evangelical Brethren on the Caribbean islands of St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. John* [Johann
Jakob Bossard, ed] (Ann Arbor, 1987; orig. 1777). Arguably, the major explanatory factor should be situated in the respective colonising states. In Denmark, the monarchy and its elites were fervent protagonists of Christianisation, and simply obliged the colonists to comply. As indicated above, the eighteenth-century Dutch elites found no personal or political expediency in spreading the gospel to the colony. Incidentally, even if the Dutch state had advocated Christianisation, its influence on the colonists was tenuous well into the nineteenth century.

50. Teenstra, Negerslaven, 121, 124. Wolbers, Geschiedenis, 810. The militant abolitionist author W.R. van Hoëvell argued for a hierarchy of races in which Africans were situated immediately below Europeans, but above Asians and (the lowest order) Amerindians. Blacks could certainly advance, but not in Africa itself, where nature, climate and isolation combined to form "a barrier to the progress of civilisation"; Slaven en vrien onder de Nederlandse wet (Zaltbommel, 1854), 237–238.

51. In 1830, the Moravians counted less than 1800 converts among the non-white population; by 1861, this figure according to inflated official statements had increased to over 27,000, plus 11,000 Catholics; in both years, the total non-white population was barely over 50,000 (Van Lier, Frontier Society, 173–174). Yet the missionaries themselves expressed strong doubts about the real impact of Christianisation; Lamur, Kerstening; Oostindie, Roosenburg, 192–195.


54. In the same period, "Enlightened" elites in the metropolis embarked on socialising policies for their own proletariat. Actually, the above-mentioned colonial trouble-shouter Van den Bosch was in the vanguard of that movement as well. Conversely some of the more subtle socialising techniques, such as awarding medals and pecuniary prizes to "lesser" people for voluntarily rendering outstanding services to the elites, were occasionally applied in Suriname as well; C.M. Moes, "Redevoering over de ware menschlievendheid, als den volkomensten band van alle maatschappelijke vereeniging," Surinaamsche Almanak (1845), 129–153. See also Davis, Slavery and Human Progress, 121–129, 214–226.

56. The absence of "scientific" racism certainly did not interfere at all with the use of (semi-) bonded labour in both the Dutch East Indies and West Indies well into the twentieth century, and with routine racism against colonial subjects. On post-abolition "scientific" racism in Britain and France, see Seymour Drescher, "The Ending of the Slave Trade and the Evolution of European Scientific Racism," *Social Science History* 14 (1990), particularly 440–447.