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Same Old Song?
Perspectives on Slavery
and Slaves in Suriname and Curacao

Explaining abolition has long been a central concern in the historiography of the Americas.¹ 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. In fact, the belatedness of Emancipation was the most remarkable fact about it all. 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 J. 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' (Wolbers 1861:746). Subsequent 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' (Davis 1984:285).²

The question then seems to be not so much why the Dutch abolished the slave trade and slavery but rather, as Seymour Drescher rightly reformulates the issue in this book, why so late and in so laggard a manner as they did?³ Why was Dutch society, with its presumed conscience-stricken tradition of questioning the gathering and deployment of wealth, so little responsive to

¹ An earlier version of this paper was published in 1992 in The Journal of Caribbean History 26:147-70, under the title 'The Enlightenment, Christianity and the Suriname Slave'. I thank the editors of The Journal of Caribbean History for permission to use these materials in the present article. Seymour Drescher, Pieter C. Emmer, Sidney W. Mintz, Richard Price, and Tracey Thompson kindly criticized the earlier version. In the present version, I have lightly revised the sections on Suriname, while adding a new section on Curacao and rewriting the conclusion. The writing of the earlier version was facilitated by a Fulbright Research Fellowship, awarded by the Netherlands America Commission for Educational Exchange.


³ See Drescher's contribution in this book.
the abolitionist cause? Short of an immediate answer, suffice it to question here the notion of a chronic Dutch Embarrassment of Riches (Schama 1988), and to recall 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. Britain provided the momentum in Dutch abolition by simply imposing the ending of the slave trade at the closing of the Napoleonic wars; there was no serious public debate on this issue in the Netherlands. 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, and particular the major colony, Suriname, to its metropolis. The timing may be related to the eventual emergence of a modest abolitionist lobby and, indeed businesslike, to the 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 indemnification of the West Indian slave-owners.

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 ignore Dutch and Dutch West Indian ideologies (Davis 1966, 1975; Lewis 1983). This contribution attempts to partly fill this gap through an analysis of the contemporary literature on the major Dutch Caribbean colonies, Suriname and Curaçao. In discussing current justifications for slavery and particularly representations of the Dutch West Indian 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; in fact,

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4 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.

5 Van Stipriaan 1993 provides the most comprehensive economic history to date of Suriname slavery; see also Van Stipriaan 1989. 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 (Oostindie 1989:458).

6 Prior to the Napoleonic wars, the Dutch West Indies consisted of Suriname, the three smaller, neighboring colonies of Berbice, Demerara, and Essequibo, the three Leeward Antilles (Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao), and the three Windward Antilles (St. Eustatius, St. Martin, Saba). After the Napoleonic wars, the British acquired Berbice, Demerara, and Essequibo, which was subsequently renamed British Guiana.
after reading Davis's and Lewis's works one is hard pressed to find anything original in the relevant, predominantly Dutch-language writings. This reading therefore largely confirms established notions about the flatness of Dutch and Dutch Caribbean dialog. 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 West Indian slave.

*Slavery as a Non-Problem in the Dutch World*

When the Dutch established commercial relations with Africa in the late sixteenth 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, focusing on the presumed savagery of the African instead, with paganism and licentiousness as defining features. The subsequent involvement in the Atlantic slave trade and New World plantation economics 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 on Cham and his descendants. The infinite inferiority of the blacks was therefore somehow of God's

7 Van den Boogaart (1982:53-4) provides a thoughtful analysis of these initial representations. He concludes that blackness to the Dutch was no core attribute or as such a symbol of depravity, but rather a more neutral distinguishing feature. For the British, according to Jordan (1968), blackness was one of the five core attributes in the perception of the African, the others being heathenism, savagery, beastliness, and voluptuousness. 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 (Herlein 1718:94).

8 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 'Cham ideology' and justifying slavery even of christened Africans. Capitein was honored in a poem underpinning the 'white-washing' of his soul by the workings of the gospel (Oostindie and Maduro 1986:12). On the wider symbolism of blackness, see Davis 1966:447-9, 1984:37-42. On the curse of Cham, see Davis 1984:42-3, 86-7.
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 Christianization; yet in the Dutch world this argument never made it to the mainstream as it did in Catholic Europe (Cohen 1980:43). Finally an occasional author such as the medical doctor D.H. 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.' (Gallandat 1769:3-4).

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 (Paasman 1984:98-121).

How should we account for this lack of interest, which gives the Dutch a poor showing not only in comparison to the unique British case, but even to 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.\footnote{Slave trading in the Netherlands was forbidden as early as the late sixteenth century, and the numbers 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 twenty 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 1986:}
to postpone serious debates on slavery: the very subject was beyond the Dutch frame of reference. Finally, whereas in the eighteenth century the Suriname Maroon Wars – and only two slave rebellions in Curacao – had occasionally brought the colonies into the spotlights, 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 (Davis 1984). 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 (Zwager 1980:11-3, 63-4). 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 much the same (Jacob and Mijnhardt 1992:23, 204, 212, 220, 227). In this context, it seems characteristic that in the sixteen essays on the Dutch eighteenth century and Enlightenment, the issue of slavery is not raised even once. This oversight reflects the eccentricity 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.

The establishment of the Batavian Republic (1795-1806) seemed a break with the conservative political traditions. Yet the program of its ‘radical’

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7, 13-7, 155-64). In 1870, a colonial author explicitly linked the virtual absence of blacks in the metropolis to Dutch ignorance regarding the West Indies (Anonymous 1870:777). In contrast, by the 1770s current estimates put the black population in England as high as 20,000 (Walvin 1973:46-7). This figure may have been more in the order of 10-15,000; see Drescher (1986:27-30). Even so, 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 1980:111).

10 On the ambiguous position of Enlightenment thinkers, see Davis 1966:391-445.

11 Mijnhardt (1992), for example, 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 1984:209-16.
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 contemplate duplicating the short-lived French abolitionist policy.\(^\text{12}\)

If the Enlightenment did not provide a source of antislavery ideology, neither did religious dissenters. The Protestant Nederlandsch Hervormde Kerk 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 – even 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 expediency in championing anti-slavery policies.\(^\text{13}\) As neither denomination created significant dissenting offspring, religious potential for abolitionism was far weaker than it had been in Britain.\(^\text{14}\)

\(^{12}\) The Batavian Republic leaned heavily on revolutionary France. The Dutch radicals were superseded by direct French rule in the so-called Kingdom of Holland (1806-1810), followed by straightforward annexation (1810-1813). During most of the 1796-1813 period, the British held the Dutch colonies in 'protective' occupation. In 1814, the Dutch ceded the colonies of Berbice, Demerara, and Essequibo to England, 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 Schutte 1974:146-9. 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, Stedman 1799-1800:148-85. The proposal went largely unheeded.

\(^{13}\) In 1726, the proportion of Catholics in the Netherlands was 34 per cent; in 1775, 36 per cent. Owing to the inclusion of two southern, overwhelmingly Catholic provinces, this proportion rose to 38 per cent in 1809, fluctuating between 35 and 40 per cent up to the 1970s. In 1809, members of the dominant Nederlandsch Hervormde Kerk accounted for 55 per cent of the population; the share of other Protestant denominations was 4.5 per cent. Protestant dissenters did not present a considerable numerical threat to the Nederlandsch Hervormde Kerk before the 1880s – that is, beyond the period under discussion here. All figures taken from Knippenberg 1992:23, 61, 170. Even if the Netherlands was renowned for religious tolerance, the Nederlandsch Hervormde Kerk was the only officially recognized church, and a highly privileged institution. Well into the nineteenth century, active membership was a condition for participation in the national élites.

\(^{14}\) Under pressure of British Quakers, a numerically insignificant but intellectually im-
What about industrial capitalist ideology? In its 'Golden' seventeenth century, the Netherlands had been a pioneer capitalist state. Commenting on recent debates emphasizing the role of a progressive capitalist mentality in the emergence of abolitionism, Drescher indicates that precisely Dutch society should have been a case in point, but failed to live up to the theory.15 The implications of the Dutch case for this theoretical discussion are not my main concern here. Yet it may well be argued that the pioneering quality of early Dutch capitalism had long passed. For one thing, and 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 (Kossmann 1992:20). 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 industrialization 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 élite'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 labor for slavery. It took another half century before an isolated Dutch observer wrote on slavery in even remotely similar terms, fifty years later indeed (Van Heeckeren van Waliën 1826).16

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 did the Dutch élites decide to finally abolish the peculiar institution. By then even the Dutch, struggling to modernize their state and to regain the prestige that had once characterized their nation, had succumbed to the

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16 Jacob points to a late eighteenth-century enlightened vision of industrial progress in the metropolis, but she does not suggest a link to the issue of slavery (Jacob 1992:238-9).
'peer' pressure of more advanced European neighbors. In the modernizing outlook, the project of regaining respectability and rejoicing the concert of progressive nations by necessity implied the dismantling of Dutch West Indian slavery.

The Colonial Perspective: Suriname

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. With fine exaggeration, 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' (Lewis 1983:109, 327). Suriname could certainly be read as 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 (Nassy 1788:5, 1779:83). 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.

With the significant exception of two major historical studies, the bulk of the relevant literature was written by men with direct and often ongoing experience with Suriname slavery (Hartsinck 1770; Wolbers 1861). Their writings expressed with some clarity the ambivalence of people dependent on humans to whom they had to deny their humanity. Their perspectives,

18 See also Davis 1975:184-97. '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' (Davis 1984:80).
19 Nor did colonial reform; see Cohen 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 the Candide (1759), even if this would have been an easy target in denouncing 'Enlightened' antislavery discourse; see Oostindie 1993.
20 J.J. Hartsinck was a servant of the Dutch West Indies Company; his two-volume Beschrijving 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; in the belles lettres in contrast, authors such as Petronella Moens, Elizabeth Post, and Betje Wolff did publish on issues related to slavery.
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 the colony really 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 J.D. Herlein's Beschryvinge van Zurinamen (1718) held sway up to the early nineteenth century at least.21 '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 convert these people to Christianity; 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 of the creed of the Nederlandsch Hervormde Kerk. 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 (Herlein 1718:90-121).22

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 behavior.23 The axiom apparently lost

21 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 zwarte (blacks). The ambivalent Mooren, including Southern Mediterranean people, disappeared completely in all later writings on Suriname. In the Netherlands, it continued in use longer. See also Blakely 1993.

22 Citations from pp. 96, 105, 94 and 86, respectively. All translations in this paper are mine; I have striven 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 G. Udemans. Their axiom rested on abstract juridical, respectively Christian principles rather than pragmatic grounds.

23 See plantation regulations of 1759 and 1784; See Schiltkamp and De Smidt 1973; Pistorius
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 the fact 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. George Warren, in 1667, had them 'naturally treacherous and bloody,' J.J. 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 Thomas 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' (Pistorius 1763:98; my italics).

Yet when would the time be set for allowing the slaves to enjoy the fruits of Christianity? Unlike their counterparts in Curaçao, the Suriname colonists were notorious for disallowing any attempts to convert 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 J.G. Kals, in the 1730s, had cried out in vain for spreading the gospel; even if his argumentation included the economic gains to be made. Sporadic metropolitan urgings to undertake Christianization equally fell on deaf ears. In Suriname, one knew that attempting to christen the slaves was to cast pearls before swine. Hartsinck underpinned the superiority of creole over African slaves by affirming that the former were 'more civilized, 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

1763; Hartsinck 1770, I:381, 404, 415, 1770, II:907, 918; Fermin 1770:145-7, 1778:345; Blom 1787:352-5; Stedman 1796. Hartsinck 1770, 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.

24 Warren 1667:19; Hartsinck 1770, II:906-7. Hartsinck, like virtually all authors, implicitly took the female slaves to be more compliant. See also Blom 1787:330.

25 Kals 1756; Van der Linde 1987; Hartsinck 1770, II:743; Wolbers 1861:265.
to that God'. The slaves therefore inevitably stuck to their own superstitions. Philippe 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 conversion, 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.26

Others were more outspoken. Anthony Blom summed up eighteenth-century wisdom by simply stating that all efforts at Christianization 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 learn to work with the pickax and the shovel; and that way they live quietly, and are useful for a plantation.27

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 conversion to Christianity, 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 just 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 emphasize the civilizing mission of slavery, mostly avoiding the question as to why slavery, by their own standards, had so far failed to do so. The most significant new element in their policy was a remarkable reversal in attitudes towards conversion – even if partly inscribed in the strategy of playing for time.

At the turn of the century, John Gabriel Stedman, in his famous

26 Hartsinck 1770, II:903; Fermin 1770, I:143, 124, 148. Traditionally, Jews, Christians, and Muslims had shared the position that religious conversion did not imply (immediate) manumission (Davis 1984:22).

27 Blom 1787:348. See also Blom and Heshuysen 1786:391-2.
Narrative of a Five Years’ Expedition Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam, had confronted planter society with bitter accusations about its dehumanization; it was not the slaves who should be described as animals. Even if rather than urging for abolition he advocated amelioration of slavery, his views on ‘Africans’ were relatively favorable. However, as Richard and Sally 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 bowdlerized edition of the Narrative therefore likens Maroon civilization to African cultures and advances the alleged crudeness of both as an argument against premature abolition of the slave trade (Stedman 1796:lx-i-lxiv).

Only a decade after the publication of the mutilated Narrative the slave trade was outlawed, but the same argumentation 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’ organization Eensgezindheid characterized the slaves as ‘Pagans and uncivilized people, mostly devoid of good mores or virtues: everything is inclined to barbarity’. This explained the necessity to rule by force. Similar arguments were still advanced as late as mid-century, yet by then the mainstream argumentation was that precisely slavery should be held responsible for keeping the blacks from attaining full humanity.28

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.29 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, Christianization came to be seen as the central means of socialization. This was a remarkable shift, for as late as 1830 the missionary record was still confined to a century of mostly unsuccessful proselytizing among the Amerindians and Maroons. The choice of conversion was therefore a significant innovation. At the same time, the change of policy was all but straightforward. The initial pleas

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28 Verzameling 1804:12; Kappler 1854, l:140, versus Wolbers 1861:775-6.
29 In terms of slave revolts and maroonage, this century was far more tranquil than the previous one. The emphasis on the brutality and fierceness of the slave waned accordingly. The Haitian Revolution left only a few traces in the literature on Suriname.
for spreading the gospel were strictly confined to the so-called 'slave friends'. In the first 'modern' critique of Suriname slavery, juxtaposing ideas echoing Adam Smith and a plea for conversion, G.P.C. van Heeckeren van Waliën scoffed at the planters' 'incomprehensible obduracy' against the christening of the slaves. By the late 1840s, the Moravian missionary Otto 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'.

This indeed is what the planters' 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. 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 labor, 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 uncivilized to aspire to freedom, and actually benefitting from slavery under civilized Europeans; as mentally inferior and averse to civilization; 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 uncivilized, 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 coloreds, the Maroons and the emancipated slaves of the British and French West Indies demonstrated. And so on, and so forth.

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30 Or, before that, of foreign observers. Commenting on his visit to Suriname in the late 1770s, the French official V.P. 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' (Malouet 1802, III:114). See also Paasman 1984:157-65.

31 Van Heeckeren 1826:78-82, 87-8, 100-2, 127-8; Tank 1848:95. Similar criticism was voiced by the absentee plantation owner G.P.C. van Breugel (Van Breugel 1834:12). At the time of writing, a monograph on the impact of the Moravians in Suriname is in press (Lenders 1996).

32 E.g., Eensgezindheid 1804:19-20 and Staatscommissie 1855:294, 302.

33 Citations from Eensgezindheid 1804:12-14; Kunitz 1805:350; Lammens 1823:16; Van Heeckeren 1826:101; Teenstra 1835, II:186; Van Lemep Coster 1836:113-7; Lams 1842:22-3; Teenstra 1842:115, 119; Bosch 1843:147-8, 200-1; Van Emden 1848:11; Hostmann 1850, I:140-1, 1850, II:413; Kappler 1854:56; Staatscommissie 1855:97, 288-90; Winkels 1856:37; De Veer 1861:175-6. One recognizes elements of Elkins's once-celebrated Sambo-type: 'docile but
One of the problems for the abolitionists was that they actually shared many of these assessments; the above collection of characterizations 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 Christianizing 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. Conversion 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 adviser to the Dutch Crown sent out on a trouble-shooting mission to the colonies. It soon surfaced in many other works.35

Second, the imminent Emancipation faced the planters as well as the colonial state with the agonizing prospect of the freed slaves withdrawing their labor from the plantations – after all, they supposedly suffered from a stubborn leisure preference. Conversion 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, Christianizing 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'.36

34 The earlier pragmatic justification – slaves are the only ones able to do the arduous work on tropical plantations – continued to surface, Lammens 1982:191-2; Benoit 1980:63; Lans 1842, II:16-7, 22-7, 30-1. There are interesting parallels here with the enlightened elites' perceptions of the Dutch vulgus. See Frijhoff 1992:292-307.


36 Van Heeckeren 1826:87-8, 101-4, 127-8. See also the opportunistic inclusion of conversion in one of the last proslavery tracts: Belmonte 1855:60-1, 120.
The initial burden of Christianization fell on the German Moravians, who since the 1730s had dedicated much effort and many brethren’s 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 the negro not only religion and morality, but also impress industry and obedience to the worldly authorities, and what is more, set the example.’ The Moravian brethren had indeed attempted – up to the mid-century in vain – to enhance their acceptability by emphasizing their ‘neutrality’ in worldly efforts: 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.’

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

In the 1850s, the Moravians and, gradually, 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 converting the slaves. In practice the results were often discouraging, confirming the suspicions of the stubborn proslavery party but equally, and more painfully, the subdued apprehensions the ‘slave friends’ had felt all

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37 J.C. Baud 1842; in the same vein, J. van den Bosch 1828, and J.C. Rijk 1851; all quoted in Siwpersad 1979:200, 79, 206. Various authors confirmed that conversion would have disciplinary rather than subversive effects; Van Breugel 1834; Bosch 1843:170-3. And, in retrospect, Bartelink 1916:59.

38 H.W. Pfenninger in Van Emden 1848:73. Similarly, Tank 1848:95. Wolbers 1861:720 commented: ‘In order not to lose everything they had to give much to the slave-owners; 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 1848:95). On an earlier Moravian missionary’s socialization towards this conformism, see Riemer 1801:90-4. For a general discussion of the relation between missionary Christianity and the slave-based social order in the Caribbean, see Lewis 1983:199-205.

39 The contrast with the massive remarkably ‘successful’ Moravian mission in the eighteenth-century Danish Virgin Islands is noteworthy; Oldendorp 1987. Arguably, the major explanatory factor should be situated in the respective colonizing states. In Denmark, the monarchy and its élites were fervent protagonists of Christianizing, and simply obliged the colonists to comply. As indicated above, the eighteenth-century Dutch élites found no personal or political expediency in spreading the gospel to the colonies. Incidentally, even if the Dutch state had advocated conversion, its influence on the colonists was tenuous well into the nineteenth century.
along. M.D. 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 insensitve' 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'.

Indeed, in these last decades of slavery and those of the transition to free labor, conversion, and the imposition of Western norms of respectability, family life and work ethic proceeded with less success than was hoped for. This period must have been agonizing and disillusioning to many abolitionists, who had claimed the slaves would quickly internalize 'right' 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.

Curacao: Color over Status

In 1863, 33,621 slaves or some 55 per cent out of a total population of just over 60,000 were freed in Suriname. Around 1815, at the time of the abolition of the slave trade, the number of slaves had even been some 44,000, over 75 per cent of the colony's total population. In this perspective, the numerical significance of the Antillean emancipations pales. The number of slaves freed in 1863 was only 11,654, 35 per cent of the 33,000 inhabitants of the Dutch West Indian islands. Both the limited number of inhabitants and the modest proportion of slaves corresponded to the longer run of Antillean history. In the major Dutch West Indian island, Curacao, only 48 per cent of its 14,000 inhabitants were registered as slaves around 1815. At Emancipation in 1863, this proportion had diminished to 35 per cent out of a total population of 19,000 inhabitants.

40 Teenstra 1842:121, 124; Wolbers 1861:810. 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 civilization' (Van Hoëvell 1854:237-8).
41 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 1971:173-4). Yet the missionaries themselves expressed strong doubts about the real impact of conversion (Lamur 1985; Oostindie 1989:192-5).
43 Hoetink 1958:77; Koloniaal Verslag 1863. In 1833, slaves accounted for 40 per cent of the 15,000 Curazoleños.
Therefore, during the entire period from the abolition of the slave trade to the abolition of slavery itself, in Suriname both the number of slaves and their proportion of the total population – and, by implication, their significance for the local economy – exceeded the corresponding figures for the Antillean colonies by a wide margin. From this perspective, it is only logical that the Dutch debate on abolition, perfunctory as it may have been in any case, gravitated towards the case of Suriname. In contrast to the Dutch East Indies, where slavery may not have been so important but the colony as such was, the Dutch West Indian islands were characterized by both a limited significance of slavery within their territory and their own scant relevance to the metropolis.

The most telling illustration of this lack of metropolitan interest is the ending of slavery in Dutch St. Martin. When in 1848, the slaves of the French part of the island were emancipated, the slaves in the Dutch half reacted by declaring themselves free. For all practical purposes, the immediate negotiations between the (former) slaves and the powerless local planters and administration indeed confirmed the dismantlement of slavery. Yet as no final settlement – locally nor through Dutch legislation – was accorded, the issue remained unsettled right up to the general emancipation of 1863.44

Of the six Antillean islands, Curaçao had traditionally been the most important. From a Dutch perspective – if not necessarily as seen from the other islands – it functioned as the center of the insular Dutch West Indies. Yet again, it is striking how little the case of Curaçao figured in the debate on the abolition of slavery. Obviously, as its colonial council affirmed as late as 1847, the Curaçao slave owners did not want Emancipation.45 Yet such statements apparently had little impact. The Staatscommissie installed in 1853 to report on slave emancipation did compose a modest volume covering both the West Indian islands and the Dutch settlement in Guinea, yet in contrast to its – more voluminous and more accommodating – parallel report on Suriname, the commission in projecting abolition in Curaçao was little inclined to bear with the objections raised by the island’s slave owners (Staatscommissie 1855-56).

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44 Even beyond that date, St. Martin slave holders and the Dutch administration disputed the level of compensation to be paid to the former. The Hague initially maintained that no payment was required, as the compensation accorded to slave holders elsewhere in the Dutch Caribbean could not apply to St. Martin, where slavery had been abolished in 1848. The slave holders, in contrast, refused to accept that slavery had really ended in 1848. In the end, a compromise was reached, allowing for compensation but at a much lower level than the price accorded the other territories. See Paula 1993.

45 Raad van Poltie 1847, quoted in Lampe 1848:83. A decade later, their spokesman, while admitting the inevitability of full abolition, pleaded for caution and a gradual emancipation (Staatscommissie 1856:253-70).
A variety of factors explains this lack of metropolitan interest. First, there was the diminished significance of Curaçao to the metropolis, in both economics and geopolitics. During various periods in the eighteenth century, the tiny island’s significance as a center for slave trading, smuggling, and financial transactions had been amazing. However, the abolition of the slave trade and the dismantlement of both the Spanish empire on tierra firme and the imperial mercantilisms in the region had undermined much of this function. Moreover, precisely the strong orientation of the local élites on Caribbean and Latin American networks now worked against the interests of those perhaps still hoping to influence metropolitan thinking. Even less than the Suriname plantocracy, with its long-standing, virtually exclusive orientation towards the metropolis, could the creolized – latinized – Curaçaoan élites relate to the Dutch élites. There was no question of easy access through family ties, nor through shared commercial interests. Consequently, whereas in the Netherlands the lobby for Suriname interests may have been weak, a Curaçaoan interest group was nonexistent.

One might want to add the limited number of Curaçaoan slaves as an explanatory factor. Yet this provides space for the kind of two-way reasoning also encountered in the discussion of the relevance of the insignificance of the black population in the Netherlands, or even of the limited importance of Suriname slavery to the Dutch economy. Theoretically, numerical insignificance could cause indifference as all this seemed to matter so little, yet in contrast, it could also have facilitated abolition, as the modest economic costs involved would be so easily compensated for by the moral gratification of 'doing good'.

It seems evident that as far as metropolitan mobilization and politics are involved, the latter pseudo-causality applies. Yet within the Dutch West Indies, a difference of sorts may be observed. Whereas in Suriname the local élites did contribute to the debate on slavery and abolition, such contributions were conspicuous by absence on the Antilles.

This failure to speak out for their own interests as slave holders is consistent with a longer tradition of both little literary activity and a predominant interest in regional affairs rather than in the relationship with the metropolis. In comparison to the 'canon' of literature on Suriname dating from the period of slavery, the few scattered publications on Curaçao are poor in quantity and quality. Moreover, virtually all were written by metropolitans, many of these only drawing on a visitor's limited experience with the island and its culture. In reviewing this small corpus, a further contrast with the literature on Suriname becomes evident. Whereas authors describing life in the latter, typical plantation society dedicated many pages

to the slaves and the planter-slave relation, the focus in writings on Curaçao tended towards observations regarding color rather than to status. This subtle contrast faithfully reflected the more complex economic and socio-racial structure of the island. In contrast to the typical non-Hispanic plantation colony with its overwhelming slave majority, its small and relatively homogeneous white élite, and its equally small intermediate group of free blacks and coloreds, Curaçaoan society consisted of three substantial segments: the white population, the free blacks and coloreds, and the slaves. The share of the intermediate segment increased uninterruptedly. From a modest 22 per cent in 1789, the proportion of free blacks and coloreds augmented to 32 per cent in 1817, 44 per cent in 1833, and over half the total population at Emancipation (Klooster 1994:288-9, Koloniaal Verslag 1863). Moreover, the white population itself was differentiated both along class and religious and cultural lines.

As H. Hoetink has forcefully argued, this particular structure of Curaçaoan society, combined with the relatively tranquil character of master-slave relations, caused the white segments to worry as much – if not more – about the free Afro-Curaçaoans as about the slaves.\(^{47}\) As a seasoned expatriate in the Dutch West Indies observed:

"In Curaçao, the [free] coloreds are treated by the whites with far more contempt than in Suriname; yet as to the slaves, the contrary applies; the latter are better clothed and less oppressed on Curaçao than in Suriname" (Teenstra 1836, I:166).

Consequently, color even more than slavery is the recurring issue in contemporaries' accounts of élite discourse. Thus, the reverend G.B. Bosch reported on the white opinion that 'the coloreds were already too pretentious, and that the remaining distinction between the whites and [the coloreds] should be perpetuated as much as possible'. The dominant tendency in Curaçaoan politics, he argued, was the focus on maintaining the color line, defined as white versus colored and black, irrespective of status.\(^{48}\) The civil servant H.J. Abbring wrote about both 'the ridiculous vanity' of the white élites regarding racial purity, the 'arrogant' mulatto aspirations to

\(^{47}\) Hoetink 1958, 1969, 1972. Hoetink convincingly explains the comparatively mild character of slavery in Curaçao by reference to the non-plantation character of the economy, the on average limited number of slaves per slave owner, and the high level of social control on the small island. The 'mildness' of slavery in Curaçao was a recurring theme in writings on the island (Van Paddenburg 1819:75-8, Abbring 1834:84-6, Teenstra 1836, I:169). The obvious comparison was – and still is – with Suriname, with its supposedly extremely harsh slavery; on the pedigree and validity of this reputation, see Oostindie 1993. On the hacienda-like plantation system in Curacao, see Renkema 1981.

\(^{48}\) Bosch 1829:228, 226, respectively. As to the psychological consequences of the ambivalent position of the free coloreds, he maintained that they easily felt offended, 'as if everything said to them reflects the contempt which their origins and color inspire' (Bosch 1829:103). See also Teenstra 1836, I:165-7.
membership of the white élite, and the general contempt of free blacks and coloreds regarding the slave population.49

The imagery of slaves was condescending and informed by paternalism, but generally not as negative as in Suriname.50 Bosch countered stereotypes regarding the slaves’ alleged stupidity, and found them in religious matters ‘much less prejudiced and less superstitious than the lower classes in Europe’. Even in his summary of the 1795 slave revolt, he pictured the slaves as ‘otherwise tranquil and generous’ and led astray only by the dynamics of the moment.51 Abbring likewise, apart from praising the aesthetic attractiveness of young male slaves, mentioned the slaves’ humaneness; if they lacked certain virtues, this deficiency only stemmed from their bonded status (Abbring 1834:81-2, 85). M.D. Teenstra, drawing upon his own experience as an agricultural expert in Suriname, thought the Curaçaaoan slaves were generally better-looking, more cheerful, educated, and industrious, and smarter than their more oppressed counterparts in the Guianas. Yet somewhat confusingly, he added a reference to the 1789 colonial report by W.A. Grovestins and W.C. Boeij, maintaining that the Curaçaaoan slaves shared with the free people of color a reputation for obstinacy (Teenstra 1836, I:167). Reverend S. van Dissel in contrast maintained that ‘the character of the nonwhites, in particular of the slaves, [is] generally tranquil, docile, peaceful’, as well as industrious.52 The Catholic vicar M.J. Niewindt, while pleading for more education, underlined that ‘the slaves here are no coarse Africans: they know they are humans and realize very well that they should be treated as such’ (Niewindt 1850, cited in Dahlhaus 1924:440).

The 1853 Staatscommissie finally heard conflicting statements. Not surprisingly, the more negative stereotyping corresponded to the plea for gradual rather than immediate emancipation, and vice versa. The following discussion between the former governor of Curaçao, J.J. Rammelman Elsevier, and the acting chairman of the commission, J.B. Heemskerk, captures that spirit:

50 Thus G.G. van Paddenburg, while taking the Christianization of the slave population as additional evidence of the mild character of Curaçao slavery, could confirm to his readership that ‘The Negroes and coloreds, both free and slaves [...] have far less necessities than we, refined Europeans’ (Van Paddenburg 1819:78). Perhaps the most condescending remarks were made regarding Afro-Curaçaoan promiscuity (for example, the Raad van Politie in 1818, quoted in Dahlhaus 1924:406), and the local Creole language, Papiamentu (Van Paddenburg 1819:71-3, Bosch 1829:212-9, Teenstra 1836, I:179). Then again, at least for the language if not for both issues, this criticism implicated the whites as well.
51 Bosch 1829:220-1, 323. During the entire colonial period, two serious slave revolts were reported, one in 1750, the larger one in 1795.
52 Van Dissel 1857:116. Van Dissel has kleuringen, which is literally coloreds; from the context it is clear though that he means nonwhites in general.
R.E.: Generally, [the Afro-Curaçaoans] are the enemies of order.
H.: So, on Curacao too, troublemaking seems to be a constant element in the negro character.
R.E.: They are not averse to working in the fields, but [they are] very stubborn. [...] The negro thinks, I have to be free, not – where will I work, and how will I make a living.\(^53\)

A Curaçaoan slave owner testified in somewhat more optimistic terms, arguing that the slaves on the island were generally well-tempered and more civilized than slaves in other colonies. The latter observation was repeated in stronger terms by a priest formerly working on Curacao, J.J. Putman, who concluded 'The slave wants to be happy too. Better than one thinks, he will know how to help himself. They are not as stupid as some portray them.' (Staatscommissie 1856:263, 275, 303).

The – comparatively – subdued and even slightly positive tone of this imagery probably reflected the relatively mild character of Curacao slavery and the resultant absence of a feeling of continuous besiegement among the slave owners. Two additional factors may be mentioned. First, the positions taken by most authors cited echo their position as outsiders to the domestic economy. Second, the timing mattered. Most sources quoted date from the 1830s and beyond; in this period, even in Suriname the imagery of the slave as only 'as yet' uncivilized became mainstream and politically convenient.

Still, this is not the complete picture. The unconditional acknowledgement of the humanity of the slaves must have been representative even of the majority of the Curaçao elites who, in stark contrast to the Suriname planters, had tolerated the conversion of their slaves from an early stage. From the second half of the eighteenth century onwards, observers affirmed that all Afro-Curaçaoans, slaves and free alike, were Catholics. Indeed, at Emancipation in 1863, 86 per cent of all Curazoleños were classified as Catholic. This is a telling contrast with Suriname, where in 1863 only half the population was 'under the surveillance' of the Herrnhutters.\(^54\)

So at least officially Afro-Curaçaoans, slave and free alike, were Christians, and in contrast to the Protestant or Jewish elites adhered to Roman Catholicism. Several observations follow. The contrast between a strong and until the 1830s successful planter opposition to conversion in Suriname versus the early opposite choice in Curacao falsifies, most certainly for the

\(^53\) Staatscommissie 1856:232, 243.
\(^54\) Koloniaal Verslag 1863, no. 32, Suriname:21-2; no. 43, Curaçao:2. Of the 54 per cent of the total population in the Moravian fold, one-third were not baptized. An additional 6 per cent of the Surinamers were either baptized Catholics, or aspiring members; these were mostly former slaves too. In 1826, out of 2829 whites living on Curacao, 15 per cent were Catholics too. With some justification, Römer-Kenepa (1992:47) argues that this group and its influence in colonial society has been neglected in historiography.
Dutch case, the decisive significance of metropolitan culture for the specifics of colonial rule. So does the prevalence, in Curaçao, of Roman Catholicism, in contrast both to the dominant religion in the metropolis and among the local whites, and to the subsequent policy of conversion through the efforts of the Protestant Herrnhutters in Suriname.

Why then the early Christianization, and why precisely Roman Catholicism? The answer to the first question is somewhat speculative. The fact that the colonists had not heeded the repeated urge of the Dutch West Indies Company to convert the imported slaves to Protestantism is not remarkable; at this early stage, there was no difference between the two major Dutch colonies. What is puzzling is the subsequent tolerance towards external, and in the context of the times even somewhat antagonistic – Spanish, Catholic – missionaries. Historical contingency certainly played a role. The peculiar location of Curaçao, just off tierra firme, facilitated the continuation of Spanish missionary efforts started in the pre-Dutch era, that is, from ca. 1500 until 1634. Apparently, once the initial Catholic zeal had falsified the apprehension that conversion would provoke rebelliousness among the slaves, the local élites found a continuation of this practice expedient, and perhaps even inevitable.

Two additional motives may have been of significance. First, judging from factors such as the high level of manumission and the remarkable positive demographic growth of the slave population, Curaçaoan slave owners did not face the chronic labor shortage which as late as the 1850s made Suriname planters reluctant to lose time destined for productive work to the possible indirect benefits of missionaries' visits. Finally, the gradual creolization of the Curaçaoan élites into a Hispanic Caribbean orbit may have made them more familiar with the Catholic nations' practice of 'Christian' slavery.

The contrast with Suriname indeed suggests how far apart the two worlds were. Following the more conventional wisdom reigning among the Protestant colonizing nations, Suriname planters had not seriously considered the experiment of conversion until the last decades of slavery. Arguably, their very late and opportunistic change of attitude would eventually demonstrate the shortsightedness of their ancestors, and the good judgement of their Curaçaoan peers.

To some extent, the choice of Roman Catholicism again followed from Curaçao's specific colonial history and its proximity to Spanish America. Prior to the Dutch take-over in 1634, and true to their colonial logic, the Spanish had made some efforts to Christianize the native population. In the subsequent period, priests from Caracas and Coro continued to make regular visits to the island. This Spanish domination was tolerated well into the
eighteenth century; only after mid-century did the initiative pass to Dutch missionaries and, subsequently, congregations. In a way therefore, the later Dutch mission only continued a pattern set by the Spanish.55

Yet there was more to the choice of Catholicism. With some justification, contemporaries emphasized the extreme religious tolerance of the colony. As for the whites, Protestants, Sephardic and Ashkenazim Jews all openly confessed their own religion while fully tolerating the other creeds. Moreover, even when the position of both Catholicism and the Jewish faith was still subordinated to Protestantism in the Netherlands, the Protestant Curacaosans and the local colonial administrators had always welcomed the Roman Catholic missionaries and their activities among the slaves and free Afro-Curacaoan population. But notwithstanding the further benefits of the proverbial religious tolerance, the hegemonic and pacifying dimension to these policies is obvious. Thus, as early as 1708, a Catholic priest wrote in his diary 'the Governor ordered me to instill in the slaves obedience and loyalty to their masters'.56 And as for the choice of Catholicism, Reverend Bosch (1829:220, 226) remarked:

'Upon my arrival in Curacao, it struck me enormously that the visitors to Catholic churches were of another color than the Protestants, as if for humans color of skin influenced religious creed; from half an hour's distance I could already notice from someone's appearance to which church he belonged.

[...]

However, after spending some years in Curacao, I understood the true reason why Protestants have reserved their own churches here for people of white skin, a reason of more significance than the [presumed] appropriateness of the Roman church for ignorant people. This [rationale] is, namely, a colonial policy of contempt of people of black and brown skin. The larger one made the distance between whites and [nonwhites], the more one denigrated the latter, the stronger and longer, one thought, would colonialism remain in place [...].'

Religious tolerance and the conversion of the nonwhite population may thus have mutually reinforced one another; yet at the same time, the specific option for Roman Catholicism as the religion of the nonwhites served as a mechanism for upholding both the slave-free and the color divisions. As such, religious distinction would outlive slavery and persist until today.

Whatever the logic behind this double tradition of religious divide et impera, Roman Catholicism as such, and the Catholic clergy in particular,

were of particular significance in the final decades of slavery in the Dutch West Indian islands. Yet again, the impact was ambivalent. On the one hand, and for obvious reasons, the Catholic clergy had traditionally emphasized its neutrality in worldly affairs, particularly regarding the slavery issue, and its pacifying role. The first Catholic vicar, Niewindt, repeatedly argued that Catholic instruction was fundamental as a means to secure order in the colony. In 1828, he wrote to the governor, ‘what is better suited to control the slaves, to keep them subordinated, to make them loyal in their service, than the influence of the Religion?’ Later, he also emphasized the crucial significance of religious instruction with a view to an orderly transition to freedom.\(^{57}\) In his testimony before the 1853 Staatscommissie, the Catholic priest Putman again affirmed this view, adding that earlier slave revolts had been enacted in a period ‘when the slaves had not yet acquired that understanding of Religion which today has such a blessed influence among them’. The commission indeed concluded that conversion ‘has contributed in no little measure to augment the susceptibility of the slaves for freedom’.\(^{58}\) Likewise, after Emancipation on the first of July 1863, governor J.D. Crol explicitly thanked Niewindt's successor J.F.A. Kistemaker for the Catholic Church's assistance in the orderly enactment of full abolition (Lampe 1988:90).

On the other hand, a handful of clergymen, among whom again Niewindt, ended up adopting a stance far more critical of slavery and slave owners than the Herrnhutters in Suriname had ever ventured to express. Not surprisingly, their objections were informed by their own civilizing agenda, and were therefore particularly directed against obstacles raised by individual slave owners to religious instruction and formal marriages among slaves. Anyway, the explicitness of their argument reflected the growing strength and in the end the crucial significance of the Catholic Church in the social fabric of Curaçao during the last decades of slavery.

But perhaps another observation is of more relevance to the debate on Dutch slave emancipation, and the absence of a significant Curaçaoan perspective in the metropolitan debate. Much in contrast to the debate on Suriname, the available sources on Curaçao suggest a rather low-key concern about both the transition to free labor, and freedom as such.

The little concern voiced regarding possible social upheaval after Emanc-

\(^{57}\) Niewindt cited in Dahlhaus 1924:100, 395, and 430-1, respectively. Monsignore M.J. Niewindt worked on Curaçao from 1824 until his death in 1860, since 1842 as the island's first vicar. In former days, he somehow personalized the Emancipation process in Curaçao (Dahlhaus 1924, Goslinga 1956; for a more balanced discussion, see Hoetink 1958:113-4, 139-43). A similar colonial benefactor did not emerge in Suriname – pride of place, if any, was reserved for King Willem III, who signed the Emancipation bill.

\(^{58}\) Staatscommissie 1856:298 and 26, respectively.
icipation corresponded to the social fabric and mentality of Curaçaoan slave society. The limited number of slaves involved as compared to the already extant nonwhite free population may have helped to perpetuate the white élite's preoccupation with race and color rather than juridical status. The belief that the slave population would remain in the Catholic church's fold after Emancipation added to white confidence that the transition to freedom would not jeopardize their own privileged position or their very safety. The long socializing tradition of Christianity in Curaçao indeed paid off for the white élites, a tangible reward for their traditional 'tolerance.'

The lack of anxiety regarding post-slavery labor mainly reflected the poor profile of the Curaçaoan economy, and particularly the marginality of productive slavery in the local economy. Again, the report of the 1853 Staatscommissie is instructive.59 The commission concluded that the present situation of an excess of labor supply over its demand would be perpetuated after emancipation. As moreover the arid and densely populated island provided little room for subsistence peasant agriculture, the freed slaves would be forced to seek employment for a daily wage. In fact, the real problem was not, as in Suriname, how to keep the former slave force engaged in plantation work, but rather how to provide enough work for both the actual free population and the soon to be emancipated slaves. Both the slave owner H. van der Meulen and the priest Putman, thought that this objective was virtually beyond reach. They anticipated and even applauded an alternative strategy, already apparent among the free Afro-Curaçaoan population: emigration to Venezuela.

Post-Emancipation Agendas

If the case of Curaçao provides some interesting insights, the bottom line remains its relative insignificance to the general debate on Dutch West Indian slavery and its abolition. What is more, slavery itself never became a major issue in the Netherlands; nor did abolition, and one may want to argue that even Suriname 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 (Oostindie 1989:362-3).

In the end, the Enlightenment and the rise of 'modernity' affected the Dutch attitude towards slavery and blacks remarkably little. The mainstream

59 Staatscommissie 1856:9, 25, 30-1, 261-3, 277-8. The president of the commission indeed wondered why slaves were relatively expensive in the island, as the supply of labor far exceeded its demand (Staatscommissie 1856:278). See also Renkema 1981, especially p. 150.
authors of the proslavery movement in the 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 'uncivilized' for 'inferior'. The most significant pre-Emancipation change in Suriname was the embracing of conversion, a policy previously deemed useless. At first sight, it is difficult to perceive an ascendency of enlightened or modern ideologies here. In its content, 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. Of course, the implementation of this policy was remarkable. The christening of the Suriname slaves was mostly relegated to a German missionary society first, subsequently joined by the Dutch Roman Catholic mission only. In Curaçao, again, mainstream Dutch Protestantism had sought no influence on the slaves whatsoever. Both choices again symbolize the lack of commitment in Dutch political circles, and even more so in public opinion.

In Suriname, 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 labor from British India and the Dutch East Indies, and sugar production had plunged deep 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'.

In Curaçao, the transition to a free labor economy posed a different problem. As the supply of labor exceeded its demand and as few alternatives were available locally, there was no problem of finding means to secure

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60 In the same period, 'enlightened' élites in the metropolis embarked on socializing policies for their own proletariat. Actually, the above-mentioned colonial trouble-shooter J. van den Bosch was in the vanguard of that movement as well. Conversely some of the more subtle socializing techniques, such as awarding medals and pecuniary prizes to 'lesser' people for voluntarily rendering outstanding services to the élites, were occasionally applied in Suriname as well (Moes 1845:129-53). See also Davis 1984:121-9, 214-26.
continued plantation labor, but rather of building alternative economic sectors. This challenge would not be effectively met until the late 1920s, when the establishment of an oil refinery redefined the entire economy. In the meantime, in spite of poverty and a lack of opportunities, society remained tranquil. Moreover, the split between a Catholic Afro-Curaçaoan majority and a Protestant or Jewish white élite remained intact. There is little reason not to accept the contemporary Catholic claim that both the smooth transition to freedom and the subsequent absence of open class conflict owed much to its strong local influence. At the same time, the Catholic church's effort to eradicate 'superstition', 'lascivety', and other presumed African traits encountered much the same obstacles as it did in Suriname.

These results could well have contributed to a subsequent rise of Dutch evolutionary, 'scientific' racism regarding blacks as it did elsewhere.\(^{61}\) 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 by the remoteness of Africa, Afro-America, and blacks from the public mind and eye.\(^{62}\) Meanwhile, Dutch colonial rule in the West Indies continued the new policy of assimilation, attempting to socialize an increasingly plural population to Dutch standards of respectability.\(^{63}\)

All in all, Dutch and Dutch West Indian discourse on slaves and blacks in general was not altogether the Same Old Song over and over again. From the beginning, a distinct tone characterized opinions in the three major sites, the Netherlands, Suriname, and Curaçao. In addition, over time, an evolutionary ideology – and with it, a civilizing and patronizing practice – came to overshadow the earlier, cruder variants of racism as a justification for slavery and colonial exploitation.

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61 Davis 1975:48; Davis 1984:134-6, 277-9; Cohen 1980:98-9, 181, 210-21, 260-2. Ironically, an eighteenth-century Dutch scholar, Petrus Camper, had been one of the first to link phenotype ('facial angle') with race and intellectual capacities; his theory had some acclaim elsewhere in Europe both in the second half of the eighteenth century and again in the 1840s; Curtin 1964:39-40, 366.

62 The absence of 'scientific' racism certainly did not interfere at all with the use of (semi-) bonded labor in both the Dutch East Indies and West Indies well into the twentieth century, nor with routine racism against colonial subjects. On post-abolition 'scientific' racism in Britain and France, see Drescher 1990:440-7.

63 Only in the 1930s and 1940s, Dutch cultural policy in Suriname encouraged the consolidation of ethnic pluralism. Yet educational policies remained firmly modelled after the metropolitan standards.
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