



PROJECT MUSE®

Slavery

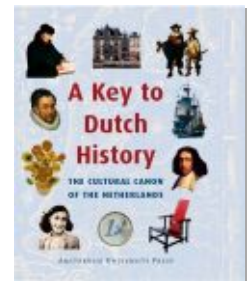
Published by

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Amsterdam University Press, 2007.

Project MUSE. <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/76693>.



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ca. 1637 - 1863

Slavery

Human trafficking and forced labour in the New World

Since the great ocean crossing of Columbus in 1492, Europeans had been settling in what they called the New World, at the expense of the indigenous populations. The Portuguese began this by setting up sugar plantations in Brazil and having these worked by slaves brought across from Africa. This policy was adopted by all the European colonial powers. Together, in some two hundred years they transported over twelve million Africans in the transatlantic slave trade. The Dutch themselves transported more than 550,000 of these slaves. Some artists recorded their miserable lot in a drawing.

The Dutch slave trade started in 1621 with the establishment of the Dutch West India Company (WIC). WIC ships were originally sent out as privateers and to wage war on the Spanish-Portuguese fleet. In 1628, admiral Piet Hein captured the Spanish silver fleet, and in 1638 the

Portuguese lost Saint George del Mina in modern-day Ghana to the WIC. In addition, parts of Brazil were occupied (1624-1654) and in 1665 the Republic's claim to colonial rights over the so-called Wild Coast (Surinam, Berbice, Essequibo-Demarary), and the Antillean islands of Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, Saint Martin, Saint Eustatius and Saba was recognised.

The Dutch became important players in the Atlantic area as a colonial power and slave traders. Up until 1730, the WIC held a monopoly on the slave trade. Subsequently, the Middelburg Commercial Company (established in 1720) grew into the biggest Dutch slave trader, with various auction houses in Rotterdam and Amsterdam to compete with the WIC. In around 1770, the Dutch slave trade reached its zenith, transporting some six thousand slaves each year. In following years these numbers quickly decreased.

Being a slave meant being forced to work and having no say in where, with whom and how you would live. The African slaves, and their descendants who were born into slavery, worked on plantations growing sugar, coffee, cocoa, cotton and tobacco. They worked in the salt ponds of Curaçao or waited on their masters. Not all slaves accepted their lot. Particularly in Surinam, people escaped from slavery by running away. They settled in the jungle and established their own communities alongside those of the Indians. These fugitive slaves were referred to as Maroons or Bush Negroes. In addition, there were constant small and large slave uprisings on plantations and in the towns. The largest slave

uprising took place on in 1795 on Curaçao under the leadership of Tula, who, inspired by the ideals of the French Revolution and the success of the slave uprising in Saint-Domingue (Haiti), demanded freedom. Tula, however, paid for his freedom with his life.

At the end of the eighteenth century, outrage against the slave trade was growing. This was true in the Netherlands too, even though discussions were often dominated by the interests of slave owners. Under pressure from the English, the slave trade was prohibited in 1814. In the Netherlands, the abolition of slave labour and slavery did not follow until 1 July 1863, making it one of the very last countries in Europe to emancipate its slaves.

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Sub-topics

Primary education sector

Life on plantations
Slave uprisings and escapes
Slave songs (such as *Faya siton*); Afro-Surinam culture;
Antillean music

Secondary education sector

Plantation economy and farming
An international comparison of the abolition of
slavery and emancipation
Afro-Surinam culture
African history
Contract workers from China, Java and India after
the abolition

Past and Present

Monuments to and the remembrance of slavery including
the question of historic responsibility
Does slavery still exist? Human rights

In the Treasure Chest

Layout of a slave ship
Chains
Slave bracelet

References

Places to Go

Amsterdam: national slavery monument, Oosterpark
Amsterdam or Middelburg: Slavery route
Amsterdam: National Institute for the Study of
Dutch Slavery and its Legacy
Rotterdam: Rotterdam Historical Museum

Books for young people

Bené Alfonso, *Medicijnmeester* (14+)
Thea Beckman, *Vrijgevochten* (12+)
Harriet Beecher-Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (12+)
Miep Diekmann, *Marijn bij de lorredraaiers* (14+)
Thea Doelwijt, *O sekoer! Help!*
Thea Doelwijt, "Nacht met mijn overoverovergroot-
moeder" In: Ton van Reen, *Ridders en Rebellen*
Mechtelly, *Het meisje uit Tapoeripa*
Dolf Verroen, *Slaaf kindje slaaf* (10+)

Background literature

Bea Brommer (ed.), *Ik ben eigendom van... Slaven-
handel en plantageleven*, Wijk and Aalburg 1993
Rosemarijn Hoeft en Clazien Medendorp, *Suriname,
gezichten, typen en costumen naar de natuur
geteekend door A. Borret*, Leiden 2003
P.C. Emmer, *De Nederlandse slavenhandel*, Amsterdam/
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Websites

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