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The Currency of Freedom

Emancipation and Dutch Anti-Abolitionism in Atlantic Relief

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These concluding remarks place the contributions to this special issue *Repentance and Reappraisal: Historicising the Defenders of Slavery in the Netherlands* in conversation with the history-writing on emancipation and anti-abolitionism in Atlantic studies. Along the way, this essay discusses some of the main themes in the literature and their parallels and departures with the findings and arguments presented by the contributors.

In deze slotreflecties worden de bijdragen aan dit themanummer *Repentance and Reappraisal: Historicising the Defenders of Slavery in the Netherlands* binnen de historiografie over emancipatie en anti-abolitionisme in de Atlantische wereld geplaatst. Het essay biedt een discussie van enkele belangrijke thema's uit deze literatuur, waarbij parallellen en verschillen met de bevindingen en argumenten van de auteurs van dit themanummer worden gepresenteerd.

The nineteenth century was the great age of emancipation, an opening of a project still in search of fulfilment. New World Slavery existed as a universal evil based on European exploitation of African bodies – legally possessed by their captors – for commercial profit. For the system to replicate itself, a framework of disavowal was created that was so magnificently encompassing in its reach, that its dismantlement was complicated and enduring. It is not surprising that now, two centuries after the first bricks were removed, historians are still advancing new interpretations of why Atlantic slavery ended.

What was once assumed about abolition in the large sweep of European imperial histories, has been re-examined closely in transatlantic history-writing. We know much more about why Cuban emancipation took so long and joined creole anticolonial struggles. The classic studies of Franklin Knight and Rebecca Scott on the complicated legal and commercial questions

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that made Cuban slavery last so long, have been notably expanded by Ada Ferrer's focus on enslaved ideas of abolition in the late eighteenth century and Scott's more recent work on microhistorical stories of Cuban émigrés and antislavery transnationalism.[1]

Brazilian historiography on abolition has gone through more distinct interpretive phases. Early history-writing endorsed a progressiveness on the part of the planters who were accepting the incompatibility of slavery with modernity and pushed for its end. The rise of Marxist analysis of the 1960s and 1970s – which greatly influenced history-writing on slavery across the Americas – drew more attention to enslaved Brazilians as agents of their freedom. More recent work has emphasised the fierceness of parliamentary debates between powerful coffee interests in northern Brazil and their opponents and regional tensions over Black citizenship. Together, this new work gives startling indication of how the vicissitudes of capital and power determined political and racial outcomes that led to the signing of the Golden Law in 1888, the final emancipation of slavery in the Americas (see Figure 1).[2]

The deeper historiography of the US Civil War has thrown up inter-American connections that were only hinted in an earlier generation of scholarship. The storied history of the British Anti-slavery movement has been challenged and broadened to include the active role of Black people in the Americas in bringing about their emancipation. A still growing historiography on enslaved resistance from the courts through to the careful organization of plantation risings have made it difficult to see abolitionism from a purely metropolitan perspective or as an idea birthed in the age of revolutions. The Haitian Revolution is today understood not so much as an

1 On Cuba, see, Franklin W. Knight, *Slave Society in Cuba During the Nineteenth Century* (University of Wisconsin Press 1974); Rebecca J. Scott, *Slave Emancipation in Cuba: The Transition to Free Labour, 1860-1899* (University of Pittsburgh Press 1985); Ada Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror: Haiti and Cuba in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge University Press 2014). DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139333672; and Rebecca J. Scott and Jean M. Hébrard, *Freedom Papers: An Atlantic Odyssey in the Age of Emancipation* (Harvard University Press 2012). DOI: https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674065161.

2 On Brazil, see Robert Conrad's influential major work, *The Destruction of Brazilian Slavery, 1850-1888* (University of California Press 1972). DOI: https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520312807. Conrad's conclusions have been persuasively critiqued in Jeffrey D. Needell's close reading of contemporary political records, *The Sacred Cause: The Abolitionist Movement, Afro-Brazilian Mobilization, and Imperial Politics in Rio de Janeiro* (Stanford University Press 2020). DOI: https://doi.org/10.11126/stanford/9781503609020.001.0001. See also, Needell's useful historiographical commentary, 'Brazilian Abolitionism, Its Historiography and the Uses of Political History', *Journal of Latin American Studies* 42:2 (2010) 231-261. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X1000043X. For a closer study of the northeastern experience and influence on abolitionism, see Celso Thomas Castilho, *Slave Emancipation and Transformations in Brazilian Political Citizenship* (University of Pittsburgh Press 2016). DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1f89r7s.

unimaginable triumph against colonial French slavery, but as a centrifuge from which new ideas of the possibilities of freedom and rights spread from the mouths and hands of a tremendously mobile Atlantic citizenry.[3]

For the Dutch Atlantic, as the essays in this special issue make powerfully clear, the history of abolitionism might be approached differently by re-examining the arguments against it. The insistence on Black abolitionism in current Atlantic historiography of slavery – influenced greatly by the new studies of the Haitian Revolution – has added complexity to how we appreciate the once overlooked ideas that stirred Black freedom struggles from the late-eighteenth-century writings of Ignatius Sancho through the 1831-1832 rebellion led by Samuel Sharpe in Jamaica.

At the same time, the force of the movement to arrest the spread of abolitionism was propelled by an Atlantic community of proslavery interests. They read, watched, debated and met with each other in European metropoles and the transnational spaces of the Atlantic. Recent scholarship on planters in the British islands, especially Barry Higman's work on John Lindsey, Crister Petley's study of Simon Taylor, Trevor Burnard on Thomas Thistlewood and Catherine Hall's work on Long, emphasize just how invested this community was in the preservation of slavery and defending white racial superiority.[4]

The essays in this special issue add an important dimension to this work. As the editors summarize in their introduction, they draw attention to 'politicians, governors, investors, publishers and authors as complicit in defending the trade in people and their enslavement.'[5] In this way, this

3 On the US Civil War and Slavery, see, for example, Edward Rugemer, *The Problem of Emancipation: The Caribbean Roots of the American Civil War* (Louisiana State University Press 2008). On resistance in eighteenth century, see Vincent Brown, *Tacky's Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War* (Harvard University Press 2020), and Gelien Matthews, *Caribbean Slave Revolts and the British Abolitionist Movement* (Louisiana State University Press 2006). On Haitian influences in the age of revolution, see the seminal work by Julius Scott, *The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution* (Verso Press 2018). The interconnections that stretch from the eighteenth through to the twentieth centuries are remarkably insightful in illustrating just how shared the imperial experiences were in this period. For a great example of this point, see Scott and Hébrard's, *Freedom Papers* which tracks a family from Saint-Domingue on the eve of revolution to Louisiana in the nineteenth century and finds their descendants in Belgium during the Second World War.

4 Barry Higman, *Proslavery Priest: The Atlantic World of John Lindsay, 1729-1788* (University of the West Indies Press 2011). DOI: https://doi.org/10.37234/XSNRCCKN; Christer Petley, *White Fury: A Jamaican Slaveholder and the Age of Revolution* (Oxford University Press 2018); Trevor Burnard, *Master, Tyranny and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World* (University of North Carolina Press 2004); Catherine Hall, *Lucky Valley: Edward Long and the History of Racial Capitalism* (Cambridge University Press 2024). DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009106399.

5 Karwan Fatah-Black and Lauren Lauret, 'Repentance and Reappraisal: Historicising the Defenders of Slavery in the Netherlands', *BMGN – LCHR* 139:3 (2024) 11. DOI: https://doi.org/10.51769/bmgn-lchr.12843.

Figure 1. Thanksgiving Mass to commemorate the Golden Law, 22 May 1888, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Photograph included in: Antônio Luiz Ferreira, *De Volta a Luz: Fotografias Nunca Vistas do Imperador* (Banco Santos/Fundação Biblioteca Nacional 2003). Public domain, via https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=3468604.

volume fits within some of the patterns of the studies discussed above. By shifting the discussion to the Dutch community that worked for the preserve of slavery, the essays collectively illuminate the long-standing obstacles to the process of Dutch abolitionism, a history that has not been fully integrated into the story of Atlantic slavery.

Dutch emancipation was often regarded as a delayed process unattached to the narrative of the winds of freedom that drifted across the long nineteenth century. This, in some part, was likely due to the way Dutch Caribbean history (normally understood as Suriname, the Netherland Antilles and Aruba) was treated. Gert Oostindie and Rosemarijn Hoefte, two of the leading scholars of the region, noted that the Dutch Caribbean figures only incidentally in general histories of the Atlantic. 'The Dutch landed on the barren rock of St. Eustacius in 1600,' wrote Eric Williams in *From Columbus to Castro* (1970), 'and the Dutch West India Company was established in 1621.'[6] That is where the story often begins and ends. The absence of subsequent references to the Dutch presence outside of its remarkable seventeenth-century dominance is with few exceptions repeated by those who wrote after Williams.

The Dutch islands were only marginally included in nationalist writing of the mid-twentieth century. Part of the reason for the low interest, according to Oostindie and Hoefte, has been what they call 'diseconomies of scale'. The Dutch islands had such small populations of enslaved persons when compared to northern Caribbean islands that Atlantic historians tend not to search their histories for common examples with the Dutch colonies. But the French islands at the upper end of the archipelago also had small populations and they have deeper historiographies. Perhaps the more central point which Oostindie and Hoefte put forth, is that the Dutch colonies always had a small elite. Where its neighbors saw the evolution of a distinct creole identity, their counterparts in the Dutch Caribbean looked across the Atlantic for their self-definition: 'Consequently, most history-witing on the former Dutch Caribbean has been the work of Dutch or expatriate Caribbean authors, even though in recent years there is an increasing number of exceptions.'[7]

This has not meant, however, that investigations into the process of abolitionism are missing from scholarly approaches to the Dutch Antilles. In fact, abolitionism is the area that most stirs interest in slavery in the Dutch islands. The influence of Seymour Drescher's celebrated essay, 'The Long Goodbye', brought Dutch slavery into a wider comparative framework that is still highly relevant. Drescher's point was that the Netherlands experienced the same period of revolution and ideology and was yet a 'society identified as a

6 Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean 1492-1969* (Vintage 1984 [1970]) 79.

7 Gert Oostindie and Rosemarijn Hoefte, 'Historiography of Suriname and the Netherland Antilles', in Barry Higman (ed.), *General History of the Caribbean. Volume VI: Methodology and Historiography of the Caribbean* (UNESCO Publishing 1999) 607.

pioneer of modern capitalism from the early seventeenth century (…) that failed to generate a major antislavery movement by the standards of the age.'[8] By connecting the debate over Dutch slavery's end with the debate over capitalism launched by Eric Williams and his seminal *Capitalism and Slavery* (1944) and carried by his supporters, Drescher identified the parallels rather than the divergences between Dutch antislavery and that of its European counterparts. This was a point given useful elaboration by Oostindie in the important edited volume *Fifty Years Later* which applies a close test of Drescher's central thesis and comes out in large support of his view that Dutch abolitionism actually followed continental processes more than had been previously acknowledged. Along the way, some of the writers to that volume called for caution in how far the comparison should be taken. Angelie Sens appreciated that discussion of Dutch antislavery in terms of capitalism shifted the temporal focus of the debate to the overlooked eighteenth century, but perceptively noted that expectations based on Anglo-American models would not render a full picture of how slavery was regarded by the Dutch. 'Nevertheless,' she concluded, 'the problem remains of how the Dutch case fits into a comparative analysis (…) it may be worth conducting further research on various national and regional cases, not on the basis of strictly formulated models, but with a flexibility in addressing the relevant questions.'[9]

The articles in this special issue find a laudable balance between these two approaches. Each author writes with a comparative frame in mind, unavoidable given current historiography on slavery, but privileges the specifics of the Dutch experience of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries just beyond the 1863 abolition with the type of investigation that Sens urged. This enables the collection to pose a different argument: it is not why Dutch emancipation was late, but it is what that lateness reveals about the perspective of slavery held by Dutch elites who defended it and whose influence shaped its legacies.

Lauren Lauret's study of compensation presents Dutch enslavers as far less ideologically driven than their British counterparts for who slavery was a fundamental way of life, normatively accepted in their concepts of the

8 Seymour Drescher, 'The Long Goodbye: Dutch Capitalism and Antislavery in Comparative Perspective', *American Historical Review* 99:1 (1994) 67. DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/2166162. Drescher's arguments on the Dutch case joined with the argument of his earlier work that refuted Eric Williams' claims, *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition* (University of North Carolina Press 1977). For an interesting state of the debate discussion see the essays in Barbara Solow and Stanley Engerman (eds.), *British Capitalism and Caribbean Slavery. The legacy of Eric Williams* (Cambridge University Press 1988). DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511572722.

9 Angelie Sens, 'Dutch Antislavery Attitudes in a Decline-Ridden Society, 1750-1815', in: Gert Oostindie (ed.), *Fifty Years Later: Antislavery, Capitalism and Modernity in the Dutch Orbit* (KITLV Press 1995) 90, 101.

world as it was economically important to imperial dominance and domestic consumption.[10] The West Indian lobby in Britain had asserted its power to secure the transition to abolition that would give them medium-term benefits. The old debate as to when that power began to recede, does not change the way it was used and how that use inspired Dutch attempts. Lauret argues through the sixteen petitions of anti-abolitionists that she examines, that the slaveowners progressively imposed conditions on emancipation that benefitted them both in terms of returns (*f*300 per freed person at the upper end in Suriname, less in the other colonies) and postslavery labour. In this they followed the British model closely.

The British Compensation Act which awarded £20M to slaveowners exposed the contradictions of abolition. Enslaved persons were recognized as free but their forced labour carried a monetary value that required its own bureaucracy. The Legacies of British Slave-ownership project at University College London has traced how compensation flowed back to the metropole and became materially embedded into the fabric of modern British life. The UCL investigation created an aperture through which Britons could regard more vividly how completely transformative imperial slavery was to their history. It has been just as impactful for underscoring the racialist foundations of British slavery over the national story of British abolitionism.[11]

The nineteenth-century British anti-abolitionist ethos of enslavers exemplified by compensation was as much an influence on what occurred in the Netherlands three decades later as was the influence of abolitionism. This is one of the important arguments Lauret makes. The point suggests another aspect to how we might productively rethink Dutch comparisons with Britain. The sorts of public discussions on slavery's metropolitan

10 Lauren Lauret, 'No Emancipation without Compensation. Slave Owners' Petitions and the End of Slavery in the Netherlands, c. 1833-1873', *BMGN – LCHR* 139:3 (2024). DOI: https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgnlchr.12783.

11 For details on the UCL Legacies of British Slave-Ownership project see Catherine Hall, Nicholas Draper, Keith McClelland, Katie Donington and Rachel Lang, *Legacies of British Slave-ownership: Colonial Slavery and the Formation of Victorian Britain* (Cambridge University Press 2016).DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139626958; and Nicholas Draper, *The Price of Emancipation: Slave-ownership Compensation and British Society at the End of Slavery* (Cambridge University Press 2010). The project database includes evidence of more than 60,000 slaveowners. See, https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/. For the work of the Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery which grew out of the project, see the CSLBS website at https://www.ucl.ac.uk/history/research/centre-study-legacies-british-slavery-cslbs. For a discussion of the Centre's new research which focuses on enslaved lives, see Matthew J. Smith and Matthew Stallard, 'Black Survivors: Unfreedom and the Collapse of Slavery in British Jamaica: New Research at the Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery', in: Stephan Conermann, Claudia Rauhut, Ulrike Schmieder and Michael Zeuske (eds.), *Cultural Heritage of Slavery: Perspectives from Europe* (Degruyter 2024). DOI: https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111331492-002.

influence in the United Kingdom that the UCL project has opened, were slow to reach the reappraisal that Lauret and Karwan Fatah-Black have identified for the Netherlands. The British 'national conversation' that accompanied the Bicentenary of the Abolition of the British slave trade in 2007 stirred new approaches to museums, exhibitions, research projects, and school curricula, then quickly fell silent or slowly ground down for lack of sustained funding. Katie Donington, Ryan Hanley and Jessica Moody have pointed out that, 'concern over the representation of transatlantic slavery in Britain is articulated as an "amnesia," a "forgetting," or something "buried": as something which regularly requires uncovering at periodic intervals.'[12]

The 2020 racial protests following George Floyd's murder in the United States jolted a mostly younger generation in the UK to come to terms with slavery's history and legacy. The studies launched by Dutch financial institutions had mirrors in the UK where banks, insurance companies, families, universities, and even the Church of England, all commissioned new research into their histories. But public accountability has not yet produced the level of state response found in the Netherlands. King Willem-Alexander's acknowledgement of the vast extent of Dutch participation in the transatlantic slave trade and that the 'horrific legacy of slavery (…) can still be felt in racism in our society,' has found no peer in the UK.[13] Instead an official

12 Katie Donington, Ryan Hanley and Jessica Moody (eds.), *Britain's History and Memory of Transatlantic Slavery: Local Nuances of a 'National Sin'* (Liverpool University Press 2016) 9. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5949/liverpool/9781781382776.001.0001.

13 'Speech by King Willem-Alexander at the commemoration of the role of the Netherlands in the history of slavery, Oosterpark, Amsterdam', 1 July 2023, Royal House of the Netherlands, https://www.royal-house.nl/documents/speeches/2023/07/01/speech-by-king-willem-alexander-at-the-commemoration-of-the-role-of-the-netherlands-in-the-history-of-slavery, accessed 12 April 2024. The King's speech, which followed Prime Minister Rutte's December 2022 statement, drew considerable international attention including mixed comments from the Caribbean. Prime Minister Rutte's admission 'I was wrong' about putting slavery as a 'thing of the past' received generally favourable responses in the Caribbean. A Jamaican editorial complemented the Prime Minister. See, 'Dutch slavery apology is just the start', editorial, *Jamaica Gleaner*, 21 December 2022, https://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/commentary/20221221/editorial-dutch-slavery-apology-just-start, accessed 14 April 2024. Some reparations activists in the English-speaking Caribbean took it as a positive step, one that they hoped would be followed by other European rulers. Professor Hilary Beckles, Chairman of the CARICOM (Caribbean Community) Reparations Commission, said Rutte's speech 'moves us closer to closure in respect of the crippling criminal chapter in human history.' See, Judana Murphy, 'Campaigners salute Dutch for slavery apology…but insist further action needed on reparations front', *Jamaica Gleaner*, 22 December 2022. In Guyana, some reparations activists took issue with the omission of Guyana from the apology but praised the speech. According to one commenter, 'Now that the Netherlands have taken the lead I look forward anxiously to

tentativeness to even address slavery and the enduring celebration of British anti-slavery still cloaks British public discourse. In this respect, at least, the Dutch are well ahead of their Anglophone counterparts.

But apologies are only a beginning. For the ideals expressed by officials such as Prime Minister Mark Rutte and the King to truly grow, they need to be practised and acknowledged outside of moments of commemoration. They also need to integrate the type of research that breaks through what John Oldfield called the 'culture of abolitionism' so that the fuller story of European defences of slavery is told.[14]

One way to get at that is the work that Esther Baakman has done with the Dutch press. Baakman's findings on the vacillations in Dutch reporting on Caribbean slavery over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, highlights a certain distance between metropolitan knowledge and colonial realities.[15] In the hundred years after the War of Spanish Succession – what Caribbean historians have called the great century of slavery – the expansion of slaveholding across the Americas, the European vision of Africans and non-White people generally transformed profoundly. The Bourbon reforms centralized power in Spanish America in ways that affected transatlantic trade and unfree labour. The references to 'negro-slaves' that Baakman notes from the *Oprechte Haerlemse Courant* in 1750, is interesting when considered in this wider context of Iberian reformism. If Spanish and Portuguese terminology influenced earlier Dutch racial categories of Africans, the shifts at mid-

the British, not only taking the noble step to apologize, but to ensure that the Descendants of the Manumitted Africans are allowed a fair share of the national cake.' See, Hamilton Green, 'The Dutch apology omitted its own legacy of slavery in Guyana', *Stabroek News*, 21 December 2022, https://www.stabroeknews.com/2022/12/21/opinion/letters/the-dutch-apology-omitted-its-own-legacy-of-slavery-in-guyana/, accessed 14 April 2024. In the former Dutch Caribbean, there was more hesitancy. A march was held in Suriname by reparations activists calling for more than an apology. Others called out the absence of descendants of enslaved persons from being included in the reading of the statement. According to one news report from Jamaica, 'the leaders of Caribbean islands Saint Maarten and Suriname in South America regretted the lack of dialogue from the Netherlands over the apology.' See, 'Dutch King says slavery apology start of "long journey"', *Jamaica Observer*, 25 December 2002, https://www.jamaicaobserver.com/2022/12/25/dutch-king-says-slavery-apology-start-of-long-journey/, accessed 12 April 2024. The 2023 study, State and Slavery (https://www.staatenslavernij.nl/het-boek-staat-en-slavernij/), which considered Dutch wealth and slavery and the twenty-two-year-old National Institute for the Study of Dutch Slavery and its Legacy, are further examples of Dutch reckoning with slavery that do not have similarly nationally sponsored programs in the UK.

14 See John Oldfield, *Chords of Freedom: Commemoration, ritual, and British Transatlantic Slavery* (Manchester University Press 2007).

15 Esther Baakman, 'From Valuable Merchandise to Violent Rebels. Depicting Enslaved Africans in the Dutch Periodical Press in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', BMGN – LCHR 139:3 (2024). DOI https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgnlchr.12793.

century when productive slave colonies were established in the Caribbean and the African trade was most active, compel us to consider more closely what concepts of African slavery meant in the Netherlands. This is especially fascinating given the wider reach of the printed press in the eighteenth century. Simon Newman has found similar shifts in racialised language about 'slaves' in English periodicals during the era of the Stuart Restoration.[16] Baakman's point on ambiguities in the eighteenth-century Dutch press in some ways suggest that this cognitive reorientation around who was considered a 'slave' was part of a wider pattern of European race-making. The colonial records might offer further evidence. John Garrigus found that in Saint-Domingue after the Seven Years War civil records reclassified freed people as 'affranchis' and in so doing connected them, whatever the status of their birth, to slavery.[17] Catherine Hall's research on planter-historian Edward Long persuasively argues that his racial prejudices of 1750 Jamaica permanently shaped British conceptions of race.[18]

These transformations from abstract to concrete in the European knowledge of the world of Atlantic slavery were driven by war, rebellion, and revolution. White colonists lived in eternal fear, surpassed in number by African captives and conscious of the human abuse of their enterprise. Each plot and rising seared their anxiety. Their shields were not only martial, but also ideological. They turned to each other for indication of how to treat and report on enslaved rebellions. The greatest of all these was what occurred in Saint-Domingue in 1791. Baakman's discussion of Dutch newspaper coverage on the events in the French colony which draw on reports from British and French sources, emphasizes how complicated the Revolution was for European audiences. Reports of preceding revolts – even the major one in Berbice in 1763 – that presented the Africans who organized it as brutal, were expanded with discussions of the politics of revolution. At the same time the Haitian Revolution represented something grander. Everything that had been touched by the nib of slavery had to consider what had occurred in Haiti. It was not just the definition of slavery that had to be reconstructed but, more significantly, the meaning of freedom.

Historians of the Haitian Revolution have in recent decades done tremendous work in giving forensic attention to the travel of a concept of Black freedom in the nineteenth century, especially after the founding of the independent Haitian republic in 1804. This was not solely a Haitian phenomenon. Black freedom was always in motion, finding purchase with the Maroons in Jamaica in the 1730s, and the Saramaka in Suriname in the

16 Simon P. Newman, *Freedom Seekers: Escaping from Slavery in Restoration London* (University of London Press 2022). DOI: https://doi.org/10.14296/202202.9781912702947.

17 John Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue* (Palgrave Macmillan 2011).

18 Hall, *Lucky Valley*.

1760s, other fleers from oppression, resistors on plantations and on the choppy waters of the Atlantic, and in the words and prose of Black travellers to Europe and across the Americas. What Haiti represented was a rejection of Enlightenment ideas of racial difference. That it occurred at a time in history when its tales could find audiences across the world, only served to force more discussion and drive more fear stretching all the way into late nineteenth century when echoes of eighteenth-century dread reverberated in colonial alarms over resistance to 'civilisation'. The more immediate responses give us indication of the knots of New World slavery and how they were frayed by events in Haiti. This question has for some time been the concern of much of the outstanding scholarship on the Haitian Revolution.

Fatah-Black's essay in this special issue argues that Dutch views of slavery were unavoidably changed by the Haitian Revolution.[19] On the surface, and given the scholarly focus on Haitian influence, this might seem expected. When considered with the specifics of Dutch debates in the 1790s and the historiographical insistence on the economics of Dutch involvement in African slavery, it is an argument that clarifies some of the ambiguities that Baakman finds in her work.

Haiti existed in the Dutch imagination as more than a rupture of French colonial slavery. It was also a warning. The rising in the former Dutch colony of Demerara in 1823, argued by Emilia Viotti DaCosta as decisive in British abolitionism, was reported in the Dutch press according to Fatah-Black's research, as a warning of a 'second Saint-Domingue'.[20] It was the same language used in Spanish periodicals after the Aponte rebellion in 1812 Cuba and in Jamaican papers after the Morant Bay rising in 1865.[21] In most other cases the Haitian alarm echoed in spaces where a liberal ethos coexisted so that the fright did not dampen the spirit of those who argued that the Haitian Revolution was why slavery should be abolished. In the United States, Haiti was invoked by both proslavery and anti-slavery interests in the southern states. In the Netherlands there was no such division. This was because, according to Fatah-Black, conservatives brought to continental Europe a predetermined version of events. The more neutral narrative by British soldier Marcus Rainsford's 1805 account of the events in Saint-Domingue was translated into Dutch and had the appeal of first-hand accounts. But it could not compete with the hardened conservative views or, perhaps, the

19 Karwan Fatah-Black, '"Oh Dutchmen, Defer this Catastrophe": The Haitian Revolution and the Decline of Abolitionism in the Netherlands, ca. 1790-1840', *BMGN – LCHR* 139:3 (2024). DOI: https://doi.org/10.51769/bmgn-lchr.12788.

20 On the Demerara revolt see the classic study of Emilia Viotti DaCosta, *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood: The Demerara Slave Rebellion of 1823* (Oxford University Press 1997).

21 On the Atlantic influence of the Haitian Revolution, see the essays in David P. Geggus (ed.), *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (University of South Carolina Press 2001).

stunning visuals of French artists depicting Black massacres of white colonists in northern Cap Français. This imagery, more than words, shaped the views of what Fatah-Black calls, 'the international colonial elite'.

One of the intriguing aspects of this argument is that the interpretation of Haitian events in the Netherlands was reinforced by news reports from other colonies. Fatah-Black finds in the *Leydse Courant* that in the period between the Treaty of Paris and the outbreak of the French Revolution, hundreds of articles on Saint-Domingue were printed. There were also hundreds of news reports in the *Leydse Courant* on Jamaica and Spanish Puerto Rico, while featuring fewer articles, appeared in over 500 advertisements. What this suggests was that in the Dutch imagination of the Caribbean there was an interregional network of trade and empire. When news about any of these colonies, especially Saint-Domingue, arrived, it could be fitted into the tapestry of Atlantic colonialism. The world in which Dutch colonialism functioned was ordered vividly through these networks; when there was a break in transmission at one node, the effect on the corpus could be clearly appreciated.

It was not just Suriname or the Netherland Antilles that were affected by nineteenth-century Dutch visions of colonialism and slavery, but also the recent colonies of the Dutch East Indies. In his discussion of the Moluccas in Southeast Asia, Philip Post examines how an international grammar of abolitionism was deployed to assert Dutch colonialism.[22] The Dutch colonial apparatus had evolved in such a way as to distinguish slavery from colonialism. Anti-slavery was an esteemed indication of humanitarian modernity. The colonial machinery, on the other hand, was the binding source of imperial enlightenment and required whatever was necessary to continue to turn. This, as Post illustrates, included enforced labour and the same instruments of control that the administrators claimed to have defeated. In some ways this process synchronizes with the point in Lauret's research about slaveholding interests unyielding demand for labour as a condition of abolitionism.

The separate spheres in which abolitionism and colonialism revolved in the nineteenth century, have traces in what Dirk Alkemade finds in eighteenth-century Dutch republican distinctions between antislavery and abolition.[23] It was rousing to sidle with early humanitarian castigations against Black oppression. It was another thing entirely for that sentiment to matriculate to political or popular action to end slavery. As Alkemade states, 'the onset of enlightenment had not led to any serious attempts to abolish slavery.' Pieter Vreede's parliamentary eloquence on the 'rights of man'

22 Philip Post, 'A Benign Empire? The Instrumentalisation of Abolitionism in the Moluccas, 1817-1879', *BMGN – LCHR* 139:3 (2024). DOI: https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgnlchr.12792.

23 Dirk Alkemade, 'Why was Slavery not Abolished in 1798? Humanity and Human Rights in the Batavian Revolution', *BMGN – LCHR* 139:3 (2024). DOI: https://doi.org/10.18352/bmgnlchr.12807.

emerged in an atmosphere where similar debates over British colonialism in the Caribbean and India stirred by the contradictions in Paris and Cap Français were clearly significant to the parliamentary debates in the Batavian period.[24] Alkemade answers the question of his title by emphasizing the supremacy of political fears over moral right.

It might be that for the Batavians in that ephemeral period, as for the men who met in Philadelphia a decade before, the collision of applying Enlightenment thinking of the universal rights of man to Africans in bondage and the preservation of a transatlantic economy based on enslavement was too great to resolve. Post's discussion of Governor Van der Capellen's use of registration of enslaved persons illustrates the point well. The contradiction between the 'lofty rhetoric' of the governing elite on abolitionism did not halt their participation in the trade of Africans. The registers of enslaved persons introduced by Van der Capellen – a practice also done extensively in the British islands between 1816 and 1834 on the insistence of anti-slavery organizers – introduced an instrument concerned principally with surveillance and less with treatment.

The contradictions raise a scholarly challenge to explain the co-existence of anti-abolitionism and abolitionism within the same skin of Enlightenment. Anxieties over race haunt the writings of European Enlightenment thinkers who were read by people on opposing sides of the debate over what Black freedom meant. Surya Parekh has suggested that it might be more useful to focus less on contradictions but to read them differently across a wider geography. In *Black Enlightenment* Parekh describes the arrival of enslavement in the Dutch Cape of Good Hope in the seventeenth century that identified Black people as 'lazy'. Accounts published in Dutch, German, English and French travelled a century until finding their repetition in Kant's writings which, in turn, had their own journey bringing ideas of racial difference into the minds and words of parliamentarians in Westminster, Washington, and the Batavian Republic. Giving pause to how Enlightenment ideas were read in the eighteenth century by an expansive public of various races, demands our awareness of 'the limits of Enlightenment, of its compatibility with hierarchical schemes, and of our own complicity in thinking related thoughts today.'[25]

It is also useful to read the fears of the possible outcomes of abolitionism which, like Enlightenment thought, were heterogenous. Popular culture through plays and novels, which are discussed by Alkemade, spread the cultural idea that slavery was dehumanizing but it seems in the Netherlands as elsewhere, ending slavery was a difficult concept to embrace

24 On this point, see Sunil Agnani, *Hating Empire Properly: The Two Indies and the Limits of Enlightenment Anticolonialism* (Fordham University Press 2016).

25 Surya Parekh, *Black Enlightenment* (Duke University Press 2023) 21. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478027225.

Figure 2. *The Conch Blower*, in Emancipation Garden in Charlotte Amalia, St. Thomas, USVI, January 2010. The statue invokes Albert Mangonès's celebrated 1967 bronze statue, *Le marron inconnu* which stands in Port-au-Prince. Photo by Gruepig, CC BY-SA 4.0, via https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=70831167.

when reports of Black violence made it to the newspapers. Slavery had been abolished in Saint-Domingue, but that colony was still engulfed in what French recorders misinterpreted as a race war. The United States was proclaiming its young democracy as republican idealism and did it without unsettling slavery. The abolition question in the Netherlands, as Alkemade concludes, lost its fire. By the time Jean-Jacques Dessalines renounced France and claimed the once wealthy land for free Africans and their progeny, the idea of full abolition became even more difficult to comprehend (see Figure 2).

Haiti forced not only a discussion on the problem of slavery but also the colonial question. This was another matter that few people from the North Sea to the Caribbean Sea were prepared to pursue, let alone consider. The issue was always how to continue the machinery of tropical profit. In the Netherlands British pressures to abolish the slave-trade found support which arrived in 1814 as parliamentarians focused on maintaining their industries.[26] The abolition of slavery was tenable once alternatives to the maintenance of the colonial empire continued. The planter class in the British islands – declining in prestige and troubled to no end over the future of their crops – heaved great pressure for compensation and immigrant labour. The more recent colonies in the eastern Caribbean were able to manage. In Jamaica total abolition in 1838 arrived with a tightening of colonial control. Freed people were denied justice, given extremely limited political rights, and left to fend in a colony that offered them little for their centuries of forced labour.

If Dutch abolitionists looked to their left in 1863, they would have seen in Jamaica that abolition of slavery was a transformative moment in the Caribbean, that did not bring about true freedom. The explosion of the Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica in October 1865 reignited an international question as to the fate of the postslavery world. The rebellion was met with vicious bloodletting by the colonial government which was praised by many in England as the right course of action.[27] It was not the injustice that had led to the event that was discussed so much as the colonial obligation to freed people: an intensification of control that limited rather than released more rights.

What bound most people living in the archipelago in the century between emancipation and independence was the visceral awareness that

26 Pepijn Brandon, '"Shrewd Sirens of Humanity": The Changing Shape of Pro-slavery Arguments in the Netherlands (1789-1814)', *Almanak* 14 (2016). DOI: https://doi.org/10.1590/2236-463320161402.

27 For a history of the Morant Bay Rebellion, see, Gad Heuman, *'The Killing Time': The Morant Bay Rebellion in Jamaica* (University of Tennessee Press 1995). For a discussion of the internal political culture that shaped the precedent of the event, see Swithin Wilmot, 'Keynote Address: The Road to Morant Bay, Politics in Free Jamaica, 1838-1845', *Journal of Caribbean History* 50:1 (2016) 2-17. On the connections between Morant Bay and events in Haiti, see Matthew J. Smith, *Liberty, Fraternity, Exile: Haiti and Jamaica After Emancipation* (University of North Carolina Press 2014) 136-163.

colonialism and racism were larger than modernist clarions of collective humanity. It is in the work of those who wrote from the other side of history that we find the answers to the questions about what 'freedom' means, a question that exercised the minds of anti-slavery, abolitionists, and pro-slavery advocates alike.

The Surinamese intellectual Anton de Kom knew well the legacy of abolition. In his inspirational *We Slaves of Suriname* first published in 1934, he issued a scathing attack on the failures of Dutch abolitionism. 'It is as if we were pulled out of the fire only to be hurled into the waves of the Atlantic, unable to swim.'[28]

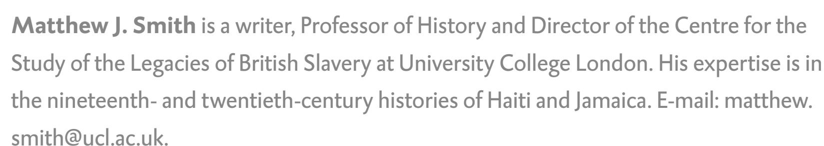
De Kom, like others of his generation, was a descendant of enslaved persons who questioned the inheritance of legislative freedom. He grew up in a Dutch colony plagued by inequality and misery that resembled the postslavery colonies of the Caribbean and the poorer districts of the US South and the independent nations of South America. He wrote to a White Dutch readership that like the French readers who read Haitian Anténor Firmin's, *De L'égalité des races humaines* (1883), the British audience that read Trinidadian CLR James' *The Black Jacobins* (1938), the Portuguese readers who read Brazilian Gilberto Freyre's, *Casa-Grande e Senzala* (1933), the Spanish readers who read Cuban Alejo Carpentier's *El reino de este mundo* (1949), and the US readers who read Black writer W.E.B. Dubois' *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), understood little of what freedom from slavery was like for the descendants of slavery. 'Prove to us, if you can,' thundered De Kom, 'that the Surinamese are free in the true meaning of the word, that they are no longer forced to sell their capacity for labour, albeit in a different manner than in the era of slavery.' Abolitionism, according to De Kom, had no plan outside of its humanitarian rhetoric for the inclusion of Black persons into Dutch society. 'While the colonists received three hundred guilders per slave, the freed slaves themselves had not one red cent to call their own. they were free, but without the means to provide for themselves for a single day. they were given no land, as the European colonists had been. They were given no agricultural training that would later have enabled them to cultivate their smallholdings.'[29]

The commemoration of 150 years of emancipation in the Dutch Atlantic has come at a time when the kind of critique offered by De Kom has found assertive expression among his heirs. The campaign for reparatory justice continues to grow and issue demands for more serious engagement with the legacies of slavery. The commitment to confront the clunky remnants of racial disavowal is part of something that can be sensed more palpably in the Caribbean. It lives in the ownership of the split heritages of Curaçaoan artists, the pride of the Saramaka memorials and the colours of Wandelmars on the streets of Paramaribo. In those spaces, the culture of the people

28 Anton de Kom, *We Slaves of Suriname* (Polity [1934] 2022) 144-145.

29 Ibid., 144-145.

who settled from Africa and Asia merge in melodic cadences of resistance languages to form a Caribbeaness. And at the Curaçao Maritime Museum in Willemstad the story that rings through the silences in the display text is of a threaded Caribbean experience, joined by imperialism, slavery, constant movement among the islands and the struggle to define and claim a freedom denied by emancipation. A way forward for the scholar of Dutch slavery is to probe further these experiences and treat them as one with the eighteenth-century debates of the Dutch. It is, after all, in the archives of the Dutch Atlantic past – more textured than those of other islands – and the breathing archive of the present that we find the evidence of the people of the Antilles, the real El Dorado.



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