



## Life in New Amsterdam Educator Resource Guide



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**Andrea C. Mosterman** **Slavery In New Amsterdam**



## Slavery in New Amsterdam

Slavery became an integral part of New Amsterdam's economy and society almost from the beginning. As early as 1626, enslaved Africans lived in the Dutch colonial town, and especially during the early years of settlement they made up a significant part of the town's population. When imagining slavery, we tend to think of the large plantations in the Caribbean or the 18th and 19th century U.S. South. The lives of New Amsterdam's enslaved population differed greatly from the enslaved people on those plantations; in fact, slavery in New Amsterdam had a distinct character.

Most of New Amsterdam's enslaved population belonged to the Dutch West India Company. The Company used these enslaved men and women to help build New Amsterdam's fort, develop the colony's infrastructure, work on the local farms, and protect the early settlements from Native American attacks. At least some of their labor was done in chain gangs with an appointed overseer who ensured that these slaves completed their work properly. These Company slaves lived in houses located in an area outside of the main settlement.

Over time, a growing number of individual settlers owned slaves, but these enslaved laborers did not work on large plantations. Instead, many of these enslaved men, women, and children labored on the farms, worked in the docks, served as house servants, or assisted Dutch artisans in the workplace. Some settlers rented slaves or complete farms from the Company, but most of them purchased their slaves either from the West India Company or from other slaveholders.

A local slave trading market never matured in the Dutch colonial period. Nevertheless, several slave auctions did take place in New Amsterdam. At an auction in May 1664, for instance, the Company sold up to 30 slaves to 20 city residents for prices that ranged from 255 to 615 guilders; an enslaved woman and her child were sold together for 360 guilders. Two large slave ships arrived in New Amsterdam: the *Witte Paert* in 1655 and the *Gideon* in 1664, but in this same time period, most African captives arrived in the colony in relatively small numbers on board ships that brought various people and goods from the Dutch colony of Curaçao.

Although New Amsterdam's enslaved population came from various parts of Africa and the Americas, the majority of the earliest enslaved population originated in West Central Africa. Their names, like Manuel Congo or Isabel D'Angola, reveal their West Central African origins. Because we know where many of New Amsterdam's enslaved Africans came from, we can better understand their life and culture in New Amsterdam. For example, their Catholic, Portuguese first names indicate that they were probably Christian before they reached New Amsterdam. This is certainly not surprising, since large numbers of West Central Africans had converted to Christianity in the 16th and 17th centuries.

These Catholic slaves married and baptized their children in the Dutch Reformed Church, the only Christian Church allowed in the colony. The earliest recorded slave marriage in the church was in 1641 between Anthony van Angola and Lúcie D'Angola, but others soon followed. At least 30 children of enslaved Africans were baptized in the church between 1639 and 1645. Fellow African slaves stood witness at these events, and by doing so they created strong extended kinship connections as a way to substitute for the family ties that had been lost when they were enslaved and transported across the Atlantic. And different from what was custom in many slave societies, colonial authorities as well as individual settlers in New Amsterdam acknowledged and often honored slave marriages and parental relations. When Jeremias van Rensselaer purchased an enslaved man from Petrus Stuyvesant, the director of the colony urged Van Rensselaer to also buy the man's wife.

Unlike other societies where enslaved Africans made up an important part of the labor force, New Amsterdam's enslaved Africans could own property and even earn wages. In 1639, for example, Pedro Negretto won a court case against a free Dutch

PREVIOUS PAGE (TOP):  
Slave burying ground. ca. 1910.  
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PREVIOUS PAGE (BOTTOM):  
Located on Duane Street just east of  
Broadway in Manhattan lies the African  
Burial Ground National Monument. It is  
the nation's earliest known African and  
African American cemetery.  
Courtesy Wally Gobetz/Creative Commons

## ABOUT

# Andrea C. Mosterman

Growing up on an island in the most northern part of the Netherlands, I never really learned much about the history of slavery in the Dutch colonies or Dutch participation in the slave trade. When I moved to Amsterdam in my late teens, I became close friends with people of Surinamese descent, some of whom were descendants of enslaved Africans in this former Dutch colony. They exposed me to a part of Dutch history I knew very little about. As a child, for example, I would often hear stories about people like Petrus Stuyvesant, Dutch men who had been so important to Dutch expansion in the Golden Age, but these stories failed to include that Stuyvesant benefitted from the labor of enslaved Africans and facilitated the sales of African captives in New Amsterdam. As I learned more about this history, I came to realize that I did not know the history of my country and its people very well. It is this realization that led me to study the history of slavery, so that, hopefully, I can help educate future generations about this often-ignored part of history.

*Andrea C. Mosterman is an assistant professor in Atlantic History at the University of New Orleans. After having obtained a BA and MA from the University of Amsterdam, she completed her Ph.D. at Boston University, specializing in Atlantic and Early American History. In her work, she explores the multi-faceted dimensions of slavery, slave trade, and cross-cultural contact in the Dutch Atlantic and early New York. Mosterman was awarded various grants, among them the John Adams Grant from the General Society of Colonial Wars and the Michael Kraus Grant from the American Historical Association. She was also a Gilder Lehrman Research Fellow at the New-York Historical Society, and she received the Quinn-Library and Quinn-Archives Research Residencies for research at the New York State Archives and Library. She has published in, among others, The Journal of African History.*

settler for unpaid labor. Cleijn Manuel, also a Company slave, went to court because a free colonist had struck his cow. The court resolved that the colonist pay Cleijn Manuel for the damages he had done. Company slaves not only claimed property rights and demanded wages, but some of them also petitioned the Company for their freedom. In 1644, 11 Company slaves argued that they had worked for the Company for as much as 18 or 19 years and needed their freedom so that they could better take care of their families. The Council responded by giving these slaves and their wives “conditional freedom,” also known as “half-freedom”: they would have to pay modest, yearly fees to the Company and provide service to the Company whenever it needed them (but be paid for such service). The agreement also required that their children remain enslaved. Records suggest, however, that most of these children remained with their families. Those receiving conditional freedom in 1644 were also given plots of land north of Manhattan’s Dutch settlement, so that they could provide for their wives and children. Here, they established themselves as independent farmers and built a close-knit community that survived into the 18th century.

Several others followed their example, although the conditions of their freedom differed per case. When three enslaved women requested manumission from the Company in December of 1662, the Council granted them their freedom under the condition that each week one of the three women would return for housework at the Director-General’s house. Only a few months later, Mayken, one of the women, petitioned for full freedom, which she received. By now, the other two women had passed away, leaving all the work to her. In her petition, she explained she was old and weak, having been a slave since 1628, and she wanted to live the final part of her life as a free woman.

New Amsterdam’s African community understood that their half-free condition was distinct to the Dutch colony. That is why on September 4, 1664, eight “half-slaves” petitioned New Netherland’s Colonial Council to grant them their full freedom. These half-free men linked the urgency of their petition to the “arrival of the English ships and soldiers.” They reasonably feared that the English might re-enslave them because the English would not understand their conditional status.

Despite their fears, these former Company slaves successfully held on to their freedom after the English took over the colony. They lived north of the Fresh Water Pond in the area where we now find Washington Square Park. Their descendants continued to live on this land for several generations as New York City’s first free African-American community.

In conclusion, slavery in New Amsterdam differed significantly from slavery in the plantation societies of the Caribbean or the American South. Nevertheless, in the latter part of the 17th century, the reliance on slave labor by individuals increased and the circumstances under which the enslaved population lived became more oppressive. In August of 1664, just before the colony was transferred to English control, the Dutch slave ship *Gideon* arrived in the New Amsterdam harbor. The 290 African captives on board this ship would never have the same distinct opportunities that the earlier generations of enslaved men and women had in New Amsterdam.

## Biography of Cleijn Anthonij van Angola

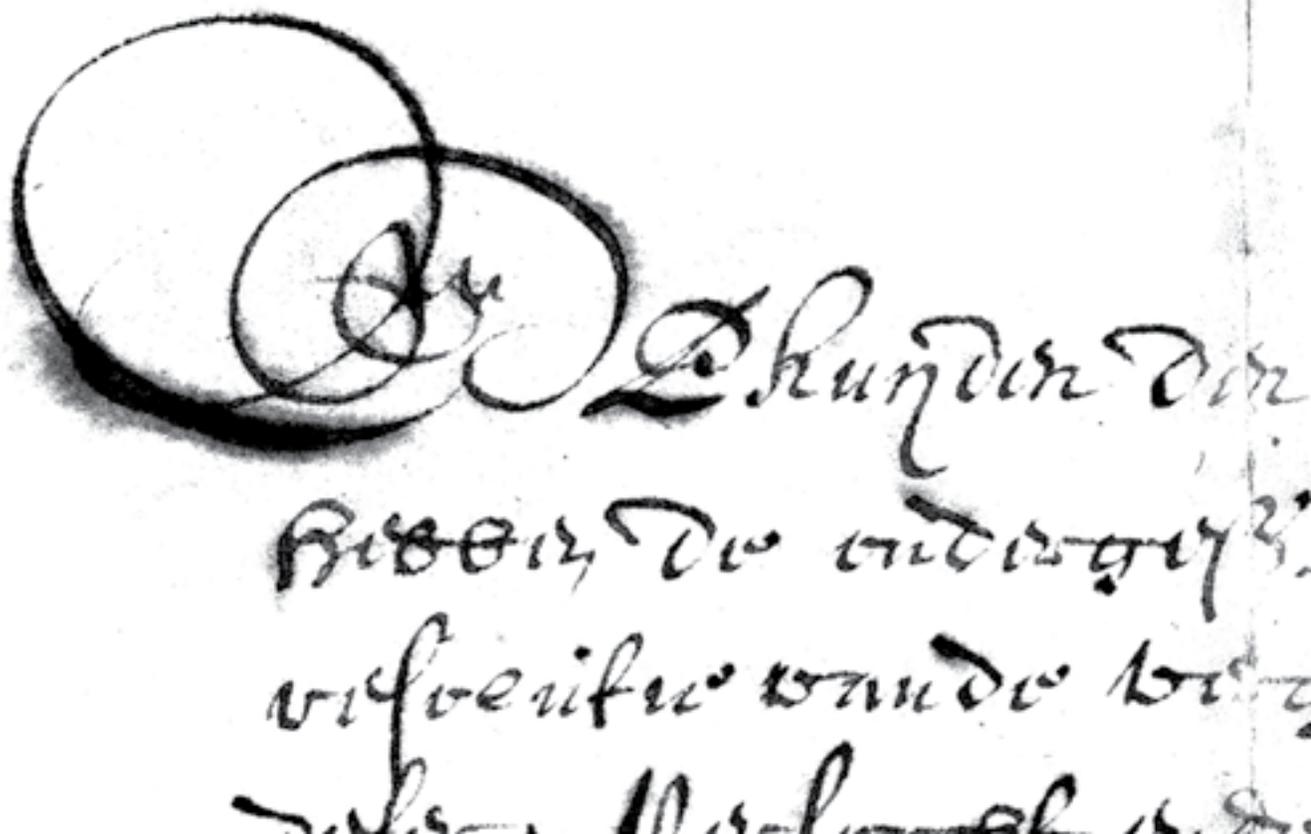
On February 25, 1644, Cleijn Anthonij or Antonio van Angola (meaning little Anthony from Angola) was among the 11 slaves to whom the Dutch West India Company granted half-freedom and land for farming. At this time, he had served the Company for at least 18 years. He was likely one of the first slaves to have arrived in New Amsterdam. Like most of the slaves who arrived in New Amsterdam in the 1620s, he came from West Central Africa, as his name indicates.

Several years before he obtained half-freedom, in January of 1641, he was one of nine slaves who admitted to killing fellow Company slave, Jan Premero. At the time, the Company decided to execute only one of the nine slaves for the crime. The drawing of lots would determine who would receive this unlucky fate, which fell to Manuel de Gerrit de Reus. But De Reus managed to survive the hanging when both nooses around his neck broke. It is unknown whether this was a result of a pure or planned accident. At the urging of the crowd of witnesses, the Company pardoned him, perhaps thinking that the botched hanging was enough of a punishment to De Reus and a warning to others, or maybe the Company was pleased that pardoning De Reus would allow keeping this undoubtedly valuable worker alive. Interestingly, even though both Cleijn Anthonij and Manuel de Gerrit de Reus had confessed to killing a Company slave, the Company still granted them half-freedom only years later. In fact, the Company granted half-freedom to all but one of the slaves who had admitted to the crime.

Throughout his years in the colony, Cleijn Anthonij proved to have been a prominent member of the African community. For example, several fellow Africans asked him to serve as a witness of their children's baptism, which could be considered a great honor and important responsibility. Anthonij married Louize, also a Company slave, and they had at least one child, a boy named Anthonij, who was baptized on August 30, 1643, in the Dutch Reformed Church. Sadly, Louize died only a few weeks after her son was born, and Cleijn Anthonij passed away about five years later. Fellow freed Africans Dorothy Angola and Emanuel Pietersen took care of Cleijn Anthonij's son, and they eventually were able to get the boy full freedom in 1661. Their care for this child of fellow Africans reveals once again that these African men and women created a close-knit community in the Dutch colonial town of New Amsterdam in which they took care of each other when needed.<sup>1</sup>

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Council Minutes 21 March 1661, A1809 Council Minutes, 557, NYSA.



The image shows a close-up of a handwritten document in Dutch. The text is written in a cursive script. The visible words include "De", "Lijndin", "van", "Bibor", "de", "indigij", "vifveite", "wande", "be", "duke", "Nederland". The handwriting is dark and somewhat faded, with some ink bleed-through from the reverse side of the page.

## Slavery In New Amsterdam

# LESSON

# 4

### BELOW:

Declaration of the West India Company  
acknowledging the sale of the Company's  
farm on Manhattan Island to Jan Jansz  
Damen on behalf of Petrus Stuyvesant.  
March 12, 1651. 35.431.1.

## Introducing the Topic

Slavery is an involuntary condition in which a person is considered and treated as property with little to no independent rights. In New Amsterdam, most of the enslaved population belonged to the Dutch West India Company, and these people became a very important part of the town's society. Most slaves arrived in small groups on board ships that carried various people and goods from the Dutch colony of Curaçao in the Caribbean. Additionally, there were two large slave ships that brought slaves to New Amsterdam — the *Witte Paert* in 1655 and the *Gideon* in 1664. Enslaved people worked on the docks, as house servants, and assisted Dutch artisans in their work. They used to protect the early settlements of New Netherland from attacks by Native Americans. Both the Dutch West India Company and individual slave owners used enslaved laborers on their farms to grow food for the colonists and for export.

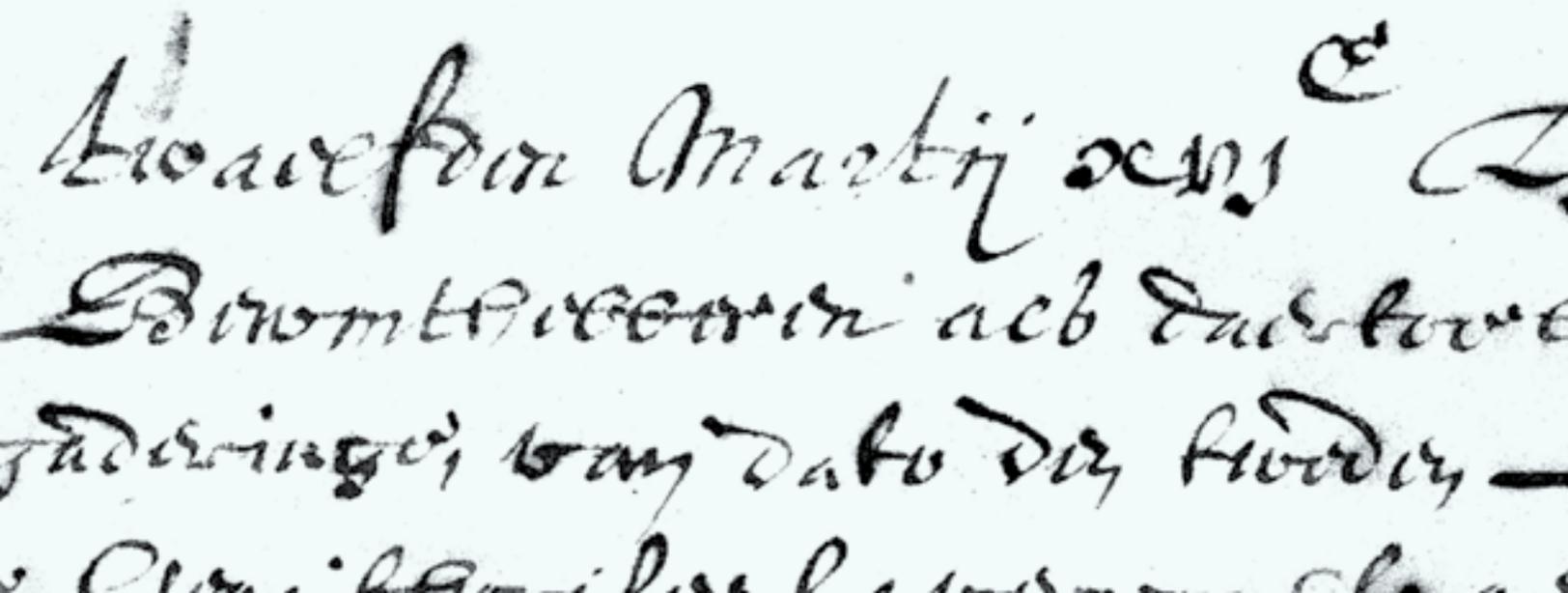
In 1644, 11 slaves made a petition to the Company, saying that they had worked for 18 or 19 years, and now needed their freedom in order to take better care of their families. The Council's answer was to give these slaves and their wives "conditional freedom" or "half-freedom," which meant they would still have to work for the Company when needed, but for payment. Those with "conditional freedom" lived on land north of New Amsterdam, beyond the wall, and had to pay a yearly fee to the Company. Their children remained enslaved, but evidence suggests that they remained with their families and built a close-knit community of independent farming families on their land. While few of their belongings have been left behind, we can glimpse the story of their lives through other types of artifacts and see their legacy in the shape of the city in the streets of lower Manhattan.

### Essential Questions

What role did enslaved people play in New Amsterdam? How did enslaved people advocate for themselves to gain conditional freedom? What tools do we have to conduct research to learn about historical events?

### Vocabulary List

- Artifact
- Half-freedom
- Petition
- Enslaved
- Legacy
- Slavery



## Introducing the Sources

### **The Castello Plan. New Amsterdam in 1660. 1916. 29.100.709**

- This image, rediscovered in the Villa di Castello in Italy in 1900, shows a plan of New Amsterdam in 1660. This copy was created in 1916. Keep in mind that this plan, like many made in the 17th century, is oriented differently from maps made today. West is on the top (Hudson River), north is to the right, east is on the bottom (East River), and south is to the left.
- The plan shows the location of the star-shaped fort, the windmill near the Hudson River, the dock on the East River, houses, and streets. Most of the streets on this map are the same streets that exist in lower Manhattan today.
- Much of the infrastructure of the city, including the fort, was built by the enslaved people who belonged to the Dutch West India Company and were brought to New Amsterdam against their will. At least some of this work was done under harsh conditions, with an overseer appointed to make sure they completed their tasks.

In this lesson, newly digitized artifacts from the Museum of the City of New York's collection will help students learn about the enslaved people who lived and worked in New Amsterdam.



### **DOCUMENT BASED QUESTIONS**

- Can you identify any of the buildings, streets, or other places depicted in this plan?
- Who do you think built all these places?
- What clues do you see about how slaves arrived in New Amsterdam?
- Locate the wall at the north end of the town. Why would a wall be built here?
- Half-free individuals were given farms north of the wall. Why do you think the Company would give this land to the formerly enslaved men and women?

**Slave burying ground. ca. 1910.  
X2010.11.6774**

- This photograph shows grave stones, trees, and long grass. It shows a cemetery where slaves belonging to the Hunt family were buried in the 18th and 19th centuries.
- Slaves were buried in a separate cemetery near the one used by members of the Hunt family themselves.
- This photograph is one of very few clues to indicate exactly where this burial ground was located, currently Joseph Rodman Drake Park in the Bronx. Students from PS 48, their teachers, and local historians and politicians are working together to find out more about this site and the people who were buried there to commemorate their lives.



**Declaration of the West India Company acknowledging the sale of the Company's farm on Manhattan Island to Jan Jansz Damen on behalf of Petrus Stuyvesant. March 12, 1651. 35.431.1**

- This earliest dated document in the Museum of the City of New York records the purchase of property by Director-General Petrus Stuyvesant, through his agent Jan Jansz Damen, from the Dutch West India Company, on March 12, 1651. This was the Company's Bouwerie (farm) No. 1, where Stuyvesant lived after the English conquest until his death in 1672. This deed gives him title to a dwelling house, barn, barrack, land (about 120 acres), six cows, two horses, and two African slaves for the sum of 6400 guilders.
- Petrus Stuyvesant was the last Director-General of New Netherland from 1647-1664. He was in charge of running the entire Dutch colony.



**DOCUMENT BASED QUESTIONS**

- What is Stuyvesant taking ownership of according to the deed? Create a list.
- What don't we know about the slaves mentioned? What details are left out?

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## Further Reading: Cleijn Anthonij Van Angola

Have students read Andrea C. Mosterman's biography of Cleijn Anthonij van Angola (or read it out loud to younger students). How does his story relate to the images and artifacts we've seen in this lesson and other lessons? What clues does his story give us about the lives of enslaved people in New Amsterdam?

- Cleijn Anthonij, or Antonio van Angola was one of 11 slaves to arrive in New Amsterdam on February 25, 1644, in a sailing ship similar to those we've seen in the *Nova Amsteldam* print.
- As one of the earliest slaves in New Amsterdam, his labor may have contributed to creating much of what we see in the Castello Plan and the *Nova Amsteldam* image, including the fort, the wall, houses, and roads.
- These 11 slaves were probably the first in New Amsterdam. They petitioned the Company for their freedom, and received it, but with conditions.
- Cleijn Anthonij van Angola's name, like those of other enslaved people, gives us a rare clue about his life before he arrived in New Amsterdam.
  - "Van Angola" means "from Angola," which is in West Central Africa. Other names that reveal the West Central African origins of enslaved people in New Amsterdam are Manuel Congo, Isabel D'Angola, and Dorothy Angola.
  - Many slaves' first names also hold a clue — some were common in Portuguese Catholic society. Many West Central Africans had converted to Christianity in the 16th and 17th centuries.
- African men and women in New Amsterdam created a strong, close-knit community among themselves, and Cleijn Anthony was an important part of this. He witnessed the baptism of children of fellow Africans, which could be both a great honor and a responsibility.
- When Cleijn Anthony died, his son was cared for by fellow freed Africans, who were eventually able to get full freedom for the boy. This care for one another shows the connections that Africans in New Amsterdam made with each other, as a substitute for the family ties that were lost when they were enslaved and taken across the Atlantic Ocean.

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## Contemporary Connections

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### Slave burying ground. ca. 1910.

Little was written down about the daily lives of enslaved people. One of the ways we can remember their lives is to locate and preserve places that were important to them, including their burial grounds. Take a trip to the African Burial Ground National Monument in New York City to learn more about how early Africans in this city expressed their culture through their burial sites.

Additionally, due to the research performed by students from PS 48 in the Bronx, you can visit the site of the photograph, *Slave burying ground*, ca. 1910, a recently rediscovered burial ground on Hunts Point Road in the Bronx.

- What parts of the photograph give you clues about the site's history?
- Why is this an important site for New Yorkers today?
- Read *The New York Times* article about the work of the PS 48 teachers and students: <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/25/nyregion/south-bronx-students-may-have-found-site-of-slave-burial-ground.html>
- What tools did the students use for their research? What challenges did they face?

How do we connect modern day New York City to its Dutch roots? Have students read Andrea C. Mosterman's account of how she became interested in New Amsterdam (or read out loud to younger students).

