

INTRODUCTION

Connections within and beyond the Dutch Realm in the Long Eighteenth Century

On the eve of the Second World War, the Dutch could not imagine an end to the status of their country as a colonial power. In parliament, the idea of a parting with the Netherlands East Indies was dismissed as both fatal and unnecessary—fatal because the colonial link was perceived by many as “the cork that keeps our economy floating,” without which the Netherlands, in geopolitics, would “descend unto the rank of a country such as Denmark.” As it turned out, a parting was also unnecessary as, to paraphrase the words of a leading politician, the Netherlands had “been there [in the East Indies] for three hundred years and [would] remain there for three hundred more.” The Indonesians, he added, appreciate the Dutch presence very much. Barely ten years later, Indonesia became an independent republic, in spite of Dutch attempts to thwart the nationalist struggle for full independence through both negotiations and brutal warfare. Suddenly the Kingdom of the Netherlands had contracted to a small state bordering the cold North Sea and some Caribbean colonies on the other side of the Atlantic.¹

World War II and decolonization were two watersheds in modern Dutch history. While the Dutch were reluctant to accept the independence of Indonesia, they were happy to transfer sovereignty to Suriname in 1975, and it took two decades more before the Dutch grudgingly accepted that the six Antillean islands would remain part of the kingdom—not because of perceived metropolitan gains, but because these tiny islands refused the dubious gift of sovereignty. The Kingdom of the Netherlands therefore remains a transatlantic entity until this very day.

Postcolonial migrations formed another unanticipated dimension to post-World War II decolonization. Today, well over one million out of a total of 17 million Dutch citizens have colonial roots. Colonialism therefore has come home, and with it a critical reexamination of colonial history. Glorifying the colonial past is no longer *de rigueur*. Instead, colonialism sparks critical debates about the nation's failure to live up to its own professed ideals of democracy, liberalism, and humanism. Dutch Atlantic history today is mainly associated with the Atlantic slave trade and African slavery in the Americas, and with the resulting colonial riches converted into the stunning canal houses of old cities in Holland and Zeeland. In 2002, the National Slavery Monument was unveiled in the nation's capital Amsterdam. Both the Dutch queen and the prime minister attended the ceremony, listening attentively to solemn speeches and witnessing Afro-Caribbean rituals.²

This book recounts a long and crucial episode in this unfinished history: the long eighteenth century of the Dutch Atlantic. This was a period in which, unlike in the post-1815 world, the Atlantic exploits seemed as promising to the Dutch as their colonial ventures in Asia. It was also a period in which they engaged in the Atlantic slave trade, built their own plantation colonies on the "Wild Coast" of South America, and developed their Caribbean islands into commercial assets, only to suffer from overstretch and eventually irrevocable contraction during the Napoleonic wars.

This was the last period in Atlantic history in which the Dutch played a major role—a far more prominent one than might be expected bearing in mind the moderate scale of both the metropolis and its colonies. Much of the historical importance of the Dutch in the Atlantic was tied up in other Atlantic territories and ventures, as we will learn. This is not a history most Dutch are proud of today—the nation's reputation for

early democracy, religious toleration, and freedom of thought compares poorly to practices of enslavement and terror, racism and bigotry, and crass exploitation. And yet there are intriguing stories here too of ethnic diversity, of cultural entanglement, and of working around the disadvantages of being a minor power by constantly forging formal and informal connections to larger nations' territories.

A key element in the recent historiography of the early modern Atlantic is the growing awareness of the interconnectedness not only of the various continents, but also of the various empires that made up this Atlantic world. This book contributes to our understanding of the deeply entangled character of the Atlantic by focusing on the Dutch Atlantic, by which we mean not just the Dutch Republic and its colonies in West Africa and the Americas, but equally the web of relations linking these nominally Dutch places and their inhabitants to a larger world dominated by the Iberian, British, and French empires. *Realm among Empires* therefore offers both a succinct analysis of a lesser-known part of Atlantic history and a contribution to our understanding of the entangled character of the wider Atlantic.

The Second Dutch Atlantic in the Historiography

While one reason for writing *Realm among Empires* was simply that this history is too often neglected in general overviews of Atlantic history, there is also a deeper motive with relevance to the wider historiography. Dutch Atlantic history illustrates how strongly the early modern Atlantic relied on the circulation of goods, people, and ideas across the lines drawn by the various metropolitan states. These entanglements have long been obscured by the tendency among historians to look at only one Atlantic domain or, if an attempt at comparison was done at all, to compare only the Spanish and British Atlantic empires.

Indeed, much of the historiography of the Dutch Atlantic has tended to look only at this slice of the colonial world, or even to focus on one of its constituent parts only. This applies to historians rooted in the Netherlands or its former Atlantic colonies, but equally to the few others who overcame the linguistic hurdles involved in studying Dutch colonial history. Traditionally, most historical studies have focused on Suriname, followed

by Curaçao and the broader theme of the Dutch slave trade. Only in the last decade or two has there been more attention to the links between the various constituent parts of the Dutch Atlantic and its ties with the wider Atlantic world.

That it took a long time for Dutch Atlantic historiography to mature is not entirely surprising, even if we exclude the linguistic factor.³ Dutch colonial history has long been associated mainly with the initial spectacular successes of the Dutch East India Company (VOC), the subsequent development and exploitation of the Dutch East Indies after 1815, and the traumatic process of decolonization in Indonesia (1945–49). The international historiography of the early modern Atlantic in turn has focused primarily on the Iberian and British empires, and to a lesser degree the French empire. For a very long time, the Dutch Atlantic fell between the cracks, perceived to have been of marginal significance to both the Dutch Republic and the emergence and functioning of the wider Atlantic. In the past prominent economic historians of the Dutch Republic and its Atlantic colonies such as Jan de Vries and Pieter Emmer indeed explicitly promoted the idea of the Dutch Atlantic as a persistent failure.⁴

In the last fifteen years or so, this interpretation has been challenged, again mainly by economic historians. The volume *Riches from Atlantic Commerce* (2003), edited by the foremost historian of the Dutch Atlantic slave trade, Johannes Postma, and the Dutch scholar Victor Enthoven, sought to highlight the substantial economic significance of the Dutch Atlantic, an argument that particularly Enthoven and historian Henk den Heijer have since defended with programmatic zeal.⁵ Quantitative research done over the past decades has indeed led to upwards revisions of the volume of both the Dutch Atlantic slave trade and the bilateral trade between the Caribbean colonies and the Dutch Republic. In our own recent publications as in the present book, we also indicate that the Dutch Atlantic economy grew with leaps and bounds up to the 1780s, a growth the more remarkable as the domestic Dutch economy became stagnant for much of the eighteenth century.⁶

An even more promising line of revisionism developed in this book is the emphasis on the role Dutch Atlantic intermediaries played in the broader Atlantic world. This is the story, on the one hand, of merchants in the Dutch Republic spinning commercial networks that covered locations throughout the Atlantic, and on the other hand—and more

spectacularly—of the ascent of Curaçao and St. Eustatius (or Statia) as free trade markets linking various parts of the Atlantic across imperial borders. Many contributions to the recent volume *Dutch Atlantic Connections, 1680–1800* (2014), edited by Gert Oostindie and Jessica V. Roitman, indeed testify to the role of these Dutch isles and more generally Dutch actors as lubricants of the Atlantic economy.⁷ All of this confirms what De Vries has defined as the early pioneering role of the Dutch in the “soft globalization” that characterized the early phases of Atlantic history.

We use the term “realm” to denote the Dutch Atlantic of the long eighteenth century in order to distinguish it from the Dutch Moment, the period of unbridled imperial ambition that began with the founding of the West India Company (1621) and ended with the company’s demise in 1674 and reestablishment as an organization without military objectives.⁸ Its small size and lack of expansionism also made the Dutch Atlantic realm distinct from the domains of the other Atlantic powers of the eighteenth century. Nonetheless, Dutch markets and actors continued to play crucial roles up to the late eighteenth century across the Atlantic world.

At first sight one might not expect the eighteenth-century Dutch Atlantic to have mattered much whatsoever. By 1750, the Dutch share of the Caribbean colonial populations was less than ten percent (table 1). The relative smallness of these Dutch Caribbean populations translated into

TABLE 1. Populations of the Caribbean, ca. 1750

	White	Enslaved	Free nonwhite	Total
French	42,000	316,000	9,000	367,000
British	40,500	271,000	3,000	314,500
Spanish	166,000	46,000	78,000	290,000
Dutch	8,000	77,000	3,500	88,500
Danish	2,000	15,000	150	17,150
Swedish	150	50	–	200
Total	258,650	725,050	93,650	1,077,350

Source: Adapted from Engerman and Higman, “Demographic Structures,” 48–49.

Notes: Adjustments made to allow for correct grouping of colonies under metropolitan flags as valid ca. 1750. Our rounding off of figures produced minor discrepancies (the total given by Engerman and Higman is 1,076,622). As Engerman and Higman indicate, their figures are only approximations. This also explains the discrepancy with more specific figures provided in this chapter for Dutch Atlantic populations.

a modest commercial role. The Dutch share of the Atlantic slave trade was roughly five percent, or six if limited to the period up to 1800. By the 1770s, in spite of considerable growth, the Dutch share in Atlantic imports to Europe, worth some 20 million Dutch guilders, was dwarfed by the French and British shares (worth 57 and 72 million guilders), and whereas Atlantic trade made up some 40 percent of these countries' overall international trade, its significance to the Dutch economy was only 15 percent.⁹ But as we demonstrate in this book, much of the Dutch contribution to the economic growth of the Atlantic rested elsewhere: in its indispensable auxiliary role for the Spanish, British, and French empires in legal and particularly illicit trades.

The potential of the burgeoning field of Atlantic history derives largely from its drive for a comparative, cross-imperial approach and its preference for multi- and interdisciplinary methodology. Clearly the historiography of the Dutch Atlantic has much to win by the application of these twin innovations—perhaps especially the latter, as most of the scholarly literature on the Dutch Atlantic used in wider Atlantic debates pertains to the field of economic history. Dutch Atlantic historiography has therefore been criticized as particularly conservative in its emphasis on economic rather than social and particularly cultural history.¹⁰ This criticism may be a bit overstated as over the past three decades a great number of mostly Dutch-language social historical studies on slavery and slave resistance have been published—the major exception being the work on the history of the Surinamese Maroons by the American anthropologist Richard Price (*First-Time*, 1983, and *Alabi's World*, 1990)—and these Dutch studies have been largely unheeded by English-language scholars.¹¹ In recent years, however, the social and cultural history of the Dutch Atlantic has come to fruition, testifying to an awareness of the wider Atlantic context and an attempt to broaden the disciplinary scope of Dutch Atlantic studies.¹²

A Singular Republic and its Decentralized Realm

The Republic of the Seven United Provinces, or the Dutch Republic for short, originated by leaps and bounds during a drawn-out war of secession against Habsburg Spain. The outcome of this Eighty Years' War

(1568–1648) was a remarkable new state, geographically confined to the northern part of what had been the Habsburg Netherlands and constitutionally exceptional because of its republican and highly decentralized character. Of the seven provinces, Holland was by far the most powerful, and within Holland the city of Amsterdam was dominant. The political history of the republic, which was proclaimed in 1581 and lasted until the French occupation in 1795, is characterized by constant bickering over the rights and obligations of the various provinces and cities. The States General, which met in The Hague, represented these entities, exercised sovereignty over the Republic, and ultimately assumed responsibility for all state matters, including international politics, warfare, and colonial affairs.

To complicate matters, the House of Orange, a family from the nation's traditional nobility, had risen to high status during the war against Spain, with a series of leaders acquiring the semi-royal position of "stadtholder." After the conclusion of the war, there was a continuous debate as to whether or not the Orange stadtholders should be allowed a major role in state affairs. The stadtholders, who had been military commanders during the independence war, would continue to represent the more belligerent factions in the republic. Their influence in Dutch politics varied enormously over time. While there were times in which the stadtholder could almost act like a traditional monarch, there were also long periods in which the House of Orange was officially excluded from high politics.

In the decades prior to and following the 1648 Peace of Westphalia that confirmed the Dutch Republic's status as a sovereign state, the state lived its "Golden Age." The Dutch enjoyed "primacy" in world trade, in Jonathan Israel's words, even attaining (following Immanuel Wallerstein) a "world-hegemonic" status. Visible in the inner cities of Amsterdam and many other Dutch port cities, this period of unprecedented economic growth was founded on both a very competitive agrarian and industrial sector and Holland's role as an international staple market.¹³ This Golden Age, of course, was also the period in which the Dutch Republic excelled in urban planning, the arts, and sciences. Over time, the republic's complicated governmental structure enabled tremendous entrepreneurial drive, but also caused a lack of consistent leadership and hence stagnation. This was of particular concern as the eighteenth century progressed and the

Dutch Republic found itself no longer a match for its major European competitors, Great Britain and France. This, in the end, would lead to the republic's collapse in the late eighteenth century.

The origins of Dutch colonial history likewise date from this period. Individuals from the Habsburg Netherlands had long been involved in the Iberian ventures in Africa, Asia, and the Americas, but during the secession from Spain all of this acquired a new purpose and scale. Colonial expansion was not only driven by economic motives, but equally by the geopolitical ambition to inflict damage on the Iberian powers wherever this was possible. Overseas ventures were thus a national concern highly valued by the States General, the various provinces, and the major cities alike.

The institutional form given to these Dutch ambitions was exceptional. Rather than making overseas expansion and the establishment of colonies a state affair and therefore also a monarchical affair as it was in all other European countries, the States General decided to delegate these tasks to private companies. In 1602, the Dutch East India Company (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, VOC) was founded with its initial capital raised by a large number of private share-holders. The States General delegated all matters both economic and political to the VOC board, thus making the company a semi-state entity in the parts of the world over which it was given a monopoly: eastward from the southern tip of Africa up to East Asia.

In 1621, the States General issued a similar monopolistic permit to the Dutch West India Company (WIC), defining its operational area to West Africa and the Americas. Within a few decades, the WIC had conquered Spanish colonies in the Caribbean, Portuguese strongholds in West Africa, and parts of Portuguese Brazil, and had established new colonies in the Guianas and in Manhattan and environs (New Netherland). But unlike its Asian peer, the WIC experienced major financial problems from its very start and was bankrupted in 1674—partly because of the cost of failed military operations and partly because of its inability to enforce a monopoly for Dutch operations. A second WIC was established that would have a precarious existence until its liquidation in 1792. In 1674, the colonial Dutch Atlantic consisted of several fortresses along the coast of West Africa, of which Elmina was the most important; some nascent plantation colonies in the Guianas dominated by Suriname; and six tiny

Caribbean islands, of which Curaçao and St. Eustatius would be most prominent. This (from a comparative Atlantic perspective) modest collection of Dutch possessions would largely remain intact until the Napoleonic Wars concluded in 1815.

A highly decentralized European republic thus built an equally decentralized colonial framework, delegating governance, military matters, trade, and finance to two semi-state private companies. Each of these companies was governed by a board reflecting the character of the Dutch state, with “Chambers” representing the various provinces. Holland was always the most powerful among these, followed at a large distance by the other province bordering the North Sea, Zeeland. Within the province of Holland, several cities vied for influence, but none could hope to be a match for Amsterdam. The stadtholders, meanwhile, were *ex officio* members of the VOC and WIC boards, their real influence fluctuating with their overall position.

To complicate matters, the WIC lost most of its initial prerogatives during the company’s first decades, although the transatlantic slave trade remained as a monopoly. Faced with the apparently unbeatable competition by domestic, predominantly Zeeland interlopers, the company relinquished its last monopolistic pretensions in the 1730s. Long before, it had accepted the consequences of the fact that it possessed neither the financial nor the military means to conquer and govern a significant number of Atlantic possessions. In the end the insular Caribbean and the fortresses along the coast of West Africa remained under the direct jurisdiction of the WIC. The Guianas, by contrast, were ruled by separate entities in which the company was only one partner along with the city of Amsterdam in particular (*Sociëteit van Suriname*, *Sociëteit van Berbice*); or in an arrangement in which the WIC’s Chamber Zeeland was nominally dominant, hence inciting bickering again with Amsterdam (*Essequibo*).

The consequence of this institutional patchwork was that there was not one consistent Dutch interest or policy for the Atlantic, but rather many ad hoc measures and particularistic governance. Much power was thus entrusted to local assemblies headed by a “governor” or “director” representing either the WIC or one of the societies, but otherwise mainly made up by local planters and merchants. In general, they aimed for minimal metropolitan interference and taxation, but insisted on maximal military assistance in times of need. Whereas the metropolitan point of view

tended towards the opposite, it is obvious that this arrangement ended up producing extremely localized variants of “Dutch” Atlantic governance. Thus each of the colonies developed its own body of rules and regulations on social order and slavery (placards), all based on Roman law but otherwise exclusively geared towards the local elites’ best interest. There was no such thing as a singular governmental or legal framework valid for the entire Atlantic.

As we will later discuss in depth, migration greatly added to this diversity within the Dutch Atlantic. All early modern Atlantic societies were marked by the unprecedented phenomenon of the Atlantic slave trade—throughout this period, there were three enslaved Africans for each European crossing the ocean. The Dutch Atlantic was no different, but the resulting population mixes were highly diverse. In West Africa, the Dutch fortresses were primarily inhabited by employees of the WIC: both Europeans and, in the later eighteenth century, increasingly people—mainly men—of mixed African and European origins. More important, these enclaves harbored only small numbers of whites surrounded by infinitely larger numbers of Africans that were not in any way under Dutch control.

This was obviously different in the Dutch Americas. Colonial expansion implied the early marginalization of the indigenous population of the Guianas, and soon enslaved Africans and their descendants came to make up some 95 percent of the population in these plantation colonies. In the insular Dutch Caribbean, the Amerindian population had been marginal even at the time of the Dutch takeover from the Spanish. Again, population growth was primarily the result of the importation of enslaved Africans, but the share of slaves in the total population was much lower than in the Guianas both because of the primarily commercial function of these islands and higher levels of manumission.

While such different ethnic and legal ratios would have made for considerable diversity and hence different trajectories of creolization anyway, there was the additional factor of European heterogeneity. In the domains of both the VOC and the WIC, typically no more than half of the entire European population was of Dutch origin. As in the orbit of the VOC, European immigrants into West Africa and the Dutch Americas also hailed from Germany and Scandinavia, and to a lesser degree from a variety of other European lands. In contrast to the realm of the VOC, immigration into the Dutch Caribbean colonies also involved significant numbers of

Jews, predominantly Sephardim, but also Ashkenazim. All of this would leave deep marks on patterns of creolization in the Dutch Atlantic and help explain, as we will demonstrate, why the Dutch left less of a cultural footprint in the Americas than its major European competitors.

The Ambitions and Contents of this Book

With the present book, we present a history of the Dutch Atlantic in a comparative framework, incorporating the earliest contemporary writings up to the most recent scholarly work published by fellow historians on the early Dutch Atlantic, as well as the comparative approach characteristic of modern Atlantic studies.¹⁴ Entanglement is a common thread in this book, as we focus on connections between actors in various locations and social positions in both the Dutch Atlantic and its wider regional context. Moreover, we attempt to move beyond both economic history and the more conventional focus on only one or two Dutch Atlantic locations. Thus we do discuss economic history, but we also engage with politics, migration and demography, and social and cultural history. While the book is not focused on the metropolis, we do look at metropolitan relations with the various colonies, but more particularly at relations between these colonies and the neighboring non-Dutch colonies.

We define the Dutch Atlantic as not only the Dutch Republic and its various colonies and settlements along the West African coast and in the Americas, but equally the network of relations entertained by Dutch actors with other parts of the Atlantic. This network certainly included (British) North America, but we do not pay specific attention to the territory formerly known as New Netherland, nor to the Dutch-speaking communities in North America. Piet Emmer and Jos Gommans have rightly argued that a Dutch settlement colony in North America might have maintained stronger links with the metropolis and displayed a more pronounced Dutch culture than the colonies that remained in Dutch America after 1664.¹⁵ Dutchness, ironically, was stronger in the area that had once been called New Netherland than in most colonies where the Dutch flag continued to fly. The English conquest of New Netherland did not signal the start of a process of smooth assimilation of the Dutch population to English culture. On the contrary, the English takeover seems to have led

to the emergence of a self-conscious Dutch identity at odds with mainstream English values.¹⁶ The Dutch Reformed Church functioned as an anchor of Dutch identity in colonial and post-colonial New York and New Jersey. The number of congregations of the church had been 11 in 1664, but grew steadily to 78 in 1740 and 127 in 1780. These congregations, which came under the ecclesiastical authority of Amsterdam until 1772, helped shape Dutchness by systematically conforming to Calvinist orthodoxy as practiced in the Dutch Republic. Even though the ratio of ethnically Dutch men and women shrank compared to the overall population, these men and women emphasized their Dutch ways more emphatically in the eighteenth century than their forbears had done. The battle with the English language was lost eventually, but only in a process that spanned many decades. In New York City, English-language services in Dutch Reformed churches may have begun alongside those in the Dutch tongue before the American Revolution, but they were not introduced in Tappan, New Jersey, until 1835.¹⁷ Dutchness also faded away in Albany, where the Dutch lived in a tightly-knit society prior to the revolution. Their world gradually collapsed as immigrating New Englanders began to outnumber them, and as the old communal ethos gave way to commercialization and individualism.¹⁸

Although the Dutch in North America valued their linguistic and religious heritage, there is no indication that this “community” had any specific link to the Dutch Atlantic, apart perhaps from the commercial links between New York on the one hand and Amsterdam and Curaçao on the other.¹⁹ Neither do we include the Dutch Cape Colony and the Dutch commercial endeavors alongside the East African coast. Institutionally, these parts of Africa pertained to the monopoly of the VOC. More important, as historian Nigel Worden writes, the Cape Colony “shaped and was shaped by the wider Indian Ocean world” and there are no indications of significant links between these parts of Africa and the Dutch Atlantic as defined for our present purposes.²⁰

The choice for a “long eighteenth century” was made because the period running roughly between 1680 and 1815 is one that may be usefully contrasted with what came before and after. Before, we have the Dutch Golden Age, an era of great imperial ambitions in the Atlantic no less than elsewhere in the world. After this “Dutch moment” had passed, the importance of the Dutch in and to the Atlantic diminished,

although as we argue throughout this book their role was more significant than was long thought. Geographical contraction was offset by the economic development of both the plantation economy of the Guianas and the commercial success of Curaçao and St. Eustatius. This relative success only started to falter in the last quarter of the eighteenth century and was reversed during the Napoleonic Wars, which also saw the abolition of the slave trade and hence the progressive severing of the life line between West Africa and plantation America. In hindsight, the decline of the Dutch Atlantic was only confirmed, not initiated by, the Peace of Vienna and the establishment of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, around 1815. After this date, the Dutch Atlantic ceased to be a vital part of the Dutch colonial domain and of the Atlantic world as a whole.

We have organized the book along partly chronological, partly thematic lines. The opening chapter covers the prelude up to 1680 and then summarizes the development of the Dutch Atlantic up to the early 1780s—this chronological approach is taken up again in the closing chapter discussing the period from 1780 to 1815. We begin by outlining the early rise and subsequent contraction of a Dutch empire, placing this development in a broader geopolitical context. In spite of the vast extent of their empires in the Americas, the Iberian powers lost their early hegemony in the Atlantic in the seventeenth century. In the more dynamic Northern Atlantic, France and Great Britain emerged as the dominant powers. After its own heyday was over, the Dutch Republic's policy was dictated by the need to steer a neutral course between both powers. This policy was quite successful until the 1780s. The resulting Dutch Atlantic was defined by its deep entanglement with the rest of the Atlantic world. From an early stage, the European residents of the Dutch Atlantic were closely intertwined with foreign traders and colonies. The plantation colonies in the Guianas were as much oriented towards the British West Indies and particularly North America as they were towards the Dutch Republic. International trade was the mainstay of Curaçao and St. Eustatius, which developed into popular entrepôts for vessels from across the circum-Caribbean and from North America's eastern seaboard. All of this Dutch commerce developed in spite of British, French, and Spanish mercantilist policies, and in this way the Dutch Atlantic contributed significantly to the commercial integration of the New World.

Chapter 2 first analyzes the remarkable variety of governmental arrangements prevalent in the Dutch Atlantic, where unlike its counterpart the VOC, the WIC had neither an administrative nor a commercial monopoly. Next, we analyze the financial arrangements, including the ultimate failure of both the WIC and the other companies to adequately serve the colonies and colonial trade and to yield satisfactory financial results to its investors. The final section of this chapter summarizes the development of trade between the republic and its various colonies and settlements in Africa and the Americas, including the trade in both enslaved Africans and European and tropical commodities produced in the Dutch Guianas and in the non-Dutch Caribbean.

In the next three chapters, we move to the history of specific geographical parts of the Dutch Atlantic. Chapter 3 examines West Africa. While Dutch ships had been active along the West African coast before, the WIC's conquest of Fort Elmina from the Portuguese in 1637 made the Dutch the dominant European power during the seventeenth century, allowing for trade in enslaved Africans, gold, and ivory. Afterwards, both British competition and shifting political alliances along the coast undermined the Dutch position. Elmina and the neighboring Dutch forts were no real colonies, but rather simple trade stations, inhabited by a limited number of European males and, later on, children of mixed origins. By 1760 soldiers of mixed African and European heritage outnumbered Europeans. They were fully dependent on the immediate urban environment. Thus the main fortress of Elmina with its population of some two hundred relied on the fully African city of Elmina with its 20,000 people for the supply of food, labor, and military protection. Even if Elmina was the only major fortress on the Gold Coast, its role in the slave trade was limited. Enslaved Africans embarked from points all along the West African coast, with west-central Africa as the dominant supplier, followed by the Bight of Benin and only then the Gold Coast.

Chapter 4 discusses the development of the Dutch Guianas, particularly Suriname but also Berbice and Essequibo/Demerara. Developed from the start as plantation colonies dependent on the brutal transatlantic slave trade, the Dutch Guianas resembled the British and French sugar islands in many ways, but there were also contrasts in the system of governance (by various semi-public companies), in production (coffee was a major cash crop alongside and even above sugar), in the absence of an

encompassing mercantilist framework, and in the highly diverse character of the European populations.

Chapter 5 focuses on the insular Dutch Caribbean, particularly Curaçao and St. Eustatius and to a lesser degree St. Maarten. The interimperial trade networks of these islands were far more important than those of Saba, Bonaire, and Aruba, the sparsely-populated remaining Dutch islands. In spite of their primarily trade-oriented economies, the populations of St. Eustatius and Curaçao did have slave majorities. The slave trade marked the development of Curaçao between the 1660s and 1730, most of the enslaved Africans being reexported to regional destinations. Even if the majority of the island's enslaved population worked on plantations producing provisions for the home market, a significant number was directly employed in the mercantile economy, opening up relatively good chances for manumission. Without new demographic and hence cultural influences from Africa after 1730, black Curaçaoans embraced Catholicism administered by Spanish priests from the continent. Their conversion is but one illustration of the island's close relationship with the Spanish Main. On St. Eustatius and the other northern isles, the close ties to nearby British islands enabled Methodism to flourish.

Religious toleration was a pragmatic choice all over the Dutch Atlantic. This also explains the religious liberties extended to Jews not only in Suriname, but equally in Curaçao. Yet for the gentile European population, more restrictions applied, in part because of the need for the white elite to remain united. Until the mid-eighteenth century, therefore, the Reformed Church enjoyed a privileged position, only after that date making room particularly for Lutheranism. The pragmatism evident in religious policies reflected not only economic concern, but also the need to ensure white solidarity in the omnipresent awareness of the risk of black insurrections.

Not only people and commodities circulated in the Atlantic, but also knowledge and ideas—whether by formal correspondence, publications, and research, or informally through travelers. This is the theme of chapter 6. The first section discusses the webs of communication that were spun from the very start by institutional and commercial parties and later increasingly by local gazettes and the like. As a reminder of the highly diverse character of the Dutch Atlantic, we underline that many of the resulting sources are not written in Dutch, but rather in one of the many other European or Creole languages prevalent throughout the Dutch

Atlantic. The next section discusses scholarly research and its practical uses, ranging from geography and the natural sciences through medicine and agrarian expertise to ethnography. There is every reason to assume that both practical and scholarly expertise circulated widely throughout the Atlantic. In the Dutch Atlantic, this was more a question of individual initiative than of colonial policies.

The intellectual climate in Caribbean slave societies has often been painted in starkly negative terms as a spiritual wasteland. Closer inspection of intellectual efforts in the Dutch Atlantic and particularly in Suriname cannot discard such characterizations, but we did find remarkably enlightened efforts to establish scholarly, educational, and cultural practices beyond a merely utilitarian agenda. Meanwhile the Dutch Republic managed to remain a renowned center for publications on exotic places including the Dutch Atlantic colonies well into the eighteenth century, as well as a world market that absorbed and distributed ever more tropical products to its own citizens and many more on the European continent. This prompts the question of whether the Atlantic and particularly the Dutch colonies in Africa and the Americas reverberated widely in Dutch society. Whereas it will prove difficult to arrive at firm answers to this, we cannot escape the conclusion that, unlike the British and to a lesser degree the French, the Dutch did not engage in a vibrant debate about a key issue in Atlantic history: the legitimacy of the slave trade and slavery itself.

Of course, it did not help that by the time such debates raged, particularly in Great Britain, the Dutch elites were all too concerned about the fate of their own nation and wary of engaging in experiments that might be costly, disruptive, or both. The late-eighteenth-century British takeover of Berbice, Demerara, and Essequibo, and particularly the United States' ascent in the Caribbean, sealed the fate of the Dutch Caribbean. The ensuing decline and further contraction of the Dutch Atlantic is discussed in the closing chapter. This contraction resulted from long-term geopolitical changes in Europe and particularly the rise of Great Britain. Even if the Dutch Atlantic did not matter as much to its metropolis, as was the case for all other Atlantic domains, its economic importance was increasing throughout the eighteenth century. But only as long as the stronger states tolerated the Dutch as intermediaries in a highly mercantilist world could the Dutch Atlantic thrive. From the early 1780s on, the

Dutch found that this intermediary role had only been possible as long as this suited the major European powers, particularly Great Britain. Without serious naval power and strong allies, the Dutch were at the mercy of their rivals. The demise of the Dutch Atlantic during the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780–84) and the Napoleonic Wars (1795–1815) followed, culminating in the establishment of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (1815) with an Atlantic realm restricted to Suriname, the six Caribbean islands, and Elmina.

In spite of this territorial contraction, the Dutch elites including King Willem I still nurtured high hopes for Suriname as a plantation economy and Curaçao as a commercial hub. By 1830 such dreams were buried. The production of tropical staples was taken over by the Dutch East Indies, where all sorts of semi-bonded but non-slave labor arrangements proved to be immensely lucrative for the century to come, adding to the marginalization of the Dutch Caribbean colonies. Both Curaçao and St. Eustatius entered a long period of crisis. In this new era of free trade and American ascent, their services as intermediaries were no longer in demand.

This period of transition witnessed massive, even revolutionary change. The Atlantic slave trade was abolished, and the institution of slavery was bound to follow. The United States attained independence, followed by Haiti and much of Latin America. This was an era of “Creole triumphalism,” but the Dutch Atlantic remained an outsider to this phenomenon. The only revolutionary spirit in the colonies was expressed by revolting slaves, most dramatically in the 1795 Curaçao slave revolt. In the colonies, like in the metropolis, there had been strong divisions between pro-British *ancien régime* “Orangists” and pro-French “Patriots,” but no Creole nationalism nor a questioning of the slave trade or slavery.

Likewise, in the Netherlands there was broad consensus that the sole function of the colonies was to benefit the metropolis, and that in the Atlantic this implied a continuation of slavery. The abolition of the slave trade was imposed by the British, but slavery would continue until 1863. By then, the Dutch East Indies and particularly Java had become crucial to the new Kingdom of the Netherlands and the Atlantic had become a backwater in the Dutch colonial world—so much so that awareness that the Dutch Atlantic had ever mattered for the Dutch Republic and for the emergence of the early modern Atlantic at large evaporated.

In the conclusion to this book, we summarize our main findings and relate this to the broader historiography of the early modern Atlantic. We argue that the characteristics of the Dutch Atlantic as we have defined these strongly support the present emphasis among historians on the interconnectedness of the Atlantic world at large.