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Order and Authority in New Netherland: The 1653 Remonstrance and Early Settlement Politics

Simon Middleton

On December 10, 1653, nineteen delegates from eight of New Netherland’s Dutch and English towns gathered to discuss the colony’s condition at the former tavern that served as New Amsterdam’s city hall. The assembly boasted long-term residents and men of status and experience in local politics. New Amsterdam’s burgomasters, Arent van Hattem and Marten Kregier, and schepen Paulus van der Grift represented the municipal government, which had held its first meeting eleven months earlier after almost a decade of debate concerning community rights. Willem Beeckman and Frederick Lubbertsz, also veterans of the deliberations concerning city government, spoke for Breuckelen. The delegates from Flushing, Gravesend, Hempstead, and Middleburgh were English puritans: farmers, traders, and soldiers who had quit the Bay Colony in search of land and religious freedom and migrated to New Netherland in the early 1640s. They included George Baxter, Robert Coe, and Tobias Feake, all of whom made frequent appearances in the colony’s records before and after 1653 as minor officeholders, Indian fighters, and religious radicals. The Dutch towns of Amersfoort and Midwout lacked a recognized court of their own and thus technically the authority to send delegates, but they were represented by five settlers including Englishman Thomas Spicer. Following a day of discussion, the nineteen drew up a remonstrance that was severely critical of the West India Company’s provincial government and its director general, Petrus Stuyvesant. Subscribing to common principles, the settlers identified shared concerns and outlined what they considered

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the proper character and operation of legitimate government in New Netherland. The following day they presented the document to Stuyvesant and withdrew to await his reply.¹

The delegates acknowledged the divine and natural origins of government and declared their allegiance to the West India Company and its designates. Yet they also presented themselves as freemen and subjects of the United Provinces who had to defend the common good in the face of an arbitrary and illegitimate administration. Their remonstrance has generated a variety of scholarly responses. Nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century historians celebrated the gathering as a liberal protest against a despotic official that “would have met with approval in the New York of Stamp Act or of Revolutionary days.”² When such Whiggish teleologies became unfashionable, interest in the delegates’ dissent diminished and Stuyvesant’s reputation as a hard-nosed autocrat became entrenched. Michael Kammen considered the remonstrance indicative of the colony’s ethnoreligious diversity and undeveloped public institutions. Noting contemporary assessments of the director as a man “peacock like with great state and pomposity” who bore himself as if he were a “Muscovy Duke,” Kammen argued that given the circumstances Stuyvesant’s severity was understandable.³ More recent studies

¹ Burgomasters and schepens were municipal officials broadly similar to English mayors and aldermen. The full list of delegates comprised Marten Kregier, Arent van Hattem, and Paulus van der Griff for New Amsterdam; Willem Beeckman, Frederick Lubbertsz, and Paulus van der Beeck for Breuckelen; Tobias Peake and John Hicks for Flushing; Robert Coe and Thomas Hazzard for Middelburgh; John Seaman and William Washburn for Hempstead; John Strycker, Thomas Swartwout, and Pieter Woffertsen for Amersfoort; Elbert Elbertsen and Thomas Spicer for Midwout; and George Baxter and James Hubbard for Gravesend. Four of the towns were Dutch and four English. Ten of the delegates were Dutch and nine were English. See “Petition of the Commanalty of New Netherland, &c., to Director Stuyvesant,” in E. B. O’Callaghan et al., eds., Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New-York, comp. John Romeyn Brodhead (Albany, N.Y., 1856), 1: 550–52, esp. 552. The remonstrance is also reproduced in “The humble remonstrance and petition of the colonies and villages in this New Netherland Province,” in Arnold J. F. van Laer et al., eds., New York Historical Manuscripts: Dutch (Baltimore, 1983), 5: 91–94.


have challenged this impressionistic view of the colony’s administration and its directors. Where earlier investigators found chaotic cultural pluralism, revisionists have traced a vibrant Dutch culture and administrative and judicial practice modeled on the towns of the republic. Far from an autocrat operating with a free hand, Stuyvesant worked within constraints set by the States General and Dutch precedent, by the company’s shareholders and board, and by the provincial council and the views expressed by ad hoc panels of settler representatives convened to consider local affairs. There were occasional conflicts, especially during the transformation of the West India Company from a commercial to a civil administration in the 1640s. But aside from these intermittent disagreements, the persistence of Dutch culture ensured a broad consensus regarding the character if not always the pace of administrative reform. One of the few points of agreement between earlier commentators and revisionists concerns the marginality of the 1653 assembly: ascribing the gathering’s radical sentiments to troublesome English puritans, as did Stuyvesant, scholars judge the remonstrance to have expressed heterodox and inchoate opinions outside mainstream public discourse with little or no bearing on New Netherland’s administration.4

Rather than epiphenomenal to contemporary political culture, the 1653 remonstrance represented an important and enlightening moment of Anglo-Dutch settler collaboration at a critical time in the colony’s history. Considered in the context of the migration and political exchanges of the preceding decade, it sheds light on contemporary views of legitimate government. The 1648 Peace of Westphalia ended decades of conflict and initiated tumultuous changes in Europe. In England and the United Provinces, republican governments resisted and supplanted monarchical authority and then fought the first of three wars over navigation and


trade interests. Throughout these domestic and foreign calamities, presses churned out pamphlets fueling debates concerning the relationship between rulers and the ruled across the Atlantic world. Assembling midway through the First Anglo-Dutch War (1652–54), the New Netherland delegates adumbrated their own challenge to the authoritarian claims of the company’s administration. In particular they averred that the provincial government’s legitimacy depended not only on the powers delegated by the States General and West India Company but also on the application of those powers by public officials under the scrutiny of respectable settlers. Concerns regarding officeholders’ virtue were a prevalent feature of the diverse polities from which the settlers hailed. Such concerns were understandable at a time when public officials claimed a natural authority derived from personal qualities of honor, dignity, and impartiality and subjects’ status and rights depended on their membership in particular communities and the provisions of corporate bodies and positive, human law. In New Netherland the colonists worried about signs of corruption, favoritism, and the balance between private interests and the public good. They looked to safeguards, such as the hearing of counsel and deferential petitions, to check the spread of vice in public life. They also argued for some measure of participation by respectable subjects in civil and productive conversations concerning administration as a guarantee of provincial order and authority.5

In England and the Dutch Republic, the local and idiosyncratic arrangements achieved within this general schema led to the develop-

ment of the largely self-governing communities that clashed with claims of monarchical and centralizing powers at midcentury. These assumptions also figured in the more idealistic motives for English and Dutch colonization schemes. Once in the colonies, however, settlers and their governors found that conditions presented unanticipated and frequently intractable challenges to the kind of relationships and exchanges likely to realize harmony and settler deference. In New Netherland, a thinly populated territory scarred by Indian conflicts, the company relied on migrants from diverse European and colonial locations to sustain a colony it considered secondary to its interests in the South Atlantic. Stuyvesant and his predecessor, Willem Kieft, demanded their subjects’ deference. But settler loyalties were unpredictable, reflecting changing conditions and divergent material, ethnic, and confessional interests. In the decade preceding the 1653 remonstrance, colonial conditions nurtured shared anxieties and occasional collaboration but did not foster a common or even consistent commitment to a particular tradition of government. Different sides invoked Dutch and other precedents and practices, yet settlers’ objections had less to do with the particular form of local government and more with its operation and function: the extent to which it acted, and was seen to act, to secure individual and community liberties and what the colonists considered the common good. The 1653 remonstrance warrants attention in these terms, as an unprecedented instance of collaboration that drew together, if only

fleetingly, settlers from different constituencies and articulated a common set of arguments about provincial order and authority.\(^7\)

The English and Dutch jostled for territory from early in their occupation of northeastern America (Figure I). In the decade after 1629, the migration of thousands of puritans to Massachusetts and the sprawl of English settlement prompted a contest for control of the fertile Connecticut River valley. In June 1633 the West India Company tried to secure its position, purchasing a three-mile stretch of land along the Connecticut River and establishing a blockhouse at Fort Good Hope. This initiative failed to stem the English tide. In 1633 and 1635, groups from Dorchester and Watertown, pushed by doctrinal and political discord and pulled by the lure of available land and the Indian trade, settled at Windsor and Wethersfield. In 1636 Roger Williams founded Providence with twelve companions he later described as “loving friends and neighbours” on land purchased from the Narragansetts.\(^8\)


following year William Coddington and Anne Hutchinson visited Providence on their way to settling Pocasset (later Portsmouth) and Newport. In 1638 John Davenport and his congregation established the colony of New Haven under the governorship of wealthy London merchant Theophilus Eaton. In the same year, delegates representing the three Connecticut River towns framed their government according to a
set of fundamental orders including the principle that the foundation of authority is laid in the free consent of the people. By the end of the decade, the puritan surge engulfed large swaths of territory formerly claimed by the West India Company. The once-isolated Dutch Fort Good Hope stood at the center of the bustling English town of Hartford.9

The mingling of Dutch, English, and native populations complicated already vexed questions of landownership and control. The West India Company sought to trade with the Amerindians rather than establish permanent settlements. When it endeavored to acquire Amerindian land titles, most famously with the “purchase” of Manhattan in 1626, it was partly to counter English assertions that New Netherland fell within the bounds of Virginia or as terra nullius was free and open to colonization. Circumstances on the ground, however, favored the more numerous English. In the wake of the 1637–38 Pequot War, some two thousand English settlers moved into Connecticut, many under the auspices of agreements made with Amerindian communities. Different groups clashed with the company’s officers and farmers over rights to fence, plow, and sow fields. There was little or no consistency in this opportunistic land grab: powerful English lobbies frustrated the West India Company by denying Dutch territorial claims one minute and offering to buy them out the next. Some grew bolder following the collapse of the Stuart dynasty in England and cited ungodly attitudes among the Dutch—evident, they claimed, in the company’s disinterest in the establishment of permanent communities—as justification for land seizures. Weaker groups, such as the small bands of puritan dissenters who migrated south in search of farms and protection from Indian attack, sought “the protection of the noble Lords, the States, his Highness, the Prince of Orange, and the West India Company, or their Governor-General of New Netherland” and promised to behave as “honest subjects.”10


10 O’Callaghan et al., Documents Relative to History of New-York, 2: 144 (quotations). Many New Englanders first explored Connecticut as militiamen during the Pequot War and also realized the possibilities for new settlements on Long Island. In 1637 Israel Stoughton and John Underhill returned from the war and extolled the virtues of the coast between Saybrook and Fairfield: “The place and places whither God’s providence carried us, that is, to Quillipeage River, and so beyond to the Dutch,” wrote Stoughton to John Winthrop. See Stoughton to Winthrop, ca. Aug. 14, 1637, in John Winthrop, The History of New England from 1630 to 1649 (Boston, Mass., 1825), 1: 398–401 (quotation, 1: 400). Stoughton also noted that the coast “is too good for any but friend” and “the Dutch will seaze it if the English do not.” See “Copy of a Letter from Israel Stoughton to the Governor of Massachusetts,” [ca.
Fearing that New Netherland would shortly be overrun, the West
India Company again sought to secure its position, purchasing all the
land west of Oyster Bay from the Canarsee Indians. It also revised
the colony’s “Freedoms and Exemptions,” suspending its trading monopoly
and offering “one hundred morgens of land” (about two hundred acres)
to anyone who undertook to settle five colonists over the age of fifteen.
Hoping that freedom of trade would encourage immigration and deliver
badly needed revenue from duties on exported furs and imported sup-
plies, the company declared that “should it happen that the dwelling
places of private colonists become so numerous as to be accounted
towns,” residents could nominate their own magistrates for confirmation
by the provincial director.11 These revised “Freedoms and Exemptions”
stimulated a new wave of relocation, taking restless Englishmen and
Englishwomen farther into West India Company territory. In 1641,
following disputes in Wethersfield, the Reverend Richard Denton and a
dozen or so families settled Stamford on land claimed by the settlers at
New Haven. Within two years the Stamfordites fell out with their
neighbors, and Denton and his followers moved to Hempstead, Long
Island, on land secured from the Indians. The Stamford group followed
a trail blazed by the Reverend Francis Doughty, Hutchinson, John
Throckmorton, and their families and followers, all of whom led bands
of settlers from Connecticut to the government of the West India
Company in the early 1640s. In 1643 a group gathered around Deborah
Moody—an Anabaptist and widow of English aristocrat Henry Moody—

11 “Resolution of the States General on a New Draft of Freedoms and
Exemptions,” in O’Callaghan et al., Documents Relative to History of New-York, 1:
118; “Proposed Freedoms and Exemptions for New Netherland. 1640,” ibid., 1:
119–23 (“one hundred morgens,” 1: 119, “should it happen,” 1: 120); O’Callaghan,
History of New Netherland, 1: 392–93.

Aug. 14, 1637], in Thomas Hutchinson, ed., A collection of original papers relative to
The history of the colony of Massachusetts-Bay (Boston, 1769), 61–63 (quotations, 62).
In 1640 the sachem Uncas ceded control of Mohegan land to Connecticut. See
O’Callaghan et al., Documents Relative to History of New-York, 1: 128–29, 564–67;
Neal Salisbury, Manhattoes and Providence: Indians, Europeans, and the Making of New
Feake purchased the land around what became Greenwich in the name of the New
Haven colony but, being warned by the West India Company and admitting con-
cerns for their title and security, Patrick and Elizabeth Feake (wife of Robert Feake)
put themselves under the authority of the Dutch and claimed “the same privileges
that all Patroons of New Netherland have obtained” in O’Callaghan et al.,
Documents Relative to History of New-York, 2: 142–44 (quotation, 2: 144); Calder,
New Haven Colony, 62; Willem Frijhoff, “The West India Company and the
Reformed Church: Neglect or Concern?” De Halve Maen 70, no. 3 (Fall 1997):
57–68, esp. 60; Faren R. Siminoff, Crossing the Sound: The Rise of Atlantic American
receiving a patent for land secured from Indians at what became Gravesend. Another group, mostly drawn from Rhode Island, secured a patent to establish Flushing in October 1645. In each case the settlers secured title to the land and liberal administrative rights and privileges in return for promising to conduct themselves as obedient subjects of the States General and West India Company.12

All nine of the English delegates who signed the 1653 remonstrance can be traced to this secondary migration following the revised 1640 “Freedoms and Exemptions.” Thomas Hazzard and Thomas Spicer had lived in Rhode Island before coming to New Netherland; Spicer moved to Vreedland with Throckmorton’s group and was listed as part of the company that established Gravesend with Deborah Moody before settling in Midwout. John Hicks followed Coddington from Boston to Pocasset and then to Newport before establishing himself as one of the eighteen original patentees of Flushing.13 George Baxter, who emerged


as a key figure and whom Petrus Stuyvesant would later suspect as the lead author of the 1653 remonstrance, was part of a group who received a patent for land on “Manhattans” in August 1641 and later negotiated the patent given to Gravesend. At this August meeting, Willem Kieft also recruited Baxter as his English secretary and translator, a position he held for the next eleven years.

The delegates’ migration within companies gathered around socially prominent or inspirational figures adhered to the earlier pattern of
movement from England. For those who acquired land and commercial interests and whose military experience was invaluable for the settlement of new towns, the lure of increased opportunities and the company’s liberal terms may have drawn them to New Netherland. Others had clearly struggled to settle among their own countrymen, first in the Bay Colony and then Connecticut. The timing of their departure and the association of some with religious heterodoxy indicate that the English ranks were peppered with men and women who would brook no interference in pursuit of a godly life. Whether dedicated to farming or to faith, these communities, sometimes made up of only a handful of families, brought together settlers with recent experience of bloody Indian conflict whose religious views ranged from the conservatives of Hartford to the radicals of Rhode Island. Some also had firsthand knowledge of the Dutch Republic’s federal political structure and the balance it struck between the local particularities and provincial authority. All had quit the Bay Colony for the protection of the West India Company and United Colonies. Indicating their determination to establish permanent communities in New Netherland, the English were careful to agree to charters, patents, and Indian relationships that stipulated settlement on clear and unimpeachable terms.16

16 John Frederick Martin, Profits in the Wilderness: Entrepreneurship and the Founding of New England Towns in the Seventeenth Century (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1991), chaps. 1–2; Roger Thompson, Mobility and Migration: East Anglian Founders of New England, 1629–1640 (Amherst, Mass., 1994), 184–205. James Hubbard was banished from Lynn, Mass., on the same day as Deborah Moody for denying the validity of infant baptism. In 1661 Thomas Spicer was arrested and fined for associating with Quakers; the following year, he was ordered out of New Netherland for continuing to frequent conventicles. See Biemer, Women and Property in New York, 18, 31. Tobias Feake’s kin and marriages indicated his affiliation with a tightly knit and heterodox group: he first married Annetje Alberts van Beyeren, the Dutch widow of his uncle’s former militia captain, Daniel Patrick, after Patrick was murdered by an irate Dutch settler in 1644. When Feake’s first wife died, he remarried, this time to Mary Patrick, likely sister of Daniel. By 1657 Feake was schout (sheriff) in Flushing and a signatory to the remonstrance against Petrus Stuyvesant’s ordinance forbidding the harboring of Quakers. For the free-grace controversy in Massachusetts and the varieties of antinomianism, see Michael P. Winship, Making Heretics: Militant Protestantism and Free Grace in Massachusetts, 1636–1641 (Princeton, N.J., 2002); David R. Como, Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Pre–Civil-War England (Stanford, Calif., 2004). In addition to those who had served in the Dutch wars against the Spanish, Englishmen well acquainted with the republic and the Dutch language and constitution included Plymouth traders Isaac Allerton; his occasional partner Thomas Willet, who became New York City’s first English mayor after the English conquest; and Thomas Hall, who worked briefly for Jacob van Corlear, agent for Kiliaen van Rensselaer, before becoming a freeman and establishing a tobacco plantation on land secured from the company. George Woolsey grew up in Rotterdam before coming to New Netherland in the early 1640s. See J. Franklin Jameson, ed., Narratives of New Netherland, 1609–1664 (New York, 1909), 375; Jeremy Dupertuis Bangs, “The Pilgrims and Other English in Leiden Records: Some New Pilgrim Documents,” New England Historical and
The 1640 revised “Freedoms and Exemptions” also stimulated the immigration of new settlers from diverse Dutch provinces as well as towns and villages in modern-day France, Germany, and Sweden. About one-third of these newcomers arrived as part of families and households. Many were likely driven out by the ill-effects of the Thirty Years’ War, and few if any claimed membership in the kinds of company that characterized English settlement. Future delegate Paulus van der Beeck, for example, came alone from Bremen, Germany, and married Maria Thomas Baddie, widow of Jacob Verdon, following his arrival in New Amsterdam in October 1644. In the same year, Paulus van der Grift, company employee and captain of the ship Great Gerrit, acquired land in New Amsterdam, though he did not settle with his family until three years later, when he conveyed the new director, Stuyvesant, to the colony. The newcomers joined established Dutch colonists such as Elbert Elbertsen from Nieukerken, who came in the early 1630s as a teenage farmhand, married well, and by the 1640s managed a sizable family farm. Frederick Lubbertsz also arrived in the 1630s and clawed his way to success first in farming and then in cattle breeding; following the company’s suspension of its trade monopoly in 1640, he turned to shipping goods for the Indian trade on the North River.17 Others would not

17 David Sterns Cohen’s sample of approximately nine hundred immigrants for the period 1630–64 indicates that a majority of settlers came from provinces other than Holland and that almost half came from territories adjacent to the Netherlands. See Cohen, New York History 62: 60. Janny Venema found that as many as one-quarter of Beverwijck’s inhabitants were of non-Dutch origin, and “although government and church rules . . . were established in the province of Holland only a few of the ‘Dutch’ settlers” claimed roots in that province and most came from inland areas. See Venema, Beverwijck: A Dutch Village on the American Frontier, 1652–1664 (Hilversum, Netherlands, 2003), 101. See also Rink, New York History 62: 37–42. For Paulus van der Beeck, see David M. Riker, Genealogical and Biographical Directory to Persons in New Netherland from 1613–1674: 2004 Supplement (Salem, Mass., 2004), 311. For Elbert Elbertsen, see George E. McCracken, “Stoothoff-Cool Notes,” American Genealogist 45 (1969): 177–79, esp. 177–78; Wilson V. Ledley, “The Stoothoff Family on Long Island, and in New Jersey,” in Genealogies of New Jersey Families from the Genealogical Magazine of New Jersey, ed. Joseph R. Klett (Baltimore, 1996), 1: 844–56, esp. 1: 844–47; Riker, Genealogical and Biographical Directory, vol. 3. For Frederick Lubbertsz, see O’Callaghan et al., Documents Relative to History of New-York, 1: 415, 2: 140, 14: 31–32; Teunis G. Bergen, Register in Alphabetical Order, of the Early Settlers of Kings County, Long Island, N.Y., from Its First Settlement by Europeans to 1700 (New York, 1882), 194; Riker, Genealogical and Biographical Directory, vol. 2. In 1633 he participated in the negotiation of land rights with the English. See O’Callaghan et al., Documents
arrive until the late 1640s and early 1650s. But whenever they came, the Dutch and other non-English newcomers more often came alone, in small family groups, or as employees mostly interested in trade rather than farming. When they settled outside New Amsterdam, it was on isolated homesteads and waterways hoping to steal a march on downriver fur traders.  

Shared conditions, experiences, and attitudes mitigated the differences in migration and settlement patterns, priorities placed on land over trade, and ethnic backgrounds that distinguished English and Dutch delegates and their respective settler communities. Confessional loyalties that divided conservative Calvinists from the heterodox could, in less extreme forms, connect subscribers to the international Protestant cause. Some of the delegates were united by ties of kinship or marriage to respectable and occasionally prominent colonial households. All shared an interest in the province’s governance and its commercial future. These common interests fostered links between families and communities as prominent householders married, intermarried, baptized their children, or witnessed baptism of others in the Dutch Reformed Church.  


Jessica Kross found that of the 605 patents granted from 1639 to 1664, only 14 were given for towns and collective settlements and of these 14 only 7 were Dutch patentees. See Kross, Evolution of an American Town, 13. In the wake of Kieft’s War, the company urged that the settlers “endeavor as much as possible . . . [to] settle themselves with a certain number of families . . . in the manner of villages, towns and hamlets, as the English are in the habit of doing, who thereby live more securely.” See “Instructions to the Director General and Council of New Netherland,” July 7, 1645, in O’Callaghan et al., Documents Relative to History of New-York, 1: 160–62 (quotation, 1: 161); Donna Merwick, Possessing Albany, 1630–1710: The Dutch and English Experiences (Cambridge, 2002); Merwick, The Shame and the Sorrow: Dutch-Amerindian Encounters in New Netherland (Philadelphia, 2006).

For example John Seaman’s wife, Elizabeth Strickland, connected him to a father-in-law who had served as a justice and militia sergeant in Massachusetts before moving to Wethersfield and Fairfield, eventually settling at Hempstead as one of the six founding patentees in 1644. John Hicks’s wife, Elizabeth Field, made him the son-in-law of Robert Field, who had followed Richard Denton out of Massachusetts and who lived for a time in Rhode Island before moving to Flushing, again as one of the original patentees, in 1645. In the summer of 1653, Field was one of eight delegates dispatched by the English towns on Long Island to discuss Anglo-Dutch relationships at a conference held at Newport, R.I. See Field, New England
the West India Company’s responsibility. They also participated in local administration, and by the mid-1640s many of the future delegates were on the way to lengthy public careers. Serving in various capacities, settlers from diverse backgrounds demonstrated their commitment to a shared view of the citizen as active participant in community affairs. For some of the delegates—notably Baxter, James Hubbard, and Marten Kregier—and their neighbors, military skills gained in the Thirty Years’ War enhanced this shared sense of public place and duty. In the view of some, military service afforded status to men from humble backgrounds and membership in a self-conscious profession governed by recognized international codes. This status, and the sensibilities it sustained, reached beyond the battlefields of Europe and into community life in the form of the civic and private military companies and citizen militias established in New England and New Amsterdam.\footnote{Robert Coe, fifty-five in 1653, had been a leading figure in the settlement of Stamford, which he represented at Hartford for two years before settling in Hempstead in 1643. He served as a magistrate for Hempstead following the 1653 remonstrance, ending up as a high sheriff of Yorkshire on Long Island. See O’Callaghan et al., Documents Relative to History of New-York, 14: 345–46, 504–5, 619–20, 623, 626, 629–30. John Hicks represented Flushing in 1653, and with other English delegates, including John Seaman and William Washburn, protested against the paying of tenths in 1656; he was a member of the committee that confirmed the purchase of the land on which Hempstead sat in 1657, and he regularly represented the community in discussions with the provincial government. John Seaman, thirty-three

In the early 1640s, settlers with military experience were in particular demand. A dispute over tributes exacted from the Raritan Indians by Director Kieft spiraled into a conflict that provoked far-reaching criticism of the provincial government. Kieft’s punitive attacks inflamed smoldering European-Amerindian tensions, culminating with the massacre of some eighty Wecquaesgeek Indians across the Hudson River at Pavonia. Thereafter the conflict was very much an Anglo-Dutch affair, Europeans and Amerindians launching raids and counterattacks in retaliation for atrocities committed by the other. In the summer of 1643, Indians destroyed the settlements established by Doughty, the Hutchinsons, and Throckmorton. At Gravesend a force of forty Englishmen held out long enough to allow Deborah Moody and her followers to flee to the nearby Dutch town of Amersfoort. By September 1643 Dutch residents in New Amsterdam resolved to seek help from “our English neighbors, at the North” and to enlist “as many Englishmen as were in the country.”

in 1653, would later serve as a magistrate for Hempstead, quelling a tax strike by the settlers in the 1650s, and then as a schepen following the brief restoration of Dutch rule in 1672–74. He was also involved in the settling of local boundary disputes (ibid., 14: 362–63, 416, 496–97, 509, 515–17, 521, 561, 629). Thomas Spicer served as the first treasurer of Portsmouth, R.I., before relocating to New Netherland. Frederick Lubbertsz served as one of the Twelve Men, a panel of settler representatives convened in 1641, and then multiple terms as a schepen in Breuckelen following the 1653 assembly. In 1663 he was a member of a convention called to address Indian hostilities at Esopus and then in 1665 he was one of those chosen to meet with Richard Nicolls to establish the English administration following the conquest. In 1673 Lubbertsz, by then in his seventies, served a final term as schepen when the Dutch retook the colony during the Third Anglo-Dutch War in 1672–73 (ibid., 1: 414–15, 14: 314, 318–19, 545–46; Berthold Fernow, ed., The Records of New Amsterdam: From 1663 to 1674 Anno Domini [New York, 1897], 2: 319, 3: 260, 4: 25). Willem Beeckman served as an official in the South River Colony as well as multiple terms as a schepen and burgomaster in New Amsterdam and, following the English takeover, deputy mayor of New York. He also served as one of the town’s orphan masters and as schout at Esopus. See O’Callaghan et al., Documents Relative to History of New-York, 1: 495–503, esp. 1: 499, 510–11, 2: 75–76, 112–14; Fernow, Records of New Amsterdam, 2: 30, 282, 319–20, 336, 342–43, 6: 247, 396, 398, 7: 111, 113, 175. Estimates suggest that as many as one hundred thousand English soldiers served in the Thirty Years’ War, an indeterminate but significant number of whom headed for the colonies from the 1620s through the 1640s. See D. J. B. Trim, “Army, Society and Military Professionalism in the Netherlands during the Eighty Years’ War,” in The Chivalric Ethos and the Development of Military Professionalism, ed. Trim (Leiden, Netherlands, 2003), 269–89; Trim, “Calvinist Internationalism and the English Officer Corps, 1562–1642,” History Compass 4, no. 6 (October 2006): 1024–48; Louise A. Breen, “Religious Radicalism in the Puritan Officer Corps: Heterodoxy, the Artillery Company, and Cultural Integration in Seventeenth-Century Boston,” New England Quarterly 68, no. 1 (March 1995): 3–43.

21 O’Callaghan et al., Documents Relative to History of New-York, 1: 181–88 (quotations, 1: 185). Within days of the Pavonia attack, Dutch forces led by Maryn Adriaenzen were “reinforced by an English troop.” See “Journal of New Netherland,” in O’Callaghan et al., Documents Relative to History of New-York, 1:
Combined Dutch and English forces engaged the Indians on Long Island and across the sound at Stamford and Greenwich, where John Underhill reprised a tactic from the Pequot War and torched a village, killing some seven hundred Indian men, women, and children. Underhill’s atrocity weakened what had always been a loose alliance of Indian communities, prompting nearby sachems to sue for peace and ensuring the cessation of hostilities the following summer. The war that united the diverse bands of Indians in the Lower Hudson Valley against New Netherland may have accounted for the liberal patents and charters Kieft negotiated with English townspeople to convince them to remain on Long Island and rebuild their shattered communities.

The horrors of the war also galvanized influential individuals and groups within the Dutch population into action against Kieft and his administration. In 1641, 1643, and 1644, the director convened panels of settler representatives chosen by the commonality, prominent settler families and property holders, to advise on the Indian war. On each


occasion these panels of Twelve and Eight Men went beyond their directed agenda and debated general administrative and commercial reforms. Invoking the model of a “council of a small village in Fatherland,” the commonality’s representatives called for greater and continuous representation. They wanted more opportunities to offer counsel regarding local affairs and taxes. They wanted to be present at criminal hearings, and they wanted the freedom to move about the colony and trade. Kieft considered the settlers’ meetings and demands “a dangerous consequence, and to the great injury both of the country and of our authority.” Writing to the States General, the representatives painted a miserable picture of villages and fields put to the torch, crops rotting where they lay, and starving and ill-defended families “seated here in the midst of thousands of Indians and barbarians, from whom is to be experienced neither peace nor pity.” Yet when the representatives tried “to propose anything tending in their judgment to the public good . . . the Director met them with sundry biting and scoffing taunts.” Consequently, “Every place is going to ruin; neither counsel nor advice is taken; the only talk here is of princely power.”

At best, as far as the company’s critics were concerned, the war had shown the shareholders’ failure to populate and adequately secure the colony. At worst it had given a grotesque dramatization of the constitutional and moral failings besetting a commercial and military organization ill-equipped to exercise civil authority.

Stuyvesant and the council had to contend with this lobby following his arrival in 1647. Stuyvesant tried to silence the most vociferous critics and appease the rest by convening a new panel of representatives, called the Nine Men, to consult on public affairs. The Nine, however, rapidly became the focus for renewed calls for reform from merchants and residents intent on augmenting the community’s administrative and commercial rights and privileges. In 1649 the Nine and their supporters drew

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up a record of complaints since Kieft’s time, again charging the company with failing to nurture and defend the colony. In a remonstrance that ran to more than forty quartos of close print, they called for administrative reforms in keeping with previous requests and in accordance with Dutch precedents and practice. To bolster their arguments, and underscoring the perceived connection between civility and legitimate authority, they invoked the example of New England, in which neither “Patroons, Lords nor Princes are known . . . only the People.” Additionally, “Each Governor is like a Sovereign in his place, but comport himself most discreetly.” Consequently, the governors “are, and are esteemed, Governors next to God by the people, so long as the latter please,” and because the people have the “power to make a change; and they would make a change in case of improper behavior, and that they therefore say is the bridle of their great men.”

The director’s response to the Nine’s criticisms was in stark contrast to the idealized dignity and discretion of Massachusetts magistrates: writing to the delegation in The Hague, one of the Nine reported that “Our great Muscovy Duke goes on as usual, with something of the wolf; the older he gets the more inclined is he to bite.”

As the New Amsterdammers, including several leading English traders, lobbied for municipal and commercial privileges, the puritan villages on Long Island busied themselves with designs on Indian lands and squabbles over the appointment of public officials and ministers. Not long after his arrival, Stuyvesant received a delegation of deputies from Hempstead who reported fears that Antinomy, son of sachem Mecohgawodt, was plotting to murder the English as they were “harvesting their grain and hay, and then cut off their entire village.” But the director and his council suspected the petitioners of fabrication and dispatched a delegation to make inquiries. In January 1648 Stuyvesant was called to intervene in a dispute between the settlers at Flushing.


27 “Resolution to Send Secretary van Tienhoven to Hempstead, To Inquire into the Truth of a Report of Indian Troubles There,” Aug. 23, 1647, in O’Callaghan et al., *Documents Relative to History of New-York*, 14: 79.
some of whom refused to accept the nomination for schout (sheriff) or to contribute toward the maintenance of the minister. Three months later Stuyvesant’s attention was again called to Flushing, this time by the parents of Jane Smith, whom the schout, William Harck, had illegally married to Thomas Newton. Historians have usually interpreted Anglo-Dutch relationships in this period as an “uneasy alliance.”28 Though this description is generally accurate, especially following the rupture of the First Anglo-Dutch War, the disputes at Flushing suggest the need to take account of divisions within the English community and the willingness of some to appeal to the provincial authorities to resolve internal conflicts. In the late 1640s and early 1650s, there is also evidence of support for Stuyvesant from within sections of the colony’s English community.29

As the campaign of his critics among the Nine gathered pace, Stuyvesant increasingly relied on a close circle of stalwarts, including his longtime assistant, Englishman Brian Newton, and Baxter. Newton had fought for the Dutch against the Spanish and signed on with the company in 1630. When others such as Baxter and Underhill joined the puritans destined for New England, Newton remained with the company, eventually accompanying Stuyvesant to Curacao in 1634. Once in New Netherland, the English veterans gravitated toward one another and Stuyvesant seemed to prefer the companionship and counsel of like-

29 Van Laer et al., New York Historical Manuscripts: Dutch, 4: 474–75. The following month the sheriff in Flushing requested that the provincial government “favor them with a pious, learned and reformed minister” and put an end to the “present differences in a manner, that shall promote peace, quietness and unanimity . . . under the protection of their High Mightinesses, his Highness of Orange, the Honble Lords Directors, and the present administration.” See O’Callaghan et al., Documents Relative to History of New-York, 14: 82. See also the letter from Robert Husted and associates from Greenwich, which placed itself under the protection of New Netherland in 1642, requesting that Petrus Stuyvesant intervene in local land disputes in September 1649 (ibid., 14: 116–17). William Harck had not only presided over an illegitimate ceremony but “also provided them instantaneously in his house with bed and room to consummate the marriage.” See Van Laer et al., New York Historical Manuscripts: Dutch, 4: 502 (quotation); Frederick W. Bailey, “The Ancestry of the Hon. John Hart, of Hopewell, N.J., Signer of the Declaration of Independence,” New York Genealogical and Biographical Record 26, no. 4 (October 1895): 170–77, esp. 171. Stuyvesant took a dim view of the ceremony, fining the bride and bridegroom three hundred guilders and Harck a further six hundred guilders. See O’Callaghan, History of New Netherland, 2: 226. Thomas Newton was a fugitive from justice in New England and his handing over to the New England Commissioners was negotiated as part of the 1650 Hartford Treaty, much to the chagrin of John Underhill, who invoked the return of Newton as one of his complaints concerning Stuyvesant’s abuse of his position in his 1653 protest. For more on Newton, see William K. Holdsworth, “Adultery or Witchcraft? A New Note on an Old Case in Connecticut,” New England Quarterly 48, no. 3 (September 1975): 394–409.
minded military men. In 1650 Baxter’s connection to Stuyvesant prompted slanderous mutterings by one long-standing resident of Gravesend. The following year Baxter relied on his association with the director to influence the selection of magistrates at Gravesend, decrying the candidates he opposed as men of “small or noe abilities in any respect to sett as it were in yor place in the seate of Justice.”

Stuyvesant’s Dutch critics and disaffected councilors bristled at his reliance on English advisers whom they accused of conspiring against Dutch interests. But in September 1650, Stuyvesant confounded his detractors by selecting Baxter and Thomas Willet as the colony’s representatives at negotiations to resolve long-standing boundary disputes with the New Englanders held at Hartford. The Dutch complained of


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Other prominent English figures included Charles Bridges, Batavianized to Carel van Brugge, and George Woolsey, also known as Jarge Woltzen and Joris Wolsey. See Venema, Beverwijck, 48–49. Baptism records suggest that the Baxter, Bridges, Newton, Stuyvesant, and Woolsey families were also close and attended the baptism of each other’s children. See for example the 1647 baptism of Stuyvesant’s son, Balthazar, at which “Nuton en syn vr [wife]” were witnesses. See Evans, Records of the Reformed Dutch Church, 23. Thomas Applegate reported to Robert Clark, Baxter’s future father-in-law, that “ye Governor Stuyvesant hath layed out your daughter for Ensign Baxter” and urged caution, calling Baxter a “beggerly scabb” and accusing him of adultery with James Hubbard’s wife. See Driggs, “The Two Baxters of New Amsterdam,” New York Genealogical and Biographical Record 70 (January 1939): 3–16, esp. 8–9. Baxter recommended the tightening up of local election procedures so that instead of the townspeople electing “three of the ablest, approved honest men,” they would choose “one leading man” who would then nominate a second and these two select a third and so on until there were six candidates, three to serve as magistrates and three as assistants. Under this arrangement Baxter and his associates retained the magistracy in Hempstead until they were expelled following the 1654 rebellion. See O’Callaghan, History of New Netherland, 2: 263–64 (quotation, 2: 263). See also “Letter of George Baxter to Dir. Stuyvesant . . . requesting him not to appoint the magistrate lately nominated,” in O’Callaghan et al., Documents Relative to History of New-York, 14: 130.
secret negotiations and accused Stuyvesant of being misled by his duplicitous advisers and seduced by English blandishments. The director's supporters struck back in letters to the company's directors in Amsterdam, urging that they support "our present Governor against all malignant persons." In September 1651 Baxter went further, arguing that "the power of electing a Governor among ourselves . . . would be our ruin and destruction by reason of our factions." Given the potential for disorder, Baxter continued, the colony required a government that was "compulsory or by force." The alternative was a colony in which "every one would desire to do what would please and gratify himself . . . [and] the strongest would swallow up the weakest." Yet within three years, these same Gravesend magistrates were urging rebellion against an administration they previously credited with ensuring "the general welfare and prosperity of the entire country." 31

The settlers who came to New Netherland were jealous of their rights and privileges. They were careful to establish communities on clear and advantageous terms, and their background and shared experiences provided for moments of collaboration as well as contest. They suffered during a murderous war, feared renewed attacks, and shared expectations of company protection and dismay when that protection was found wanting. They were committed to the notion that legitimate government depended on recognized laws, precedents, rights, and privileges and had to serve the general good. Facing novel and sometimes terrifying circumstances, they experimented with forms of argument and association, claiming status as representatives of the commonality or distinct communities and invoking foundational political principles as well

31 O'Callaghan et al., Documents Relative to History of New-York, 2: 153–54 (quotations). Thus Lubertus van Dincklage complained of the prominence of Brian Newton, "who does not understand the Dutch language, and pronounces judgment, with his Honor, on political and all other matters." See O'Callaghan et al., Documents Relative to History of New-York, 1: 441–42 (quotation). See also the Nine's complaints, ibid., 1: 283–87, esp. 285, 459–60, 495–102, esp. 496. For assessments of the significance of the Hartford Treaty, see Ronald D. Cohen, "The Hartford Treaty of 1650: Anglo-Dutch Cooperation in the Seventeenth Century," New-York Historical Society Quarterly 53, no. 4 (October 1969): 311–32; Jaap Jacobs, "The Hartford Treaty: A European Perspective on a New World Conflict," De Halve Maen 68, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 74–79. George Baxter and his fellow Gravesend magistrates closed their letter by noting, "Tis not with us as in our Fatherland, or as in Kingdoms and Republics which are established and settled by long and well experienced laws and fundamentals." Rather in "our little body, made up of . . . folks of different nations, many things occur . . . for which there are no rules nor examples," and, with this embryonic state in mind, the administration was best left to the "discretion of a well experienced Governor." See "The Magistrates of Gravesend to the Directors at Amsterdam," Aug. 20, 1650, Sept. 14, 1651, in O'Callaghan et al., Documents Relative to History of New-York, 2: 153–56 (quotation, 2: 156); Van Rensselaer, History of City of New York, 333–14.
as rights to property, representation, and participation in local affairs. They were not predisposed toward antagonism with the provincial government. But though those close to the director defended his prerogative, others felt rebuffed or, worse, victimized, in their view, by a partial, misguided, and possibly corrupt administration. Rather than an inclusive, in the sense of populist or democratic, politics, the colonists were consistent in their call for a representative administration based on meaningful dialogue between provincial officers and community leaders. Thus each side challenged their opponents’ credentials and style of participation. The Nine denounced Kieft and Stuyvesant for “comport[ing] themselves like sovereign tyrants,” and the directors were similarly scathing in their characterization of “mutinous” and “insulting” critics. Baxter opposed candidates for the magistracy in Gravesend he considered of small or no abilities and urged the appointment of those he judged the “discreetest” and “honest men of good estate.”

32 Dutch critics questioned the motives and linguistic abilities of the Englishmen who represented the colony at crucial treaty negotiations. The petitions and memoranda that litter the records also reveal the colonists’ ability to marshal subtle and timely arguments, deferring to the provincial authorities one minute and asserting their individual and community rights the next. Within these arguments, whether sincere or tactically deployed, ad hominem attacks indicated deeply held convictions concerning the connection between the character and behavior of participants and officeholders in the maintenance of order and authority in New Netherland.33

IN THE SUMMER OF 1649, the Nine had dispatched delegates to the States General in Holland to present their case for a “suitable municipal (borgerlycke) government . . . resembling the laudable Government of our Fatherland.” During the next three years, the delegates argued their case as the republic experienced its severest constitutional crisis in thirty years and prepared for war with England. A failed coup d’état by the stadtholder, William II, and the victory of Holland, the most powerful province in the republic, revived arguments concerning the rights and
privileges of autonomous states and towns within the federal constitution. In England the Rump Parliament executed Charles I and established a commonwealth. After a failed attempt to ally with the United Provinces, the English introduced a Navigation Act intended to force the Dutch out of the American trade and tighten control of Virginia and other royalist colonies. In 1652 news reached Holland that English presses were reprinting accounts of the Amboyna massacre to whip up anti-Dutch sentiment. The emerging Anglo-Dutch conflict discouraged the States General from undermining the West India Company’s chartered authority. But following an inquiry into the New Amsterdam delegates’ case, the company instructed Petrus Stuyvesant to placate his critics and equip New Amsterdam with a burgher government, a schout, two burgomasters, and five schepens.35

The outbreak of the Anglo-Dutch War clearly increased the need for a local administration that could manage the funding and repair of city defenses. Establishing the city government in February 1653, Stuyvesant chose relative newcomers such as Arent van Hattem and confidants Willem Beeckman and Paulus van der Griff as the first burgomasters and schepens. Thereafter he also introduced a new excise on wines and spirits, unpopular regulations on merchant prices, and a program of demanding public works to improve city defenses. On March 13 forty-three of New Amsterdam’s leading citizens agreed to a loan of five thousand guilders for defense costs, on a note to be repaid out of city taxes beginning in November. As the months passed, disputes concerning the mounting charges and responsibility for the repair of the fort soured relationships between the director and the newly installed municipal officers. In August the magistrates refused additional funding unless they were first granted control of the city’s wine and beer excise. Exchanges remained polite, but there was no mistaking the increasingly acrimonious tone. By mid-November the two sides were deadlocked. The magistrates resolved “to go in a body to the Director General, and demand . . . the grant of the entire excise . . . and in case of refusal,

unanimously to request our dismissal, since it is impossible for us to continue any longer.”

Amid this municipal wrangle, rumors picked up from Indian contacts and circulated by the settlers at Hempstead charged Stuyvesant and the Dutch with conspiring with Narragansett allies to murder the English. John Underhill got word to associates in New Haven and news spread to Boston, prompting an emergency meeting of the commissioners of the United Colonies of New England. Meanwhile Underhill hoisted the flag of the English commonwealth at Flushing and drew up a thirteen-point “Vindication” inciting his neighbors to rise against the provincial government. Inspired by international events and rising anti-Dutch sentiment, Underhill called on “all honest hearts that seek the glory of God” to “Renounce the Iniquitous Government of Peter Stuyvesant,” throw off “this tyrannical yoke,” and submit “to the Parliament of England.” The zealous captain also featured prominently in a tract drawing comparisons between the vulnerability of the English settlers on Long Island and the ill-fated traders at Amboyna. Denouncing those who would become “traitors to one another for the sake of your own quiet welfare,” Underhill failed to inspire a local rising or secure the backing of New England. Massachusetts, the senior partner in the United


37 “Vindication of Captain John Onderhill in the Name of as Many of the Dutch and English as the Matter Concerns, Which Justly Impels Us to Renounce the Iniquitous Government of Peter Stuyvesant over the Inhabitants Living and Dwelling on Long Island, in America,” in O’Callaghan et al., Documents Relative to History of New-York, 2: 151–52 (quotations, 2: 152). Opinions have long differed concerning the truth of these rumors regarding Dutch and Indian plots against the English on Long Island. Mariana Griswold van Rensselaer blamed Mohegan sachem Uncas for spreading tales that aimed to discredit his Narragansett foes. See Van Rensselaer, History of City of New York, 1: 338. Henry Shelley argued that the suspicions were reasonable given Dutch insecurities and correspondence between Petrus Stuyvesant and the West India Company. See Shelley, John Underhill, 352–55.
Colonies, was not eager to nurture the fortunes of heterodox radicals on its borders. Lacking colony-wide support, Underhill and Thomas Baxter, another disaffected Long Island rebel, satisfied themselves with commissions from Rhode Island to engage the Dutch. By the autumn Baxter had turned from privateering to piracy, harrying Dutch and English shipping and farms. On November 26 Stuyvesant convened an assembly of council members, city magistrates, and representatives from three English towns to consider provincial defense. It was out of this meeting that calls for a second meeting and ultimately the 1653 remonstrance emerged.38

Underhill’s rebellion and its failure were indicative of the fault line evident in Flushing since the Thomas Newton affair and the struggles over ministerial appointment. To his supporters Underhill was a godly and courageous man, willing to sacrifice the quiet and welfare he insisted others forgo in pursuit of just and godly government. To his critics he was an unpredictable gadfly whose self-righteous zealotry put him beyond the bounds of meaningful dialogue. There was, in fact, little difference between the grievances set out in Underhill’s “Vindication” and those raised by the delegates in December.39 But as practical approaches to political engagement, they were clearly worlds apart. The

Whatever the explanation, Underhill’s “Vindication” invoked the memory of Dutch perfidy in the Amboyna affair. Such was the feeling whipped up by the prewar retelling of the Amboyna massacre that the 1654 treaty, which ended the First Anglo-Dutch War, included an English demand for reparations for the alleged attack thirty years earlier. See O’Callaghan, History of New Netherland, 21: 229–33. For a copy of the Amboyna pamphlet, ibid., 21: 571–72.

38 We can only wonder at the possible connections among Thomas Baxter, English secretary George Baxter, and other prominent Englishmen. Thomas Baxter was present at the tavern brawl between pro-Kieft Englishmen and anti-Kieft Dutchmen in 1644, and he makes occasional appearances in the records thereafter. The 1652 baptism of Thomas Baxter’s daughter, Elsie, included Carel Verbrugge and, perhaps her namesake, Elsie Newton (wife of Brian Newton) as witnesses. See Evans, Records of the Reformed Dutch Church, 32. But I have yet to find more compelling links between the two Baxters and, equally tantalizing, Thomas Newton and Stuyvesant’s assistant, Brian Nuton/Newton.

outbreak of the First Anglo-Dutch War and the establishment of a municipal government in New Amsterdam seem to have driven a wedge between Stuyvesant and erstwhile supporters such as George Baxter. But in the summer and winter of 1653, the former English secretary and current magistrate from Gravesend was not ready to join a godly rebellion. Underhill’s failed revolt is noteworthy, then, not only for setting in motion the chain of events that culminated with the December remonstrance but also for the manner in which it marked a boundary of political extremism within which the Dutch and English delegates were determined to remain.

Representatives from New Amsterdam, Flushing, Gravesend, and Newtown first met at the end of November, but the assembly quickly fell into disarray. The English refused to acknowledge Stuyvesant’s representatives “because he could not protect them,” and they threatened to cease paying taxes and duties. Swearing loyalty to the States General and the company, the English invited the New Amsterdammers to join a “firm alliance . . . in peace as brothers and friends,” seeking to isolate Stuyvesant and perhaps appealing to the Dutch as comrades in an international Protestant cause. The city’s representatives reported these overtures to the director, who offered his qualified assent. Noting the balance of English and Dutch town delegates and acknowledging the significance of popular support in provincial lobbies, he also announced his intention to grant courts of justice to Amersfoort, Breuckelen, and Midwout so that together with Fort Orange “there would be sufficient votes against’ the English in the future.\footnote{Van Laer et al., New York Historical Manuscripts: Dutch, 5: 84–85 (quotations). The absence of Brian Newton, whom one might have expected Petrus Stuyvesant to send to negotiate with the English, was perhaps noteworthy. Newton is identified as a member of the council on May 12, 1653 (ibid., 5: 70), but thereafter lost his position and went back to Holland before returning and being restored to a measure of prominence as a military officer early in 1655.} Returning to the meeting, the Dutch agreed to a coalition and suggested petitioning the authorities in Holland, following a consultation with the neighboring communities of Amersfoort, Breuckelen, Midwout, and Staten Island. The delegates agreed to meet two weeks later, on December 10, “for the purpose of writing a joint letter to the Directors as Lords and Patroons of this Province on the present state of affairs here.”\footnote{“Burgomasters and Schepens of New Amsterdam to Director General and Supreme Council of New Netherland,” Nov. 29, 1653, in Fernow, Records of New Amsterdam, 1: 131–32 (quotation, 1: 132); Nov. 26, 1653, in Van Laer et al., New York Historical Manuscripts: Dutch, 5: 84–85, esp. 5: 85; O’Callaghan et al., Documents Relative to History of New-York, 14: 223–25; O’Callaghan, History of New Netherland, 2: 238.}

The remonstrance drawn up that day was first written out in English, probably by Baxter, but finding “nothing in it prejudicial to the
country and its inhabitants, nor to the abridgment of the power and authority of the . . . High Lords [of] States, or of the West India Company,” the Dutch representatives endorsed and translated the text for presentation to Stuyvesant. They began by acknowledging the authority of the “paternal government which God (in nature) has established . . . for the maintenance and preservation of peace and the good of mankind.” They declared their allegiance to “His ministers,” the States General (the governing body of the Dutch federation), which exercised “the High and Mighty power . . . to promote the welfare of their subjects . . . within the United Provinces and in the foreign settlements thereunto.” They also recognized all subaltern magistrates commissioned for the same purpose, including the directors of the West India Company and their officers and appointees. Presenting themselves as subjects concerned with the common good, the delegates prayed that their presentation be “not interpreted sinisterly, but rather advantageously” as well-intentioned counsel. This deferential posturing belied an unmistakable assertion of individual and community rights. As free subjects of “our sovereigns, the high and mighty, lords States-General,” the delegates “humbly conceive our privileges to be the same, harmonizing in every respect with those of the Netherlands, being a member dependent on that state and not a conquered or subjugated people.” They had, they argued, purchased “the soil with our own money,” transformed “a wilderness of woods and erected into a few small villages,” and settled in New Netherland by “a mutual covenant and contract,” adhering to freedoms and privileges, “expecting every enlargement and amplification, but no abridgement thereof.” In so doing, the delegates averred, “nations from divers quarters of the globe” had placed themselves under the protection of the United Provinces and become “now incorporated, as it were one body, under our sovereigns.”

Notwithstanding this presumptive claim to the status of free subjects inhabiting an incorporated community, the representatives feared the “establishment of an arbitrary government among us.” This government had “crushed our spirits and disheartened us, in our labors and callings, so that we, being in a wilderness, are unable to promote the good of the country with the same zeal and inclination as heretofore.” Identifying Stuyvesant and his provincial administration as the source of their woes, the delegates charged the director with questionable land dealings and inadequate defenses against Indian attacks so that they feared “every year, that a new war will be again begun by the Natives of

this country.” These problems, it seemed, were symptomatic of a more fundamental and disturbing malaise: “’Tis contrary to the first intentions and genuine principles of every well regulated government,” the remonstrance averred, “that one or more men should arrogate to themselves the exclusive power to dispose, at will, of the life and property of any individual,” especially when this arrogation was done under pretense of laws enacted “without the consent, knowledge or election of the whole Body” or its representatives. But, the delegates explained in additional notes elucidating their key themes, such had been their experience of late. Stuyvesant made decisions without their knowledge, “yea frequently without summoning his adjoined Councillors”; when councilors were called, it was to “approve of his plans [rather] than to assist in consultation.” Resolutions adopted with the consent of New Amsterdam’s burgomasters were “changed and altered, without their knowledge.” In the delegates’ view, the director’s actions amounted to the appointment of officers and the introduction of laws “without the approbation of the Country,” contrary to the practice and freedoms “of the Dutch Government, and odious to every freeborn man.” Worst of all, when they assembled to discuss “the good of the country,” the director “with arrogant words disclaims his fellow subjects.” Consequently, the colony was governed “according to the pleasure and caprice of Dr. Stuyvesant and one or two of his favorite Sycophants.”

Though each of the town delegations had its reasons for subscribing to the remonstrance criticizing Stuyvesant, what emerged from microstruggles over the form and use of public power had morphed into a debate of political first principles. The New Amsterdam officers, embroiled in ongoing disputes concerning their status and administrative authority, may have hoped to bring pressure to bear on the director by colluding with their troublesome English neighbors. The English, Stuyvesant supposed, aimed at avoiding paying the taxes, called tenths, that were about to fall due on their improved lands; he also suspected that they might be trying to draw the Dutch into an alliance with New England. The delegates from Amersfoort, Breuckelen, and Midwout perhaps came anticipating enhanced privileges in the future. Since scholars cannot recover the delegates’ motives with certainty, and given the possibility of dissembling and subterfuge, speculations concerning their sincerity or cynicism are of limited use in understanding the principles that

grounded their arguments. Indeed, looking for realpolitik concerns that lay behind the delegates’ arguments discourages investigation of the language the nineteen spent most of a day crafting. Regardless of their intentions, if the delegates were to appeal successfully to third parties in New Netherland and the Dutch Republic against Stuyvesant’s administration, they had to make credible and effective arguments. Stuyvesant, for his part, was similarly intent on not only asserting his authority but also winning the argument, especially to the satisfaction of his employers in Amsterdam. Whatever their motives, then, the desire of each side to legitimate its position required that they make arguments with a broad appeal. Thus the exchange over the 1653 remonstrance furnishes a glimpse of what dissenting and ruling factions considered the most effective grounds on which to challenge and defend provincial authority.

In keeping with established tactics, Stuyvesant challenged the delegates’ characters and tried to invalidate their credentials as political participants. Writing to the signatories, he first declared that parts of the document were “either unclearly phrased or badly translated” and requested new copies for each member of the council. Then he proclaimed their gathering illegal—Amersfoort, Breuckelen, and Midwout lacking the authority to send representatives to such a meeting—and denounced the other delegates as “a few unauthorized commissioners who are abusively assuming the rights and privileges of the whole.” The following day, December 13, he began a detailed rebuttal by mocking the Dutch representatives as men who needed the English “to tell them what to remonstrate.” Thereafter he promoted divisions within the assembly—the English “enjoy[ing] more privileges, than . . . any Hollander”—and raised suspicions concerning their motives because “secret claims and losses” could not be “adjusted as long as they remain secret.” Thereafter Stuyvesant’s reply focused on what he considered the document’s many errors and infelicities: the delegates’ claim to speak for the “Colonies and Villages” in New Netherland was invalid because Beverwijck, Rensselaerswijck, Staten Island, and the inhabitants of the South River were not represented; the assertion that the delegates had purchased land from the natives was an “absolute untruth,” and their pretension to constitute “one body” with a right to elect magistrates and consent to laws was absurd. Their claim to privileges commensurate with those of the citizens of the United Provinces was equally outlandish, unless they intended to send deputies to the States General like

other “Provinces and Cities of Netherland.” Moreover how was it, the director demanded, that the delegates had by their own admission “voluntarily submitted” in a “mutual covenant and contract” to a government they now condemned as arbitrary? Where once his Dutch critics had denounced his English advisers, now Stuyvesant unpacked the argument made by a former stalwart and wondered whether “George Bacxter, understands it himself.” Through this combination of personal slights, imputations concerning motives, and the seeming demolition of his critics’ arguments, Stuyvesant aimed to demonstrate that the delegates were at best unqualified and befuddled and, at worst, if they continued with their dissent, purveyors of rebellious doctrines that aimed to overthrow the state.

Yet, despite all, the delegates persisted in their claim to the status of free subjects with a right to scrutinize and thereby in some fashion participate in the provincial administration. When asked for copies, they refused, proposing that Stuyvesant make his own copies from the “original” submitted. They insisted on a considered reply and called on the director and his council to “furnish a categorical answer to each point in the remonstrance” so that they might “know how to conduct themselves.” The delegates rejected Stuyvesant’s characterization of their calling of other villages to the assembly as illegal because “the aforesaid villages were not written to . . . except with the foreknowledge of the honorable director-general and council.” Furthermore, they continued, the assembly was intended for the “service and protection of the country” and “the laws of nature give to all men the right to assemble for the welfare and protection of their freedom and property.” Refusing repeated orders to disperse, the delegates, when they finally adjourned, sent a copy of the remonstrance and explanatory notes to the burgomasters in Amsterdam, beseeching them to “prevail on the Directors of the Incorporated West India Company . . . to concert good and suitable means, tending to the protection and security of this state.”

The core of the dispute centered on different views of what constituted the legitimate use of political power. Stuyvesant and the delegates agreed that such power derived from God and that it should be used “for the preservation and protection of the privileges, freedom and property of

49 Van Laer et al., New York Historical Manuscripts: Dutch, 5: 94 (“original”), 100 (“aforesaid villages”).
50 O’Callaghan et al., Documents Relative to History of New-York, 1: 549–50.
the Company and the good inhabitants” of New Netherland.⁵¹ For Stuyvesant the authority for the use of that power lay “not [with] all men generally” but with the States General and their delegated agents, including the West India Company and those whom they appointed to the office of director and membership of the provincial council.⁵² This delegation was the foundation for the provincial authority settled on the company in the 1621 charter granted by the States General. The company had conceded elements of its chartered authority—under revised “Freedoms and Exemptions” issued in 1629 and 1639 and in the granting of local courts of justice to English and Dutch towns—but these concessions in no way diminished the company’s status as the colony’s supreme governing body. Thus the director and his council, acting with the authority of the West India Company and States General, were free to appoint officers, introduce laws, heed councilors, and call and forbid assemblies as they saw fit.

Stuyvesant’s authoritarian position is intelligible within a broadly construed theory of absolutism, which vested sovereignty in a single body or ruler and forbade disobedience to commands other than those that contradicted divine injunctions. The influence of this theory was visible throughout early modern Europe even in places where monarchy and absolutism were publicly opposed. Reflecting the influence of texts such as Jean Bodin’s Les six livres de la republique (1576), conservatives and centralized authorities alarmed by the disorder and moral panic provoked by economic crises and rising tides of religious and political dissent drew on notions of indivisibility of sovereignty and the supremacy of legislative power. In this sense Stuyvesant’s rejection of the legitimacy of dissent and insistence on obedience were also tropes and principles that were ubiquitous features of contemporary authoritarian political discourse, routinely invoked by those seeking to rebuff views they considered libertarian and destructive of order and natural authority. The alternative to this form of authority, at least as far as Stuyvesant was concerned, was to leave matters to “the people generally” and thereafter “every one would want for Magistrate a man of his own stamp . . . a thief would choose . . . a thief and a dishonest man, a drunkard, a smuggler . . . their likes, in order to commit felonies and frauds.”⁵³ It was pre-

⁵³ “Deductions Made by the Director-General and Council Regarding the Remonstrance of the 11th of December Signed by the Burgomasters and Schepens of this City and Some Englishmen,” in O’Callaghan et al., Documents Relative to History of New-York, 14: 233–36 (quotations, 14: 235).
cisely this argument that George Baxter and his fellow Gravesend magistrates had made when defending the director against his Dutch critics in September 1651. Stuyvesant’s rejection of the remonstrance maintained this line, resembling other contemporary defenses of the negative voice and, taken to the extreme, echoing arguments made on behalf of the authority of centralizing powers in England and the Dutch Republic.54

The delegates’ challenge rested on the view that constitutional and civil authorities, customs and precedents, and the standards evident in public officials’ performance all mediated the divinely ordained power exercised by worldly magistrates. The dissenters never forswore loyalty to the States General and the West India Company’s officers and designates. But they made a distinction that Stuyvesant did not: between the authority of the office, which was deserving of respect, and the authority of the officeholder, which depended on his comportment and style as judged by qualified subjects. When Stuyvesant appointed officers without the consent or approval of popular representatives, refused to heed well-intentioned counsel, and demonstrated favoritism rather than impartiality, he undermined his authority and, in the delegates’ eyes, supplied grounds for legitimate protest. In particular, when the delegates wanted to convince readers “how great an appearance there is of the establishment of an arbitrary government among us,” they pointed to Stuyvesant’s incivility and “arrogant words . . . though filling a high and honorable office.”55

Ultimately, whether the ad hominem attacks that pepper the records of New Netherland and other early colonies are accurate estimations of character is not as noteworthy as the insights such attacks offer into contemporary political sensibilities. Inhabiting a contested territory, plagued by Indian wars, and lacking what George Baxter called “long and well experienced laws and fundamentals,” the colonists were governed by officers of a commercial and military company.56


facing those seeking to establish free and independent settlements was considerable and, as the migrating puritans and their deliberative pursuit of Dutch freedoms demonstrated, fundamental rights to life and property depended on inclusion in a broader community governed by a recognized sovereign state. The colonists tried to secure their rights and privileges via patents, offices, and membership in specific corporate bodies and chartered communities, some acknowledged by the West India Company and others claimed by the settlers. Thereafter they remained sensitive to the actions and attitudes of the governors and scrutinized the behavior and policies of public officials for insights into the tenor and objectives of provincial administration. Their New World conditions may have heightened the degree of this insecurity, marking their experience as peculiarly colonial. The mingling of colonists and communities most likely accounts for their sometimes grab-bag approach, asserting their rights and privileges on the basis of diverse principles and arguments including Dutch laws, divine and natural rights, and English and customary practice. Rather than adhering to unalloyed Dutch or English ways, New Netherland’s early settlers drew on diverse sources and sometimes contradictory principles from a more or less recognizable and common Christian, humanist, and civic European heritage.

It is difficult to fit these events and claims into accepted narratives of early settlement politics. If there was no consistent frontier campaign for liberty as Whig historians once believed, neither was New Netherland’s early politics chaotic or merely local, insular and detached from wider events. The influence of Dutch traditions and precedents is evident from early on, yet so are appeals to divine law, natural rights, customs, and expectations that derived from a broader European heritage. The adaptation of these multiple sources and traditions was incremental and contingent on local circumstances, but at critical moments outside events clearly impinged on colonial loyalties and tactics. The challenges facing New Netherlanders resembled those that faced other diminutive and remote early modern communities. Engaging with the question of order and authority in their own communities, and buffeted by events beyond their control, the settlers struggled to accommodate provincial and imperial powers and interests from which they realized there could be no absolute immunity. Though these were local debates, they were far from inward looking and merely localist. Settlers took their lead from events in the wider Atlantic world and appealed to regional and European lobbies and authorities in written and printed texts. In so doing they drew on their common European heritage and experimented with forms of argument and political association that placed some Englishmen...
with Dutch traders in New Amsterdam's municipal lobby and others with officials in the provincial government.\textsuperscript{57}

Late in the spring of 1654, however, international events decided the loyalties of key players and the immediate future of the colony. Within weeks of the December remonstrance, Baxter, James Hubbard, and their associates in Gravesend were again writing to the company, this time to “furnish evidence of our fidelity or loyalty to their High Mightinesses.” Attributing their participation in the December meeting to the “sad differences between both [our] States . . . [and] a certain report of the Indians or natives having risen up against us,” they had intended no “jealousy or intention of revolting,” though “information to the contrary may have reached you.”\textsuperscript{58} Even as the Gravesend magistrates endeavored to ingratiate themselves with the Company, however, Cromwell ordered a flotilla of six ships to assist the New Englanders in the conquest of New Netherland. Through the spring and early summer, the Massachusetts General Court and English communities at Hartford and on Long Island prepared for war. In May Isaac Allerton sent word to Petrus Stuyvesant and his council that an attack was likely. The director


wrote to his counterparts in Virginia and New Haven promising friendship, eased the regulation of merchant prices in the city, and awarded the municipal government the long-sought-after excise on wines and spirits. But Stuyvesant was forced to acknowledge that the “country people, notwithstanding their belonging to our nation, will do little for the repairs of the fortifications . . . still less come to this City to assist in its defense” and that the English “abetted, favored, harbored, sustained and supported” the rebels and “although under oath of allegiance . . . would fight rather against, than for us.”

59 Lacking provincial allies, Stuyvesant looked on as his erstwhile English subjects, including Baxter and Hubbard, held meetings in Gravesend, Hempstead, and Middleburgh, elected their own officials, and planned the seizure of Dutch vessels.

In July, on the eve of New England’s invasion, news of the May treaty ending the First Anglo-Dutch War reached New Netherland. England’s attention turned to the domestic effects of civil war and restraining the royalist sympathies in Virginia and the Caribbean. The Dutch secured a ten-year stay of execution in New Netherland. The ship that brought news of the colony’s relief also delivered the West India Company’s response to the 1653 remonstrance. Considering it the “height of presumption in the people to protest against the government,” the company reproached its director for engaging with the protesters. Such dialogue, it wrote, was characteristic of overly cautious governors who “prostitute their authority when they use only protests against their subjects.” The company ordered Stuyvesant to punish the English residents “in an exemplary manner” and commanded New Amsterdam’s municipal officers to shun further “English or other conventicles, either for deliberating on affairs of state.”

60 For all their bluster, however, the company allowed reforms in local relationships thereafter. In New Amsterdam the municipal government added incrementally to its authority, presiding over biweekly courts and all manner of civic and commercial regulations.

61 As head of the provincial govern-
ment, Stuyvesant retained considerable authority and a right of approval over ordinances introduced by the merchant magistrates. But by the late 1650s, the residents had realized their ambition of a burgher government and, within this framework, a civil political discourse among burghers, municipal officials, the provincial director, and the council developed.

The Dutch authorities would reach no such accommodation with the outlying English settlements. Tempers flared when the English endeavored to settle on territories claimed by the Dutch such as Mattinnekonck Bay, Long Island, and the village of Vreedland (Westchester). Facing a more populous Dutch colony and a better-supported provincial authority, the interlopers had to agree to terms if they were to remain in New Netherland. Thereafter English grumblings about boundary disputes, Indian relationships, taxes, and local political arrangements became a routine feature of provincial politics. In December 1657 Flushing reprised its long-established role as a haven for the heterodox in a remonstrance protesting Stuyvesant’s order forbidding support for Quakers. Some on Long Island continued to plot the downfall of the Dutch: Baxter was arrested and then flitted in and out of the colony before traveling to London and participating in the machinations that culminated with the 1664 conquest. Rallying to the English forces commanded by Richard Nicolls, Long Islanders anticipated local autonomy under a new English administration. They were disappointed. In 1665 Long Island, Staten Island, and Westchester were incorporated under a civil and criminal code known as the Duke’s Laws. Nicolls made no provision for local government and placed the English towns under the direct supervision of the governor and his council. Setting out to establish “the foundations of Kingly Government,” the newly arrived Nicolls found that “Democracy hath taken so deepe a Roote in these parts, that ye very name of a Justice of the Peace is an Abomination” and

his reform of the provincial government “truely is grievous to some Republicans.”62