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### Abstract

This paper explores the history of New Netherland in light of the Dutch struggle for identity during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Dutch originally belonged to the Holy Roman Empire as a Spanish territory, and were staunchly Catholic. However, with the coming of the Protestant Reformation, things began to change. With the Reformation came a revolution against their rulers, and also a religious diversity previously unheard of in Europe. This struggle carried over into the borders of America with the Dutch establishment of New Netherland. New Netherland was the experiment of religious freedom in practice for the Dutch. The colony became home to a wide variety of religious dissenters that found no resting place in Europe. The Dutch Reformed Church struggled for its autonomy against the increasing religious pluralism, and the latter eventually won out before the English took over New Netherland, renaming it New York and New Jersey after dividing the land. The pluralism present in New York and New Jersey helped set the tone for religious freedom in America today.

### Keywords

American history, History, Colonial America, New York, New Jersey, Dutch, Religious freedom, Freedom of religion

## Introduction

In the study of colonial American history, the colonists' struggles against the British for freedom is often a centerpiece. Many correctly see in the American Revolution the background for the United States Constitution, including the Bill of Rights. Of all of the freedoms the First Amendment guarantees, freedom of religion gets much attention. Often, however, historians miss the role played by the non-British in the birth of American religious freedom. Of all the major European powers to have territory in the Americas, the Dutch frequently go overlooked. The Dutch were the original owners of present-day New York and New Jersey, and their presence in colonial America in many ways defined the structure and development of American religious freedom. These struggles were internal (between liberals and conservatives among the Dutch)<sup>1</sup> and external (between the Dutch and the English, who eventually took over ownership and rule of Dutch colonial territory on the North American mainland). The story of the Dutch concept of religious freedom and its development amidst internal and external struggle is the story of an identity crisis that spread from Europe to America, and continued throughout the colonial period. Their struggle was a battle for identity, particularly defining and preserving the Dutch religious identity. This Dutch identity ultimately became a large part of American religious identity in the founding of the United States of America.

The development of American religious freedom is itself a multifaceted topic that scholars examine from several different angles. For example, historians frequently look to the Founding Fathers, such as Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, to retrace their original ideas surrounding this topic. Both Jefferson and Madison saw the plight of religious minorities in the colonies in which a combination of church and state was in place.<sup>2</sup> Others correctly turn to a study of New Netherland and the relationship between church and state within that colony. This includes a study of the religious diversity within the colony and how this took shape first in New Netherland and then outside it in the rest of the colonies. Too often, however, the Dutch background of American religious freedom goes unnoticed. That is to say, it is essential to understand the history of the relationship between the Dutch and the British on both sides of the Atlantic in order to effectively understand how, through New Netherland, America inherited a Dutch identity in its eventual constitutional policy of religious freedom, and how this paradigm became dominant in political thought. To understand this, it is necessary to study the Dutch from their proper context.

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<sup>1</sup> This is not to say that the debate over the role of the Dutch Reformed Church in the politics of New Netherland was between theological liberals and conservatives. Rather, the debate was over whether to keep to the old paradigm of combination of church and state (conservative) or to have more of a separation of church and state (liberal).

<sup>2</sup> Thomas S. Kidd and Barry Hankins, "The Baptist Alliance with Thomas Jefferson that Secured Religious Liberty", May 26, 2015, The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, <https://erlc.com/article/the-baptist-alliance-with-thomas-jefferson-that-secured-religious-liberty>, accessed October 17, 2015; Thomas Jefferson, "Letter to the Danbury Baptists", January 1, 1802, The Heritage Foundation, <http://www.heritage.org/initiatives/first-principles/primary-sources/jefferson-s-letter-to-the-danbury-baptists>, accessed October 17, 2015, and David Belton (prod.), "A New Eden" in *God in America* (Documentary Film), Public Broadcasting Services, WGBH Educational Foundation, 2010. Jefferson made it his mission to bring about a complete separation of church and state, as did Madison. Both looked to the plight of religious minorities in the states, and this solidified their convictions on this issue. The Danbury Baptists (so named for their place of residence in Connecticut) saw Jefferson as an incredible ally in rescuing them from years of persecution.

### **Background: The Effects of the Protestant Reformation on the Dutch**

The Dutch were among the people of the Netherlands, also known as the Low Countries, in Western Europe.<sup>3</sup> Prior to the seventeenth century, they belonged to the Holy Roman Empire, and were a major territory of Spain. At the time, Emperor Charles V sat on both the thrones of Spain and the Holy Roman Empire. Foundations began to shake, however, after the outbreak of the Protestant Reformation. The Reformation was the first of several key factors that led to the emergence of a concept of Dutch identity apart from the Holy Roman Empire and the Roman Catholic Church.

Up until the Reformation, the Roman Catholic Church dominated both religion and politics in Western Europe, with relatively little schism. However, when Martin Luther nailed the Ninety-Five Theses to the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg, Europe was never the same again. Critics of this new form of Christianity called it “Protestantism”—a title that stuck. Eventually, the principles of the Reformation began to spread around Western Europe, finding expression in Switzerland through leaders such as Huldrych Zwingli, William Farel, and John Calvin.<sup>4</sup> Over time, the various Protestant sects and other dissident forms of Christianity expanded into the Low Countries.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Other modern nations included in the designation “Low Countries” were Belgium, Luxembourg, and parts of modern France and Germany by the reign of Emperor Charles V.

<sup>4</sup> For more information concerning the Protestant Reformation and its spread throughout Europe, see Justo González, *The Story of Christianity*, vol. 2 (Prince Press: 1999); Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation*, (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2005); Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1978); Bruce Gordon, *Calvin*, (Yale University Press, 2009); G. R. Potter, *Zwingli*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1984). It is important to note, however, that not all dissidents from Roman Catholicism adhered to exactly the same principles. Not only were there several theological disagreements among the Reformers themselves, but there were several more groups who went even beyond the limits of the national churches in their biblical literalism, finding enemies in Catholics and Protestants alike. These groups became collectively known as the Anabaptists among their enemies. More information about them is available in William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story: An Introduction to Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978) and Leonard Verduin, *The Reformers and their Stepchildren*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964).

<sup>5</sup> While it was primarily Calvinism that became an increasingly powerful religious force in the Netherlands, it is incorrect to assume that Calvinism was the only form of non-Catholic Christianity to take hold among the Dutch. Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam, a Catholic humanist, forerunner of the Reformation, and compiler of the Received Text (*Textus Receptus*) from which the Authorized Version of the Bible (1611, also known as the King James Version) came, was a native of the Netherlands. For more information concerning Erasmus, see Leon Halkin, *Erasmus: A Critical Biography*, (Blackwell, 1994). Menno Simons, a former Catholic priest and one of the founding leaders of the Mennonite Church, was also a Dutch native, as was his pupil, Dirk Phillips. This is significant because of the pivotal role of these two men in the shaping of the Mennonite Church, a major Anabaptist sect. For more information on Simons and Phillips as well as the wide variety of religions on the Dutch landscape, see John Horsch, *Menno Simons: His Life, Labors, and Teachings*, (CrossReach Publications, 1919); Jonathan I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall 1477-1806*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1995), 88-93. Dirk Phillips was Menno Simons’s pupil and very influential in the spread of Anabaptist beliefs. For more information about Dirk Phillips, see William E. Keeney, “Dirk Phillips’s Life”, *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 32, 1958, 171-191. In addition, Jacobus Arminius, famous for his opposition to Calvinist theology (and from whom the designation “Arminian”/“Arminianism” derives its name), was from the Netherlands. For more information concerning Arminius, see Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Asbury Press, 1985). It is thus accurate to say that the Netherlands, even prior to the Eighty Years’ War, was a “melting pot” of sorts, composed of various Christian sects, though not quite as tolerated as they would later become.

In most places that gladly received the message of the Protestant Reformation, revolution broke out.<sup>6</sup> The Netherlands was no exception. The expansion of the Reformation, whether Lutheran, Swiss, or Radical, into the Netherlands, proved threatening to the Holy Roman Empire.<sup>7</sup> It shook the foundations of the Roman Catholic Church, and, consequently, the Holy Roman Empire.

Once a stronghold of Catholicism, the Dutch now began to show sympathy to the various dissidents that brought their message into the borders of the Low Countries. Spain, nevertheless, remained the seat of power for Emperor Charles V, and consequently held firm to the defense of both the Roman Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Empire. In 1555, Charles V, unable to continue his reign due to deteriorating physical health and failure to restore the Catholic Church's absolute power throughout Europe, divided his territories between his son, Philip II, and his brother, Ferdinand. The former received dominion over Spain and the Netherlands, while the latter became the new Holy Roman Emperor.<sup>8</sup> Philip was equally committed to bringing back the sole dominion of the Catholic Church and silencing all opposition. "[Philip] believed that the Spanish monarchy as well as the Catholic Church represented Absolute Truth."<sup>9</sup> The Dutch, however, were no longer sure. Eventually, tension increased between the Dutch and

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<sup>6</sup> For example, angry peasants revolted against the nobility in Germany. In England, the Puritans, fearing Catholic dominance, revolted against the Catholic King Charles I. The ensuing conflict, known as the English Civil War, ended with the Puritans' trial and execution of Charles. The Geneva Bible, which Calvin's followers translated, played a significant role in this, as it contained some marginal notes that urged citizens to revolt against tyrannical rulers. See, for example, Naseeb Shaheen, "Misconceptions about the Geneva Bible", *Studies in Bibliography*, Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia, vol. 37 (1984), 158, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40371798>, accessed October 17, 2015; Hardin Craig, Jr., "The Geneva Bible as a Political Document", *Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 7, no. 1 (March 1938), 40, 45, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3633847>, accessed October 17, 2015. The marginal notes in question are Romans 13:5 Geneva Bible, marginal note B, and the marginal note of Jeremiah 29:7 (Geneva Bible). The Geneva Bible remained very popular in seventeenth-century England, and was influential in the decades leading up to the American Revolution.

<sup>7</sup> All three of these basic groups had clusters of people who sought refuge in the Netherlands from persecution elsewhere.

<sup>8</sup> Maarten Prak, *The Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 7, 16; Paula S. Fichtner, "The Disobedience of the Obedient: Ferdinand I and the Papacy: 1555-1564", *The Sixteenth-Century Journal*, vol. 11, no. 2, Catholic Reformation (Summer 1980), 25, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2540030>, accessed October 18, 2015. Prak also notes that it was primarily the Peace of Augsburg that brought Charles V to the realization that the damage was done to the Catholic Church as a result of the Lutheran Reformation. All hope to put an end to the defiance of papal authority in Germany and bring Luther and his followers back into submission to Rome was lost. Since the Lutheran Reformation proved beyond the capability of the Catholic Church to stop, the Church finally decided to make a compromise with the various Protestant sects emerging throughout Western Europe (Prak, *Dutch Republic*, 16). Ironically, the Peace of Augsburg was settled upon in 1555, the same year that Charles V's reign came to an end. Prak further argues in this vein that the Peace of Augsburg was one of the leading factors outside of Charles V's failing health that led to his decision to abdicate (Prak, *Dutch Republic*, 16). Now, in addition to having several new religions within their border, the Dutch also had a new Roman Emperor and a new Spanish king as a result of the religious reforms.

<sup>9</sup> Bernard H. M. Vlekke, *Evolution of the Dutch Nation*, (New York, NY: Roy Publishers, 1945), quoted in Wilson Quarterly, "Background Books: The Dutch", *The Wilson Quarterly*, vol. 11, no. 2 (Spring 1987), 84, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40257839>, accessed October 18, 2015.

Philip, and they became determined to free themselves from what they saw as his tyrannical power.<sup>10</sup> They no longer desired exclusively Catholic rule over their lives, but became open to different perspectives. This created tension that finally erupted in the Dutch revolt against Spain known as the Eighty Years' War.<sup>11</sup> This war, as its name suggests, was a very lengthy and unstable conflict that characterized Dutch relations with Spain for the next eighty years.<sup>12</sup> Though the Dutch were constantly at war with Spain during this period, they nonetheless were able to establish an identity for themselves that was neither Spanish nor completely Roman Catholic.<sup>13</sup> Their identity, however, was a very fluid concept. The continually changing shape of this new identity would adversely affect the relationship between the Dutch and the English.

### **The Dutch Identity: The Establishment of the Dutch as a Major European Power**

In the midst of the Netherlands' ongoing and chaotic conflict with Spain, it became an entirely different power in Europe. No longer was it a strictly Catholic territory of Spain or the Holy Roman Empire, but its people were now able to decide for themselves what religion to embrace.<sup>14</sup> The Peace of Augsburg's resolution was that whoever had the rule, the same also had the power to decide the state religion.<sup>15</sup> For example, a Catholic monarch necessitated a Catholic state; a Lutheran monarch necessitated a Lutheran state, etc. For the Dutch, this necessarily created an identity crisis. Evan Haefeli notes that "even the issue of who was Dutch kept shifting

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<sup>10</sup> Their grievances against Philip II are laid out in the Act of Abjuration of 1581. The parallels between the Act and American revolutionary thought nearly two centuries later are striking. For more information, see "Dutch Independence Act of Abjuration, 1581," [http://www.age-of-the-sage.org/history/dutch\\_independence\\_1581.html](http://www.age-of-the-sage.org/history/dutch_independence_1581.html), accessed March 18, 2016.

<sup>11</sup> Although Calvinism grew more popular during this period, some historians do not agree that it was a primary cause of the Eighty Years' War. Gary Waite, for example, argues that it was primarily a combination of radical millennial Anabaptists such as the Münsterites and spiritualistic followers of David Joris (also labeled "Anabaptists") and Spanish intolerance thereof that led primarily to the Eighty Years' War. Waite argues that Dutch nobles protected these two specific groups, and that this played a key role in the outbreak of the conflict (Gary Waite, "The Dutch Nobility and Anabaptism, 1535-1545", *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol. 25, no. 3 (Autumn 1992), 458-485, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2542489>, accessed October 18, 2015. Toleration of religious minorities such as the Anabaptists is a foundational principle of religious freedom that continued to characterize Dutch relations with other countries, and that eventually crossed the Atlantic Ocean into New Netherland.

<sup>12</sup> Details of the Eighty Years' War are far beyond the scope of this paper. For more information, see Geoffrey Parker, *The Dutch Revolt*, (Cornell University Press, 1977); Henk van Nierop, *Treason in the Northern Quarter: War, Terror, and the Rule of Law in the Dutch Revolt*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), trans. by J. C. Grayson; James D. Tracy, *The Founding of the Dutch Republic: War, Finance, and Politics in Holland, 1572-1588*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>13</sup> There were parts of the Netherlands that remained sympathetic to Catholicism if not staunchly Catholic. However, the provinces as a whole were not Catholic as a result of the introduction of the Reformation, and began to embrace Protestantism in some places, or at least to tolerate it.

<sup>14</sup> While the Dutch Reformed Church (Calvinist) was the state church, it did not function in quite the same fashion as other state churches in Europe. Ideally, it wanted supremacy for itself throughout territories to which it laid claim, but in many places, other sects were able to flourish without its hindrance. Additionally, Roman Catholicism still enjoyed adherence in some provinces.

<sup>15</sup> González, *The Story of Christianity*, 135.

with battle lines, immigration trends, and colonial acquisitions.”<sup>16</sup> So, in addition to having a primitive “melting pot” that was unheard of throughout the rest of Europe, the Dutch also struggled to maintain this development as the Eighty Years’ War raged on. A study of early concepts of religious freedom in this region, however, requires a specific focus on the northern part of the Netherlands, specifically such places as Holland and Zeeland.

While Calvinism and other forms of Protestantism increased in influence throughout Dutch territory, the Dutch government, like others who faced similar difficulties with the outbreak of the Reformation, needed a solution. Such a solution came about at the Union of Utrecht in 1579, which united the Northern Netherlands into a single set of provinces. The Union of Utrecht and its forerunner, the Pacification of Ghent in 1576, were two attempts to pacify the Dutch revolt against the Spanish.

The Pacification of Ghent occurred during a time where tension between Catholics and Protestants was near its climax, and William the Silent, Prince of Orange, was desperate to find a solution to unite the provinces to defeat their common enemy, the Spanish. However, his efforts were near futile because of the lack of unity between the northern and southern provinces of the Netherlands.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, William was unable to solve the dilemma of Dutch unity to help bring an end to the revolt. He also could not end the tension created with the presence of Protestant sects in once Catholic territory. He kept attempting to foster tranquility in areas over which he was sovereign, but his policies proved ineffective in most places.<sup>18</sup> However, he still hoped to unite the Netherlands into a common front. To do so, he knew that the religious tension needed to end. Finally, there came the Union of Utrecht in 1579. This union brought the northern provinces in the Netherlands together, but allowed their governments freedom of choice in regard to the state religion.

As for the matter of religion, the States of Holland and Zeeland shall act according to their own pleasure, and the other Provinces of the Union shall...establish such general or special regulations in this matter as they shall find good and most fitting for...the preservation of the property and rights of each individual, whether churchmen or laymen, and no other Province shall be permitted to interfere or make difficulties, provided that each person shall remain free in his religion and that no one shall be investigated or persecuted because of his religion...<sup>19</sup>

The Union of Utrecht did not initially produce the results William would have liked, as it served only to make the Dutch Reformed Church the state church of the Northern Provinces, and make Catholicism shift from the state religion to the persecuted.<sup>20</sup> However, it nonetheless planted a

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<sup>16</sup> Evan Haefeli, *New Netherland and the Dutch Origins of American Religious Liberty*, (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 9.

<sup>17</sup> Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 187-188.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 193-195.

<sup>19</sup> “The Union of Utrecht: January 23, 1579”, XIII, Constitution Society, [http://www.constitution.org/cons/dutch/Union\\_Utrecht\\_1579.html](http://www.constitution.org/cons/dutch/Union_Utrecht_1579.html). Accessed October 8, 2015.

<sup>20</sup> Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 193-195.

seed that eventually, over the course of the next thirty years, became a primitive form of freedom of religion in a significant part of Western Europe.

The story, however, is not quite as simple as it seems. To the Dutch, as well as to the rest of Western Europe, where Roman Catholicism was the dominant religion for centuries, the concept of religious freedom was a relatively novel idea. It went against all patterns of the relationship between church and state since the fourth century A.D. When the Roman Catholic Church transformed into the major political power of Western Europe, Augustine of Hippo became the first Christian leader to advocate for the persecution of schismatics. He said “there is the unjust persecution which the wicked inflict on the Church of Christ, and the just persecution which the Church of Christ inflicts on the wicked.”<sup>21</sup> This practice of persecuting dissidents became the standard practice of the Roman Catholic Church throughout the medieval period, reaching its peak during the Inquisition. Even Protestants affirmed the practice of persecuting heretics.

From the Union of Utrecht in 1579 up until the early seventeenth century, the concept as it played out in the Northern Netherlands was shaky at best. Evan Haefeli notes that there is no monolithic approach the Dutch took in order to identify religious freedom. There was much controversy throughout the next century over what religious freedom should look like. The provinces were mostly Dutch Reformed. However, it was unclear to the Dutch exactly how the Dutch Reformed Church should relate to the rest of society. In addition, Haefeli notes that they also struggled over the concept of a national church, which allowed room for various models and interpretations.<sup>22</sup> It is ironic that during this period of chaos in Dutch history, they began to play a very important role in the lives of dissidents from mainstream religious thought elsewhere.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> St. Augustine, *Letters*, Vol. IV (165-203), trans. by Sister Wilfrid Parsons, S.N.D., (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1955), 152.

<sup>22</sup> Haefeli, *New Netherland*, 35-46.

<sup>23</sup> Amidst the confusion over what constituted a mainstream Dutch Reformed Church in seventeenth-century Netherlands, acceptance of religious dissidents became more common in the Northern Netherlands. Among those who fled to Holland were groups of Separatists known to many today as the “Pilgrims” or “Brownists” (the latter because of their leader, Robert Browne). They wanted more reform within the Church than what the English monarchy was willing to carry out. They were like their contemporaries, the Puritans, in their zeal for radical reform. However, the Puritans thought they could reform the Church of England from within. The Separatists had already given up on the Church of England and felt the need to separate it altogether. They relocated to Holland for several years, where they found freedom to practice their religious beliefs without persecution from the English crown. For more information about the experience of the English Separatists in Holland, see Keith L. Sprunger, *Dutch Puritanism: A History of English and Scottish Churches of the Netherlands in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1982), 51-53. See also Keith L. Sprunger, “Puritans and Separatists” in Dowley, Tim, ed., *An Introduction to the History of Christianity*, (Minneapolis, MN: Lion Publishing, 1977), 389; Lisa Wolfinger (Director, Producer), *Desperate Crossing: The Untold Story of the Mayflower* (A&E Home Video, 2007). The Separatists who settled Plymouth eventually distanced themselves from the earlier “Brownist” Separatists. Sprunger also notes that it was devout members of the Dutch Reformed Church in Holland who opposed the Separatists who continued to label them as “Brownists.” The English refugees to Holland also included the early English Baptists, under the leadership of John Smyth. William J. Collins argues that the Baptists and Separatists (“Pilgrims”) became very acquainted with the Waterlander Mennonites, whose ideals helped the Baptists to embrace the freedom of conscience the Union of Utrecht strove for. For more information, see William J. Collins, “The Debt of English Non-Conformity to Holland”, *Nederlands archief voor kerkgeschiedenis/Dutch Review of Church History*, NIEUWE SERIE, Vol. 16 (1920-1921), 163-171, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24005610>, accessed October 10, 2015. Collins argues that the Waterlander Mennonites were more relaxed in their ecclesiastical discipline than mainstream Mennonites and desired to learn

During this time, the Dutch also began to establish colonies in America. In America, the Dutch religious identity finally had a testing ground.<sup>24</sup>

### **Religion, Politics, and Colonial Empires: The Dutch vs. the English**

The Dutch had multiple visions of what they wanted the relationship between church and state to look like, and they could not always agree on any one particular picture. Thus, as noted above, there was no monolithic structure that defined Dutch religion and politics.<sup>25</sup> Unlike Germany and Switzerland, which were Lutheran, Roman Catholic, or Reformed depending on the province/canton, the Dutch had a far more limited structure. Some territories, as noted

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other perspectives outside their fold. This caused them to separate from the mainstream Mennonite church. For information about the early Baptists, see John Smyth, *The Works of John Smyth* (2 vols.), (The Baptist Standard Bearer, 2009); Anthony L. Chute, et. al., *The Baptist Story: From English Sect to Global Movement*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015). For more information about the Waterlanders and the disagreement among the refugees, see Nanne Van der Zijpp, "Waterlanders." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. Herald Press: 1959. <http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Waterlanders&oldid=128076>. Accessed October 10, 2015.; See also "English Dissenters: Barrowists", Ex Libris, <http://www.exlibris.org/nonconform/engdis/barrowists.html>, accessed October 12, 2015. While many of the Separatists enjoyed a fresh, new experience among the Dutch during their stay in Holland, they did not embrace all that they observed. They still wanted to maintain an English identity (Mills, MacLaughlin, Radloff, and Ruth Family Places, <http://www.millsgen.com/gen/hist/pilstor2.htm>, accessed October 12, 2015).

<sup>24</sup> The Dutch were not the only ones who attempted to establish a colony with freedom of religion. William Penn, a Quaker, founded the Pennsylvania colony with a grant which King Charles II gave him as an alternative to repaying a debt that the king owed to Penn's late father. Penn founded the colony as a safe haven for his fellow Quakers, and allowed members of all sects of Christianity to come and live there. It became a safe haven especially for Quakers and different sects of Anabaptists, most commonly the Mennonites, Amish, and Dunkard Brethren. For more information on the Pennsylvania colony, see David W. Bercot, *In God We Don't Trust*, (Amberson, PA: Scroll Publishing Company, 2011), Online Kindle Edition, Location 1108-1270; William Penn, "Pennsylvania Charter of Privileges, October 28, 1701", Historic Documents, <http://www.ushistory.org/documents/charter.htm>, accessed October 15, 2015; Joseph E. Illick, *Colonial Pennsylvania: A History*, (Kraus International Publications, 1976).

<sup>25</sup> This does not mean that there was no confusion in European nations that had combination of church and state. England, in particular, was a special case. King Henry VIII separated from the Pope. However, many of the traditions inherited from the Roman Catholic Church were not eliminated. As noted above, Puritans and Separatists wanted the Church of England to go farther in removing Catholic traditions and adhering strictly to the Bible as their rule of faith and practice. This dichotomy created constant tension between the British government and these religious dissenters. Mary Tudor, a staunch Catholic, executed several Protestants during her reign, and several others fled to Geneva for safety until the reign of her sister, Elizabeth I. When they returned, Elizabeth was only willing to go so far with the desires of the Puritans, and saw them as a threat to the stability of English society. Eventually, the Puritans temporarily took over England when they tried and beheaded King Charles II. Their rule, however, was very brief and eventually the Crown received its power back. Years later, measures to prevent a violent Puritan revolt increased to the point where the Puritans, increasingly uncomfortable with restrictive measures against them, emigrated to the Massachusetts Bay Colony. For more information on the English Reformation, see Derek Wilson, *A Brief History of the English Reformation: Religion, Politics and Fear, How England Was Transformed by the Tudors*, (Running Press, 2012). For more information on the tension created when the Puritans came on the scene, see Ronald J. Vander Molen, "Anglican against Puritan: Ideological Origins during the Marian Exile", *Church History*, vol. 42, no. 1 (Mar., 1973), 45-57, accessed October 12, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3165045>; Peter Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans?: Presbyterianism and English Conformist Thought from Whitgift to Hooker*, (London, UK: Unwin Hyman, 1988); Blair Worden, *The English Civil Wars: 1640-1660*, (Phoenix, AZ: Phoenix Publishers, 2010) and Peter Furtado, *Restoration England: Shire Living Histories*, (Shire, 2010).

above, were staunch adherents to the Dutch Reformed Church, and enjoyed living under its combination with the state. Others, however, took a more liberal approach to the relationship between church and state, despite the privileged status of the Dutch Reformed Church. This carried over across the Atlantic Ocean into colonial America.

The Dutch had several colonies in North America. However, their colony on the mainland, New Netherland, is perhaps their most recognized contribution to the future United States of America, in both its religious ideology and economic prosperity. It was this colony that sparked tension between the Dutch and the English. The two had formerly been allies during the early stages of the Eighty Years' War, but their clash of perspectives soon took a different turn.

In the seventeenth century, Henry Hudson, an Englishman sailing for the Dutch, discovered a piece of land that he named New Netherland as an opportunity for the Dutch to make a fortune. The opportunity quickly became a wealthy trading venture and a "melting pot" for people from all over Europe. While several colonies came into being without the presence of an enforced state religion, this colony was a unique endeavor in its approach to religion.

Most colonies in the New World had at least a partial religious motivation for their founding. For example, Virginia, in addition to the economic opportunity involved in the venture, stated in its charter that one of its purposes was to bring Christianity to the Native Americans.<sup>26</sup> The Plymouth Colony as well as the Massachusetts Bay Colony both had similar reasons behind their founding.<sup>27</sup> In the case of New Netherland, the Dutch did not throw religion out altogether. The Charter of Freedoms and Exemptions (New Netherland's colonial charter), had a concern for the presence of some form of Christianity. One key statement from this charter reads as follows: "The Patroons and colonists shall in particular, and in the speediest manner, endeavor to find out ways and means whereby they might support a Minister and Schoolmaster, that thus the service of God and the zeal for religion may not grow cool and be neglected among them, and they shall, for the first, procure a Comforter of the sick there. . . ."<sup>28</sup> However, New Netherland was unique in that although it was founded with a state church (i.e., the Dutch Reformed Church), its primary purpose was not to exist as a Dutch Reformed colony. That is, it was not on American soil as a means to spread the religious beliefs of the Dutch Reformed Church.<sup>29</sup> Rather, it was established more than anything else as an opportunity for economic

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<sup>26</sup> "The First Virginia Charter (April 10, 1606)", American History: From Revolution to Reconstruction and Beyond, <http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/documents/1600-1650/the-first-virginia-charter-1606.php>, accessed October 13, 2015. The early colonists did not necessarily fulfill this part of their mission, but in the Virginia colony, the Church of England was the state church.

<sup>27</sup> "Mayflower Compact", Yale Law School Avalon Project, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/17th\\_century/mayflower.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/17th_century/mayflower.asp), accessed October 13, 2015; "Charter of Massachusetts Bay, 1629", American History: From Revolution to Reconstruction and Beyond, <http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/documents/1600-1650/charter-of-massachusetts-bay-1629.php>, accessed October 13, 2015.

<sup>28</sup> "Extract from the Charter of Freedoms and Exemptions to Patroons, June 7, 1629", American History: From Revolution to Reconstruction and Beyond, <http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/documents/1600-1650/extract-from-charter-of-freedoms-and-exemptions-to-patroons-june-7-1629.php>, accessed October 14, 2015.

<sup>29</sup> This does not, however, mean that the Dutch Reformed Church had nothing to do with the founding of New Netherland. The Dutch Reformed Church maintained a strong presence within the colony (Philip Schaff, *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/s/schaff/encyc/encyc09/htm/iv.vii.c.htm>, accessed October 14, 2015. That it was a trading post, Kenneth Jackson also attests in an article he wrote about the history of religious freedom, beginning with New Netherland. "Because the founding idea was trade, the directors of the firm took pains to ensure that all were

advancement. Thus, more than other colonies, it took a more liberal and relaxed attitude toward religion, particularly at a governmental level. While New Netherland was not without its conservatives who pushed for the supremacy of the Dutch Reformed Church, it was, due to prevailing diversity and religious liberalism at the state level, a forerunner of the American “melting pot.” At a time of increased tension between the Dutch and the English throughout the Atlantic World, this created a problem for the Dutch West Indies Company in keeping New Netherland as Dutch as possible. Their solution to this problem, however, proved more self-destructive than helpful.

When the Dutch established a major colony in North America, they, like their Spanish, British, and French rivals, were interested in the economic opportunity that a colony in the New World could bring. Like the English, the Dutch placed their colony in the charge of a trading company, in this case the Dutch West Indies Company. Like other Middle Colonies, New Netherland became a “melting pot” for various Christian denominations and even Jews.<sup>30</sup> Like any other colony, there was tension between slaves and their masters, as well as the colonists and the Native Americans that initially inhabited the land. There was also a notable presence of disorder. Eventually, when morals increasingly loosened, and it became critical to preserve New Netherland from an English takeover, the Dutch appointed Peter Stuyvesant as colonial governor, after a long history of somewhat unsuccessful governors over the colony.<sup>31</sup> Stuyvesant saw it his responsibility to bring in line a colony that was marked by social chaos. Stuyvesant desired to make the Dutch Reformed Church the state church of New Netherland, and attempted to prosecute Lutherans who wished to practice their religion. He would not allow them to establish their own church, and even tried to forbid them from worshipping in the privacy of their own homes until leaders of the Dutch West Indies Company ordered him to desist.<sup>32</sup>

During Stuyvesant’s governorship, the Spanish Inquisition was raging in Western Europe. Several Jews came to New Netherland from places under the dominion of the Spanish in order to flee from the Inquisition. Stuyvesant, himself a devout member of the Dutch Reformed Church, tried to refuse them entry, but the Dutch West India Company, much to his surprise, contested him. They did so in the name of the colony being a “trading post” rather than a “religious society.”<sup>33</sup> The Dutch West Indies Company wanted to allow everyone the same economic opportunity, with no disparaging treatment based on religious beliefs.

Leaders of the Dutch Reformed Church feared that the presence of multiple religious expressions in one given place simply was not compatible. There was great fear that the colony would descend into a “Babel of confusion” if there was not a state religion.<sup>34</sup> For Stuyvesant and

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welcome” (Kenneth T. Jackson, “A Colony With a Conscience”, *The New York Times*, December 27, 2007, [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/27/opinion/27jackson.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/27/opinion/27jackson.html?_r=0), accessed October 15, 2015).

<sup>30</sup> Ric Burns (dir.), *New York: A Documentary Film* (DVD), Disc 1, (Public Broadcasting Services, 2001); New Netherland by this time was home to a wide diversity of religions, ranging from Catholics, Anabaptists, English Puritans, etc. (Kammen, *Colonial New York*, 61).

<sup>31</sup> Kammen, *Colonial New York*, 48.

<sup>32</sup> Edwin G. Burrows and Wallace, Mike, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), 59.

<sup>33</sup> Burns, *New York*, 2001.

<sup>34</sup> Haefeli, *New Netherland*, 149.

likeminded ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church, the answer was clearly their denomination. The Dutch West Indies Company, however, firmly disagreed. To them, the answer was not supremacy of the Dutch Reformed Church, but to allow those who did not adhere to the church the same rights and privileges as those who did. Though the changes were not immediate, the struggle that ensued redefined religion on the American landscape in the generations to come. The message the Dutch West Indies Company gave to Peter Stuyvesant proved timeless in United States history for the expression of religious liberty in America. “Shut your eyes, at least not force people’s consciences, but allow every one to have his own belief, as long as he behaves quietly and legally, gives no offense to his neighbors and does not oppose the government.”<sup>35</sup>

Unlike other colonies, New Netherland attracted people from all over the European and American worlds, including people from some of Spain’s colonies in South America (including some Jews, as noted above). Stuyvesant was not alone in his concern for the decreasing power of the Dutch Reformed Church upon New Netherland society. He shared the opinions of the leaders of the Dutch Reformed Church in New Netherland, who adamantly opposed the allowance of any religious practices apart from full adherence to their church.<sup>36</sup> In a way, therefore, the religious unrest in New Netherland was legal “warfare” between the Dutch Reformed Church (with Stuyvesant as its primary representative) and its dissidents in the society of New Netherland. It was the Dutch Reformed Church’s last offensive against a society that did not include statewide adherence to itself.<sup>37</sup> Ultimately, the principle of freedom of religion prevailed, as the Dutch continued the legacy that they started in the beginning of their conflict with Spain. Religious freedom was beginning to see formal expression, and Stuyvesant found himself with no choice but to adapt.

His adaptation, however, was short-lived. Stuyvesant was not about to surrender his ambition for the Dutch Reformed Church to gain supremacy at the state level without a fight. His next move was to make Quaker meetings illegal in the colony. To make it clear that he meant business, he made a public example out of Robert Hodgson, a Quaker whom he tortured.<sup>38</sup>

However, this time some of Stuyvesant’s own people could not make themselves a part of such action. Edward Hart, then town clerk in Flushing, organized a petition of his own residents calling for compromise. They petitioned for Quakers to freely practice their religion within the colony in the form of the Flushing Remonstrance. The statement also presents a picture of what religious freedom looked like to the Dutch, as told in the Union of Utrecht.

The law of love, peace, and liberty in the states extending to Jews, Turks and Egyptians, as they are considered sons of Adam, which is the glory of the outward state of Holland, soe love, peace, and liberty, extending to all in Christ Jesus, condemns hatred, war and bondage. And because our Saviour sayeth it is impossible but that offences will come, but woe unto him by whom they cometh, our desire is not to offend one of his little ones, in whatsoever form, name or title hee appears in, whether Presbyterian, Independent,

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<sup>35</sup> Haefeli, *New Netherland*, 54.

<sup>36</sup> Kammen, *Colonial New York*, 60.

<sup>37</sup> Randall H. Balmer, *A Perfect Babel of Confusion: Dutch Religion and English Culture in the Middle Colonies*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1989), 3-5.

<sup>38</sup> Jackson, “A Colony with Conscience.”

Baptist or Quaker, but shall be glad to see anything of God in any of them, desiring to doe unto all men as we desire all men should doe unto us, which is the true law both of Church and State; for our saviour sayeth this is the law and the prophets.<sup>39</sup>

The liberals among the Dutch adhered to the principle of the Golden Rule, viz., “all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.”<sup>40</sup> While previously, Europeans handled religious differences often with persecution, now, the Dutch presented a new vision. They believed it was more in keeping with the Golden Rule to allow different religions to exist side by side rather than ban people from living in a colony due to differing religious beliefs. It was a truly innovative concept for its time in that it extended to many religious expressions.<sup>41</sup> Kenneth Jackson observes that the Flushing Remonstrance was quite remarkable in its approach to pleading with Stuyvesant for freedom of religion. Rather than any dissident sect petitioning for its own freedom, this time people who were not even adherents to the dissident sect in question pleaded on the sect’s behalf. He observes that these were not Quakers pleading for their fellow Quakers, but non-Quakers pleading on the Quakers’ behalf.<sup>42</sup>

However, this was not a total victory for the Quakers. Stuyvesant retaliated with the arrest of Hart and some of his fellow signers. However, the seed was planted. In 1663, John Bowne, a Quaker, petitioned on their behalf next. The Dutch West Indies Company ruled in his favor, and Stuyvesant’s battle for the Dutch Reformed Church was ultimately lost.

While the more liberal Dutch won a lengthy battle for religious freedom, the English, for the most part, continued to enforce the model of the Peace of Augsburg (i.e., whose rule, his religion).<sup>43</sup> Despite the newfound freedom of religion in New Netherland, however, the Dutch Reformed Church still accounted for much of the religion present in the colony by the end of the

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<sup>39</sup> Edward Hart, “Remonstrance of the Residents of the Town of Flushing to Governor Stuyvesant, December 27, 1657”, <http://www.nyym.org/flushing/remons.html>, accessed October 15, 2015.

<sup>40</sup> Matthew 7:12a. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations of Scripture will be taken from the King James Version (KJV).

<sup>41</sup> John Calvin, for example, wrote the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* in 1536 with a dedicatory preface to King Francis I of France, who at the time was persecuting Reformed Protestants. Calvin wanted Francis to see that in the minds of the Reformed, they were just being good Christians, and simultaneously good citizens, and thus did not deserve to receive the same treatment as criminals at the hands of the state. (John Calvin, “Prefatory Address to His Most Christian Majesty, The Most Mighty and Illustrious Monarch, Francis, King of the French, His Sovereign”, in *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.ii.viii.html>, accessed October 15, 2015). However, Calvin’s plea for freedom extended only to his fellow Protestants who fit his standards for orthodoxy. When Michael Servetus, an Anabaptist who had some differing theological opinions on the nature of the Trinity, quarreled with Calvin over their different theological understandings, Calvin presided over his imprisonment and execution when he finally came to Geneva fleeing from Spanish Catholics. For more information about Calvin’s execution of Servetus, see Bercot, *The Kingdom that Turned the World Upside Down*, 243-250.

<sup>42</sup> Jackson, “A Colony with a Conscience.”

<sup>43</sup> A noteworthy exception was Providence, which Roger Williams founded upon his exile from the Massachusetts Bay Colony. In doing so, he provided a safe haven for his fellow Separatists, including Baptists. For more information on Roger Williams and the Providence colony, see Edwin S. Gaustad, *Liberty of Conscience: Roger Williams in America*, (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1999), and Sydney V. James, *Colonial Rhode Island: A History*, (Scribner, 1975).

seventeenth century.<sup>44</sup> However, by now, New Netherland was not in an internally stable position due to the controversies, especially with the English. Conflict broke out between the Dutch and the English that had as a main point of contention the colony of New Netherland. Alan Taylor notes that previously, the English had only concerned themselves with the New England and Chesapeake regions, and recognized the Dutch as more powerful than themselves. However, they soon “developed a violent envy of Dutch wealth.”<sup>45</sup> This conflict became the first of many Anglo-Dutch Wars that created a further problem for the Dutch identity crisis.

Stuyvesant’s failure to restore New Netherland to his own conception of order climaxed when conflict broke out between the Dutch and the English. At the conclusion of the first Anglo-Dutch War, England acquired New Netherland when Peter Stuyvesant surrendered.<sup>46</sup> At Stuyvesant’s request, the English agreed to “give the Dutch the same rights as the English.”<sup>47</sup> The English divided the newly acquired colony into two. The upper part of the colony became known as “New York,” while the lower took the name “New Jersey” after initially being called “New Caesaria.”<sup>48</sup> Stuyvesant’s surrender to the British ultimately led to his disgrace and unhappy return to Holland.<sup>49</sup> By the time the English took over New Netherland, the religious climate still very much remained a “melting pot”, with the Church of England unable to completely eliminate the Dutch Reformed Church in the colony.<sup>50</sup>

The residents of New York and New Jersey still enjoyed a relatively peaceful life for the first several years of British rule. However, among those unhappy with the change of ownership was a man named Jacob Leisler in New York. Leisler and other likeminded people were uneasy about the English takeover. King Charles II placed the colony under the power of his brother, the future king James II, Duke of York, who was a Roman Catholic. With the vast majority of the colonists in New York professing Protestantism, this naturally created a lot of uneasiness. This uneasiness mounted when James II became king of England. To Leisler and his followers, a Catholic king was equivalent to the loss of religious freedom. “No issue aroused the suspicions and ignited the passions of New York’s Dutch inhabitants of the late seventeenth century more

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<sup>44</sup> Balmer, *A Perfect Babel of Confusion*, 28.

<sup>45</sup> Alan Taylor, *American Colonies: The Settling of North America*, (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2002), 246.

<sup>46</sup> Balmer, *A Perfect Babel of Confusion*, 3.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>48</sup> Pomfret, *Colonial New Jersey*, 22-23.

<sup>49</sup> Balmer, *A Perfect Babel of Confusion*, 6-7; “The End of New Netherland”, *American History: From Revolution to Reconstruction and Beyond*, <http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/essays/general/the-united-states-of-america-and-the-netherlands/the-end-of-new-netherland.php>, accessed October 15, 2015.

<sup>50</sup> Nelson R. Burr, “The Episcopal Church and the Dutch in Colonial New York and New Jersey—1664-1784”, *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, vol. 19, no. 2 (June 1950), 91-93, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42969642>, accessed March 10, 2016. Burr details the Anglican struggle with the Dutch Reformed Church in order to attempt to establish the Church of England as the official church of New Netherland. While it gained considerable influence during this period, between Dutch resistance and the Great Awakening, the Church of England was forced to change its strategy with the Dutch (100).

than the fear of Roman Catholicism.”<sup>51</sup> In addition, they were wholeheartedly opposed to foreign domination, particularly in the form of their British competitors.<sup>52</sup> They were afraid of losing their Dutch identity to the English, and wanted to preserve that.<sup>53</sup>

James II, over time, proved himself unwilling to work with any of the colonists, and attempted to forcibly take over all of the governments of the Thirteen Colonies. This was only temporary, as in 1688 William III, Prince of Orange (who, ironically, was Dutch himself), and his wife, James’s sister Mary, deposed him in a nonviolent manner in what is known as the Glorious Revolution.<sup>54</sup> The new monarchs were Protestant, which helped ease some of the tension. However, it was too late, as Leisler and his followers finally initiated an uprising in 1689 that resulted in Leisler’s temporary takeover of New York. The British finally deposed and executed Leisler. However, his sympathizers lived on, and the unity for which the colonists strove was badly damaged. “Because of the political quarrels, it is impossible for us to live in peace; and where there is no political peace, ecclesiastical peace cannot exist.”<sup>55</sup> Even in colonial America, this attitude betrayed the future of American religion and politics.<sup>56</sup> When either religion or politics became divided, both realms entered into chaos. Robert C. Ritchie, commenting on the unrest that characterized the Leisler Rebellion, says that “whenever there was a crisis the people had no common trusted institutions to rely on, and the result was fragmentation of the province into its constituent parts.”<sup>57</sup> The civil unrest typified in Leisler’s Rebellion came to define the religious and political landscape once America became independent from Great Britain.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Randall H. Balmer, “Traitors and Papists: The Religious Dimensions of Leisler’s Rebellion”, *New York History*, vol. 70, no. 4 (October 1989), 344, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23178499>, accessed October 18, 2015.

<sup>52</sup> Balmer, *A Perfect Babel of Confusion*, 32.

<sup>53</sup> Balmer, “Traitors and Papists”, 343. Balmer claims that in addition to the anti-Catholic motives of Leisler and his followers, they were also acting to preserve Dutch interests. This insistence on preserving Dutch identity is in sharp contrast to the English Separatists, who left Holland over their desire to maintain an English identity and emigrated to Plymouth.

<sup>54</sup> Taylor, *American Colonies*, 282-283 .

<sup>55</sup> Balmer, *A Perfect Babel of Confusion*, 50.

<sup>56</sup> This does not mean that it was a tension unique to the American colonies. All nations that embraced the Reformation consisted of conservatives and liberals of various sorts. Whenever a group of people advocated any sort of change in the religion or politics, both realms of society entered a state of complete disarray, such as the Puritans’ tension with the monarchy and the subsequent outbreak of the English Civil War. This European pattern found its way across the Atlantic Ocean to the Thirteen Colonies.

<sup>57</sup> Robert C. Ritchie, *The Duke’s Province: A Study of New York Politics and Society, 1664-1691* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1977), 199-200.

<sup>58</sup> For example, the American Civil War, less than a century after the American Revolution, involved a tension both of religion and politics. The political tension is obvious in that the nation split into the Union (North) and the Confederate States of America (South). However, the religious tension is not so obvious for those who have not studied the subject in detail. Southern Christians believed they were fighting to preserve slavery as a divine stewardship, for which there were great consequences for abuse. For an excellent study of the fall of the Confederate South and the religious tension involved in the Civil War, see Eugene D. Genovese, *A Consuming Fire: The Fall of the Confederacy in the Mind of the White Christian South* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998).

For the remainder of the seventeenth century, England and the Netherlands struggled over who had power over New York. For a brief period, the Dutch took control again. Ultimately, however, the colony entered into the hands of the English. Over the course of the following century, New York and New Jersey, now in English control but still containing the Dutch identity, grew from their role as an experiment to an agent of change. Nelson Burr notes that “when the Revolution came, the Dutch were almost solid in the American cause, and dearly paid for it in plundered homes and desecrated churches, as the war was largely fought in their territory.”<sup>59</sup> Prior to the war, the “melting pot” pattern continued throughout New Jersey, which was a very religiously diverse colony even after passing into British ownership.<sup>60</sup> Anglican attempts to win the Dutch Reformed Church over to itself were met with much resistance and ultimately weakened both institutions. The identity for which the Dutch fought, however, was not completely gone.

### **Setting the Trends: The Preservation of the Dutch Identity**

While the struggles over religious freedom in New York and New Jersey bore witness to the grappling of the Dutch to secure and defend their religious identity throughout the world, the American Revolution was primarily an English war. Now, however, cries for religious freedom everywhere in the colonies were on many fronts, whether New York, Pennsylvania, etc. By the time the American Revolution broke out, New York was a flourishing colony on many levels. Jack Greene argues that the Middle Colonies, of which New York was one, could be studied through a developmental model societally (i.e., socioeconomically, the colonies had humble beginnings but became very prosperous).<sup>61</sup> While Greene’s model is certainly true as far as New York’s socioeconomic history is concerned, it is not true as far as societal stability is concerned. The residents of New York, after all, declined morally to the point that the Dutch West Indies Company felt the need to employ Peter Stuyvesant for restoration. Thus, Greene’s “declension model,” which he employs in dealing with the New England colonies, would be more appropriate.<sup>62</sup> While New York had not yet achieved independence, it did, however, become a catalyst in the machinations of the future United States of America.<sup>63</sup> Its “melting pot” of

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<sup>59</sup> Burr, “Episcopal Church and the Dutch”, 99-100.

<sup>60</sup> For more information on colonial New Jersey, see John E. Pomfret, *Colonial New Jersey: A History*, (New York, NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1973).

<sup>61</sup> Jack P. Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 151.

<sup>62</sup> Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 55-80.

<sup>63</sup> The PBS documentary film, *New York*, shows how New York went from being a luxurious Dutch trading post to setting precedents for all of American history. The film makes the point that throughout U.S. history, New York defines everything about America, from religion to politics, and even to culture. See Burns (dir.), *New York*, 2001.

One of the most noteworthy trendsetters of American history was Alexander Hamilton. Hamilton was born in the Caribbean, but as a young man, entered King’s College in New York. He was able to utilize the economic opportunity New York offered to pioneer the credit-based economic system upon which American economics rest. Hamilton was a major Founding Father as well as the founder of the Bank of New York. A discussion of Hamilton, however, is beyond the scope of this paper because Hamilton’s contribution is mostly to American economics. For more about Hamilton, see Burns (dir.), *New York*, 2001; Joseph A. Murray, *Alexander Hamilton: America’s*

ethnicity and religion likely helped to set the stage for the principles upon which the United States Constitution was written and amended in regards to religious freedom. Peter Stuyvesant's struggles with the Dutch West India Company over freedom of religion typify the struggle to avoid religious dominance of a state.

### Conclusion

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...”<sup>64</sup> Thus reads the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. The Dutch played a pivotal role in the development of the concept behind it. A nation that once was a stronghold of the Holy Roman Empire embraced the Protestant Reformation. In their revolt against their former masters, the Dutch began to embrace liberty of conscience concerning matters of religion. This new tolerance made Holland a safe haven for religious dissidents.

The Dutch “melting pot” took residence in New Netherland. Despite resistance to free exercise of religion from the Dutch Reformed Church and its representative, Peter Stuyvesant, New Netherland became home to a wide variety of religious expressions, from Lutheranism to even Judaism. The concept of religious tolerance in America was the end result of a struggle of Dutch identity that took place both on European and American soil. Once the Dutch became independent, they no longer unquestioningly embraced Roman Catholicism. This came because of the Reformation's entry into the Netherlands, as well as the resulting sympathy upon religious dissidents. Upon coming to America, they established New Netherland as a valuable trading center, and resisted all attempts to make it into a religious society. Consequently, they often struggled to stay united as a colony. However, they did provide a good model for American religious freedom that the Founding Fathers may have taken into consideration, although they were not by any means the only influence. However, they were a key component. Combined with Puritanism (and its Scottish counterpart, Presbyterianism), the two colonies formerly known as New Netherland became a seedbed for religious freedom to mature. The United States of America inherited remnants of a Dutch identity through New Netherland, and established religious freedom throughout its borders.

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*Forgotten Founder*, (Algora, 2007), and Ralph E. Bailey, *An American Colossus: The Singular Career of Alexander Hamilton* (Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Co., 1933). New York also became a common location for revivals during the Great Awakening. George Whitefield, James Davenport, and Jonathan Barber, among others, all preached through New York during the Great Awakening. For more information concerning the Great Awakening and its role in the founding of America as well as its pattern for revival that continued even into the nineteenth century, see Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical History in Colonial America*, (Yale University Press, 2007). In addition, James Madison received his education at Princeton University (then known as the “College of New Jersey”), largely under John Witherspoon. This is significant because the College of New Jersey incubated in a place of strong Dutch influence. For more information on the role of John Witherspoon and the College of New Jersey on the shaping of James Madison's political thought, see Mark A. Noll, “Princeton in the Revolutionary Era, 1757-1815”, *The Journal of Presbyterian History*, vol. 85 (no. 2), Fall/Winter 2007, 89-101 and *Princeton and the Republic: 1768-1822*, (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 1989); Terence S. Morrow and Terence A. Morrow, “Common Sense Deliberative Practice: John Witherspoon, James Madison, and the U.S. Constitution,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, vol. 29, no. 1 (Winter 1999), 25-47, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3886390>, accessed March 10, 2016; and James H. Nichols, “John Witherspoon on Church and State,” *Journal of Presbyterian History* (1962-1985), vol. 42, no. 3 (September 1964), 166-174. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23325864>, accessed March 11, 2016.

<sup>64</sup> U.S. Constitution, Amendment I, Cornell University Law School, [https://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/first\\_amendment](https://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/first_amendment), accessed October 17, 2015.