
Paul FINKELMAN*

Religious freedom is one of the central constitutional principles of the United States. The original Constitution — written in 1787 — banned religious tests for holding public office, allowing people of any faith to be elected or appointed to public office. By this time Americans of all faiths had held civilian or military offices in the new nation. Unlike every other western nation, the United States did not have a national religion or an established church. The First Amendment, ratified in 1791 declared: “Congress shall make no law, respecting an establishment of Religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” Ever since then, the United States has provided substantial freedom for religious minorities.

There are many sources of the origins of religious freedom in the US, including enlightenment ideas of philosophers such as John Locke, the theological arguments of Roger Williams in Rhode Island, and the sense of toleration coming out of the Quakers in Pennsylvania. This article explores a less well-known, but very important, origin of religious freedom in the United States: the experience in Dutch New Netherland and early English New York.

I: New York’s First Constitution and Religion

In 1684 Thomas Dongan, the new royal governor of New York, reported to his superiors: “Here bee not many of the Church of England; [a] few Roman Catholicks; abundance of Quakers preachers men and women especially; Singing Quakers, Ranting Quakers; Sabbatarians; Antisabbatarians; Some Anabaptists; some Independents; some Jews; in short of all opinions there are some, and the most part none at all.” Dongan was charged with strengthening the established Anglican Church, but in the end he would mostly fail.

New York would remain nominally Anglican until the Revolution, but it was

* President William McKinley Distinguished Professor of Law and Public Policy, Albany Law School, Albany, New York. [paul.finkelman@albanylaw.edu]. I presented this paper at Nanzan University while holding a fellowship from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science. I thank the JSPS, Nanzan University, and my host in Japan, Professor Bunji Sawanobori.
mostly an establishment in name only. In 1777, while the Revolution raged, New York adopted the first state Constitution without any religious establishment and was the only revolutionary state that did not have a religious test for office holding. Recognizing the special needs of Quakers, the constitution provided them with alternatives for taking oaths and fulfilling their military obligations.

Another clause banned clergymen from holding “any civil or military office or place within this State.” While modern theorists of establishment and free exercise would reject such a concept, for New Yorkers, this was an important step toward religious freedom and disestablishment. In Great Britain bishops, archbishops, and other high Anglican clerics — the “princes of the Church” — sat in Parliament. Historically chancellors in equity had been clergymen. New Yorkers understood that when clergymen held office, political liberty and religious liberty were threatened. They remembered that a keystone of the tyranny of King Charles I was his official religious intolerance and his use of the Church of England for political purposes. Americans remembered that even before the Parliamentarians executed King Charles I, they had justly beheaded the hated Archbishop William Laud, who used the established church as an arm of Stuart authoritarianism. Similarly, Americans recalled that King James II had tried to use a Catholic army to impose tyranny on the people of England. James’s move did not involve the use of Catholic clergymen per se, but it did involve an attempt to use the leading bishops in the realm (who also sat in Parliament) to subvert the liberties of Englishmen. The refusal of the Bishops to support the King’s attempt to undermine Parliament and the fundamental rights of Englishmen led to the Glorious Revolution. While the Bishops were the heroes at that moment, New Yorkers understood that mixing religion and politics could always threaten liberty. Indeed, in 1777 Anglican support for the King in the ongoing struggle with the colonies simply underscored the dangers of an

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3 New York Constitution, 1777, Article VII (property qualification for voting for members of the assembly), Article X (property qualification for voting for members of the Senate); Article XVII (property qualification for voting for the governor and qualification that the governor be a “wise and discreet freeholder of the State”); Article VIII (Quaker exemption from voting); Article XI (Quaker exemption from military service).

4 New York Constitution, 1777, Article XXXIX.

established church. With this background, New York banned clergy office holding to help prevent a co-mingling of Church and State.

The new state constitution contained a scathing attack on established churches, declaring that “benevolent principles of rational liberty” were required “not only to expel tyranny” but to “guard against that spiritual oppression and intolerance wherewith the bigotry and ambition of weak and wicked priests and princes have scourged mankind.” To prevent this, New York declared that “the free exercise and enjoyment of religious profession and worship, without discrimination or preference, shall forever hereafter be allowed, within this State, to all mankind.”

This clause was one of the most important statements of free exercise in the new nation and also a clear rejection of any sort of establishment. New York’s Constitution emphatically equated an establishment of religion with “civil tyranny,” “spiritual oppression,” “intolerance,” and “bigotry,” while arguing that establishments led to “weak and wicked priests and princes who scourged mankind.” The reference to “priests” may have reflected prevailing fears of Catholicism, but the phrase was also a direct reference to the Anglican priests like Archbishop Laud and the Anglican hierarchy supporting King George III in opposition to the American Revolution.

Unlike other state constitutions, New York’s founding document did not create religious tests for office holding. Nor was there any clause establishing a church or recognizing an official church, or indeed, any church. In New York, separation was assumed as was political equality for people of all faiths. The ban on clergy officeholders, specific tolerance for Quakers, and condemnations of the “wicked priests and princes [who] have scourged mankind” reinforced this separation.

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7 New York Constitution, 1777, Article XXXVIII.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Virginia’s 1776 Constitution also had no religious tests for office holding.

11 Virginia did not establish, or disestablish, a church in its 1776 document, but nevertheless the Anglican and then the Episcopal church remained established church in the state until after the Revolution. Virginia provided for religious freedom, but tied it to “Christian forbearance … toward each other.” Virginia Bill of Rights, Sec. 16. Moreover, in the 1770s and 1780s there was massive and vicious official and legal persecution of Baptists and other dissenters in Virginia.
What made New York different? How did the new state almost completely avoid the religious discrimination and state establishments found in all of the other new states? What was it about New York that made it so different from Massachusetts, South Carolina, Virginia, and indeed every other state, on the issue of establishment? What made it different from other states on political rights for people of all faiths? Why was New York’s position on free exercise so emphatic?

The answers to these questions are rooted in the earliest history of New York, and the Dutch predecessor colony, New Netherland. Part of the understanding of this history is seen in Governor Dongan’s remark, in 1684, that “in short of all opinions there are some, and the most part none at all.” But, this is only the observation of what resulted from a process that began half a century earlier, under the Dutch. To understand this history, we must begin by looking at the concept of toleration and establishment in Western Europe at the moment of North American settlement and then turn to the Dutch experience in New Netherland.

II: Religious Toleration in the Establishment World of the Seventeenth Century

In the early seventeenth century virtually all European political leaders accepted the idea that religious diversity was dangerous to the stability of any government and that a ruler and his subjects should have the same religion because religious difference would inevitably lead to internal social conflict, civil war, and anarchy. The brutal wars of the sixteenth century certainly reinforced this idea. The Peace of Augsburg in 1555 reflected such theories, as it established the concept of *cuius regio, eius religio* (whose the region, his the religion). This rule allowed local rulers to decide the religion of their subjects. Some rulers allowed Jews, Moslems, or dissident Christians to live as subjugated residents but usually not as citizens. Religious diversity, even among Christians, was simply too dangerous for most jurisdictions. European leaders reaffirmed this principle in the Treaty of Westphalia (1648), which ended the Thirty Years’ War.

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12 The final clause of Constitution required immigrants seeking naturalization to “abjure and renounce all allegiance to all and every foreign king, prince, potentate, and State in all matters, ecclesiastical as well as civil.” New York Constitution, 1777, Article XLII. This clause undermined the free exercise, presumably, of Anglican and Catholic immigrants seeking naturalization, by requiring them to “abjure and renounce” their allegiance to foreign bishops and the Pope. This did not apply to people already in the state and those born there. It does not appear to have ever prevented the naturalization of any immigrant.

In the seventeenth century the one great exception to this general rule was The Netherlands. In the late sixteenth century The Netherlands was the most tolerant nation in Europe. English separatists, the Pilgrims who would settle the Plymouth Colony in 1620, initially found refuge in Leyden, Holland. By the 1620s, Amsterdam’s Jews, while officially second-class residents, “enjoyed virtual freedom of religion in all essential respects.” Some Jews were actually granted citizenship. By the 1630s Roman Catholics, even more despised than Jews in Holland, nevertheless “had total religious freedom in Amsterdam” in terms of their actual practice, although “they could build no churches with towers in the public streets.”

Dutch toleration did not undermine the established Dutch Reformed Church, because the church in Holland was deeply entrenched, with the overwhelming majority of the population as members. Members of minority faiths were few in numbers, and while not persecuted, they were not in any position to disrupt the society. The Jews and the Plymouth separatists were simply grateful to have been given a place of refuge and had no interest in challenging existing church-state relations. Disestablishment was certainly not on anyone’s mind in the early seventeenth century. At most, some people in Holland (and a few elsewhere) were beginning to argue for toleration, but even that was rare. Strong arguments for even limited toleration, such as John Milton’s Areopagitica (1644) or John Locke’s work had not yet been published. Dutch toleration was based on the practical value of allowing newcomers to contribute to the economy without excessive restrictions on their personal beliefs and practices.

Dutch toleration migrated to the New World along with the Dutch flag. In 1624, the same year the New Amsterdam settlement began, the Dutch West India Company (WIC) also seized the Portuguese colony at Bahia, in Brazil. Six years later the Company seized Pernambuco, with its main city of Recife. Jews in Amsterdam would help finance these adventures in Brazil and Jewish soldiers were heavily involved in the military operations that led to Dutch rule. Once the colony was in Dutch hands, the WIC guaranteed Jews freedom of religion in the privacy of their homes, and ordered that no Dutch official should “molest them or subject them to inquiries in matters of conscience.” By the mid-1640s there were about 1,000 Jews in Dutch Brazil and they constituted about half of the European population of Recife. Thus, religious pluralism came to the Dutch New World early. However, the issues of tolerance and establishment were more complicated in the New Netherland colony, established the same year the WIC invaded Brazil.

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14 Ibid.
The Dutch who arrived at Manhattan in 1624 were not seeking religious freedom. Nor did they hope to create any sort of idealistic city on a hill, as the Puritans did in Massachusetts. New Netherland was a purely commercial venture, sponsored by the private investors of the WIC. Settlement was necessary for economic success and the Directors of the Company, the Heeren XIX, wanted to have a harmonious colony. In addition to administrators, they arranged for Dutch Reform Church ministers to provide for the spiritual needs and guidance of the settlers.

The WIC accepted the prevailing notion of the Atlantic world that an established church would help provide stability in the new community perched on the edge of their known world. At the same time, because Holland had greater religious freedom than anywhere else in the western world, the leaders of the WIC understood the value of toleration and sometimes took advantage of it, as their adventure in Brazil illustrates. However, the New Netherland colony was far less cosmopolitan than the colony in Brazil. The WIC hoped to establish a Dutch colony, with a homogenous population of settlers who spoke the same language and attended the same church, just as the English had done in nearby Virginia and Plymouth.

However, almost from the beginning of the colony the leaders of the WIC began to stress the importance of tolerance. In 1638 the Heeren XIX declared that the Dutch Reformed faith should “be taught and practiced” as it was in Holland, but that no “person shall hereby in any wise be constrained or aggrieved in his conscience.” Significantly, at the time of this directive there were no known religious dissidents in the New Netherland colony. None of the Anabaptists, Puritans, Jews, Lutherans, Quakers, and others who would later trouble the authorities in New Netherland had arrived in the colony. In 1638 it was a Dutch colony, with only Dutch Reformed settlers.

Although the Heeren XIX endorsed religious toleration in the absence of any religious or ethnic pluralism, the leadership in New Amsterdam generally resisted their superiors on this issue. Starting in the 1640s there were persistent conflicts between the tolerance of the Heeren XIX in Amsterdam, and the intolerance of

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17 Swetschinski, Reluctant Cosmopolitans, 115.
18 Literally the “Nineteen Lords Directors.”
the local leadership in New Amsterdam.

The New Netherland leaders believed that religious toleration threatened the stability of the colony. These Dutch Calvinists “interpreted a harmonious state to mean one in which the magistracy and church worked together to preserve doctrine and therefore civil unity. Conversely, they held that doctrinal diversity must necessarily lead to civil anarchy and disintegration of the state.” Such ideas were of course common throughout Europe and its colonies at this time. But, in contrast to these views, the Dutch government and the Heeren XIX were on the cutting edge of appreciating the value of toleration. But the older ideas—that “doctrinal diversity must necessarily lead to civil anarchy and disintegration of the state”—resonated with the leaders of New Netherland.

Initially, the colonial officials were able to sustain religious homogeneity. All of the first settlers were Dutch Reformed and while not necessarily pious or observant, none offered a dissenting view of religion. But this homogeneity could not be maintained. Refugees, including the religiously oppressed, were more likely to move to the New World than were contented Dutch citizens. Furthermore, the WIC leadership in Holland also undermined the intolerance of New Netherland. Despite persecution by the local authorities, members of other faiths moved to the colony in the 1640s and 1650s. The Heeren XIX always allowed these outsiders to settle in the colony with at least some religious freedom, often overruling the local colonial officials on these matters. Once they were allowed to live in the colony, they quickly sought other privileges, including citizenship and the right of public religious observance. When denied the latter right they appealed to authorities in Holland and sometimes practiced in defiance of the law.

Thus, within a short time the colony became cosmopolitan, as people from much of Western Europe and practitioners of numerous faiths arrived. When the British took over the colony in 1664 they found a wide variety of Protestants, as well as a smattering of Jews and Catholics. The early presence of four different religious/ethnic groups—English Protestants, Lutherans, Jews, and Quakers—led to pluralism which undermined the Dutch Reformed establishment. The arrival of 23 Jewish refugees in 1654, who fled Recife after Dutch Brazil was recaptured by the Portuguese, is probably the most famous example of the problem of

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20 Smith, *Religion and Trade in New Netherland*, 64.


22 Smith, *Religion and Trade in New Netherland*, 64.
religious diversity in the colony. Director-General Petrus Stuyvesant infamously tried, and failed, to expel them. His later persecution of Quakers, which led to the famous Flushing Remonstrance, is also a well known part of this story. Both examples—the attempt to expel the Jews and the harsh treatment of the Quakers—must be seen in light of the arrival of other settlers who were not Dutch Reformed.

III: English Protestants

In 1640 a few Puritans from Massachusetts settled on the eastern end of Long Island. While on Dutch territory, they were too far from New Amsterdam to threaten the colony. As other English dissenters drifted into the colony, Director General Willem Kieft gave them religious freedom and some limited political autonomy. Kieft also allowed Lady Deborah Moody, an Anabaptist, to settle on the southwestern tip of Long Island, in what is today Brooklyn. Moody’s settlement attracted other dissenters. Similarly when the authorities in Massachusetts expelled the radical Calvinist Anne Hutchinson, Kieft allowed her to settle in his colony. Other English refugees settled in present-day Brooklyn, Queens, and further out on Long Island. These refugees from New England orthodoxy lived by themselves and did not threaten Dutch hegemony or Dutch Reformed orthodoxy. Most were Calvinists, like the Dutch, although Hutchinson was an extremist and Lady Moody were even more radical. But New Netherland accommodated the English Protestants because they helped populate the large and mostly empty colony.

The English Calvinist settlers were theologically close to the Dutch Reformed Church and posed no obvious threat to the colony’s established orthodoxy. Lady Moody’s Anabaptist theology might have been troublesome, but she settled well away from the center of New Netherland. She was also circumspect in her religious practice, content to bother no one if no one bothered her. The more radical Anne Hutchinson might have been more problematic, but she was killed by Indians less than a year after she arrived. More English moved to western Long Island closer to Manhattan at Flushing, Hempstead, and other places. While not challenging the established church, these outsiders nevertheless posed some threats to the nature of the Dutch Reformed establishment. Their very presence made New Netherland religiously diverse, and thus the established church did not have full control and authority over everyone in the colony. In addition, alternative religions, even those like the Puritanism that were compatible with the Dutch Reformed church, offered competition to the established church. Clearly, settlers who did not accept the official church were a potential threat to the establishment. In the 1650s some of these English settlements would become

23 Van Der Zee, A Sweet and Alien Land, 91–92.
politically problematic for the Dutch authorities as they gave sanctuary to Quakers and undermined the Dutch Reformed establishment. In 1664 these English settlers would welcome the British seizure of the colony. But initially, in the 1640s, these English Protestants were seen as isolated and innocuous. More importantly, these English settlers helped fill up the mostly empty colony which would benefit the investors in the WIC.

The arrival of Lutherans, Jews, and Quakers, was more problematic, but in the end they would be allowed to stay because the colony was desperate to get more settlers. By the time these immigrants arrived, Director-General Kieft had been replaced by Petrus Stuyvesant, the longest serving governor of New Netherland or New York. Stuyvesant persecuted these minorities, but in the end would submit to the directives of the WIC to allow them to live in the colony with some religious liberty.

IV: Petrus Stuyvesant and the Non-Dutch Immigrants

Petrus Stuyvesant, the Director-General of the colony after 1646, was a professional soldier who had lost a limb fighting the Spanish. The peg-legged Director-General was “fiercely patriotic, fearless in battle, capable of towering rages, and an autocratic leader with a reputation for discipline and work.” 24 The WIC sent him to the New World to bring order and stability to a teetering colony run by a company that was going bankrupt. Stuyvesant “arrived in New Netherland at the colony’s darkest hour, and he must have fancied himself something of a savior because from the moment he stepped ashore he became a whirlwind of activity, issuing proclamations, closing down brothels and taverns, and setting a new tone of optimism.” The colonists never loved Stuyvesant, or even liked him, rather they “respected” and “feared” him. Despite his arrogance, narrow mindedness, and authoritarianism, Stuyvesant was “the most capable man the Company had ever sent” to govern New Netherland. 25 Ultimately his authoritarianism also undermined Dutch rule, so that the English takeover of the colony in 1664 would be accomplished without firing a shot. The English offered fair terms, and the burghers of New Amsterdam were quick to surrender their colony and their director-general.

While a towering figure in early American history and in the history of New York, Stuyvesant looms even larger in the history of American Jews, as I will explain below. He was the first official to encounter the Jews, and the first to espouse an anti-Semitic response to them. He is, in a sense, an American Haman: He tried to do harm to the Jews and was stopped before he could complete his

25 Ibid., 225.
work.

However, Stuyvesant’s response to the Jews must be put in a larger perspective. The WIC had sent Stuyvesant to rescue the colony from mismanagement and chaos. The son of a clergyman and an elder in the Dutch Reformed Church, he “believed strongly ... that the combined forces of church and state were the best promoters of morality and social harmony.” He preferred to have no one in the colony who was not Dutch Reformed, or at least from Holland. His infamous attempt to expel the 23 Jewish refugees from Dutch Brazil in 1654 was in part the act of a political functionary, trying to implement what he deeply believed were the policies best suited for the colony. His actions were colored by his strong devotion to the Dutch Reformed Church, his xenophobia, and his anti-Semitism. But Stuyvesant’s anti-Semitism, while transparent and hateful, was in the end not particularly vicious, especially when compared to his response to other religious outsiders. He allowed the Jews to land in New Amsterdam, unlike the Quakers, and while trying to get rid of the Jews he did not jail them or physically abuse them, as he did to Lutherans, Quakers, and even some Puritans. He preferred “to require them in a friendly way to depart.” In the spring of 1655 he wanted to expel the Jews, but was still waiting for authorization from Holland to do so. At about the same time he did not even seek authorization to do this to some Lutherans and Quakers, jailing them while waiting to expel them.

Stuyvesant’s response to the Recife Jews contrasts sharply with his response to the arrival of Quakers three years later. Stuyvesant prohibited the Quakers from even landing in the colony and he jailed, under horrible conditions, a few who secretly came ashore. Similarly, the Dutch Reformed cleric Dominie Johannes Megapolensis in the colony wrote anti-Semitic tirades to his superiors in Holland, he also provided the Jews with charity through the winter of 1654–1655. The contradictions between the words of Stuyvesant and Megapolensis and their actions towards Jews, Lutherans, and Quakers, underscore the complexity of religious liberty and establishment in New Netherland.

V: The Lutherans

The experience of the Lutherans in New Netherland illustrates the connection between toleration and establishment. The authorities in New Netherland vigorously opposed the presence of Lutherans because they threatened the Dutch Reformed establishment. Lutherans were eventually given some religious liberty

27 Stuyvesant to the Amsterdam Chamber, 22 September 1654, reprinted in Oppenheim, Early History, 4–5.
in the colony and their presence in fact did undermine the establishment.

In 1655 the Dutch completed a seven year campaign to size the Swedish settlements to the south. Virtually all of the residents of New Sweden were Lutheran, and the peace agreement required that the Dutch allow them to have a Lutheran pastor. Meanwhile, in 1649 Lutherans from Holland (where they had substantial religious freedom) began to drift into the colony. In 1653, the year before the Jews arrived, the Dutch Lutherans in the colony asked for the right to import a minister and build a church, especially since in the southern part of the colony (present-day New Jersey and Delaware the Lutherans had a pastor). The Dutch ministers emphatically argued that a Lutheran minister and church anywhere else in the colony “would tend to the injury of our [Dutch Reformed] church, the diminution of hearers of the Word of God, and increase of dissensions.” They feared it would “pave the way for other sects, so that in time” the New Netherland colony “would become the receptacle of all sorts of heretics and fanatics.” The leaders of the Church in the colony happily noted that Director General Stuyvesant agreed with them that allowing a Lutheran minister and church would be “contrary to the first article of his commission” which required that he not allow “any other than the Reformed doctrine.” The ministers reported that Stuyvesant was “zealous for the Reformed Religion” and “would rather relinquish his office than grant permission” for the Lutherans to have a minister or a church.

Toleration and establishment simply could not co-exist, at least in the mind of Stuyvesant and Dominie Johannes Megapolensis and Rev. Samuel Drisius, the colony’s Dutch Reformed ministers.

In 1656 the Lutherans once again demanded a minister, arguing that in Holland they were allowed to openly practice their faith. Stuyvesant responded by publishing a placat, which was the equivalent of an executive order or ordinance, against the Lutherans, and then jailing some of them. The Heeren XIX reprimanded Stuyvesant for both acts. The WIC would not allow the Lutherans to have a church or a minister, but objected to their persecution. The Heeren XIX ordered Stuyvesant to “let them have free religious exercises in their houses.” Lutherans in Holland then petitioned the WIC for the right of their co-

29 Revs. Megapolensis and Drisius to the Classis of Amsterdam, 6 October 1653, Ecclesiastical Records, 1: 317–318.
30 The Directors to Stuyvesant, 14 June 1656, Fernow, ed., Documents Relating to the Colonial History, 14 (Old Series): 351. A placaat, or placat, is “a form of subordinate or inferior legislation.” J. W. Wessels, History of the Roman-Dutch Law (Grahamstown, SA: African Book Co., 1908), 208. According to Grotius “the general written law consists of enactments of the States, i.e. of the knights, nobles and representatives of the large towns; or plaacaats of the heads of provinces (lands hoofden) to whom such power has been lawfully granted by the States under the title of counts, lords, governors or chief magistrates.” Ibid.
religionists to have public worship and a minister, but in March 1657 the Heeren XIX reaffirmed that the Lutherans could not have either, although they were still allowed to live in colony and have private worship in their homes.

The leaders of the WIC, like the leadership in New Amsterdam, understood that allowing a Lutheran church and minister in New Netherland would in fact undermine the Dutch Reformed establishment. This position illustrates how a religious establishment required some religious suppression and significant denials of free exercise. The Dutch Reformed church feared it could not maintain its power in the face of competition from non-established churches, like the Lutherans.

The Lutherans in New Amsterdam then petitioned the States-General, Holland’s legislature, for relief. At the same time they smuggled a minister, Rev. Johannes Ernestus Gutwasser, from Holland into the New Netherland colony. In response, the Dutch Reformed clergy petitioned authorities in Holland for assistance, warning if this happened “the Papists, Mennonites, and others, would soon make similar claims. Thus we would soon become a Babel of confusion, instead of remaining a united and peaceful people. Indeed it would prove a plan of Satan to smother this infant, rising congregation [Dutch Reformed Church in New Netherland], almost in its birth, or at least to obstruct the march of its truth in its progress.”

Significantly, while worrying about “a Babel of confusion,” the Dutch Reformed ministers did not mention any threats from the city’s small Jewish community. The real threats to the established church came from other Christians, especially Lutherans, Mennonites, Quakers, and Catholics.

Shortly after this New Amsterdam’s officials ordered Rev. Gutwasser “not to hold public or private exercise” in New Amsterdam until they heard back from the Directors in Holland. In October Stuyvesant resolved the crisis by ordering Rev. Gutwasser to immediately leave the colony. Having missed the opportunity to leave on his own, he was arrested and summarily forced to sail back to Europe, or at least that is what was reported to the Directors of the WIC. In May 1658 the Heeren XIX confirmed that Stuyvesant was correct in expelling Gutwasser:

32 Petitions of the Lutherans to the Governor and Council, 24 October 1656; and letter from the Directors to Stuyvesant, 7 April 1657, Ecclesiastical Records, 1: 358–360; 372–373 and 377–378.
33 The Classis of Amsterdam to the Consistory of New Netherland, 25 May 1657, Ecclesiastical Records, 1: 378–381. He is also called Goetwater in some of the letters.
34 Petition of Revs. Megapolensis and Drisius to the Burgomasters, etc. Against Tolerating the Lutherans, 6 July 1657; Report of the Mayor and Aldermen of New Amsterdam Upon the Petition of the Ministers Against Allowing Lutheran Service, 14 July 1657, Ibid., 1: 386–388; 388–390.
35 Ibid.
“That you have sent back here the Lutheran preacher is not contrary to, but rather in accordance with our good intentions.” Significantly, in contrast to his treatment of Jews, which I discuss below, Stuyvesant did this without prior authorization for the WIC Directors in Amsterdam. While the Directors approved what Stuyvesant did, they thought he “might have proceeded less vigorously.” The Directors suggested that next time something like this happened, the Director-General should “use the least offensive, and most tolerant means” of removing an unwanted clergyman, “so that people of other persuasions may not be deterred” from attending the Dutch Reformed Church, “but in time [might] be induced to listen and finally gained over.”

Meanwhile, Gutwasser had not actually left the colony, but was harbored by a Lutheran farmer. In the summer of 1658 he was discovered but continued to evade expulsion and to preach until the spring of 1659 when Stuyvesant had Gutwasser arrested and placed on a ship, which took him back to Holland.

The crisis over Rev. Gutwasser was over, and from the perspective of Stuyvesant and the Dutch Reformed Church this was cause for rejoicing. But the Lutherans did not go away. In 1660 Lutherans at Fort Orange (Albany) began to collect money to bring over a preacher. No Lutheran minister seems to have been brought over at this time, but the fear continued to rattle the Dutch clergy in the colony. Finally, in 1666 the new governor of what was by then the New York colony would grant Lutherans the right to have their own ministers and church.

While Revs. Megapolensis and Drisius were battling the Lutherans and Pastor Gutwasser, they sent a very long letter to the religious authorities in Amsterdam, explaining the situation in New Amsterdam. They complained about the Lutheran pastor, and explained how they had petitioned the local government demanding his expulsion. They also complained about the Swedes in Delaware and the fact that the “Swedish Governor made a condition in his capitulation, they might retain one Lutheran preacher,” which in fact they had. The Dutch Clergy declared that this preacher was “a man of impious and scandalous habits, a wild, drunken, unmannerly clown, more inclined to look into the wine can than into the Bible.” He would, they proclaimed, “prefer drinking brandy two hours to preaching one.” The ministers also complained about Englishmen on Long Island, Mennonites who “reject the baptism of infants” and a “cobbler from Rhode Island” who had come to preach “saying he had a commission from

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37 Rev. Gideon Schaats to the Classis of Amsterdam, 22 September 1660, Ecclesiastical Records, 1: 482-483 and response by the Classis, Ibid., 504-505 and 515-516. “Letter from the Governor in Regard to the Lutherans,” 13 October 1666, Ibid., 583.
Christ.” They worried about “Independents,” Presbyterians, Puritans, and the arrival, in early August, of Quakers. The ministers at first thought the Quakers had all gone on to Rhode Island, “for that is the receptacle of all sorts of riff-raff people, and is nothing else than the sewer [latrina] of New England.” But then they discovered that a few Quakers had secretly landed in New Netherland. Fortunately, the ministers reported these Quakers had been jailed and so they hoped “God will baffle the designs of the devil” and save the colony from “these machinations of Satan.”

While defeating the threat from the Lutherans, the leaders of the Dutch establishment were also fighting a second front against religious pluralism. This one probably did not really threaten the established Dutch church, except to the extent that any diversity threatened an establishment, and any precedent for diversity might be used by people of other faiths. This second front came from a tiny and virtually powerless group of Jews.

VI: The Jews

In 1654 twenty-three Jewish refugees from Recife arrived in New Amsterdam. They had been part of the WIC settlement in Brazil and had fled when the Portuguese recaptured the colony. This first Jewish migration holds a special and iconic place in American Jewish history as the beginning of three-and-half-centuries of Jewish transplantation to America. Almost immediately Director-General Stuyvesant and the leaders of the Dutch Reformed establishment tried to expel these Jews, but were thwarted by the Heeren XIX. In part this outcome resulted from the intervention of Jews in Amsterdam, but it was mostly a function of the WIC’s own notions of both tolerance and the need for settlers. Eventually the Jews secured the right to stay, and while the Recife refugees did not particularly prosper—in fact most of them seem to have left the colony within a few years—this small group secured a legal right for Jews to stay in New Netherland.

38 Revs. Megapolensis and Drisius to the Classis of Amsterdam, 5 August 1657, Ecclesiastical Records, 1: 393–400.
39 Ibid.
41 I have discussed this history and the iconic place of these Jews in Finkelman, “A Land that Needs People for its Increase,” 19–50 and 488–496 [notes]
decade after their arrival—their subsequent co-religionists did prosper. Indeed, while the Puritans in Massachusetts Bay, with their established church, were never able to create a “New Jerusalem” for themselves, Jewish immigrants eventually accomplished that for themselves in the Golden Medina. The creation of this new Promised Land began in New Amsterdam in 1654.

The arrival of these Jews is also a key moment in the development of toleration—and the ultimate undermining of establishment—in New Netherland and later New York. Their arrival and their struggle to remain in the Colony illustrate the complexity of allowing a diverse religious culture in the Dutch colony. When placed in the context of earlier arrival of Lutherans and the later arrival of Quakers, the Jewish story tells us much about free exercise and establishment in this period.

In the summer of 1654 a few Jews from Holland trickled into the colony and without any comments or hostility from the government. Even though he did not want Dutch Jews in his community, Stuyvesant must have known that Jews in Holland had relative religious freedom at this time. By this time, Jews in Holland had established synagogues, burial grounds, schools, and rabbinical leadership. By the standards of the period, they had enormous religious freedom, despite their lack of political and legal equality. In 1642 the Prince of Orange made an official state visit to the newly consecrated Portuguese Synagogue. By 1648 Dutch Jews were allowed to be naturalized citizens, although they could not inherit citizenship, and, unlike almost everywhere else in Europe, they were allowed to attend universities. As Jacob Marcus observed, “As far as the Jew was concerned, in no place was the new age of tolerance better documented than Holland.”

The situation in New Amsterdam changed dramatically in early September 1654, with the arrival of the twenty-three utterly impoverished Jewish refugees from Recife.

The Recife refugees immediately became dependant on the charity of the colonial government, the Dutch Reformed Church, and individual Dutch settlers. Dominie Megapolensis complained “they have been at our charge, so that we have had to spend several hundred guilders for their support.” He complained that the Jews from Recife “came several times to my house, weeping and

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bemoaning their misery.” Megapolensis thought the Jews an unnecessary burden on the community.

On 22 September 22, 1654, about two weeks after they arrived, Stuyvesant wrote the WIC directors, asking to be allowed to expel the Recife Jews. Stuyvesant did not immediately write such a letter because he was apparently waiting to see what the Jewish refugees actually wanted. If they were only planning to stay for a short time, he was willing to offer them sanctuary, just as Rev. Megapolensis begrudgingly gave them food and other charity. But, when Stuyvesant found that “they would nearly all like to remain here,” he acted to prevent this break in the wall of Dutch establishment in New Netherland. So, he sought permission from officials of the Dutch West India Company “to require them in a friendly way to depart.” Stuyvesant made three arguments for their expulsion.

First, Stuyvesant argued that the Jews were “very repugnant” to the colony’s leaders and feared they would engage in their “customary usury and deceitful trading with the Christians.” This fairly standard anti-Semitic canard was especially absurd in light of the abject poverty of these immigrants. These impoverished Jews could hardly have been money lenders or traders. On the contrary, they were money borrowers, having almost nothing of their own.

Contradicting his fears that the Jews would be money lenders, Stuyvesant noted that “owing to their present indigence” the Jews “might become a charge in the coming winter.” Simply stated, Director-General Stuyvesant did not feel his colony should be held responsible for the maintenance of poor people from another country.

Stuyvesant’s third reason for wanting to get rid of the Recife Jews appears, at first glance, to be a classic example of anti-Semitism. On careful examination, however, Stuyvesant’s position is more complex. Stuyvesant asked “that the deceitful race—such hateful enemies and blasphemers of the name of Christ—not be allowed further to infect and trouble this new colony, to the dissatisfaction of your worships’ most affectionate subjects.”

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46 Stuyvesant to the Amsterdam Chamber, 22 September 1654, partially reprinted in Oppenheim, Early History, 4–5.
47 Stuyvesant to the Amsterdam Chamber, 22 September 1654, reprinted in Oppenheim, Early History, 4–5. Oppenheim provides only an extract of Stuyvesant’s letter. Unfortunately, Oppenheim does not provide a source for this letter, indicating the extract was “recently found by the writer [Oppenheim] in a clearly written Dutch MS. of the period,” Ibid. at 4. This extract also appears in Jacob Marcus, The Jew in the American World: A Source Book (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 19), 29. Neither volume gives a source for this letter.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
The phrases “deceitful race” and “hateful enemies” of Christ suggest the anti-Jewish attitudes of some Calvinists. However, dislike of Jews per se does not seem to be Stuyvesant’s main concern. Rather, he is worried that the Jews will “infect and trouble” the colony. In other words, Stuyvesant saw that the presence of practitioners of any faith other than the Dutch Reformed threatened the colony’s established church. Although anti-Semitic, Stuyvesant was also deeply concerned with the increasingly polyglot nature of the community. He objects to the Portuguese Jews, not merely because they are Jews, but because they threaten the established church and the very Dutchness of the colony. The Jews are doubly dangerous because they threaten both religious and cultural establishments.

The Dutch Reformed leader Dominie Megapolensis also asked authorities in Holland to support the expulsion of the Jews. Megapolensis clearly disliked Jews, who, he believed, were “godless rascals” and had “no other God than the unrighteous Mammon, and no other aim than to get possession of Christian property.” Significantly, however, after all of his anti-Semitic rants, Megapolensis did not ultimately make his case for expelling the Jews on anti-Semitic or on theological grounds. Rather, he argued that if the Jews settled in the community it would be one more step on the road to ethnic and religious chaos that would undermine the established church. He noted “we have here Papists, Mennonites and Lutherans among the Dutch; also many Puritans or Independents, and many Atheists and various other servants of Baal among the English under this government, who conceal themselves under the name of Christians; it would create a still further confusion, if the obstinate and immovable Jews came to settle here.”51 This outburst is fascinating, because it is aimed as much at non-Jews as it is at Jews.

In January the Directors of the WIC received a long and detailed petition from a group of Jews in Holland, who referred to themselves as “the merchants of the Portuguese Nation residing in this city [Amsterdam].” They complained that that the WIC Directors had “raise[d] obstacles to the giving of permits or passports to the Portuguese Jews to travel and to go to reside in New Netherland, which if persisted in will result to the great disadvantage of the Jewish nation.” They argued it could “be of no advantage to the general company but rather damaging.” The petitioners noted that the English and French colonies in the New World were at this time welcoming the Portuguese Jews, and thus the Portuguese Jewish petitioners were perplexed as to why the Amsterdam Jews could not go to all the Dutch colonies, especially since some members of their community had been

50 Swetschinski, Reluctant Cosmopolitans, 51, notes that by the end of the seventeenth century Jews began to get similar economic, social, and even political rights in Bordeaux and London.
51 Rev. John Megapolensis to the Classis of Amsterdam, 6 October 1654, in Ecclesiastical Records, 1: 334–336. See also Van Der Zee, A Sweet and Alien Land, 290–291.
living in that city for “about sixty years” and many were “born here and confirmed burghers.”

They reminded the leaders of the WIC that the New Netherland colony “needs people for its increase.”

In effect the petition of the Portuguese Jews was an offer to help the WIC make New Netherland a success. It was a powerful argument. In April the company emphatically rejected Stuyvesant’s request to expel the Jews. The Heeren XIX were clearly unimpressed by Stuyvesant’s letter and may have wondered what possessed the director-general to expend so much energy and time on the arrival of a handful of Jews. Politely, but firmly, they informed him:

We would have liked to agree to your wishes and request that the new territories should not be further invaded by people of the Jewish race, for we foresee from such immigration the same difficulties which you fear, but after having further weighed and considered the matter, we observe that it would be unreasonable and unfair, especially because of the considerable loss, sustained by the Jews in the taking of Brazil and also because of the large amount of capital, which they have invested in shares of this Company. After many consultations we have decided and resolved upon a certain petition made by said Portuguese Jews, that they shall have permission to sail to and trade in New Netherland and to live and remain there, provided the poor among them shall not become a burden to the Company or the community, but be supported by their own nation. You will govern yourself accordingly.

As they had with the arrival Lutherans, and as they would when Quakers came to the colony, the directors of the Company acknowledged Stuyvesant’s fears that a polyglot community would be difficult. But, this was all they were willing to concede to their director-general. In rejecting his request for permission to remove the Jews, the Directors reminded Stuyvesant of the important Jewish contributions the settlements of the WIC in Brazil, pointing out that it would be “unreasonable and unfair, especially because of the considerable loss, sustained by the Jews” in Brazil for the company to now suddenly turn its back on the

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53 Ibid.
Jewish refugees from Recife. Morality dictated that the Jews be allowed to stay. So too did good policy, because the Jews had been good citizens and good colonists for the Company.

Ultimately, the Heeren XIX were influenced by the very practical matter that the WIC needed settlers in the colony. The Jews were there, and they were willing to stay there. They had been good settlers in Dutch Brazil. It would have been foolish to expel them from another WIC colony without a very compelling reason. The Heeren XIX knew that these Jews had been loyal residents of the WIC colony in Recife. From Stuyvesant’s perspective they may have been foreigners, but from the perspective of the WIC, they were very much a known commodity. All of these reasons combined to frustrate Stuyvesant’s goals. The Jews would stay and he would "govern" himself “accordingly.” As the petition of the Jewish merchants noted, this was “a land that needs people for its increase.”

A year later the company further strengthened its position on religious diversity, telling Stuyvesant the Jews had “permission” to “enjoy” “civil and political rights” but not full religious freedom. They wrote:

The permission given to the Jews, to go to New-Netherland and enjoy there the same privileges, as they have here, has been granted only as far as civil and political rights are concerned, without giving the said Jews a claim to the privilege of exercising their religion in a synagogue or at a gathering; as long therefore, as you receive no request for granting them this liberty of religious exercise, your considerations and anxiety about this matter, are premature and when later something shall be said about it, you can do no better, than to refer them to us and await the necessary order.

Thus, the Jews would remain. By this time, as noted above, both the civil and religious authorities were focusing on the dangers, as they saw them, from Lutherans. The Jews were clearly no longer a major annoyance. In addition, because the Jews were clearly outsiders, they did not threaten the established Church in the same way that Lutherans did. It was unlikely that any member of the Dutch Reformed Church would suddenly abandon the established church to become Jewish. The Lutherans, however, posed such a threat. So too did other Christian faiths.

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56 Petition to the Honorable Lords, Directors of the WIC, January 1655, published in Oppenheim, Early History, 9.
57 The Directors to Stuyvesant, 13 March 1656, Fernow, ed., Documents Relating: to the Colonial History 14 (Old Series), 341.
VIII: The Quakers in New Netherland

The Jews arrived in the midst of the established church’s crusade against the Lutherans. Despite Stuyvesant’s anti-Semitic outbursts, within a few years after their arrival the Jews were no longer very much on the minds of the authorities in New Amsterdam. The Lutheran problem and the secret arrival of Rev. Gutwasser had perplexed and bedeviled Stuyvesant and the ministers for much longer than the Jews. The Quakers would create an even greater challenge.

In the seventeenth century, Quakers were notorious for their opposition to most forms of political authority. With little exaggeration, one historian has argued that “As Bolsheviks were feared after the Russian Revolution of the twentieth century, so the very thought of Quakers frightened people of the seventeenth.”

The Society of Friends was founded by George Fox in 1652. The religion grew out of Puritanism and is an extreme example of “the relentless movement of the Puritan-Reformed impulse away from the hierarchical, sacramental, and objective Christianity of the Middle Ages towards various radical extremes in which intensely individualistic and spiritual motifs become predominant.” Quaker teaching “undermined the establishment by minimizing the liturgical and teaching function of an ordained ministry, abandoning the idea of objective sacraments, and inspiring conduct which was attributed to the promptings of an inner voice. Most ominous of all to the authorities was the phenomenal missionary zeal which flowed from the Quaker conviction of the universality of the Holy Spirit’s work.” The Friends became known as the “Quakers” because of their shaking or “quaking” while praying and giving sermons.

The description of the arrival of a shipload of Quakers in New Amsterdam provided by the Dutch clerics illustrates the consternation the Quakers could cause government officials. In early August 1657, a ship “having no flag” came into the harbor. This ship “fired no salute before the fort, as is usual with ships on their arrival.” People in the colony “could not decide whether she was Dutch, French, or English.” When a government official boarded the ship, the passengers and crew “tendered him no honor or respect.” When the ship’s master came before Stuyvesant “he rendered him no respect, but stood still with his hat firm on his head, as if a goat.” The ship was allowed to remain in the harbor for only one night.

The Dutch ministers believed that after it was sent away the ship went to Rhode Island—“the receptacle of all sorts of riff-raff people.” Since “all the

58 Pratt, Religion, Politics, and Diversity, 19.
cranks of New England” had moved there, the Dutch assumed these Quakers would do the same. However, before the ship left two Quaker women somehow managed to disembark and hide on Long Island among the English settlers, and “as soon as the ship had fairly departed, these began to quake and go into a frenzy, and cry out loudly in the middle of the street, that men should repent, for the day of the judgment was at hand.” The two women were soon jailed. Other Quakers coming to New Netherland were expelled, jailed, and tortured.61

This was the beginning of the longest and most brutal religious suppression in the colony’s history. Over the next six years, a number of Quakers were jailed, expelled, fined, placed at hard labor, and tortured for preaching in the colony. Non-Quakers were also jailed and fined for aiding or harboring Quakers.62 The story provides a significant contrast to the treatment of the Recife Jews, who were not only allowed to disembark, but given charity when they landed.

This persecution proved futile. Each new persecution only strengthened the Quakers, especially in the English-speaking settlements on Long Island. The persecutions led some colonists to argue for religious toleration as a duty of Christian love. In the “Flushing Remonstrance” of 1658 thirty-one settlers, including the sheriff, called on Stuyvesant to stop levying heavy fines on people who harbored Quakers. These mostly English petitioners declared that “wee desire therefore in this case not to judge least wee be judged, neither to Condem, least wee bee Condemed, but rather let every man stand and fall on his own.” They felt bound by God’s law “to doe good unto all men,” and thus, by Stuyvesant’s decree, they were trapped between the law of God and that of man. Rather than persecute the Quakers, they would allow them freedom, because “if God justify who can Condem, and if God Condem there is none can justifiye.”63 Stuyvesant not only rejected the petition, but arrested the leading petitioners for sedition.

Ultimately, officials in Holland ended the persecutions. The Heeren XIX told

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61 Ibid.
62 In 1657 Dutch authorities in New Netherland tortured the Quaker Robert Hodgson in a variety of ways, including dragging him behind a horse cart, placing him in a vermin filled dungeon, and severely whipping him and “chaining him to a wheelbarrow in the hot sun until he collapsed.” He was later hung by his hands in a prison cell and “whipped until he was near death.” After two days in solitary confinement, he was again whipped until near death. Hodgson’s ordeal ended when Stuyvesant’s own sister convinced him to release Hodgson from prison and expel him from the country. Smith, Religion and Trade in the New Netherlands, 223. See also Zwierlein, Religion in New Netherland, 213–246.
63 “Remonstrance of the Inhabitants of Flushing, L. I., Against the Law Against Quakers,” 1 January 1658, in Ecclesiastical Records, 1: 412–413.
Stuyvesant that they too wished no Quakers had moved into the colony. But once in the colony, the Directors asserted “we doubt very much, whether we can proceed against them rigorously without diminishing the population and stopping immigration, which must be favored at a so tender stage of the country’s existence.”64 In other words, the colony could not grow and prosper, and the investors with it, without tolerance.65 The Directors told the director-general to “shut your eyes” to the Quakers, and “not force people’s consciences, but allow every one to have his own belief, as long as he behaves quietly and legally, gives no offence to his neighbors, and does not oppose the government.” The Directors pointed out that this had been the practice in old Amsterdam “and consequently” the city had “often had a considerable influx of people.” New Amsterdam too “would be benefitted by” this practice.66

Thus, as with the Lutherans and Jews, tolerance once again won out over establishment. By 1660 the Dutch colony was a true polyglot, with Lutherans, Quakers, Jews, Catholics, Puritans, Anabaptists, and a number of other Protestants worshipping and threatening the established church. The final threat to the established church came from Anglicans, who arrived in 1664. Unlike the other non-Dutch Reformed settlers, these Anglicans were neither refugees nor defeated enemies. They were conquerors.

IX: The Arrival of English

In 1664 an English fleet seized New Amsterdam and, with it, the entire Dutch empire on the mainland of North America. New Netherland was renamed New

64 Directors of the Dutch West Indies Company to Stuyvesant, 16 April 1663, Ecclesiastical Records, 1: 530.
65 Other evidence suggests that the actions of Stuyvesant were often in tension with the goal of the Directors to increase the population of the colony and to preserve basic liberties. For example, the Directors reprimanded Stuyvesant for inserting a clause “in the printed passports, given to freemen sailing from here [Holland] to New-Netherland” which required “that they must remain there [New Netherland] for a certain number of years.” The directors noted this was “offensive to many,” “antagonistic to the liberty of free people” and “an obstacle to the increasing of the population.” The letter to Stuyvesant ended: “You will govern yourself accordingly.” Directors to Stuyvesant, 30 July 1654, Fernow, ed., Documents Relating to the Colonial History, 14 (Old Series), 280. See also The Directors of the W.I. Co., Dept. of Amsterdam, David van Baerle, Edward Man. and Abr. Wilmerdonx to Director [Petrus] Stuyvesant and Council in New Netherland, 13 March 1656, in Ibid., 341, ordering Stuyvesant to allow the ship Scots to sail “to and fro ... because for the sake of increasing the population, trade and its freedom must not be hampered with, but ought to be relieved from all restrictions.”
66 Directors of the Dutch West Indies Company to Stuyvesant, 16 April 1663, in Ecclesiastical Records, 1: 530.
York, after the colony’s new proprietor, James, Duke of York. By the 1664 there was growing toleration in England. Most Protestants had religious liberty, Catholics faced discrimination, but not persecution. Jews had been trickling into the country since the 1640s. The very fact that England had taken over a Dutch colony meant that a certain amount of religious toleration was necessary, because the overwhelming majority of the residents of the colony were not members of the Church of England. This also meant that no strong religious establishment could succeed in the colony.

The Duke’s colony was probably the most polyglot in the New World. In addition to the Dutch Reformed majority, a religious census at the time would have found Lutherans from Holland and Sweden; French Calvinists, Presbyterians, Puritans, Separatists, Baptists, Ababaptists, Quakers, and a variety of other Protestant sects from the British Isles and elsewhere; and small numbers of Jews and Catholics. The only conspicuous absence was anyone who claimed membership in the Church of England.

Most of the residents of this new English colony were members of the Dutch Reformed Church. No official in the “Duke’s Colony” ever contemplated expelling them or forcing them to accept the Church of England. This would have been impossible and impractical. Instead, the Duke and his deputies adopted an unusually tolerant policy. The Articles of Capitulation provided that the “Dutch here shall enjoy the liberty of their consciences in Divine Worship and church discipline.” What the Duke gave to the Dutch he also gave to the Protestant dissenters living on Long Island. Minority faiths were granted the right to conduct meetings openly. In 1666 Lutherans gained the right, long denied under the Dutch, to build their own churches. In 1674 the Duke of York ordered his new governor, Edmund Andros, to “permitt all persons of what Religion soever, quietly to inhabitt wthin ye precincts of yor jurisdiccon, wthout giveing ym any disturbance or disquiet whatsoever, for or by reasons of their differing opinions in matter of Religion.” In 1683, the New York Assembly partially codified this tolerance in the colony’s Charter of Liberties and Privileges, which declared:

Noe person or persons which professe ffaith in God by Jesus Christ Shall at any time be any ways molestd punished disquieted or called in Question for any Difference in opinion or Matter of Religious Concernemnt ... But that all and Every such person or persons may ... at all times freely have and fully enjoy his or their Judgments or Consciencyes in matters of Religion throughout all the province.


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This charter did not separate church and state, but explicitly provided for the government to tolerate all Christian faiths. In addition in 1682, year before the Charter was written, the colony allowed the Jews to have their own house of worship, even though they clearly did not “professe ffaith in God by Jesus Christ.” Jews now had complete freedom of public worship, something the Dutch had denied them.71

Even without statutes and explicit protections of religion, no one seems to have been turned away from the colony for their religious beliefs. New York was already a commercial entrepôt and something of a melting pot. In 1678 Governor Andros reported to his superiors in London that he could find “Noe account” of “childrens births or christenings” because ministers had kept few records. Further complicating his attempts to take a complete census, Andros noted: “There are Religions of all sorts, one Church of England, severall Presbiterians and Independents, Quakers and Anabaptists, of serverall sects, some Jews....”72 A decade later Andros’s successor, Governor Thomas Dongan reported: “Here bee not many of the Church of England; [a] few Roman Catholicks; abundance of Quakers preachers men and women especially; Singing Quakers, Ranting Quakers; Sabbatarians; Antisabbatarians; Some Anabaptists; some Independents; some Jews; in short of all opinions there are some, and the most part none at all.”73

At one level, the fears of Stuyvesant and the Dutch clerics had been realized. The colony they helped govern was no longer homogenous. It was a polyglot of religions and sects and ethnicities. But, it was on its way to becoming the most economically successful city in the New World.

X: The Struggle for Equality and the Defeat of Establishment

As the Jews fought for and won concessions they created an atmosphere where religious toleration worked. By the end of the Dutch period, Catholics, Jews, Lutherans, Puritans, Baptists and Quakers, among others, were allowed to hold their “superstitious” religious services—as the Dutch authorities called

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70 Pratt, Religion Politics and Diversity, 34–35.
them—in private homes. The reason for this was not the desire to protect religion from government interference that motivated Roger Williams of Rhode Island. This toleration was also not a function of Christian charity, love, or fear of God, although some in the colony thought it should be. Nor was toleration the result of an enlightenment philosophy that denied any role for the government in the saving of souls.

Toleration in New Netherland had almost no theory or philosophy behind it. It evolved out of the need to populate a frontier and encourage trade and commerce. Put simply, the Dutch West India Company valued worldly success above theology. For Petrus Stuyvesant “religion was an important instrument of social control,” and the failure to exercise such control was “an invitation to an anarchy of contesting beliefs.” However, his superiors in Amsterdam understood that too much control of religion might lead to tyranny and would certainly discourage settlement. Lutherans, Jews, Quakers, Catholics and others were allowed to settle and trade in the colony because they could make the colony grow and prosper. To put it another way, there was no need for a theoretical or philosophical defense of tolerance because tolerance—and a weakened established church—grew out of the practical reality that tolerance had real economic benefits. This was the message the Dutch officials conveyed to Stuyvesant whenever he wanted to suppress religious minorities. Stuyvesant and other overly devout colonial officials were simply told to “shut your eyes” to persons of other religions, and let everyone in the colony go about their business. Indeed, business, not religion, was the purpose of the colony. Toleration stimulated growth and trade. And as the Merchants of the Portuguese nation had reminded the Directors of the WIC, “Yonder land is extensive and spacious. The more of loyal people that go to live there, the better it is...” That was reason enough to allow persons of any faith to discreetly practice their religion and openly ply their trades.

The Jews played a crucial role in the development of this economic and cultural polyglot, not just as businessmen and entrepreneurs, but as pioneers who helped successfully force the issue of toleration on the local government. In the process they helped undermine the Dutch Reformed establishment and later the

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74 Paul Finkelman, “School Vouchers, Thomas Jefferson, Roger Williams, and Protecting the Faithful”: 525.
75 Pratt, Religion, Politics, and Diversity, 24.
76 Pratt argues that the failure to resolve the tension and contradiction between Stuyvesant and the West India Company officials undermined the Dutch colony. Religion, Politics, and Diversity, 25. This may be true, although it seems unlikely that a consistent policy of either tolerance or repression would have prevented English seizure of the colony. Petition to the Honorable Lords, Directors of the WIC, January 1655, published in Oppenheim, Early History, 10.
Anglican establishment. In this sense, the story of the first Jews suggests a different moral for modern Americans than the traditional narrative. The Jews succeeded in the New World in part because of help from the Old, but also because in the New World they persistently demanded the right to be part of the polity, to build houses, participate in the economy, and stand guard at night like other burghers. They also succeeded because the directors of the WIC understood the value of hard-working immigrants who would help an empty colony grow. Finally, their success was directly tied to the success of other minority groups. For these mid-seventeenth century Jews heterogeneity—what an early generation of historians called pluralism and what modern scholars call cultural diversity—was a blessing. The more diversity New Netherland had, the more the Jews (and Lutherans and Quakers) could prosper and the more the colony could prosper.

Stuyvesant opposed Jews and Lutherans and Quakers and just about everyone else who was not Dutch who might come to his colony because he feared instability and chaos, and because he correctly understood that such diversity would undermine the Dutch Reformed establishment. He never understood that diversity could also lead to stability. Fortunately, Stuyvesant was defeated by Anabaptists, Puritans, Lutherans, Jews, Quakers, and other immigrants who persisted in helping the colony prosper in spite of its narrow-minded director general. Equally fortunate, Stuyvesant was overruled by wiser leaders, in Amsterdam, who understood that in diversity there was strength.

In creating this diversity, the Lutherans, Jews, Quakers, and other outsiders not only made a place for themselves, but also undermined the Dutch Reformed establishment. The Dutch Reformed clerics and Director-General Stuyvesant predicted this would happen. But, economic necessity and the culture of tolerance in Holland overcame these concerns. Indeed, prosperity through diversity was in the end far more important than a strong established church. The English after 1664 fully understood this, and while they claimed to have an establishment, then did not. Well before the Revolution the marriage of church and state in New York was collapsing. The 1777 Constitution simply affirmed that the final divorce of what had already become a de facto separation.