

***The Dutch Moment: War, Trade, and Settlement in the Seventeenth-Century Atlantic World*****Wim Klooster****Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016****432 pages****\$35.00****ISBN: 9780801450457****DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14713/njs.v3i2.98>**

In *The Dutch Moment*, Wim Klooster details the rise and fall of the Dutch Atlantic empire in the half century beginning with the founding of their West India Company (WIC) in 1621 through the middle of the 1670s. New Jersey historians can mark the end in the English acquisition of New Netherland, including New Jersey and all of the Delaware valley, in 1674.

The Dutch had been trading in the Atlantic since the 1580s and they continued to do so through the end of the eighteenth century. What changed in these fifty years was Dutch determination to carry their long war for independence from Spain (1567-1648) into the Atlantic. The Dutch founded the WIC to attack the enemy everywhere, even to seize Portuguese and Spanish colonies in the New World. Their conquests included a large portion of Portuguese Brazil- for a little while the greatest jewel in their imperial crown- and stations for slave and other kinds of trading on the West African coast. They founded New Netherland as a part of the same movement and conquered Curaçao, Surinam, and other places in the Caribbean.

The Dutch were unique empire builders in a number of respects. Klooster insists that instead of gathering an empire haphazardly, as did other European powers, they developed and attempted to follow a grand design, a plan for conquest both overall and in specific instances which he details in a chapter titled “Imperial Expansion.” They also helped to transform the Atlantic by contributing to the “takeoff” of the sugar economies of the Caribbean and by their example stimulated the Swedes and the Danes to follow them into the slave trade. Their many commercial and military successes provoked the English Navigation Acts and three Anglo-Dutch wars between

1652 and 1674. Their rapacious attacks on Portuguese shipping led the Portuguese to establish a fleet system that was the forerunner of the better-known twentieth-century convoy system that enabled Great Britain to survive two world wars.

The Dutch also had a tremendous, usually negative, impact on native societies on both sides of the Atlantic. Their conquest of the West African port of Luanda deranged local political relationships and shifted “the area in which Africans were captured who would end up on European slave ships” (p. 2). Alliances with Amerindians enabled the conquest of Brazil, but the Dutch violence against Native Americans was “pervasive” (p. 258), provoking endless instability in Brazil and New Netherland.

More positively, the Dutch commitment to a minimal level of religious toleration enabled Jews to thrive in Brazil, the Caribbean, New Netherland, and the United Provinces themselves. The daring, often amazing exploits of some Dutch admirals helped create a national self-image as unstoppable in pursuit of their goals—most famously Piet Heyn’s seizure of the annual Spanish silver fleet, intact, in Matanzas harbor (Cuba) in 1628, a cause for celebration throughout the United Provinces.

*The Dutch Moment* is intensely focused on the Atlantic and complements broader, earlier studies of Dutch military and commercial ascendancy, most notably Jonathan Israel’s *Dutch Primacy in World Trade, 1585-1740* (1990) and C. R. Boxer’s classic *The Dutch Seaborne Empire: 1600-1800* (1965). But because of Klooster’s strong Atlantic focus his book lacks Boxer’s deep history of the Dutch Republic in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and his detailed treatment of the Dutch East India Company (founded in 1602), a model for the WIC.

Klooster’s book has many strengths. Like Boxer’s it helps to dispel myths about universal Dutch prosperity, even during the republic’s golden age. The WIC could not maintain its ships

and forts or feed and clothe its soldiers and sailors adequately, or even supply the sinews of war consistently. A major cause of the WIC's impoverishment is summarized in a table (p. 136) that shows for 1649 that not a single one of the republic's seven provinces came close to meeting its commitments to subsidize the company. Friesland's deficit (the largest for that year) was 83 percent. Even Holland, the richest province and the one most enthusiastic about the Atlantic venture, supplied only about 40 percent of its assessment and that was the closest any province came to full support.

The book's strengths include its treatment of religious tolerance and toleration, Dutch trade, even with enemies, and the extent to which the Dutch came to dominate the Atlantic slave trade from the 1640s to the '70s, a period during which Dutch ships made nearly half of all slaving voyages across that ocean.

The most remarkable aspects of this fine book are the Dutch Republic and its citizens, who, while fighting an eighty-year war for independence and for national survival, created a worldwide empire (however tainted by slavery and endemic violence) that was the envy of Europe and had lasting implications for trade and empire everywhere the Dutch sailed, conquered, and settled, in the Atlantic and elsewhere.

**Richard Waldron**