

Adriaen Van Der Donck “Of the Reasons and Causes Why and How New Netherland is so Decayed” ca. 1650

- New Netherland
- Trade
- Mercantilism
- Colonization

- Reading for Tone
- Close Reading
- Gathering & Interpreting Evidence

Middle & High School
Level

- That certain laws of the colony were enforced in a partisan manner
- Illicit trade was dissuading individuals from trading legally
- Export duties, or Recognition, also dissuaded legal trading
- Individuals traded legally to hide other illicit trading
- New Netherlanders were turning to illicit trade to survive poverty

Essential Question:

Why was the Dutch West India Company struggling to regulate trade in New Netherland?

Historical Context:

In 1650, Adriaen Van Der Donck, a law enforcement officer and prosecutor in New Netherland, wrote on the issues plaguing the colony during his time in office during the 1630s and 1640s. In his description, Van Der Donck details the ongoing illicit trade in beaver furs between residents of Beverwijck, just outside of Fort Orange, and Native American traders living or traveling nearby. Starving and impoverished, the colonists dealt in secret with Native Americans in their homes, in public houses, and in the forests and riverfronts near Fort Orange. After giving up its monopoly of the fur trade, the Dutch West India Company began regulating and collecting export taxes on all trade vessels passing through Fort Orange and Fort Amsterdam, requiring merchants to have a license in order to trade legally. Van Der Donck captures the futility of the Company’s attempts to regulate the fur trade and the growing desperation of the colony in this document. By 1653, Van Der Donck retired his post and lived the remainder of his life along the Mohawk and Hudson Rivers near modern day Albany and Watervliet, where illicit trade was most common.

Document Analysis:

1. Set the stage for the lesson by presenting an image of Adriaen Van Der Donck's Petition from May 26th, 1653. Read aloud the transcript located here:
<http://digitalcollections.archives.nysed.gov/index.php/Detail/objects/45167>
2. Ask students a guiding question to answer as you read aloud the document a second time: "Why might Van Der Donck need permission to return to where he was once a figure of authority?" Guide students towards an answer by reminding your students that Van Der Donck has made a certain promise in the petition that will help them in interpreting the overall importance of the document.
3. Following a discussion of the petition, provide a brief lecture on Van Der Donck's role as prosecutor in New Netherland [See historical context above]. Then hand out a copy of Van Der Donck's "Reasons and Causes..."
4. Instruct students to read through Van Der Donck's "Reasons and Causes" once individually. Then pair students, or groups of 3 when necessary, and instruct the pairs to answer the accompanying guiding questions. Give students roughly 10 minutes to answer these questions and instruct them to raise their hands as they finish.
5. Once each group has finished, introduce a discussion web by drawing one on the board for the class to see for your students to copy into their notes. The discussion web should have a bubble titled "main argument" followed by three boxes titled "supporting arguments" below it, and parallel to each of those three more boxes titled "text-based evidence."
6. Instruct pairs to volunteer what they believe is Van Der Donck's "main argument" and write it on the board under "main argument." Then instruct students to volunteer Van Der Donck's support for his arguments from within the text with an accompanying citation for each. Continue this process until a main argument can be supported with three supporting arguments and accompanying citations. Repeat the process if more than one group meets these requirements successfully.
7. As a class, discuss a possible conclusion, including discussions of each pair or small group's response for the essential question: "Why was the Dutch West India Company struggling to regulate trade in New Netherland?"

Optional Extension Activity:

The following activity could be completed in order to extend students' thinking and encourage them to make connections.

Following this exercise, instruct students to look for potential bias in the document by analyzing each supporting claim in the discussion web, searching for opinions and hyperbole in Van Der Donck's words. Ask the class to write a short response paper for homework answering: "What does the presence of bias, or lack thereof, in Van Der Donck's work, tell you about why Van Der Donck had to sign a petition to return to New Netherland in 1653?" This response paper should include at least two references to each text and be a minimum of 2 paragraphs long and a maximum of 4 paragraphs long. Remind your students that historians must often play the role of detective, and the limited knowledge that they have can be enough to answer this question.

Petition of Adriaen Van Der Donck for Permission to Return to New Netherland, and Pledging Himself not to Meddle in Public Affairs, May 26th, 1653.

Courtesy of the New York State Archives, *Dutch Colonial Administrative Correspondance: 1646-1664 Vol. 11.*
<http://digitalcollections.archives.nysed.gov/index.php/Detail/objects/45167>

[May 26th, 1653]

The undersigned, [Adriaen] van der Donck, humbly requests consent and passport of the [Board] to go to New Netherland, offering to resign the commission previously given him as President of the community, or otherwise as its deputy, and promising upon arrival in New Netherland and taking up residence there, to accept no office whatever it may be, but rather to live in private peacefully and quietly as a common inhabitant, submitting to the orders and commands of the Company or those enacted by its director. Which doing, etc.

Adriaen van der Donck

[Endoresed:] Petition for Adriaen van der Donck submitted the 26th of May 1653.

What does this document tell you about the life of Adriaen Van Der Donck?

What does Van Der Donck agree to do, or not to do, in this document? Why might someone need to make such a promise?

What more would you like to know about Van Der Donck or this document? List any response you may have.

Commission: Post, duty, or responsibility given by a higher authority

Deputy: Law enforcement officer with seniority and authoritative power

Office: Public position or government job

Adriaen Van Der Donck: “Of the Reasons and Causes Why and How New Netherland is so Decayed” [abridged] in J. Franklin Jameson *Narratives of New Netherland: 1609-1664*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1909. From: *The Representation of New Netherland: Concerning Its Location, Productiveness and Poor Condition* [1650]

... Had the first Exemptions¹ been truly observed, according to their intention, and had they not been carried out with particular views, certainly more friends of New Netherland would have exerted themselves to take people there and make settlements. The other conditions which were introduced have always discouraged individuals and kept them down, so that those who were acquainted with the business, being informed, dared not attempt it. It is very true that the Company have brought over some persons, but they have not continued to do so, and it therefore had done little good... Trade, without which, when it is legitimate, no country is prosperous, is by their acts so decayed, that it amounts to nothing. It is more suited for slaves than freemen, in consequence of the restrictions upon it and the annoyances which accompany the exercise of the right of inspection. We approve of inspection, however, so far as relates to contraband. This contraband trade has ruined the country, and contraband goods are now sent to every part of it by orders given by the Managers to their officers. These orders should be executed without partiality, which is not always the case. The Recognition² runs high, and of inspection and confiscation there is no lack; hence legitimate trade is entirely diverted, except a little, which exists pro forma, as a cloak for carrying on illicit trading. In the mean time the Christians are treated almost like Indians, in the purchase of the necessaries with which they cannot dispense. This causes great complaint, distress and poverty: as, for example, the merchants sell those goods which are liable to little depreciation at a hundred per cent. And more profit, when there is particular demand or scarcity of them. And the traders who come with small cargoes, and others engaged in the business, buy them up from the merchants and sell them again to the common man, who cannot do without them, oftentimes at a hundred per cent advance, or higher and lower according to the demand....”

What do you notice about Van Der Donck’s word choice in this document? Do you notice any remarks that stand out to you? Take note of the specific groups of people he mentions while answering these questions and record your answers below.

Based on your answers above, what is the tone of Van Der Donck’s descriptions of New Netherland? Be as descriptive as possible and include references to the text.

¹ The Charter of Freedoms and Exemptions, 1629. A Charter issued by the Dutch West India Company that allowed for private investors to help fund colonization of New Netherland. The Charter also granted certain property and legal rights, establishing a “patroon” class of landowners. Certain trading rights were granted to individuals for the first time, signaling the initial break in Company monopoly of the fur trade.

² A specific form of tax imposed on goods by the Dutch West India Company.

Van der Donck believes trade to be the lifeblood of a nation. Does Van der Donck believe there are any problems related to trade in New Netherland, and if so, what are they? What does he argue is the cause of those problems?

What does this document tell you about the condition New Netherland is in when it was written?

Vocabulary:

Acquainted: Aware, familiar with **Legitimate:** Legal, true

Right of Inspection: The searching of a ship or naval vessel, performed by governing agents of the DWIC in accordance to its laws

Contraband: Items that are illegal to own, trade, or possess **Managers:** Officials in the Dutch West India Company

Partiality: Preference, bias, or opinion in favor of one person or side of an argument

Confiscation: A legal process in which the government takes away something from an individual, typically as a form of punishment for crimes regarding contraband

Diverted: Sent away from, redirected

Pro forma [Latin]: Latin for “in a matter of form,” or to adhere to formality or standard practice

Illicit: Illegal **Necessaries:** Necessities **Dispense:** To get rid of or let go of

Liable: accountable for, responsible for **Depreciation:** a reduction in the value of something

Profit: financial gain, typically a result of a financial interaction **Scarcity:** limited amount

Cargoes: Shipments of goods or merchandise **Advance:** Early or upfront payment