

From: **Governors Island Tolerance Park** <tolerancepark@gmail.com>

Date: Wed, Sep 20, 2017 at 6:00 PM

Subject: Rosh Hashanah, Stuyvesant, and deletion from NY City's statue removal list

To: commissioner@culture.nyc.gov

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Re: **Rosh Hashanah, Stuyvesant, and deletion from NY City's statue removal list**
<http://interactive.nydailynews.com/map/nyc-statues/>

Dear Commissioner Finkelpearl,

Today, at sundown on September 20, 2017, begins Rosh Hashanah, the day of the Jewish New Year. September was also the month during which New York's first Sephardic Jews arrived three hundred sixty-three years ago - in 1654. Their arrival marked the start of full inclusion of both Ashkenazic **and** Sephardic Jews in New York City (American) life.

At the time, colonial settlements in the Western Hemisphere were established by royal armchair decrees and revolved exclusively around religion and/or were founded by individuals at the exclusion of other religions, ethnicities and nationalities. New Netherland with New Amsterdam (now New York City) as its center, founded by parliamentary laws of a republic against [Spanish] royal tyranny, was a unique exception – everyone belonged.

This colonial diversity based on the republican values of religious tolerance and freedom of conscience, as derived from the mother country, was smothered for a while following a change from republican to royal English authority (see, e.g., what happened in 1691 attached.) However, such pluralism endured and continued to thrive following the 1776 Declaration of Independence and until today.

This early civic diversity in New Netherland required guidance and compelling behavior from the mother country in order to preserve shared political values of inclusiveness as in 'old' Amsterdam. Before English royal authority was imposed on the New Netherland province, such leadership was displayed last locally by the commanding personality of Petrus Stuyvesant in the name of order and 'unity' (see e.g., Brooklyn's original seal as 'Concordia' or 'Een Draght Mackt Maght') rather than the protection and strengthening of ethnic and religious dominance. (Calvinism was however preferential but it was not a state religion.)

Stuyvesant's aversion to the refugees as reflected in his 'discriminatory' language was rooted in his earlier personal experience in South America (see attached.) Using the 'other' religion as justification in trying to exclude them from residency is not so different from the New York politicians' religious animosity toward Muslims in 2010 by denying them their (Cordoba) cultural center (see e.g., September 7, 2010 to Bloomberg.) Furthermore, denying the welcome mat to a bewildering shiplot of 'others' as refugees to New York City in 1993 is also not so different from what happened in 1654 (see attached.)

Contrary to simplistically trying to portray Stuyvesant as an anti-Semite and seeking the removal of his likeness as a 'symbol of hate', one's understanding of (i) the life of Petrus Stuyvesant, born in a **republic** that was founded on republican principles that were delivered to Governors Island in 1624 and on which the nation's values were built, (ii) the places in which he grew up and lived, and (iii) certain specific ethnic and religious groups (Sephardim and Quakers) to which he directed his wrath to avert disunity and disorder, thus seeking to protect the majority from turmoil, would help people understand what New Amsterdam's (New York City's) culture was all about since birth – and therefore still is.

Representing New Amsterdam's trade faction, Stuyvesant's words vis-à-vis the Sephardim were more about constraining competition and protecting trade and profit from outsiders rather than religious intolerance. Moreover, in all matters of [perceived] religious intolerance he was overruled by his superiors in the Republic.

For New York City to accept his bronze in its historical context of the times, the statue would help make New York's infancy relevant for living people interested and willing to grasp why New York is what it is and why America's ethos of liberty derives from the nation's tolerance credo.

What is attached is the rationale for deleting the Stuyvesant name from the City's "monuments removal list" while explaining a bit more about Stuyvesant in a section of an article named '**Governors Island- Lifeblood of American Liberty**' that was written in 2004 upon commemorating the 350th anniversary of New York's Jewish arrival. It puts Petrus Stuyvesant's words and persona in their historical context.

If you have any further questions or comments, please let me know.

Sincerely,

Joep de Koning

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<http://www.TolerancePark.org>

<http://www.Tolerance.org> (not officially affiliated)

Re: <http://interactive.nydailynews.com/map/nyc-statues/> (September 8, 2017)

On the monument removal list is:



PETER STUYVESANT. DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF WHAT IS NOW NEW YORK 1647-1664

"In 1654 Peter Stuyvesant wrote to the Dutch East India Company (this shows ignorance as Stuyvesant wrote the West Indian Company) protesting the influx of Jews (unlawful destitute Sephardic refugees only) relocating from South America, demanding that 'the deceitful race – such hateful enemies and blasphemers of the name of Christ – be not allowed to further infect and trouble this new colony'."

Uninformed critics seek to hold Stuyvesant's words to the letter out of context and as specifically anti-Semitic. His statement was in response to the unlawful arrival of a large group of destitute Sephardic refugees from Dutch Brazil seeking shelter and residency in New Amsterdam in 1654. Eighteen years earlier, the Sephardim in Dutch Brazil had been granted a license by the Dutch Governor-General Johan Maurits to build a synagogue at Recife in 1636. Construction was started in 1640. The edifice was consecrated in 1642. It was the first synagogue in the Western Hemisphere.

Petrus Stuyvesant, appointed by the West Indian Company as Director-General (not governor) of New Netherland (not New Amsterdam) and the son of an orthodox Reformed preacher, arrived here as the seventh director in 1647 from Curacao and formerly from Brazil where intense power struggles between Sephardim and Christians for control of and financial gain in the sugar industry had taken and was taking place.

This explains the historical fact that Stuyvesant had made no such statement about Jews who had officially arrived earlier as residents of New Amsterdam (Ashkenazic Jews.) Asser Levy was one of them. Levy also had arrived in 1654, from Amsterdam with passport in hand. He died in New York City in 1682. We therefore need to place Stuyvesant's oft-quoted words in their historical context and take them out of the disinformation category.

Following a petition, the indigent Sephardic refugees of 1654 had however received residency within just a half year of their arrival. Compare their plight to an identical event three hundred thirty-nine years later, in 1993, when 70% of a shipload of destitute Chinese refugees to New York City were deported and 30% were incarcerated for more than three years. Were Mayor David Dinkins or Governor Mario Cuomo then helpful in having them stay? Even after 15 years many didn't have a resident card or had been granted citizenship.

(See <http://abcnews.go.com/US/video/ship-smuggling-chinese-immigrants-runs-aground-nyc-1993-19569195> and <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/golden-venture-tragedy-hell-sea-american-dream-article-1.294299>.)

Additionally, three hundred fifty-six years later, in 2010, in contravention of the U.S. Constitution, powerful New York politicians, such as the Governors Pataki and Paterson, the Assembly Speaker Silver and Mayor Giuliani, sought to deny Muslims their right to build a cultural center – the [Islamic] Cordoba Center – wherein a prayer room (see e.g., September 7, 2010 to Mayor Bloomberg attached.) Conditioning that right by restricting its construction geographically is no different than the not-too-long ago curtailment of colored people’s right to choose any available seat during a bus ride. Was it an expression of ‘hate’ when officials objected to the Cordoba Center with the trumped-up charge that it was a mosque? No such political/religious obstruction took place with the construction of a Greek orthodox church on the Ground Zero site.

In the seventeenth-century **[royal]** politics and religion were inexorably one and the same. There was no separation between state and church. It was an era wherein the world’s economically most powerful nation, Spain, gave its residents three choices: conversion to Catholicism, banishment from their country or death, and wherein the world’s second most powerful nation, England, in 1691 outlawed the Catholic religion by an act of parliament which was also enacted by New York’s Assembly. Then, New York State’s (New Netherland’s) original 1624 foundational principles of religious tolerance and freedom of conscience were even eradicated in 1701 when Queen Anne instructed Governor Lord Cornbury to warrant liberty of conscience to all persons except "papists."

Contrary to simplistically trying to portray Stuyvesant as an anti-Semite and seeking the removal of his likeness as a ‘symbol of hate’, one’s understanding of the life of Petrus Stuyvesant, born in a **republic** that was founded on republican principles that were delivered to Governors Island in 1624, the places in which he grew up and lived, and the specific ethnic/religious group to which he directed his wrath, would help people understand what New Amsterdam’s (New York City’s) culture was all about since birth – and therefore still is. Representing New Amsterdam’s trade faction Stuyvesant’s words were more about constraining competition and protecting trade and profit from outsiders rather than religious intolerance. For New York City to accept his bronze in its historical context of the times, the statue would help make New York’s infancy relevant for living people interested and willing to grasp why New York is what it is.

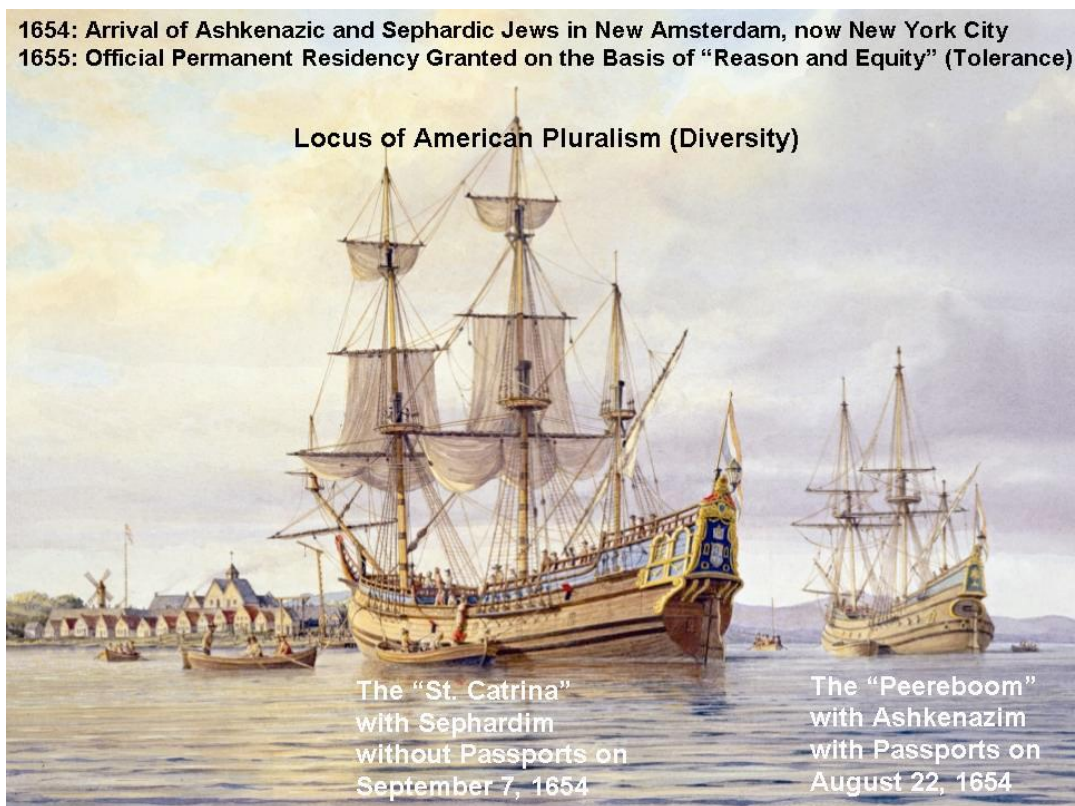
What follows is a section from an article named ‘Governors Island- Lifeblood of American Liberty’ that was written in 2004 upon commemorating the 350th anniversary of New York’s Jewish arrival. It puts Petrus Stuyvesant’s words and persona in their historical context.



**Celebrate 350
Jewish Life in America
1654 ~ 2004**

In September 1654, Petrus Stuyvesant, director-general of New Netherland, attempted to deny a sizable contingent of destitute Sephardim, Jews of Iberian or North African origin, permanent residency in New Amsterdam. He had not objected to the earlier arrival, in August 1654, of a few Ashkenazim, High German or East European Jews, traveling with Dutch West Indian Company passports from Amsterdam via London on the *Peereboom* (*Peartree*). The large group of Sephardic refugees, however, sailing without passports on the Dutch vessel *Sint Catrina* from South America via the Caribbean, was made to feel decidedly unwelcome.⁽¹¹⁾

Stuyvesant, certainly intolerant by today's standards, was a pillar of the Dutch Reformed Church who viewed religious heterodoxy as a potentially divisive factor that would militate against the organic unity of New Netherland. However, as the West Indian Company's agent, he was answerable to a higher authority. Stuyvesant's personal idealistic ecclesiastical vision for the province clashed with the secular commercial interests of the Company's directors in Amsterdam, as well as with the more enlightened cultural and legal traditions of the mother country and, particularly, the city of Amsterdam.



It was a general rule in the Dutch Republic that whenever or wherever in the world the interests of state and church, or of commercial and ecclesiastical power, came into

conflict, it was the secular authority that ultimately prevailed—and this certainly held true for both the West Indian and East Indian Companies. Hence, in all matters of religious intolerance, Stuyvesant was overruled by his superiors, who in 1655 granted the Sephardic merchants residency on the basis of “*reason and equity*,”⁽¹²⁾ thereby continuing a tradition of cultural pluralism in the colony. This, and the fundamental, natural right to toleration as written in the 1579 founding document, was affirmed by treaty for New Netherlanders exclusively when English rule was imposed on them in 1664, and later reintroduced as legal-political code in the First Amendment to the American Constitution.

Yet, intermittently for more than three centuries, cultural and legal intolerance, and overt prejudice towards minorities, would continue to occur in New York. Roman Catholicism, for example, was outlawed from 1691 to 1783. From the arrival of the first Jews in New York to the inauguration of Abe Beame in 1974—320 years later—as the city’s first Jewish mayor (*pace* Mayor Fiorello La Guardia’s Jewish mother), lie some profoundly important lessons for humanity. Placing that crucial event of 1655 into its broader global context, and including it in America’s collective memory, will lead to a better understanding of its historical significance and help sort the facts from the myths surrounding this issue.

The Republic’s founding document was to prove a potent enticement for those seeking sanctuary from religious intolerance during the turbulent years of the Reformation. Two years later, in 1581, when the port of Lisbon was closed to Dutch merchants, the States General of the Dutch Republic issued the first permit (*sauvegard*) for Portuguese-Jewish merchants to trade freely by way of Dutch ports, giving them the same privileges as Dutch merchants. Not only poor migrants, but also large-scale merchants trading in sugar, Brazil wood, ginger, cotton, diamonds and pearls, they took advantage of the freedom to practice their Jewish faith again in their newly adopted country.



The spiritual founder of the West Indian Company, Willem Usselinx, himself a migrant from Antwerp, declared in 1645 that “*it is because of foreigners that the country will be peopled, because its might is derived mostly from those who come from abroad and settle, marry and multiply here. If one were to remove the foreigners, their children and grandchildren, from the large cities of Holland, the remaining residents would be fewer in number than those departed.*”⁽¹³⁾ The attitude reflected in his statement provided the basis for the cultural toleration that encouraged ethnic diversity in the Dutch Republic. It also served as a magnet for foreign capital seeking new investment opportunities, thereby stimulating international trade and nourishing the Republic’s Golden Age.

In 1624, this enlightened tradition of cultural pluralism and commerce accompanied the first settlers to Governors Island, then called Noten Eylant (Nut Island). Their settlement was established on the basis of secular concerns. Yet, as noted previously, they were under specific instructions not to discriminate against anyone for one's religious belief and were to grant everyone the liberty of one's conscience. Nevertheless, they were also instructed to try attracting natives and non-believers to God's word but then only "*through attitude and by example.*" May not, then, Governors Island safely be designated as the point of origin in the New World, and what was to become the United States of America, of the jurisprudence of [religious] tolerance as the foundational principle for American liberty and New York's ethos and tradition of tolerance?

Cultural diversity as a legal imperative, rather than as something contingent on the shifting views, prejudices or self-interest of an individual on the basis of fleeting authority obtained by appointment to office, was thus planted on the North American continent in 1624. Upon the provisional transfer to England of New Netherland on August 27, 1664, the New Netherland Council ensured that, under the provisions of Article VIII of the Articles of Transfer they negotiated, New Netherlanders under future English jurisdiction "*shall keep and enjoy the liberty of their consciences in religion.*"⁽¹⁴⁾

Yet, ten years before the imposition of English authority, Stuyvesant, the seventh and last West Indian Company director for New Netherland, had attempted to prevent the sizable contingent of impoverished Sephardic refugees from settling in the province on the pretext of religion. What accounts for his council's apparent change of heart in 1664? Did Stuyvesant's earlier attempt to impose his personal views on a pluralist community have its basis in commercial self-interest? Or was it an effort to strengthen his authority, and that of the Reformed Church Council of which he was a member, over a culturally diverse population at the expense of the Dutch motto of "Concordia"; or both? (The latter word, meaning "Harmony in Difference" or "Unity," is still incorporated in the municipal seal of the borough of Brooklyn.)

After all, at a time when Jews were banned from Portugal, Spain, France and England, the toleration of both Sephardim and Ashkenazim in Amsterdam was already legendary. The right to openly practice their faith in the Dutch Republic proved a compelling inducement to immigration: the first Sephardic community, Beth Jacob, was founded at The Hague in 1602. But freedom to practice their religion was not the sole consideration determining their relocation to various mercantile towns of the Dutch Republic.

Why was it that the well respected, commercially successful Amsterdam community of Portuguese Israelites enjoyed such an excellent relationship with Holland's Lord-Lieutenants Maurits and Frederick Henry, half brothers and noblemen of the House of

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Orange-Nassau? They were the sons of William I of Nassau, Prince of Orange and founding father of the Dutch Republic. In 1642, Frederick Henry and his son William, the future Prince Willem II, made an official visit to Amsterdam's Sephardic synagogue, Talmud Torah. Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel presented them with a 2000 florin gift on behalf of the congregation and gave a speech in which he said; *"We no longer consider Spain and Portugal our fatherland but Holland; we no longer honor the Spanish or Portuguese king but the states of Holland and you as our authorities, whose blessed arms protect and sword defend us...knowing that our prosperity depends on you."*⁽¹⁵⁾

Such protection must truly have been special, given the Jewish immigrants' relatively short incubation as a new community in a strange land where they would continue to speak the language of the Republic's Iberian archenemy for over 200 years. Later, in



1655, the same Ben Israel, not only a rabbi but a printer, in a pamphlet titled *Humble Address* would begin his discussion of the admission of Jews to England at the "invitation" of Oliver Cromwell in London with the words *"How Profitable the Nation of the Iewes are."* In it, Ben Israel writes that the Jews received *"great Charity and Benevolency"* in Amsterdam, where there were no less than 400 families who *"enjoy a good part of the West and East-Indian Compagnies"* in *"no lesse then three hundred houses of their own."*⁽¹⁶⁾ Only in 1664 did the English Crown, in the person of Charles II, extend the Jewish community in England a formal

promise of protection, followed in 1673, after a period of persecution, by a guarantee of freedom of worship.⁽¹⁷⁾

Also in 1642, the new and less important Ashkenazic community in Amsterdam bought land for its own cemetery. But more significantly, across the ocean, Johan Maurits of Nassau, the Governor-General of Dutch Brazil, opened the first Sephardic synagogue in the Western Hemisphere at Pernambuco in Recife. A year earlier, Chacham Isaac Aboab da Fonseca, a member of the Amsterdam rabbinate, had sailed for Dutch Brazil to become the first rabbi in the Americas at Recife.⁽¹⁸⁾

Brazil had been a destination of Dutch merchantmen since the 1580s and Dutch merchants already controlled over 50 percent of the Brazilian sugar trade by the end of the Twelve-Year Truce between the Republic and Spain (1609-1621). At the time, sugar was a more important commodity than even pepper. The high value of sugar and the enormous profits that could be made can best be indicated by the fact that, in 1618, the wholesale value of four shiploads of sugar was equal to that of 200 ships carrying salt. Given the higher profit margins on sugar, just one shipload of sugar was more profitable than fifty of salt!⁽¹⁹⁾

The migration of Portuguese Jewish merchants to the Republic from 1580 onwards meant that sugar, traded mainly by them, became the focus of the West Indian Company's activities when it was founded in 1621. The refining of sugar in Spain and Portugal had been forbidden since 1581 so that the low-cost, high-value-added activity of refining would stimulate internal economic growth in Brazil. In 1620, construction of Amsterdam's first public synagogue had begun and, in 1622, the Portuguese Israelites explained their importance to the Republic by pointing out that during the armistice between 1609 and 1621 they had built about 10 to 15 ships yearly and were able, at the expense of the Portuguese caravels that had previously dominated the transport of the commodity, to attract between a half and two-thirds of the lucrative sugar trade.⁽²⁰⁾ Their business caused the number of sugar refineries in Amsterdam to increase from three to 25 in 25 years.

Portuguese Jewish merchants thus contributed to the emergence of the Dutch Golden Age, as the trade in high-value-added colonial products, controlled primarily by Israelite merchants and, in Asia, by the East Indian Company, was a substantial reason for the republic's prosperity. The West Indian Company's "groot desseyn" (grand design) was, by taking Brazil, to seize the source of its enemy's wealth. Its first attempt, in 1624, to attack Bahia with 26 ships and 3,300 men failed, but its assault in 1630 on Recife and Olinda in Pernambuco, with 67 ships and over 7,000 men, succeeded, forming the bridgehead for control of more than half of Brazil. The return of Dutch Brazil to the Portuguese in 1654 was the reason that some of the Brazilian "Portuguese Israelite" merchants sought residency in New Netherland.⁽²¹⁾

Stuyvesant was highly regarded because of his administrative and military capabilities. Before being appointed Director-General in New Netherland, he had served in Dutch Brazil and had been promoted from Commissary of Stores to Governor of Curacao [a Caribbean island which still has a splendid synagogue from 1732, a copy of the Portuguese Synagogue in Amsterdam and the oldest functioning Jewish house of worship in the New World⁽²²⁾].

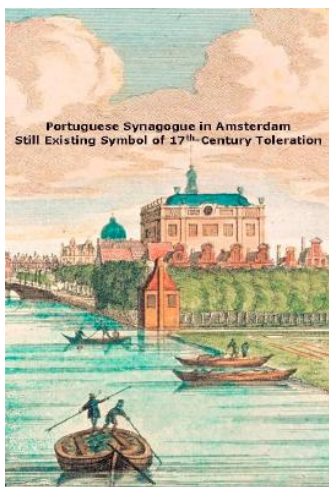


As the son of an orthodox Reformed minister, he had studied at the Calvinist University of Franeker. A lettered man and a dogmatic member of New Amsterdam's Reformed Church Council, he must have been familiar with *The History of the Jews* and *The Brazilian Money Sack*, two well-known pamphlets of the period dealing with the supposed perfidy of the Jews. *The History of the Jews*, written by Abraham Costerus, a fundamentalist Calvinist preacher from Antwerp, and published in Amsterdam in 1609, warned Amsterdam's merchants of the deceit of the Jews desiring a public synagogue from which they could spew their corrupting influence upon Christians.

The Brazilian Money Sack, purportedly printed in Recife in 1647, was an anonymous pamphlet describing alleged complicity between representatives of the West Indian Company and the Portuguese Israelite merchants.

In spite of the magnetism that the Jewish nation exercised on many biblically oriented Dutchmen, some Calvinist zealots viewed the Jewish nation as blasphemous and a threat to the “true religion,” and, perhaps more worrisomely for them, as an exclusionary force in competition with Christian trade. These two themes were used by both Stuyvesant and the doctrinally rigid New Amsterdam dominie Johannes Megapolensis in their attempt to deny the Jews sailing from Brazil residency in New Netherland.

As the “established” or “official” religion, the Dutch Reformed Church played a great role in the affairs of the state and was influential in political matters. Its fanatical wing even favored a theocracy. However, the Dutch Reformed Church was not a state church, and when the Sephardim exercised their right to petition the government for redress of their grievances (now enshrined in the First Amendment), civil power prevailed and dominie Megapolensis and Stuyvesant were forced to retreat. In all attempts at religious partiality or intolerance, Stuyvesant was overruled by his superiors. After all, prior to his arrival in 1647, toleration had already been established as the basis for religious and ethnic pluralism and as an implicit cultural and legal tradition in New Netherland since 1624. It also served as the West Indian Company’s policy in the management of its possessions in the Western Hemisphere, which specifically provided that “*Catholics or Jews must be left free without interference or investigation in their consciences or homes.*”⁽²³⁾



Portuguese Synagogue in Amsterdam
Still Existing Symbol of 17th-Century Toleration

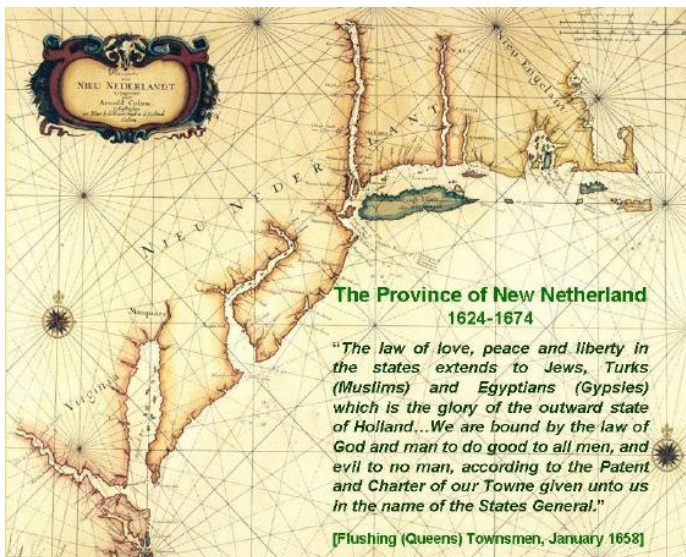
Ironically, at the same time that Stuyvesant sought to exclude the Dutch-Brazilian Jewish refugees from permanent residency in New Amsterdam and Menasseh ben Israel visited Cromwell in London to plead for the admission of Jews to England, a member of the Portuguese Israelites in Amsterdam was excommunicated and banned from the people of Israel as a heretic by the parnassim (Jewish religious leaders). The ban, the Cheirem, was pronounced against the Amsterdam-born philosopher Baruch de Spinoza who had questioned the Torah as divine revelation. This ban had never before been decreed on the basis of heretical ideas and is still seen as an example of rabbinic intolerance.

Was toleration on Spinoza’s mind as being implicit to liberty in the Dutch Republic when he wrote: “*Ours has befallen a rare fortune to live in a republic where everyone is allowed complete freedom of conscience and God worship and where one doesn’t consider*

anything more precious and loving than liberty”?⁽²⁴⁾ In his *Tractatus-Theologico-Politicus* he stated that *“the city of Amsterdam leads the fruit of this freedom in its own great prosperity and in the admiration of all other people. For in this most flourishing state and most splendid city, men of every nation and religion live together in the greatest harmony...his religion and sect is considered of no importance...In fact, the true aim of government is liberty”*.

In New Netherland, in matters of religion, Petrus Stuyvesant had sought to bolster the position of the Dutch Reformed Church by trying to reduce religious competition from non-Christian, non-Reformed denominations such as Jews, Lutherans, Catholics and Quakers. By consolidating his power and that of his church over the young pluralist society he hoped to forestall the possible destabilizing effects of ever increasing diversity on political harmony or, eventually, political survival. However, he was strongly rebuked by his superiors for his issuance of harsh ordinances between 1658 and 1662, aimed particularly at preventing the influx of Quakers who, then, were seen as ungovernable *“machinations of Satan”* and considered subversive, anarchistic agitators and a threat to the public order due to their non-conformist and vociferously proselytizing ways. Referred to by Stuyvesant as *“this new unheard of, abominable heresy”*⁽²⁵⁾, Quakers challenged the concept of order itself.

That the States General of the Dutch Republic didn’t make such explicit distinctions was already reflected in the 1645 patent for Flushing, now in New York’s borough of Queens. It had offered *“welcome”* in New Netherland to persons of *“tender conscience in England and elsewhere oppressed”* and provided *“the right to have and enjoy liberty of conscience, according to the custom and manner of Holland, without molestation or disturbance from any magistrates, or any other ecclesiastical minister.”*⁽²⁶⁾ Therefore, Stuyvesant’s 1657 ordinance against Quakers drew the immediate wrath of the townspeople who drew up a *“remonstrance”* signed by thirty-one townsmen. This *“Flushing Remonstrance”*



demonstrated that religious liberty can never be taken for granted unless one is willing to vigorously defend it through *“broad awareness and conscious vigilance.”* As the remonstrance proved, it had not been enough that *“the law of love, peace and liberty in the states extends to Jews, Turks (Muslims) and Egyptians (Gypsies) which is the glory of the outward state of Holland...We are bound by the law of God and man to do good to all men, and evil to no man, according to the*

Patent and Charter of our Towne given unto us in the name of the States General” as the Remonstrance would state.⁽²⁷⁾

In a final dispatch, on April 16, 1663, Stuyvesant’s superiors admonished to *“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. As the government of this city (Amsterdam) has always practiced this maxim of moderation and consequently has often had a considerable influx of people, we do not doubt that your Province too would be benefited by it.”*⁽²⁸⁾

One year later, the tables were turned on Stuyvesant when his authority was challenged by another foe—this time not from below but from above. It was now a foreign adversary in possession of overpowering military might that would abridge his command, compelling him, in defense of his quasi-official church, to become an advocate of religious diversity in a pluralist culture. Article VIII, one of 24 articles of provisional transfer (in contradistinction to capitulation) that he and his town council negotiated with the English in September 1664, specifically provided for toleration. They were well aware that earlier, in March 1664, King Charles II (who had not yet guaranteed protection to English Jews) had resolved to annex New Netherland and install an Anglican government.

Frenetic appeals by Stuyvesant to his superiors for military help had gone unheeded. Instead, they sent him a letter, written on April 21, 1664, and received one month prior to the arrival of four English frigates, suggesting that liberty (*“freedom of conscience in religion”*) need not be defended but would take care of itself. They reasoned that English colonists in New Netherland, *“removed mostly from old England for the causes aforesaid”* would *“not give us henceforth so much trouble, but prefer to live free under us at peace with their consciences than to risk getting rid of our authority and then falling again under a government from which they had formerly fled.”*⁽²⁹⁾ A few months later it was all over, but by then cultural pluralism had taken root and protective measures been put into place for its continuance.

Twelve years after the definitive political end of New Netherland, in 1686, Governor Thomas Dongan described New York’s religious diversity as *“Here be not many of the Church of England; few Roman Catholics; abundance of Quakers; preachers, men and women especially; singing Quakers; ranting Quakers; Sabatarians; Antisabatarians; some Anabaptists; some Independents; some Jews; in short of all sorts of opinion there are some, and the most of none at all.”*⁽³⁰⁾

The meaning of the welcome extended the Ashkenazim and Sephardim in New Netherland, that *“they shall be allowed to sail and to trade in New Netherland and also be allowed to reside and settle there”*⁽³¹⁾, when viewed in its historical context, is complex.

Their North American presence, and those of many others of diverse religious conscience as reflected in Thomas Dongan's statement, was the result of religious diversity through the dynamic conception of tolerance. This historic notion is New Netherland's inheritance to America. This bequest, in turn, is genealogically connected to New York's birthfather whose lengthy, complicated biography is indispensable in understanding his North American offspring accurately.

A century after Dongan's description of religious diversity in England's latest territorial acquisition, New Netherland's contribution toward religious plurality in the American colonies allowed for a constitutional stipulation that *"no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States."*⁽³²⁾ Because this said next to nothing about individual rights, New York, amongst other states, insisted on the introduction of amendments to guarantee rights. The Bill of Rights was proposed on



March 4, 1789, to the states' legislatures by no one less than John Adams as Vice-President of the United States and President of the Senate who, from 1780-1784, had been the Congressional envoy and first plenipotentiary minister of the United States at The Hague in the Dutch Republic. The First Amendment, its most important article, stated that *"Congress shall make no law prohibiting the free exercise of religion or respecting an establishment of religion."*⁽³³⁾ On December 15, 1791, the U.S. Congress ratified this and nine additional articles because by then it had no other choice except for granting religious freedom in the Original Thirteen.

The fact remains that the vibrant notion of tolerance, whether religious, ethnic or racial, is no less important today than it was 350 years ago. Yet, there are few among us who understand that at the foundation of American heterogeneity—indeed, of Western Civilization as it is now conceived—lie the dual concepts of tolerance and liberty as equal partners. In a culturally intolerant society, constitutional freedom is meaningless unless actively defended: Tolerance as a basic human right demands reciprocal respect rather than unilateral accommodation. First established in the Americas by the Dutch on Governors Island in 1624, it provided the basis for New York's cultural history and still serves as the lifeblood of American liberty. It was no accident or historical anomaly that the Virginian William Byrd, commenting on his visit to New Amsterdam in 1682, remarked that *"they have as many sects of religion there as at Amsterdam."*⁽³⁴⁾



Opening of the 1675 Sephardic Synagogue in Amsterdam

In 1675—one year after New Netherland was ceded to the English for the second time, following a two-year war between the Dutch Republic and the English Kingdom—the grand Portuguese Synagogue was opened in Amsterdam. With more than 1,600 seats, the synagogue remained the largest in Europe for nearly two hundred years. Across from it stood the Great Synagogue of the Ashkenazim, which opened in 1671. By then, there were more than 2,500 Sephardim in Amsterdam and over 5,000 Ashkenazim, together constituting four percent of its population. Those two edifices now represent the only tangible symbols of the toleration which the Jews in particular fought for and earned in the 17th century.



1675 Sephardic and 1671 Ashkenazic Synagogues in Amsterdam

In the United States, the only naturally existing historic symbol to represent a fundamental American precept has yet to be popularly recognized: Governors Island in New York harbor, where the foundation of American pluralism through toleration was planted in 1624. In addition, the island was the place of birth of the states of New York, Connecticut, New Jersey and Delaware. These historic events were finally acknowledged three hundred seventy-eight years later, in May 2002, through Senate and Assembly Resolutions No. 5476 and No. 2708.

However, to restore the island to its historical integrity with its distinctive message of national substance, the legislature needs to do more. It also needs to preserve America's ultimate virtue and sustain it for future generations by dedicating 30% of the island to the proposed tolerance park Historic New Amsterdam with the envisaged Tolerance Monument as centerpiece. Doing so would compose an island triad in New York harbor of primary American conceptions: Tolerance, Liberty and Welcome.



The sum of this iconic “National Heritage Triangle”, with each islet exemplifying its own unique facet of history, would be worth more than its collective parts and would promulgate that tolerance and liberty define the juridical and cultural construct to which American freedom refers—that the dynamic precept of tolerance distinguishes the specifically American notion of freedom from the generic or static.

Only then can New York State's most important landmark, its birthplace, be broadly acknowledged as the nation's earliest fundamental cultural asset with a message of

profound national meaning and can serve as a physical reminder to the world that tolerance and liberty are freedom's indispensable partners.

In the way that a house of stone and brick is held together by cement, tolerance is the glue that holds this world together, that enables cultural diversity and mankind to prosper. When the cement fails, so will the house—as in intolerance. As a vibrant precept, tolerance requires ongoing struggle grounded in “broad awareness and conscious vigilance.”

When restored to its historical integrity with its distinctive message of national substance, Governors Island would preserve and extol America's ultimate virtue as an ethical force by sustaining it for future generations.

Indifference, complacency, laxity and insipidness are the friends of iniquitous intolerance. Its antidote is the dynamic virtue of tolerance as defender and definer of liberty in an ever-changing society—indeed, the limits of tolerance set the limits of liberty or societal freedom itself.

