

A Dutch Confederate

Charles Liernur Defends Slavery in America

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In the 1850s and 1860s, Dutch immigrants in America struggled to square their racial views with the politics of slavery in their new country. The historiography of the Dutch World would benefit from incorporating this story, because it is often in moments of conflict when the most explicit expressions of ideology present themselves. The letters of Charles Liernur, a Dutch-born Confederate, provide a unique insight into the mind of an explicit supporter of slavery in an American context. How and why a Dutchman could defend slavery is the primary question this article addresses. Building on Liernur's story, this article also challenges the standard view that Dutch Americans were natural opponents of slavery. Instead, they held diverse and ambiguous views, shaped in part by the circumstances of their settlement.

Een Nederlandse Confederate: Charles Liernur verdedigt slavernij in Amerika

In de jaren vijftig en zestig van de negentiende eeuw hadden Nederlandse immigranten in Amerika grote moeite een standpunt in te nemen met betrekking tot de slavernij. Een analyse daarvan lijkt van belang voor de Nederlandse geschiedschrijving, omdat vaak tijdens conflicten ideologische overtuigingen op scherpe wijze uitgedragen worden. De brieven van Charles Liernur, een Nederlandse 'Confederate', bieden een unieke blik op de denkwereld van een uitgesproken voorstander van de slavernij. Hoe en waarom kon een Nederlander zo fel de slavernij verdedigen? Dat is de centrale vraag waarop dit artikel een antwoord probeert te geven. Het verhaal van Liernur laat zien dat de gangbare visie, dat Nederlandse Amerikanen van nature tegenstanders van de slavernij waren, niet klopt. Immigranten hadden veeleer uiteenlopende en ambigue meningen over slavernij, bepaald door de omstandigheden waarmee ze in hun nieuwe vaderland te maken kregen.

In recent years, Dutch historians have linked the Netherlands and its colonies to reveal wider webs of knowledge across the Dutch empire.¹ To fully grasp the history of Dutch experiences overseas, we must expand our focus beyond national territorial possessions and incorporate Dutch migrants abroad, who also contributed to the knowledge networks of the Dutch World. In 1860, Dutch-born people in the United States numbered over 30,000. The ubiquitous political discussion regarding slavery in the US challenged Dutch American immigrants and their children to rethink their ideas of race. Understanding how Dutch Americans responded to slavery can shed broader light on Dutch racial views of the era.

Most Dutch immigrants in America in the nineteenth century settled in the Midwest, partly to avoid slavery. In the collective memory of twentieth-century Dutch Americans, their ancestors' service to the Union in the American Civil War proved that their ethnic group had fought against slavery and had therefore been on the 'right' side of history. What is forgotten in this story, however, is that many Dutch Americans went to great lengths to avoid military service, and that they had struggled mightily to decide what position to take in the national debate about the expansion or abolition of slavery.² Writing in the 1920s, the first professional historian of Dutch Americans, Jacob Van Hinte, presented a view that has stood its ground in the historiography. 'Nowhere, so far as I know', he wrote, 'did Dutchmen, although largely Democrats, take up service under the leaders of the Confederate States, not even the few Dutchman who lived in the 'Secession State' of Virginia at that time.'³ Hans Krabbendam has introduced a nuanced and more tempered understanding, that Dutch Americans were opposed to slavery, but feared abolitionist rhetoric. Krabbendam, however, cites no sources to support his claim.⁴

In this article, I argue that Dutch Americans were not of one mind when it came to slavery, but instead developed a variety of views along the

- 1 Remco Raben, 'A New Dutch Imperial History: Perambulations in a Prospective Field', *BMGN-Low Countries Historical Review* 128:1 (2013) 5-30 DOI 10.18352/bmgn-lchr.8353; Wim van den Doel, 'The Dutch Empire. An Essential Part of World History', *BMGN-Low Countries Historical Review* 125:2-3 (2010) 179-208 DOI 10.18352/bmgn-lchr.7119.
- 2 Willemien M. Schenkeveld, 'The Colony and the Union: Dutch-American Reactions to the Civil War (1861-1865)', in: Rob Kroes and Henk-Otto Neuschäfer (eds.), *The Dutch in North-America. Their Immigration and Cultural Continuity* (Amsterdam 1991) 240-258; Michael J. Douma,

'A Black Dutchman and the Racial Discourse of the Dutch in America, 1850-1920', *Dutch Crossing: Journal of Low Countries Studies* 36:2 (2012) 143-157 DOI 10.1179/0309656412Z.0000000011.

- 3 Jacob Van Hinte, *Netherlanders in America: A Study of Emigration and Settlement in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries of America*, ed. Robert P. Swierenga, trans. Adriaan de Wit (Grand Rapids MI 1985) 431.
- 4 Hans Krabbendam, *Vrijheid in het Verschiets: Nederlandse emigratie naar Amerika 1840-1940* (Hilversum 2006).

pro-slavery and anti-slavery spectrum as they engaged with the American political tradition. The letters of the Dutch-born Charles Liernur provide an unprecedented source to explore this topic.⁵ During the course of the American Civil War (1861-1865), Liernur, a Confederate army engineer, mailed a stream of letters to his parents in Haarlem, in which he expressed his sympathies for the Southern cause and justified his participation in the war. Liernur first arrived in the United States in 1848. By 1860, he had lived more than a decade in Alabama, where he developed a fairly thorough, educated defence of slavery, combining common legal, economic and biological arguments of the day. Slavery was no sin, he declared:

We who live in the South naturally know better. We know from experience that slave labour is necessary to cultivate sugar, tobacco and cotton, and that it is the foremost product here. We know that it is not a sin because the negroes are happy and content here as slaves, get enough to eat, grow strong and fat, and gladly reproduce themselves across the earth, whereas when they are free and must maintain themselves through free labour, they do not get enough to eat, find themselves in unfortunate conditions and die.⁶

In Liernur's view, racial slavery was not an unfortunate blemish, nor an impediment to progress, but a preferable form of social order. Elsewhere in his letters, Liernur defends slavery for its essential role in promoting economic progress, freeing up the entrepreneurial, innovative class to produce technologies to benefit society. As an engineer, Liernur saw himself at the avant-garde of progress and a well-placed beneficiary of the 'slavocracy'.

Liernur's letters also help us to situate Dutch ambivalence about the American Civil War within a broader context of international racial attitudes in the nineteenth century. Liernur's defence of slavery and his justifications for defending the Confederacy were written not only to reassure his parents that he knew what he was doing, but also to serve a real didactic purpose in explaining to his family what they might not have gathered about American events through the Dutch press. According to the historian Jan Willem Schulte-Nordholt, Dutch newspapers at the time were 'generally silent

5 Noord Hollands Archief, Collection 3934, Stukken afkomstig uit de opgeheven collectie Haarlemse genealogieën te Haarlem, 2.2 Johannes George Liernur, ingekomen brieven, 1844-1865. All of the following cited letters without any other attribution come from this collection.

6 Liernur, 16 January 1862. Translation of: 'Wij die in het Zuiden leeven natuurlijk weten beter. Wij weet bij ondervinding dat het slaven werk is

nodig om suiker, tabak en katoen te teelen, en dat is het voornaamste produkt hier. Wij weten dat het geen zonde is omdat de negers als slaven hier gelukkig en tevreden zijn, genoeg te eeten krijgen, dik en vet worden, en gaarne zich in aarde vermenigvuldigen, terwijl wanneer zij vrij zijn en zich door vrijwillige arbeid moeten onderhouden ze niet genoeg te eeten krijgen, zien ongelukkig bevinden, en gaan sterven.'

about the great clash on the other side of the ocean.⁷ Few in the Netherlands understood the war, and the nation could do little diplomatically to shape its outcome. In the 1840s and 1850s, a variety of voices in the Netherlands spoke out against slavery, but slave emancipation never became a popular political cause among the Dutch public, partly because of the perceived risk that such discussion would motivate slave revolts in the colonies.⁸ Except for a few diplomatic squabbles about neutral ports and shipping, historians found little to say about Dutch-American relations during the war.⁹

If we consider that few Dutch immigrants settled in the Southern states, it becomes clear why historians have not previously found evidence of Dutch Americans who were sympathetic to the South. Dutch immigrants settled primarily in the Midwest, partly so that they could avoid living near slaves and competing with their labour, but also because of economic opportunities and the availability of land. According to figures I carefully compiled from the 1860 US census, in that year there were 557 Dutch-born people in the eleven states that made up the Confederate States of America (CSA) out of a total of more than 30,000 Dutch-born people in the United States as a whole. At the very maximum, 275 Dutch-born men living in the Southern states in 1860 were of the proper age to have been subject to military conscription during the war. However, foreign-born people in the Confederacy who had not previously been granted American citizenship were able to opt out of the draft. Regardless of this, many potential recruits could have bought replacements, or fled the country. Some Dutch-born men in the South in 1860 worked in maritime trades. Others were merchants in port cities. Only fourteen were listed as farmers or planters, which indicates that few were entirely tied to the land.

The following chart indicates the distribution of Dutch-born people in Southern states in 1860, a year before the start of the Civil War.

By state	Total Dutch-born	Draftable men (17 to 50 years of age in September 1862)	Dutch-marriage	Out-marriage
Alabama	31	21	1	14
Arkansas	5	1	0	3
Florida	6	4	1	3
Georgia	24	10	6	4

7 J.W. Schulte Nordholt, 'The Civil War Letters of the Dutch Ambassador', *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 54: 4 (Winter 1961) 341-373, 343.

8 Johanna Maria van Winter, 'De Openbare Mening in Nederland over de Afschaffing der Slavernij', *De West-Indische Gids* 34 (1953) 61-90 DOI 10.1163/22134360-90000111; Maartje Janse, *De*

Afschaffers: Publieke Opinie, organisatie, en politiek in Nederland, 1840-1880 (Amsterdam 2007).

9 Gerlof D. Homan, 'Netherlands-American Relations during the Civil War', *Civil War History* 31:4 (December 1985) 353-364 DOI 10.1353/cwh.1985.0059.

Louisiana	287	149	26	81
Mississippi	18	8	1	5
North Carolina	14	6	0	5
South Carolina	32	15	2	11
Tennessee	40	16	6	9
Texas	43	18	1	15
Virginia	57	27	6	31
Totals	557	275	50	181

The census data demonstrates that nowhere in the South, apart from perhaps New Orleans, did anything resembling a Dutch ethnic enclave develop, as happened in most states in the Midwest.

Throughout the eleven Southern states, Dutch immigrants were nearly twice as likely to be married to a non-Dutch partner, primarily Americans or Germans, than they were to be married to another Dutch-born. A total of 50 Dutch-Dutch married couples were living in the South, whereas 180 Dutch-born men and women were married to spouses of other nationalities. This latter number includes 70 marriages to American-born partners, 69 to people born in the German states, 10 French spouses, 7 English, 7 Irish, 5 Swiss, 5 Belgians, 3 Bahamians, 2 Danes, 2 Poles, 2 Italians and a Canadian. This indicates that many Dutch people either came to the South unmarried and then found a suitable partner there, or that many mixed European marriages brought the Dutch to the South for other reasons. The distribution patterns indicate that the Dutch in the South spread out widely. They were apparently well-integrated into Southern society, and none more so than Charles Liernur.

To understand why Charles Liernur fought for the Confederacy and so explicitly defended American slavery, I will trace his story from his migration to the United States in 1848 to his eventual return to Europe in 1865. Through a narrative of Liernur's experiences in antebellum America, I will describe the development of his thoughts on race and slavery. Next, I will situate Liernur's racial ideology within the historical context of Dutch views on race in the nineteenth century. Then, employing Dutch American newspaper records, I will argue that regional factors shaped the Dutch American response to slavery. In a penultimate section, I will narrate the story of Liernur's participation in the war, highlighting the depth of his diverse and often incompatible commitments to family, nation and ideology. I will conclude by arguing that Liernur's pro-slavery, pro-Confederate views should not be seen as anomalous in the Dutch World, but as consistent with a tradition of Dutch racial understanding. In the 1850s and 1860s, as the Netherlands moved to abolish slavery in its colonies, another debate on slavery took place in the minds of Dutch Americans.

Becoming American (1848-1860)

At just twenty years of age, Herman Carl Anton Thieme Liernur arrived in New York on 26 August 1848. The young man came commissioned by two Amsterdam merchants, Stoop and de Beaufort, to measure and map real-estate purchases.¹⁰ His business trip turned into a seventeen-year stay, in which he crisscrossed the developing United States. Liernur was fascinated with the technological innovations and progress in his new land. He was also motivated by profit, which he knew could be better gained if he integrated into American society and established social contacts. As Liernur pursued wealth, he found himself embedded in Southern society and sympathetic to its worldview.

Charles Liernur was born and raised in the Netherlands. Although the Liernur name originated in Saarland on the French-German border, Charles' branch of the family had been in Holland since the seventeenth century.¹¹ Liernur's father, born in The Hague, had studied theology in Tübingen and served as a minister of an Evangelical Lutheran church in Haarlem. The Liernur family was middle class, and for Charles a university education seemed unnecessary. Charles was an autodidact, who showed promise in mathematics. As a teenager, he took a job with the architect H. P. J. de Kock, and quickly rose to a position of responsibility, supervising engineering projects throughout North Holland. Clearly, Charles was more educated, more cosmopolitan and more urban than most Dutch immigrants in America at the time. Many of these immigrants settled together as families and communities in the Midwest, but Liernur rode the winds of business and fortune to the South. Intent on a professional career, he was wisely concerned with building an image and a reputation on American shores. He was proud, for example, to read his name accompanied by the title 'Chief Engineer from Haarlem' listed in the *New York Sun* for recent arrivals from Europe.

From New York, Liernur excitedly penned twenty-page letters back home. From these letters, we learn that he was struck by American culture for its pace of life and opportunities. There were city streets 'an hour and a half long', he reported, and the city of New York was so big that there had been a fire in a different neighbourhood every day since he had arrived two and half weeks earlier. 'One does not have to ask if there is a fire', he wrote,

10 Although Liernur does not provide the full names of his employers, they were probably the landowner and politician Arnoud Jan de Beaufort (1799-1866) and the Amsterdam banker Johannes Bernardus Stoop (1781-1856), who both invested money in agricultural lands in the Netherlands already.

11 Jan Pieter de Bie, Johannes Lindeboom and D. Nauta (eds.), *Biographisch woordenboek van protestantsche godgeleerden in Nederland* 6 (The Hague 1949) 21-24; Th.A. Fafié, 'Ds.J.G. Liernur (1791-1868) en zijn gezin', *Documentatieblad Lutherse kerkgeschiedenis* 4 (1989) 3-11.

‘but one can always ask where is there a fire at the moment.’ Each day in the metropolis seemed to bring new adventures for the young Dutchman. During a rainstorm, he ducked into a building, which happened to be a textile factory. Thirty girls sitting at sewing machines giggled as the female supervisor ushered him out. What perhaps struck him the most about New York City, however, was that everyone read the newspaper every day. ‘Every morning, in front of open windows, old ladies sit in rocking chairs and rock back and forth while reading the news and smoking a little pipe.’¹² Liernur recognized that information was the key to wealth.

In an ironic foreshadowing, Liernur also noticed trains everywhere. Trains were so common in New York, he found, that the horses there had grown accustomed to their presence. While travelling around New York State, Liernur met a railroad agent who recruited him to work on a new railroad to run from Mobile, Alabama, to Louisiana. The agent offered what seemed to Liernur an enormous sum: a hundred dollars per month. ‘Three thousand guilders per year’, he wrote, ‘I would need to look for some time to find such a job in my fatherland.’¹³ Liernur took the job and sailed for New Orleans, reaching the Southern port city in three weeks.

In the summer of 1849, Liernur settled in Mobile and began work on the Mobile and Ohio Railroad. Excited about his American prospects, Liernur’s gaze still frequently turned to Europe, especially when he read news about revolutions in Germany. He also began to send money home, apparently following up on a promise that he had made to his parents. He had been in the United States less than two years when he changed his name from Carl Frederick Anton Thieme Liernur to Charles Liernur. He wrote: ‘Two family names is to their [American] ears positive nonsense. They always ask if Thieme is the name of my first father and Liernur the name of the second.’¹⁴

Although he was quickly becoming an American, Liernur was intent on eventually returning to Europe. Indeed, he remained in contact with his German girlfriend, Theodora Fresenius (1821-1879), whom he had met before he left for the United States in 1848. In December 1853, Liernur outlined his plan. He would work for the railroad for six or eight more years, then sell his affairs and move back to Holland, where he would help support his parents in their old age. To be able to do this, he told himself, he would have to be a great

12 Liernur, 10 September 1848. Translation of: ‘oude dames zette s’ morgens voor de open vensters op hobbelloze stoelen heen en weer te wiegelen de courant te lezen en een pijpje te roken.’

13 Liernur, 17 October 1848. Translation of: ‘3000 Guld. s’ jaars. Ik zou wezelijk lang moeten zoeken in mijn vaderland voor zo’n baantje.’

14 Liernur, 2 March 1850. Translation of: ‘Twee familie namen is in hun ooren positief onzin. Zij vragen altijd of Thieme de naam van mijn eerste vader is en Liernur de naam van de tweede.’

15 Liernur, 1 December 1853.



A photo of a sketch that Liernur drew of a house in Alabama, in a letter written to his parents.

Collection Noord Hollands Archief.

man in his field. First, however, within the year, he would return to Europe and marry Theodora:

The dear girl has finally decided, notwithstanding her opposition to this wild land, the aversion she feels for this rough population of negroes, uncivilized whites, and above all that portion that is completely restless, the scum of Europe, to cross over the ocean, to leave her Germany, and join the man who chose her as a bride.¹⁵

True to his word, Liernur married in Frankfurt, in January 1854.¹⁶

Having returned to Alabama, now with Theodora by his side, Liernur began climbing the social ladder. By all accounts, he was an exceptionally capable engineer. In 1855, he was serving with the US Engineers on a salary of \$1,500 per year. He supervised a tollhouse construction project in Mobile. The building, he boasted, was constructed without wood, and was supported by iron beams and granite walls. By the mid-1850s, Liernur's inventive genius also began to shine. He invented and patented a successful railroad speedometer. To sell his inventions to manufacturers, Liernur travelled to Washington DC, and to Philadelphia and Baltimore. He even began a lucrative business selling shares in his patents. He sold a tenth share of one invention for 22 acres of land near a railroad station in Alabama. 'The land cost me nothing but a bit of thinking and not a single cent', he boasted.¹⁷ In 1857, now a chief engineer for the Pensacola Railroad Company, he moved into a new house on property adjacent to his brother-in-law, 'Peter' (John Peter Fresenius, born 1828), who by 1855 had joined the Liernurs in Alabama. By 1859, Peter had married an American, the daughter of a cotton farmer who owned a hundred slaves.¹⁸ At around the same time, Charles Liernur developed passionate opinions about the sectional crisis in the United States. For example, the skirmishes in Kansas in 1856 drew his attention, and he wrote home to condemn the abolitionists who tried to hunt and kill Southerners migrating to the new territory.¹⁹

In the early part of 1857, Charles Liernur came as close as he ever would to realizing his American dream. His speedometer patent was guaranteed for fourteen years. The first railroad car from Boston reached Mobile in 1857, and Liernur had the honour of riding in the first locomotive on the new line. His position earned him \$3,000 per year. His wife and child

16 Noord Holland Archief, Collection 3924, 'stukken uit de opgeheven collectie Haarlemse genologieën te Haarlem, 2.4 Hermanus Carol Anthoni Thieme Liernur.'

17 Liernur, 19 November 1856. Translation of: 'Het land kost mij niets maar een beetje denken en geen enkele cent.'

18 Liernur, 8 March 1855; 25 September 1857; 20 October, 1859.

19 Liernur, 12-14 June 1856.

were happy and healthy. ‘You see dear Father – I am determined to make a name for myself’, he wrote.²⁰ From Haarlem, Charles’ young brother Jan wrote that he also wanted to become an engineer and move to Alabama.²¹

A national recession in 1857, however, put a damper on Liernur’s plans, and the slowdown in government engineering projects meant that he had to seek private work further away from home. ‘All public works have stopped’, he reported in 1858, as the economic recession continued.²² Liernur now spent long periods away from home, where his wife and a servant managed the children, a vegetable garden, pigs and over hundred chickens. In 1858, he had grown frustrated with the government’s response to the crisis, and he blamed Congress for not appropriating any money for internal improvements.²³

In 1859 and 1860, the economy recovered and Liernur seemed once again on his way to making a fortune. His speedometer was being used on the New York and Erie railroad. His brother Jan arrived in Mobile. The grown man, the successful railroad engineer and inventor, was at the height of his power. A letter from September 1860 reads like the manifesto of a man who had seen America and had embraced its industrial might and enlightenment promise. In a number of letters, Liernur told his father that science was the true saviour and had done more for humanity than religion.²⁴ In defending slavery, Liernur often returned to the theme of progress through rational social order.

By the outbreak of war in 1861, Liernur was by his own account well integrated into the fabric of Southern life. He felt himself an important person, a fixture in society, and his prosperity depended on Confederate victory, which he felt assured would come. In the spring of 1859, he had opened his own engineering firm and he had quickly developed a reputation for the ability to design anything from an efficient sawmill to a workable farm tractor or a stately mansion. Liernur built custom homes for elite slave-owning planters. ‘It is very unfashionable to live in a house not designed by the great Engineer and architect Mr Liernur’, he opined.²⁵ As the war began, Liernur justified the necessity of his participation by referring to his social standing: ‘If I stood less high in society then it probably would have been possible to flee. As it is, I could not do it.’ In addition, Liernur declared, ‘all of my sympathies are with the Southern party – because essentially all of the injustice is on the other side.’²⁶ He also spoke of the fear Southerners had,

20 Liernur, 7 April 1857. Translation of: ‘Gij ziet lieve Vader – ik ben bepaald om mij eene naam te maken.’

21 Liernur, 10 June 1857.

22 Liernur, 26 June 1858. Translation of: ‘Alle publieke werken zijn gestopt.’

23 Liernur, 18 November 1858.

24 Liernur, 1 September 1860; 28 October 1860.

25 Liernur, 12 May 1859.

26 Liernur, 28 February 1861. Translation of: ‘Wanneer ik minder hoog in de maatschappij stond het zou waarschijnlijk mogelijk geweest zijn om mij schuil te hoden. Als het was ik kon het niet doen. Behalve dat alle mijne sympathies waren met de Zuidelijke party – want wezenlijk al het onrecht is aan de andere zijde.’

that the North wanted slaves to revolt, kill the whites and take their women.²⁷ It appears from a letter in 1864, that Liernur was also a slave owner, as he reported having an African-American maid who cleaned the house, washed clothes and took care of the children.²⁸

Dutch racial views

Perhaps the best primary source on Dutch American attitudes towards slavery is the *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode* (published in Sheboygan, Wisconsin); the only Dutch American newspaper for which there is a complete set of surviving issues covering the decade before the American Civil War. It was a secular newspaper serving primarily a Dutch Calvinist audience, and was widely disseminated and read across Dutch American communities in the Northern states. It was also decidedly a Republican publication, so its lopsided coverage of the politics of slavery must be understood within that context. Liernur was unlikely to have read this newspaper and it does not reflect his views. However, the slavery debates in the *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode* are important, in that they demonstrate how the context of the debate among Dutch Americans in the Northern states sharply contrasted with the nature of the discussion of slavery in Liernur's Alabama. The editor of the *Nieuwsbode*, Jacob Quintus, frequently published anti-slavery articles, translated and reprinted from other newspapers. He also reprinted articles from the Netherlands that addressed emancipation in the Dutch West Indies. In an early article on American slavery from 12 March 1850, Quintus explained the political situation of slavery in simple terms for immigrants largely ignorant of American politics. Over time, Quintus became an increasingly outspoken opponent of the spread of slavery. Calling the Democrats 'the party of slavery', Quintus was ready to do battle.²⁹

The *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode* demonstrates that in the 1850s, Dutch Americans discussed politics almost as much as religion, and they often mixed the two. By the end of the decade, one could complain that 'everyone wants to join the political discussion despite usually knowing less about it than an ox.'³⁰ Rarely, in the run of years did Quintus or any other Dutch American explicitly call for the outright abolition of slavery across the nation. In reality, the Dutch American debate about slavery was just a debate about the expansion of slavery in the western states. That is to say, few Dutch Americans called for the outright and immediate abolition of slavery. While the motives

27 Liernur, 28 February 1861; 16 January 1862.

28 Liernur, 8 June 1864.

29 *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*, 12 September 1854.

30 *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*, 8 October 1860.

Translation of: 'ieder gaarne over politiek wil medepraten hoewel hij er vaak niet meer kennis heeft dan een os.'



A photo of the cover of a letter from Mobile, Alabama to Haarlem, the Netherlands, sent in March 1861.
Collection Noord Hollands Archief.

were sincere, the fervency of the debate rose and fell with the election seasons, when the spoils of politics were at stake.

The slavery debate among Dutch Americans was at the same pace as, informed by, and ran parallel to the national debate. In the 1850s, the most dominant political issue in the United States was not the abolition of slavery, but the potential expansion of slavery to new territories in the West. At the most general level, the anti-slavery movement in the North made political and cultural gains in a debate against Southern slaveholders and their supporters. On the one hand, Republican free-soilers hoped to see the spread of free labour, while on the other, supporters of Democratic popular sovereignty wanted each jurisdiction to be able to decide for itself whether it would be free territory or slave territory. The incorporation of new free or slave territories as states would tip the balance of power in the US Congress and determine the nature of future legislation about slavery. Quintus called all Democrats implicit supporters of slavery for allowing its expansion and for supporting a pro-slavery administration. However, there was ambiguity among the arguments from both Democratic and Republican Dutch Americans.

Dutch immigrant Democrats, for example, seldom defended American slavery explicitly. Instead, they called for restraint, adherence to the laws of the land and a focus on other problems. Take for instance, the views of N.W.A. van Catz Smallenburg, of Buffalo, New York, who declared that he disliked slavery, but that it was in God's hands to decide its fate. 'Is it not ridiculous', he asked, that Dutch Americans 'with our small number, only a drop in the bucket, declare war on a power a thousand-fold greater, without hope of a good result, and that we do this in a language that no one understands but ourselves?'³¹ Signing with the name 'Jan de Klompenmaker', a contributor to the *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode* in 1853 complained that Dutch immigrants did not have the right to complain about the laws of a country that they had chosen to migrate to. Klompenmaker likened Dutch agricultural labourers, among others, to slaves. He told Dutch Americans to focus on their own sins before addressing the sins of the nation. Instead of complaining in newspapers, he argued, Dutch immigrants should contribute to a fund to buy slaves and send them to Liberia.³²

The way Dutch Americans addressed slavery also changed over time. In the earliest years of the 1850s, when they were learning American politics, they questioned whether slavery was a sin. Dutch American opponents of slavery tended not to cite biblical justification for their views, but appealed to the moral principles of Christianity to label slavery as cruel and barbaric. The strongest voice among anti-slavery Dutchmen was perhaps H. van der Kolk of Chicago, who told Dutch Americans to end their indifference to slavery

31 *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*, 8 March 1853. Translation of: 'Is het niet belagchelijk, met ons klein getal, slechts een drupje aan den emmer, den oorlog te

verklaren aan een duizendvoudige magt, zonder eenige hoop op goed gevolg, en dat nog wel in eene taal die niemand als wij zelve verstaan?'

and to recognize it as a sin.³³ Van der Kolk's writings indicate that there were plenty of Dutch immigrants who still needed to be convinced: some referred to the Hamitic legend, others 'would argue that the fate of the slaves would be preferable to that of the servile and working class in the Netherlands!'³⁴ To push the point further, Van der Kolk related how in New Orleans he had seen slaves treated like animals, and he invited his readers to consider selling themselves into slavery if it was indeed preferable to the status of free agricultural work. In 1855, the synod of the Reformed Church in America took up the question of whether slavery was sinful. The debate in the church reverberated in the Dutch American press, with supporters on both sides.³⁵

The Dutch American debate on slavery was long, bitter and at times, frankly uncivil. It was one thing to refer to an unnamed defender of slavery as an '*aartsdomkop*' (complete dunce) or '*aartsschelm*' (terrible vain) as did one editorial in 1856, and another thing altogether to specifically target an opponent by name, as did Quintus when he declared that Henry P. Scholte was a '*boosaardige leugenaar*' (evil liar) whose God was Mammon.³⁶ Scholte became a crucial figure in the debate, as Dutch Americans singled out this leader of the Dutch in Iowa for his outspoken political views. In poetic verse, a contributor questioned whether Scholte had abandoned Jesus for a few pieces of silver by choosing to speak for the Democrats and slavery.³⁷ Scholte became a Republican in time for the 1860 election of Lincoln, but he never embraced the abolitionism of the radical Republicans. In 1860, Scholte wrote that if Southerners followed biblical slavery, then the children of relationships between masters and slaves should be set free and slavery would gradually end of its own accord.³⁸ While it is difficult to hypothesize, it seems likely that had more Dutch Americans lived in the South, they would have been even more sympathetic to the Southern slaveholding perspective. As it was, the Dutch Americans in the Northern states were pressured by their American peers to slowly move in the direction of anti-slavery.

In the Midwest, Dutch Americans never reached a consensus on slavery, but a mainline anti-slavery position gradually came to dominate. A published summary of a sermon by Albertus C. Van Raalte demonstrates what was probably the dominant Dutch American ecclesiastical response to the issue of slavery. In 1863, Van Raalte told his Reformed Church congregation in Holland, Michigan, that the Bible clearly opposed slavery, not as it was in the

32 *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*, 1 March 1853.

33 *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*, 21 March 1851.

34 *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*, 21 February 1851.

Translation of: 'sommigen zouden beweren willen, dat het lot der slaven nog de voorkeur zou verdienen boven dat der dienstbare en arbeidende klasse in Nederland!'

35 H.D. Ganse, *Bible Slaveholding not Sinful* (New York 1856); U.W. Brandt, 'Is Slavernij al of niet Zondig?', *Sheybogan Nieuwsbode*, 15 April 1856.

36 *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*, 3 June 1856; 28 October 1856.

37 *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*, 7 October 1856.

38 *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode*, 21 March 1860.

ancient world, but specifically as it was practiced in the South. In short, Van Raalte condemned American slavery for its abuses, but he did not take a stand against slavery universally. Although many in the congregation agreed that American slavery was a sin, others wished that Van Raalte had left politics out of the church.³⁹

Van Raalte's anti-slavery sermons and his calls to defend the Union inspired some Dutch Americans to volunteer for the war. However, research into the Dutch American contribution to the Union army demonstrates that this immigrant group held mixed feelings about the Civil War. Dutch American soldiers in the Union army, for example, had practical as well as patriotic motives; some fled service, found replacements or sought exemptions to the draft through the Dutch diplomatic network. During the war, immigration from the Netherlands declined to less than 30 percent of its pre-war average. As an ethnic voting bloc, Dutch Americans also showed mixed motives. The Dutch in Iowa, for example, were concerned more with issues of nativism and naturalization than slavery, and in the majority voted for the Democrats in 1860 and 1864, whereas the Dutch in Michigan supported the Republicans.⁴⁰

Like other Dutch Americans, Liernur inherited a set of racial ideas that did not lend themselves easily to anti-slavery or abolitionism. As did the two centuries of Dutchmen before him, Liernur believed Africans were a servile race whose enslavement was justified primarily on economic grounds. While Liernur was raised a Lutheran, he could not have avoided the influence of Dutch Calvinism and its views on slavery. Although some Dutch Calvinist theologians in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries opposed slavery, many defended it by reference to the Hamitic legend, the biblical curse on Canaan. Even Isaac da Costa and Willem Bilderdijk, major figures in the ultra-orthodox Calvinist tradition that influenced many Dutch American clergy, had in the 1820s and 1830s defended the prolongation of slavery. From the seventeenth century onwards, Dutch Enlightenment thinkers developed secular natural rights arguments against slavery, but these had little impact as slavery remained profitable in Dutch colonial possessions.⁴¹

39 *De Grondwet* [newspaper], 12 August 1863. The only known original is in the Bentley Library in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Translation printed as: 'Rev. A.C. Van Raalte on Slavery', *Origins. Historical Magazine of the Calvin College Archives* 31:2 (2013) 40-41.

40 The statistic for migration during the war is based on a table in Robert P. Swierenga, *Faith and Family: Dutch Immigration and Settlement in the United States, 1820-1920* (New York 2000) 39. For

voting patterns, see Robert P. Swierenga, 'The Ethnic Voter and the First Lincoln Election', *Civil War History* 11:1 (March 1965) 27-43 DOI 10.1353/cwh.1965.0030.

41 Dienne Hondius, *Blackness in Western Europe: Racial Patterns of Paternalism and Exclusion* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2014) 71-72, 124-152; P.C. Emmer, *De Nederlandse Slavenhandel, 1500-1850* (Amsterdam 2000); Van Winter, *De Openbare Mening*, 64.

In addition to Liernur, other Dutch-born men found reasons to defend the Confederacy. In 1861, Charles Liernur declared that his brother Jan was prepared to fight for his new nation. The Dutch consul in Mobile had given his seal to Confederate citizenship papers for the pair. As far as the law was concerned, Liernur explained, neither he nor his brother were Hollanders any more.⁴² Jan Liernur spent most of the war working for the Mobile and Ohio Railroad, along with his brother-in-law Peter Fresenius, and was therefore exempt from military service since the railroad was a necessary component of the Southern infrastructure under the command of the Confederate government.⁴³ A death certificate deposited with the city in Haarlem in 1878 declares that Jan died in Alabama on 14 April 1864, but the cause of his death is not shown.⁴⁴ Peter Fresenius, on the other hand, remained in Alabama after the war and worked as an engineer and railroad superintendent.⁴⁵ In the 1870s, Fresenius and former Confederate General Braxton Bragg formed Bragg & Fresenius in Texas, offering their services as civil engineers and architects. The pair were responsible for the first phase of construction of the Gulf, Colorado and Santa Fe Railway.⁴⁶

A few other Dutch-born men in the South also supported the Confederacy. In Richmond, Jacob Ezekiel, whose mother was born in Amsterdam, served in a Confederate military patrol, while the Groningen-born Jew, Isaac Magnin, enlisted in the Confederate army.⁴⁷ Joe Osterman, a pro-Confederate born in Amsterdam in 1799, was an early resident of Galveston and a wealthy merchant who owned slaves and also bought and sold them from time to time.⁴⁸ In the 1870s, Justus van Löben Sels travelled from the Netherlands to San Francisco to write a legal dissertation on the American Civil War. Van Löben Sels was fairly sympathetic to Southern aims, and his main argument – albeit a poor one for a dissertation – was that the South was legally in the right. He thought the Yankees were hypocrites for having made money in the slave trade before

42 Liernur, 28 February 1861.

43 During the war, Fresenius was an Assistant Superintendent on the Mobile and Ohio Railroad. *Memphis Daily Appeal* (newspaper), 28 March 1864.

44 http://www.onzestamboom.info/stamboom2012/du/liernur_john_fg_2157.html (23 March 2016). The website includes a scanned copy of the document and lists the source as 'Kennemerland Haarlem Akte Jaar 1878 Nummer 22'.

45 J.P. Fresenius filed a report in *Annual Report of the Secretary of War for the Year 1880*, Vol. 2, Part 2 (Washington, DC 1880) 1093-1098.

46 Braxton Bragg Papers, Manuscript 32-0058, Rosenberg Library, Galveston, Texas.

47 Robert P. Swierenga, *The Forerunners: Dutch Jewry in the North American Diaspora* (Detroit, MI [1994]) 54, 309-310.

48 Bryan Edward Stone, *The Chosen Folk: Jews on the Frontiers of Texas* (Austin, TX 2010) 47. In New Orleans, a pair of Dutch Jews, Manis Jacobs and Levy Jacobs, had dealt in slaves too, before their respective deaths in 1839 and 1855. Swierenga, *Forerunners: Dutch Jewry in America*, 213, 215.

demanding that the South emancipated its slaves without compensation to the owners.⁴⁹

While certain networks of acquaintance may have developed among the Dutch in the South, these appeared, at least in the view of the well-travelled Liernur, to be more accidental than planned. Although Liernur did not specifically seek out other Dutch immigrants, he was glad to make their acquaintance whenever possible. In 1850, he reported meeting a railroad engineer, the son of the Dutch-born Gerard Troost, a Geology professor in Tennessee.⁵⁰ Liernur was acquainted with a few Dutch merchants in Mobile, but he knew there were more Dutch in New Orleans. When a cousin from the Netherlands, Koenraad Fuhri, came to Mobile in the spring of 1856, Liernur encouraged him to move to New Orleans to find work in the Dutch social network there.⁵¹ In June 1858, two months before yellow fever would kill Fuhri and three of his daughters, Liernur visited the family in New Orleans. Visiting the Fuhris was like being in the Netherlands, Liernur wrote.⁵²

Liernur at War

While racial ideologies played a substantial role in Liernur's decision to fight, circumstances also determined his course. As the war got underway, Liernur had invested too much emotional and financial effort to turn away. Even the physical stresses of war did not deter him at first. On 2 March 1861, while directing slaves in an earthwork defence project for Mobile, Alabama, Liernur suffered the loss of a leg in a railroad accident. He does not give specific information about how the accident happened, but because it was far from the front line, we can be certain that the wound did not occur in battle. A month later, Liernur's left leg below the knee was amputated at a local medical college.⁵³ He recovered and returned to work ahead of schedule, spending most of his time on horseback.

In the excitement of wartime patriotism and propaganda, Liernur redoubled his ideological defence of the Confederacy. On 31 March 1862, writing now in English to his family, he declared steadfastly that there was no chance the government in the North would regain control of the Southern states. 'All hands here are heart and soul in the cause. Men, women and children only think of one thing and that is to fight. It is sure to come out glorious for us.'⁵⁴ Statistics proving the strength of the South were an

49 Pieter Justus van Löben Sels, *Beschouwingen over den Noord-Amerikaansche Staten-Oorlog van 1861-1864* (PhD Utrecht University, Zutphen 1878) 94-97, 119. Van Löben Sels' father-in-law was James de Fremery, the Dutch consul in San Francisco.

50 Liernur, 26 November 1850.

51 Liernur, 22 March 1856.

52 Liernur, 26 June 1858; *Zierikzeesche Nieuwsbode*, 18 December 1858.

53 Liernur, 8 May 1861.

54 Liernur, 31 March 1862.

attractive reassurance of victory for him. In 1863 on a visit to Richmond, Virginia, he reported on the size of the armies then engaged in battle: the Union General Hooker with 159,600 men and the Confederate General Lee with 87,000. Liernur claimed to have participated in the third day of the battle of Fredericksburg, where his horse was shot out from underneath him. The battle was terrible, he said, and little mercy was shown. Casualty numbers favoured the Confederates, however, so Liernur considered the battle a victory.⁵⁵

During the war, Liernur continued to be attracted to positions of power and the opportunity to build his reputation. He kept on file letters of recommendation, and even a translation into French and English of his certificate for a successful examination to work as a surveyor in his home province of North Holland. Letters from American associates also attested to his abilities.⁵⁶ In April 1862, he was promoted to Chief Engineer in Mobile, a place, he declared, that now could not be conquered by fewer than 130,000 soldiers and 40 ships. For his work in securing the safety of the city, the citizens of Mobile presented him with a ceremonial sword.⁵⁷

Liernur's sacrifices during the war nevertheless eventually convinced him to seek a way out of the conflict. As early as 1862, he had complained about his modest salary. The cost of provisions was so high, he declared, that his income was not sufficient to maintain a family. 'House rent, school fees, water rates and servant hire consume my income to within \$20 and this is not enough to feed and clothe a family of ten persons', he wrote.⁵⁸ Letters from Liernur's immediate superior, Colonel Leadbetter, sent to Confederate treasurer J.P. Benjamin attested to the value of Liernur's work and resulted in his successful promotion to captain.⁵⁹ The promotion was a question of 'meat and bread for him.'⁶⁰ By 1864, Liernur hoped for an end to the war at all costs. 'The Yankees are almost worn out', he wrote.⁶¹

55 Liernur, 23 May 1863. An obituary record claims that he also received a bullet in the shoulder 'near Richmond', but other information in the obituary is untrustworthy. *Eigen Haard, Geïllustreerd Volkstijdschrift* (Haarlem 1893) 281-281.

56 Confederate Service Records, 1861-1865. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA); *Carded Records Showing Military Service of Soldiers Who Fought in Confederate Organizations, compiled 1903-1927, documenting the period 1861-1865*; Catalog ID: 586957; Record Group #: 109; Roll #: 107. Available online at: <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/22084852> (20 January 2015).

57 Liernur, 18 January 1863.

58 Confederate Service Records. Charles Liernur to General Sam Cooper, 24 May 1862. Why Liernur wrote that his family consisted of ten persons, is unclear. He could have been including servants in his count, or he may have been exaggerating the numbers to gain sympathy.

59 Confederate Service Records. Col. Leadbetter to J.P. Benjamin, 29 January 1862.

60 Confederate Service Records. Chilian to Hon. Jon. Campbell, Asst. secretary of war, 21 November 1862.

61 Liernur, 8 June 1864. Translation of 'De Yankees zijn bijna uitgeput.'

After the summer of 1863, Liernur had told his superiors in the Confederate government that he needed to go to Europe to be fitted for an artificial leg, since no proper prosthetic could be found in the Confederacy. At one point, he was granted furlough for this purpose, but he missed an opportunity to sail for England because, as he said in a letter to the Chief Confederate Engineer in Richmond, there had been ‘a misunderstanding on the part of the Govt. Agent’ entrusted with organizing the venture.⁶² As a consolation, Liernur was granted a post in Wilmington, North Carolina, where, he was told, he might be able to board a ship heading to Bermuda or Nassau. In Wilmington, Liernur served as the inspector engineer for the Confederates’ third military district, which comprised southern Virginia and North Carolina.⁶³ He remained there for the rest of the war, waiting for a ship that never sailed.

Liernur was reluctant to leave the United States without his family, and he indicated more than once that he wanted to take his family with him on his trip to England. It is easy to speculate that Liernur used this line of argument as a ruse to justify his escape to Europe with his family in tow. His wife, Theodora, eagerly wished to return to Europe.⁶⁴ In 1861, the couple’s first daughter was born, making it now four children to take care of: Francis (born 1854), George Albert (born 1857), William Peter (born 1859) and Jeannette Theodora (born 1861). In the years before the war, Liernur had also spent long intervals away from his family. When he returned, he would bring joy to his children by allowing them to ride in the locomotive with him or their uncle Peter.⁶⁵ In his absence, Theodora became his secretary, writing in French to Liernur’s parents. In 1858, the family had also hired a maid, an ‘old English woman’, he wrote.⁶⁶ Liernur’s descriptions of his children showed him to be an attentive, loving father.⁶⁷ Despite his rise in rank and accompanying rise in salary, Liernur again complained about his poverty and insufficient pay. He speculated that his foreign birth played a role in the military administration’s reluctance to promote him further.⁶⁸

The end of the war brought Liernur such financial ruin that he could not afford tickets for England. As Wilmington fell, he feared for his safety. He told his father:

You must know dear father that it is impossible to live here any longer, since the Northerners have taken over this city [Wilmington] they have freed the negroes and armed them. These dumb free people, who are not used to freedom, are

62 Confederate Service Records. Liernur, 10 November 1863. To Col. L.P. Gilmer, Chief Engineer in Richmond.

63 Liernur, 22 September 1864.

64 Liernur, 12 June 1863.

65 Liernur, 17 January 1858.

66 Liernur, 24/26? February 1858.

67 Liernur, 16 January 1862.

68 Confederate Service Records. Liernur, 15 November 1864. To Hon. W.P. Chilton, representative from Alabama in the Confederate House of Representatives in Richmond.



A photo of Liernur later in life.

Collection Ir. Mr. L. Barendregt, Leiden.

now let loose like so many devils... murder and break-ins are now the order of the day and everyone lives in constant fear for their family.⁶⁹

However, with the end of the war, Liernur was at least assured that he could return to his fatherland. At the end of May, 1865, he brought his family to New York City, where a cheque from his parents was waiting to be cashed. From New York, the Liernurs sailed to Liverpool.⁷⁰

Conclusion

After the war, Liernur enjoyed a successful career as an inventor and engineer in Europe, distancing himself from his past in the American South. He lived first in England, where he was the editor of a publication called *The Engineer*. He returned to live in the Netherlands for a few years, before moving to Germany. Liernur's fame as an engineer spread when he developed a successful, widely adopted sewage disposal system. For his services, he was knighted by the emperor of Austria-Hungary.⁷¹

In 1914, Liernur's daughter Novadora, born in 1866 in Germany, applied for a US passport from her temporary safe haven in Switzerland. Since the US authorities would have suspected that she was simply trying to flee the war in Europe, Novadora worked to convince them that she was deserving of a passport and had considered applying before, but had been delayed, first by the necessity of taking care of her aged father, and then out of her fear of travel brought on by the sinking of the *Titanic*. A letter accompanying her passport application relates the story of her father's experiences in the United States, notably without any reference to his Confederate ties. She begins the story with her father's arrival in the United States:

My father from an old Dutch family was sent in his youth by an important firm to America as [an] engineer. He did [what] he was engaged for and decided afterwards to stay, having got most tempting offers for interesting work. Keen and clever, he was soon employed as officer of engineers by the government, and having to build forts, lighthouse, and railroads, he became an American citizen. He got married and had four children, all born in the States.⁷²

69 Liernur, 4 May 1865. Translation of 'Gij moet weten lieve vader dat het onmogelijk is hier langer te wonen, sedert de noordelijken hier deze stad verovert hebben, hebben zij de negers vrijgemaakt en ze gewapent. Dese domme vreedden menschen, die aan vrijheid niet gewoon zijn, zijn nu als zoo veele duivelen losgelaten... Moord en inbrekken is nu den

orde van den dag en iedereen leeft in eene gedurige angst voor zijn huisgezin.'

70 Liernur, 4 June 1865.

71 Adam Scott, 'The Liernur System at Vienna', *Journal of the Society of Arts*, Vol. xxiv (London) 24 May 1876.

72 National Archives and Records Administration (NARA); Washington D.C.; *Passport*

In appealing to the suffering of her father in the American Civil War, however, she conveniently neglected to state that he had fought for the failed Confederate rebellion, that his ‘sword of honor’ was received not for courage in battle, as one might have assumed, but for engineering the defences of a Southern city, and that he lost his leg not as a result of sacrifice in battle, but in a railroad accident: ‘When war was declared, he followed as captain, got a sword of honor and was wounded several times. He lost one leg, his home, his fortune and a little girl.’⁷³

Liernur’s obituary, published in the Netherlands in 1893, also gave him the benefit of the doubt in his choice to defend the South. ‘When the civil war broke out, Liernur chose the side of the country where he had long worked and lived, as he was also convinced that the Northerners were not determined to free the slaves.’⁷⁴ However, on this latter point the obituary was incorrect, as Liernur’s letters attest that he knew full well the Union was fighting to free slaves. Indeed, he greatly feared the death of American slavery and the consequences for his lifestyle in the Southern economy. How the obituary writer got such a wrong impression is unclear, but it likely stemmed from a desire to protect Liernur’s reputation in an age when pro-slavery ideas in the Dutch World could no longer be defended.

In their later memories of the war, I have argued elsewhere, Dutch Americans tended to exaggerate the levels of their ethnic group’s commitment to the Union cause.⁷⁵ As the Dutch Americans cleansed their own history of any references to ambiguity about slavery, so the Dutch in the Netherlands were given a false impression of the Dutch American story. Most Dutch immigrants in the United States had settled in free states, and their letters to the old country spoke about family life and competitive markets, not slavery. Other sources that informed the Dutch conventional knowledge of their overseas kin were newspaper accounts and a few published books about the immigrants.⁷⁶ Not only did these sources not speak of any Dutchmen in the

Applications, January 2, 1906–March 31, 1925;
Collection Number: ARC Identifier 583830/MLR
Number A1 534; NARA Series: M1490; Roll #: 236.
The accompanying letter from Geneva is dated 9
December 1914.

73 *Ibid.*

74 Translation of ‘Toen de burgeroorlog uitbrak, koos Liernur partij voor het land waar hij zo lang geleefd en gewerkt had, temeer daar hij innig overtuigd was, dat ‘t den noordelijken niet bepaald te doen was om de slaven vrij te maken.’ *Eigen Haard, Geïllustreerd Volkstijdschrift* (Haarlem 1893) 281–281. Another obituary written by D.E. C. Knuttel in the Hague in March 1893, appeared in

De Ingenieur, Orgaan der Vereeniging van Burgelijke Ingenieurs 8:13 (1893) 136–137.

75 For a more complete historiography and summary of the Dutch American contribution to the Union effort, see Chapter 2 of my book, *How Dutch Americans Stayed Dutch: An Historical Perspective on Ethnic Identities* (Amsterdam 2014).

76 Examples include Dingman Versteeg, *Pelgirm-Vaders van Het Western: Eene Geschiedenis van de Worstelingen Der Hollandsche Nederzettingen in Michigan, Benevens Een Schets van de Stichting Der Kolonie Pella in Iowa* (Grand Rapids, MI 1886) and Henry E. Dosker, *Levenschets van Rev. A.C. Van Raalte, D.D.* (Nijkerk 1893).

Confederacy, they also neglected to describe the difficulty Dutch Americans had had when choosing sides in the debate on slavery. As Dutch historians confronted the history of their own nation's involvement in the slave trade, and the history of Dutch racial views more generally, a glance towards Dutch American historiography would have hardly contributed to the conversation. Kardux and Horton explain that the Dutch erased from the public consciousness any memory of their nation's slave trading and slaveholding past. As this memory is revived through renewed historical research, it is important to recognize that the Dutch Americans once also chose to forget the complexities of their past struggles with slavery.⁷⁷

During the American Civil War, Charles Liernur had argued that not only could racial slavery for blacks co-exist alongside freedom for whites, but that such an arrangement was preferable; morally, socially and economically. It is important not to treat Liernur as a lone curiosity, but to consider him as an example of the complexities of Dutch views on slavery in the mid-nineteenth century. Liernur's story demonstrates how a Dutchman placed into a slave society could come to explicitly support slavery without any internal moral dilemma, without being opposed by his family and without destroying his reputation in the Netherlands. The editions of the *Sheboygan Nieuwsbode* demonstrate moreover that plenty of Dutch Americans were sympathetic to maintaining slavery.

The implications of this view are important for Dutch and American history. That Dutch immigrants in the United States had ambiguous views about slavery, or that they could indeed defend it, challenges not only the hagiographic view of a morally good immigrant group, but more specifically, it challenges the view that anti-slavery was the natural extension of Dutch Americans' ideas about freedom. Other European immigrants in the period exhibited similar migration patterns by settling heavily in the Northern states. While some immigrants in the South held steadfast anti-slavery views and refused to fight, the Confederate army included perhaps 5,000 to 10,000 Germans, 20,000 Irish and as many as 2,000 French out of a total foreign-born Confederate population of around 218,000.⁷⁸ Because the Dutch in the South were small in number, they have remained largely invisible in the history of the American defence of slavery. Nevertheless, in viewing developments in racial ideologies in the Dutch World, the story of Dutch American involvement in the Civil War should not be neglected.

77 James Oliver Horton and Johanna C. Kardux, 'Slavery and the Contest for National Heritage in the United States and the Netherlands', *American Studies International* (June-October 2004) 51-74.

78 Dean B. Mahin, *The Blessed Place of Freedom: Europeans in Civil War America* (Washington, DC 2002) 59; Christian B. Keller, 'Pennsylvania and

Virginia Germans during the Civil War: A Brief History and Comparative Analysis', *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 109:1 (2001) 37-86. David T. Gleeson, "'To live and die [for] Dixie": Irish civilians and the Confederate States of America', *Irish Studies Review* 18:2 (May 2010) 139-153 DOI 10.1080/09670881003725879.

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