

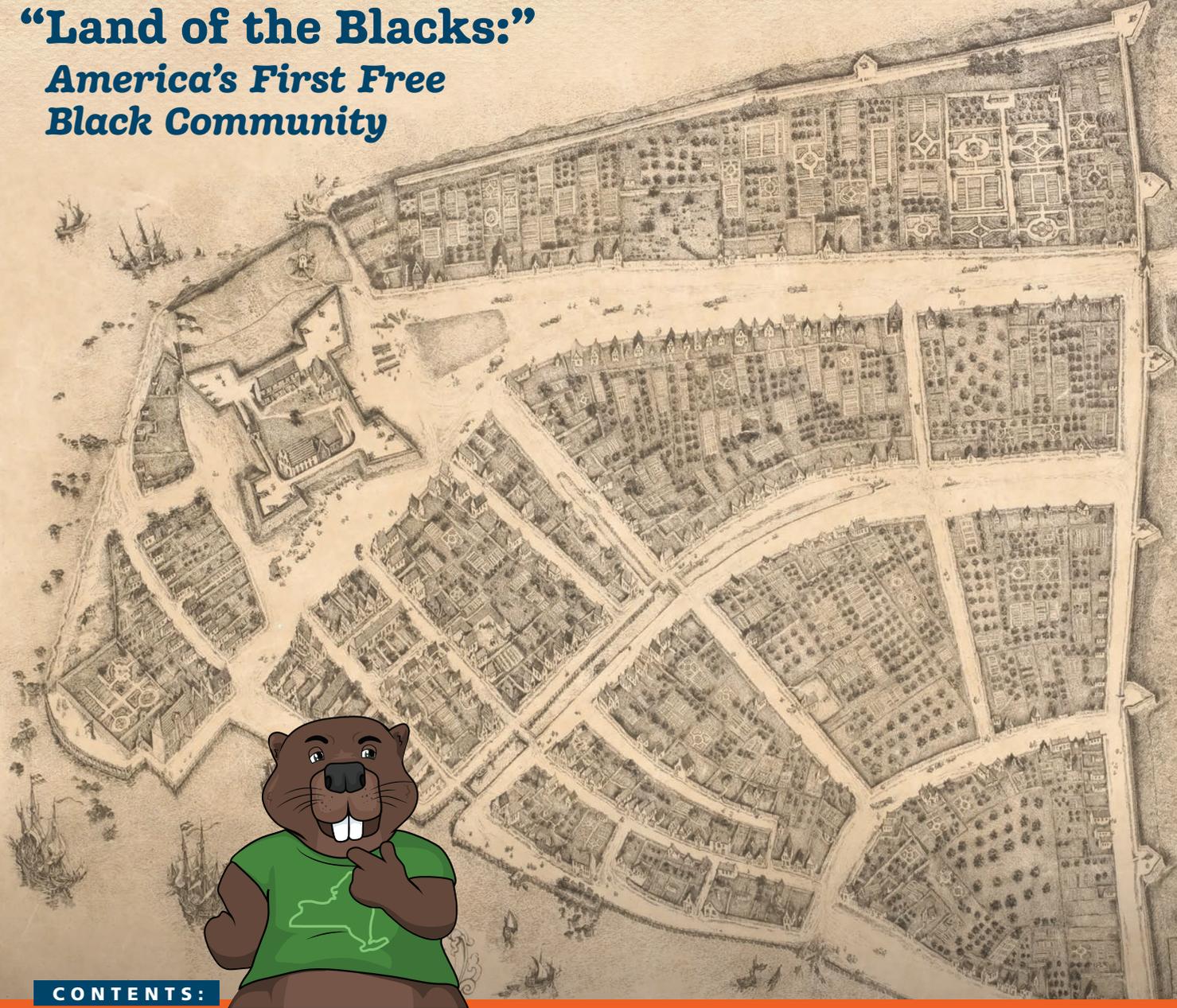
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## “Land of the Blacks:” America’s First Free Black Community



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# “Land of the Blacks:” America’s First Free Black Community

## AT THE STATE ARCHIVES

Jasmine Bumpers and Jamie Brinkman

The Colony of New Netherland was founded by the Dutch West India Company (WIC). Its purpose was to establish trade with the Native Americans in the area. In 1627, the first enslaved Africans arrived in New Amsterdam on the ship *Bruynvisch*. They were enslaved by the WIC. Over time, other enslaved people were brought to the colony as well.

In 1643, 11 enslaved men and their wives were given “half-freedom.” But this “freedom” had many rules. For example, they could be called back to work for the WIC at any time, they had to pay a fee each year to the WIC, and their children were still enslaved by the WIC.

Land was granted to these families. They were able to build homes and farms from which they could earn a living. But the WIC had a purpose in granting the land. The land

was northeast of the main settlement so that the Black residents would become a barrier between New Amsterdam and the neighboring Algonquin speaking communities.

The village was called the “Land of the Blacks.” It was one of the first free Black communities in the United States. The residents created farms, sold their crops, went to church, and became friends with their neighbors. The neighborhood did well.

On September 8, 1664, the British took over New Netherland from the Dutch. The British allowed the residents of the “Land of the Blacks” to keep their land, but in 1712, the British passed a law stating that Black landowners could not give their land to their children when they died. Because of this law, the village eventually disappeared.



## Gnaw on This



- The first enslaved Africans arrived in New Netherland on August 29, 1627.
- In November of 1711, a Common Council law established a market for the auctioning of enslaved individuals on Wall Street.
- In 1730, the British Colonial Government in New York passed a law known as the “New York Slave Code” to prevent enslaved individuals from rebelling.
- The Act for Gradual Abolition legally ended enslavement in New York State in 1827.
- Until 1841, non-residents were allowed to bring enslaved individuals into New York State and keep them here for up to 9 months.

## Community Connections

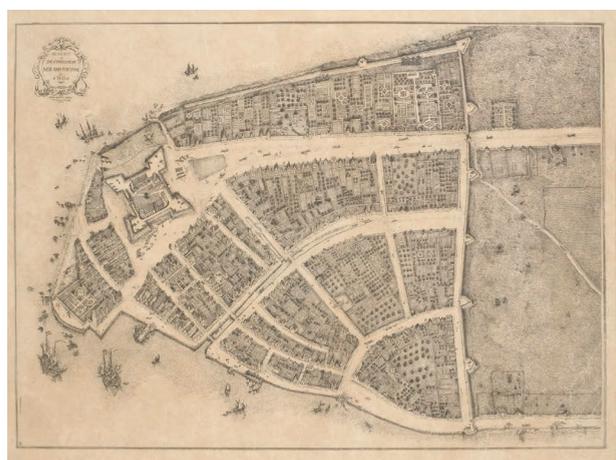


- **Weeksville Heritage Center**, Brooklyn. Learn about a free, 19th century African American Community. <https://www.weeksvillesociety.org/>
- **Seneca Village**, Central Park West, Manhattan. Discover one of the earliest African American Communities. <https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=170981>
- **African Burial Ground National Monument**, Manhattan. Visit the location of the largest known burial ground for free and enslaved Africans.
- **Mannahatta Park**, Manhattan. New York City’s Municipal Slave Market was in this location. <https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=84899>

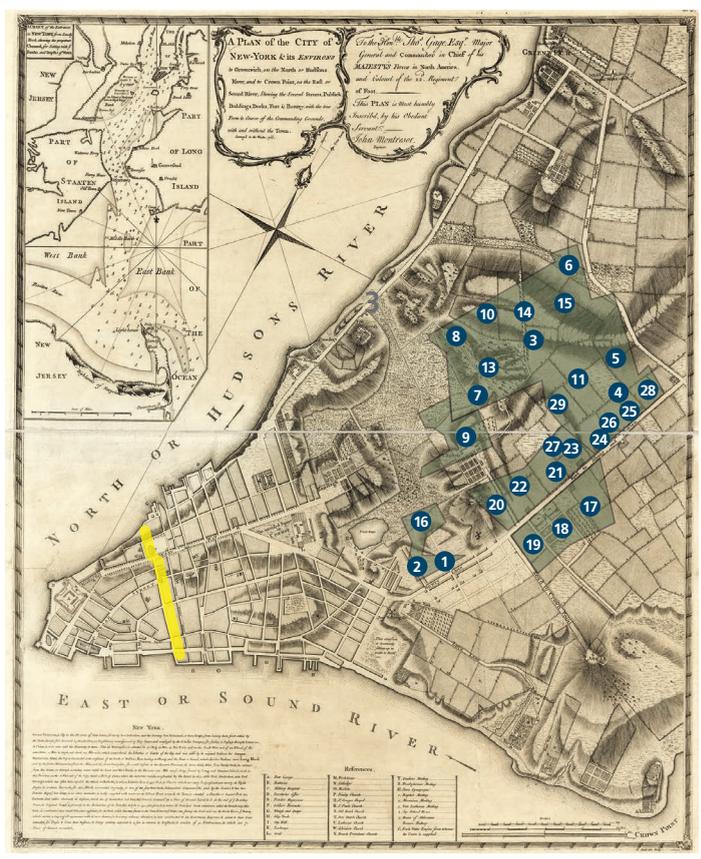


# Take a Closer Look

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_



The map above is from 1660. The area beyond the wall shown on this map was considered to be dangerous. The land of the Musnees lay further north and east.



The map to right was created in 1766. It shows where the Land of the Blacks was located. The yellow line is where the wall seen in the 1660 map was located. This map shows how the land beyond the wall was developed over time. Much of the development seen between the Wall (Wall Street) and the Land of the Blacks would not have been there in 1643.

**Observe:** Looking at both maps, describe where the Land of the Blacks was located. Use directional words and reference other places on the map.

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**Infer:** Using information from the article and your observations, why do you think the Land of the Blacks was in this location?

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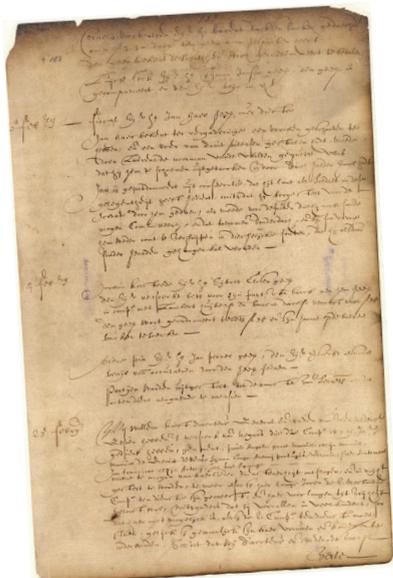
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## Learning Activity

### Manumission of Manuel de Gerrit & Ten Others



Above is the image of the original document. To the right is the translation. The original was written in Dutch.

#### The 25th of February

[1] We, Willem Kieft, director general, and the council of New Netherland, having considered the petition of the Negroes named Paulo Angolo, Big Manuel, Little Manuel, Manuel de Gerrit de Reus, Simon Congo, Antony Portuguese, Gracia, Piter Santomee, Jan Francisco, Little Antony and Jan Fort Orange, who have served the Company for 18 or 19 years, that they may be released from their servitude and be made free, especially as they have been many years in the service of the honorable Company here and long since have been promised their freedom; also, that they are burdened with many children, so that it will be impossible for them to support their wives and children as they have been accustomed to in the past if they must continue in the honorable Company's service; Therefore, we, the director and council, do release the aforesaid Negroes and their wives from their bondage for the term of their natural lives, hereby setting them free and at liberty on the same footing as other free people here in New Netherland, where they shall be permitted to earn their livelihood by agriculture on the land shown and granted to them, on condition that they, the above mentioned Negroes, in return for their granted freedom, shall, each man for himself, be bound to pay annually, as long as he lives, to the West India Company or their agent here, 30 schepels of maize, or wheat, pease, or beans, and one fat hog valued at 20 guilders, which 30 schepels and hog they, the Negroes, each for himself, promise to pay annually, beginning from the date hereof, on pain, if any one shall fail to pay the annual recognition, of forfeiting his freedom and again going back into the servitude of the said Company. With the express condition that their children, at present born or yet to be born, shall remain bound and obligated to serve the honorable West India Company as slaves. Likewise, that the above mentioned men shall be bound to serve the honorable West India Company here on land or water, wherever their services are required, on condition of receiving fair wages from the Company. Thus done, the 25th of February 1644, in Fort Amsterdam in New Netherland.



**Infer:** Underline information in the text, using the color key below.



Text that gives evidence of when this document was created.



Text that gives evidence of who was "released from servitude and be made free."



Text that gives evidence of where this document was created.



Text that gives evidence of freedoms gained by de Gerrit and the others.



Text that gives evidence of who created this document.



Text that gives evidence that de Gerrit and the others were not completely free.