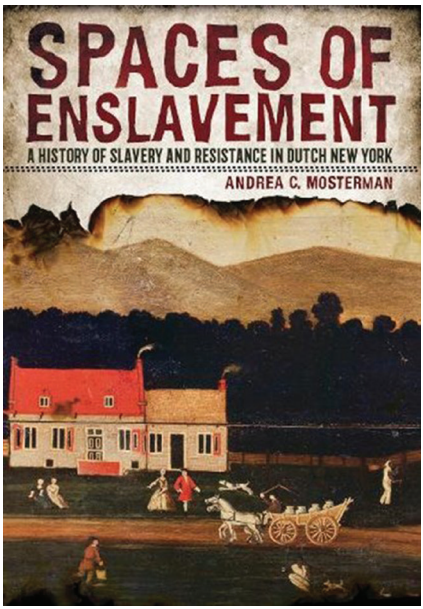
Review

Andrea C. Mosterman, *Spaces of Enslavement. A History of Slavery and Resistance in Dutch New York*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2025, 246 pp. ISBN 9781501781698.



'As I imagined the sounds, sights and smells of the space, that holding cell – its small size, thick walls, and only a loophole that provided some light and fresh air – told a story of enslavement and human trafficking that is rarely captured in written sources' (1). Upon paying a visit to the *Maison des Esclaves* on Gorée Island in Senegal, Andrea C. Mosterman realised how important it is to study the places where people experienced enslavement. Being physically in the space where enslaved people were once held sparked a feeling of what Johan Huizinga described as historical sensation, the sense of connection with the past and the emotion that arises from it. While many historians recognise the feeling, very few utilise historical sites as part of their research.

Spaces of Enslavement was originally published in hardcover in 2021 and is now available in paperback. The first two chapters provide the historical context on Dutch New Amsterdam/New York and the New Netherlands, while the subsequent three chapters examine distinct specific sites of enslavement: namely, public spaces, homes, and churches. Mosterman combines her archival research with archaeological and architectural studies to explore these spaces of enslavement in Dutch New York. This new perspective is a welcome addition to the field of slavery studies, helping to overcome the biases present in colonial archives and incorporate the often-missing voices of enslaved individuals.

Mosterman's main argument is that 'sustaining a system of enslavement necessitates strategic spatial control' (3). In Dutch New York, there were formal and informal systems in place to monitor the presence of Black people in public spaces. This surveillance aimed to restrict the activities of enslaved individuals in the public space. Gallows and prisons,

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which were often built on hills, were visible symbols of power. Runaway advertisements were posted in churches. Enslavers believed that they controlled their environment and assumed that enslaved people navigated the city in the same way. However, as Mosterman demonstrates, the lived experience of enslaved people was notably different. As they often lived and worked behind their enslavers' dwellings and in cellars, they had a distinct perspective on the towns they inhabited. In the fifth chapter, for example, the unequal treatment of Black congregants by the Dutch Reformed Church is examined by Mosterman: where they were seated during the sermons, and where they were buried after they died. How did they interact with White congregants? Like other chapter, this chapter shows 'that even when enslaved people', or in this case, free Black people, 'inhabited or frequented the same places as their enslavers, their experiences within these spaces were inherently different' (133-134).

Mosterman's interdisciplinary research is particularly evident in the fourth chapter, which investigates the impact of Dutch American architectural developments on the lives of enslaved people. In this chapter, Mosterman addresses the issue of how enslavers felt towards enslaved people, and the idea that these enslavers believed they shared a special bond with them. She mentions Scottish author and poet Anne Grant (1755-1838), who recounts her experience of living at the Schuyler Flats estate in Albany as a child. Grant depicted the lives of the enslaved people living on the estate, portraying an idealised version of slavery. She stated that enslaved workers and their children often remained with the same family throughout their lives. Grant also mentions two enslaved women, Maria and Diana, who appear to have been the primary ancestors of numerous family lines. However, Mosterman disputes this portrayal by citing a scientific study analysing the mtDNA of remains at the estate, which showed no matrilineal relation. She argues that, while Grant may not have intentionally misinterpreted family connections, her account is subject to significant criticism. Her description neglects the harsh realities of slavery and often exaggerates the opportunities available to enslaved people to form families.

Mosterman's use of spatial analysis is particularly powerful because it enables her to answer the kind of seemingly simple questions that documents kept in archives typically cannot answer. For example, it helps to identify where enslaved people worked and lived within the house, and crucially, it offers insights into how they might have experienced their enslavement. In doing so, she provides new perspectives on the everyday realities of enslavement. A striking example of this is her discussion of the Lott House in Brooklyn, New York. Mosterman describes how archaeologists found several artefacts placed ritually below the floorboards: corncobs, a child's shoe, and a cloth pouch containing an oyster shell and part of a sheep or goat pelvis. Their placement near the chimney and doorway suggests that they served as protective charms. These findings help us to understand the dual nature of the home: 'to the enslaved men, women, and children who lived in these houses, however, these were spaces of enslavement, forced labor, abuse, and possible separation from family members. To them, these homes represented anything *but* a safe haven' (94). Indeed, in recent years, historians have challenged the notion that slavery on plantations was inherently crueller than household slavery, highlighting instead the distinct risks and dangers associated with the latter. For instance, women in

household slavery were often at risk of sexual harassment or abuse due to their proximity to the enslaver, as Mosterman also notes. Using spatial analysis, Mosterman is able to provide a detailed explanation of the specific risks encountered by people enslaved in households by describing living arrangements and daily activities.

Mosterman's *Spaces of Enslavement* is a valuable addition to Dutch New York historiography and an inspiring resource for global slavery studies. Her work emphasises that the historical sensation occasionally experienced by historians deserves closer scrutiny, as it can prompt us to ask new questions, and develop fresh perspectives and thereby enrich our understanding of early modern slavery.

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