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Resilient Subjects: Negotiating Allegiance in a Contested Colonial Territory.

During the seventeenth century, no less than ten different colonial regimes sought to assert their authority over the Delaware Valley in eastern North America. A few succeeded, but most failed. Success brought its own problems, as Dutch authorities in the West India Company discovered when they conquered New Sweden in 1655. Unable to populate the territory with Dutch settlers, the WIC's officials in New Netherland had no choice but to allow the existing Finnish and Swedish population to remain along the river, where several hundred had built farms and started families. This paper considers the relationship that these Finnish and Swedish settlers forged with New Netherland's officials and explores how understandings of allegiance and nation shaped that relationship. It shows how a diverse community of settlers forged a common ethnic and political identity as a loyal "nation" of subjects in collaboration with local Dutch authorities who welcomed their labor and their allegiance. Yet their separate status was not so welcome to metropolitan authorities, who saw danger in a conquered "nation" maintaining significant autonomy in a contested colonial territory. The paper examines how these various sets of authorities and settlers negotiated solutions to their differences at a critical location and a critical period in colonial North America. It considers, as well, the lessons their experiences might provide for contemporary questions of identity and allegiance, the incorporation of foreigners, the extension of the rights of citizenship, and the relation between governors and governed in times of crisis.

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