

Neighborly Rendition: Interpolity Law, Mobility, and the Boundaries of Political Community in Anglo-Dutch America, 1624–64

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Officials in the Dutch, English, and Swedish colonies of the seventeenth-century Atlantic seaboard frequently corresponded to request the rendition of fugitives who had sought freedom across imperial boundaries. In these requests, officials deployed a political language of neighborliness as a rhetorical device to frame rendition arrangements in ways that bolstered jurisdictional boundaries without compromising obligations to sustain imperial claims. Colonists' strategic use of this neighborly idiom reveals how networks of cross-imperial collaboration and exchange were not purely economic or cosmopolitan projects; they were constructed through political processes of community and boundary formation. Performances of neighborly rendition simultaneously affirmed colonial communities as clearly bounded jurisdictions and constructed a normative interpolity framework for adjudicating property claims over mobile people. Attention to such frameworks centers the importance of private law and property relations, rather than state-centric legal rubrics, for the construction of interpolity legal regimes. Through this lens, European colonizing appears less a sequence of discrete and competing imperial ventures than a fractious but interconnected process of property formation and extraction anchored in efforts to regulate mobility and define political community.