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The Colonial History of the House of Orange-Nassau

The Dutch Monarchy and Its Colonial History, 1600-2025

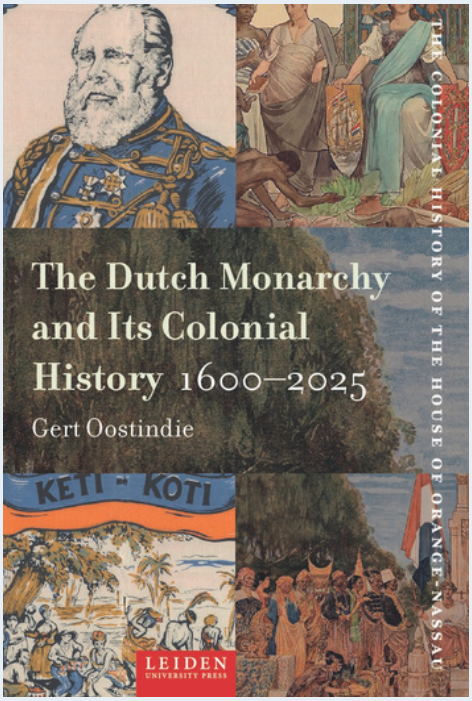
Gert Oostindie

An initiative of King Willem-Alexander

What role did the House of Orange-Nassau play in Dutch colonial history? Were the Orange-Nassaus mainly symbols of the empire or were they actively involved in the colonial expansion, slavery, and economic exploitation? The historian Gert Oostindie has written a powerful, accessible book assessing four centuries of entanglement between the Orange-Nassaus and the colonial empire. Drawing on a major academic research programme initiated by King Willem-Alexander, Gert Oostindie shows how the House of Orange-Nassau was implicated in colonial trade, war, and slavery. The family utilized its prestige and power in its involvement in the East and West India Companies, as well as in Indonesia, Suriname, and the Caribbean islands.

The Orange-Nassaus aided expansion overseas and lent a regal allure to the empire while benefiting from colonial revenue. Yet their role was in constant flux. King William I proactively shaped the colonial empire, while Queen Wilhelmina became the figurehead of Dutch imperialism in its heyday. It was only after decolonization that the family found room for doubts, reflection, and (eventually) apologies.

Gert Oostindie is Emeritus Professor of Colonial and Postcolonial History at Leiden University and former Director of the KITLV /Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies in Leiden (KITLV -KNAW). He published extensively on colonial and postcolonial history.



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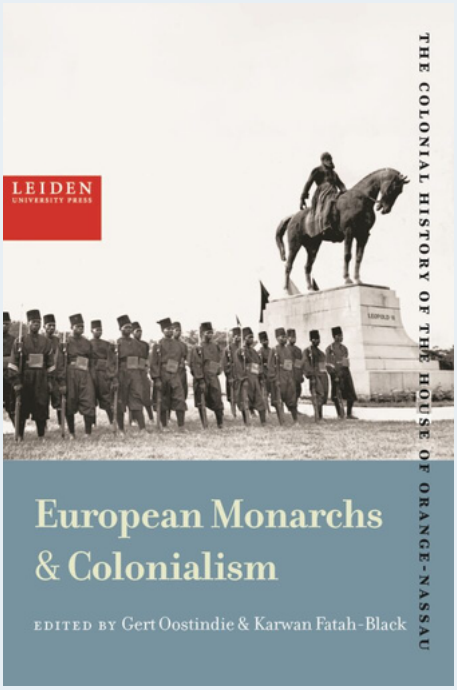

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