**Amsterdam and New Amsterdam with Russell Shorto**

**Context on source:** Russell Shorto is a writer of narrative history and the author of the books Smalltime, Amsterdam, Descartes Bones, and The Island at the Center of the World. At his website russellshorto.com you can also find his mini-course on learning to write your family’s story.

**Questions about Amsterdam (starting at 7:55-29 minutes)**

1. What was Russell Shorto’s argument in his book “Amsterdam?”
2. What role did geography play in the Dutch story?
3. What is liberalism? Why was Amsterdam so important to the development of liberalism?
4. Why were the Dutch important in the development of the Enlightenment?
5. Who were Rene Descartes and Baruch Spinoza? And why were they so important?
6. Why does Shorto believe that religious toleration developed in the Netherlands? What was the Union of Utrecht?

**Island at the Center of the World (7:55-11:15 and then from about 29 minutes)**

1. What was New Amsterdam? What role did pirates play in the founding of New Amsterdam?
2. What is Russell Shorto’s argument about New Amsterdam and its importance?
3. Who was Adrian Van der Donck? Why was he important? Why did he have conflict with Pieter Stuyvesant?
4. How did Dutch residents of New Amsterdam advocate for rights in the colony?
5. How did relations with Native Americans (and the choices made by the Dutch director) influence discontent among the Dutch settlers?
6. According to Shorto, what is the historical consensus about women in Amsterdam and New Amsterdam?
7. What was an important negative aspect of the colony of New Amsterdam?

**Reflection Questions**

1. Which aspect of the conversation did you find most interesting? Important? Surprising?