

**DUTCH-AMERICAN IDENTITY POLITICS:  
THE USE OF HISTORY BY DUTCH IMMIGRANTS**

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## *Dutch-American Identity Politics: The Use of History by Dutch Immigrants*

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In 1991 Guy Vander Jagt, Republican Congressman from Michigan, succeeded in securing two hundred twenty signatures from his colleagues in the House of Representatives to send a resolution to President Bush asking him to declare 16 November “Dutch-American Heritage Day.”<sup>1</sup> In an interview Vander Jagt revealed that not all of his colleagues signed because they felt so close to the Dutch, but because they could not resist Vander Jagt’s oratorical wit. Guy remembers how he approached Congressman Jim Bunning, a former baseball pitcher, who refused to comply, saying, “I don’t do that sort of things,” and how he responded with, “Come on Jim. You pitched for the Detroit Tigers. Detroit is Michigan and Michigan is Holland, Michigan. It’s sort of your State.” This example of irrefutable logic persuaded Bunning and many others to sign and President Bush Sr. duly elevated 16 November to the status of commemoration day for the ethnic heritage of the estimated eight million Americans identifying with their Dutch roots.<sup>2</sup> Vander Jagt admitted that he had initiated this act to please his Dutch constituency, but without the desired success.

Historians find this phenomenon intriguing, since it has historical antecedents to do with the use of history in public announcements. In this paper I want to explore the ways Dutch immigrants in the United States used history (both Dutch and American history) and what they achieved with it.

### *Immigrant Strategies*

In 2000, the Norwegian literary historian Orm Overland analyzed the strategies used by non-British immigrants in creating their home in the United States.<sup>3</sup> He asserts that immigrants participated early in the modern process of identity politics, because they were caught in the middle between being foreign in America and equally foreign in their home countries. Whatever they decided about maintaining or surrendering their old culture, they met critical responses from their relatives or their surroundings. A way out of this tension was to create mythical stories connecting their group’s heritage with America.

Overland identified three types of myths available to the immigrants: a foundation myth that claimed a share in the origin of the United States, a myth of sacrifice that emphasized the contribution of immigrants in America’s wars, and an ideological myth that asserted that an immigrant group had an American disposition (usually love of freedom and democracy) before it had even emigrated. These myths were common ingredients in the popular and filiopietist histories and commemorative addresses of Euro-American groups from 1870 to 1930, the decades of massive European immigration, and were often used in combination. Ethnic leaders deployed these strategies to strengthen their group’s self-respect and a sense

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<sup>1</sup> The date referred to 16 November 1776 when the batteries of the Dutch castle on St. Eustatius fired the first salute to the flag of the rebellious United States. The government of the Dutch Republic waited until 1782 to officially recognize America’s independence, but the commercial base in the West Indies was quick to accept a virtual reality.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Witteveen, “The Dutch Sentiment of Guy Vander Jagt,” *DIS Magazine*, December 1997, 8-17. Vander Jagt used his Dutch background in his keynote address at the Republican National Convention in Detroit in 1980 to nominate Ronald Reagan. I do not think that many Americans outside the Dutch subculture noticed this event. Not even the *New York Times* reported the introduction of this day.

<sup>3</sup> Orm Overland, *Immigrant Minds, American Identities: Making the United States Home, 1870-1930* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

of continuity in order to prevent their group from anonymously sliding into the amorphous American society.

This common pattern among European immigrant groups did not mean they showed solidarity with one another. Foundation myths of one group competed with similar myths of another group in order to move a step up on the ladder of privilege. When Norwegian-Americans promoted Leif Erikson as the “discoverer” of the New World, Italian-Americans considered this act an embezzlement of “their” Columbus. Swedes tried to push Finns out of the celebration of the founding of New Sweden because Finland was not an independent nation in the seventeenth century. Nor were these invocations always successful. Germans during World War I unsuccessfully deployed arguments of sacrifice in order to keep their place in the pecking order. The Irish were first in developing a myth of ideology, based on their fight against the British and their struggle for freedom. The tenuous nature of this myth is evident when we find no welcoming reception for the Irish upon their arrival on American soil in the 1840s and 1850s as “freedom fighters.”

Not all uses of history were monolithic within one ethnic group. Class made a difference: typical working-class socialistic sympathies did not encourage these myths, since these myths destroyed labor solidarity. The location of the settlement, the interaction with surrounding ethnic groups, and the presence of the dominant Anglo-Saxons determined the choice of arguments: midwestern and eastern reactions could differ. Immigrant groups preferred to use the foundation myth, followed by the myth of sacrifice and ideology myth. We will see that different sections in the Dutch-American subculture chose different strategies.

Not only recent immigrants used their heritage to demand more respect. Simultaneously, organizations of respectable descendants of colonial immigrants emerged explicitly to protect their specific heritage, and later in the twentieth century foreign governments discovered the same strategy to strengthen diplomatic and economic relations. Around the time of the Great War, the Dutch minister in Washington faithfully attended the annual meetings of the Holland and Netherlands Societies in his region singing the praises of the Netherlands as the “Holy Land of Modern Europe” (to quote an Oxford don) and raise emotional support for the Dutch position.<sup>4</sup>

[Apart from these three positive myths, immigrant subcultures created negative myths. A key example of this category is the “No Irish Need Apply” story, deconstructed by historian Richard Jensen.<sup>5</sup> This widespread belief in the signs rejecting Irish workers proved to be imaginary, apart from a few ads and popular songs. Jensen explains the persistence of this myth by showing the strong ties of working-class solidarity among the Irish, which had strong and effective collective bargaining strategies. This helped them to gain and keep considerable political power. The “No Irish Need Apply” myth might very well have been meant to issue defensive warnings not to break these bonds of solidarity by accepting jobs from Protestants or others outside the circle of control. This “negative” myth was not in competition with the “positive home-making” myth; on the contrary, it emphasized the perceived unfairness that the Irish were wanted in the American army, but not in regular jobs.]

The value of historian Overland’s analysis is that it transforms the meaning of ethnic celebrations in the United States from rear view mirrors of nostalgia to windows on the future as instruments to make America home.

### *Dutch History Surfaces*

One could conclude that groups most under pressure in American society would turn to these devices first. But the evidence reveals no specific link between nativism and an effort to claim a part in America’s heritage. For instance, the publication of the first Dutch-American newspaper (the *Sheboygan*

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<sup>4</sup> *Addresses Netherlands Society of Philadelphia*, 155, 159. Sweden started to contact the Swedish-Americans only in the 1930s, when the Swedish government needed to strengthen bilateral relations and used the commemoration of New Sweden as a welcome and positive event.

<sup>5</sup> See his annotated and illustrated online publication at <http://tiger.uic.edu/~rjensen/no-irish.htm>.

*Nieuwsbode*) in 1848 was more a result of the recent wave of immigrants who needed a channel of communication than of emerging nativism. One could assume that once a group reached the status of acceptance, these three myths lost their usefulness. This appears not to be the case, since these tropes still function in official diplomatic exchanges, and they continue to be revived at the building of international relations (which is, of course, a different use of similar strategies).

The first scholarly attention given to the Dutch in the New World was not a product of the “tribe.” While Washington Irving had placed the New Netherland Dutch in a comic light in his Knickerbocker tales, the Dutch reputation had received a serious correction in the late 1840s thanks to the publication of *The History of New Netherland* by an Irish-American Edmund B. O’Callaghan, which provided a factual treasure trove for the foundation myth. This boost was surpassed by the even more popular *The Rise of the Dutch Republic* in 1856 by the Anglo historian John Lothrop Motley.<sup>6</sup> For almost seventy-five years this book determined the image of the Netherlands in the English-speaking world, even though it was not as well-researched as his later books. The fabulous sales of this book were a result of the obvious parallels between the Dutch and American wars of Independence and the increasing tension between North and South, while it also took an anti-Spanish and anti-Catholic perspective. Motley hoped to liberate the English-speaking world from its concentration on itself. He provided the arguments for the ideological parallels between the Dutch and American Republics and was aided by Douglas Campbell, who in his book on the Puritan in England, Holland, and America, published in 1892, denied the British the honor of having nursed American institutions.

The celebration of America’s centennial in 1876 and the professionalization of historical studies in the U.S. kindled the interest in Clio. In the 1880s the awareness of the historical ties between the U.S. and Holland were rediscovered and published. In 1881 the American minister in the Netherlands, James Birney, retraced the evidence for the first salute at St. Eustatius in Dutch archives. At the end of the decade, the ceremonies at Plymouth, Massachusetts, triggered one of his successors, Samuel R. Thayer, to make an effort to erect a monument for the Pilgrims’ departure in Delfshaven.<sup>7</sup>

International affairs also contributed to the growing awareness of Dutch ethnicity. The Boer Wars of the early 1880s, and in particular those of the 1899-1902 years, pumped up feelings of ethnic solidarity with the descendants of the Dutch in South Africa, who played the heroic role of the underdog. The horror stories about the concentration camps where innocent women and children suffered aroused an anti-British sentiment that lasted till after World War I. The financial and protest campaigns to support the Boers further strengthened the ties with the Netherlands, where similar sentiments gained ground. The Boers stood for the virtues of faith and courage that the Dutch liked to identify with.<sup>8</sup> These events prove that the sources documenting the Dutch presence were available, and that the motives to remember the Dutch part came from outside the circle of recent Dutch immigrants.

### *Holland Society*

In the mid-1880s societies were founded with the mission to preserve Dutch heritage. The founding of the venerable Holland Society of New York in 1885 was a reaction of the Old Dutch colonial elite to the overwhelming forces of industrialization and immigration. Its establishment resulted from a court case

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<sup>6</sup> Alice P. Kenney, *Stubborn for Liberty: The Dutch in New York* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1975), 191-96. O. D. Edward, “John Lothrop Motley and the Netherlands,” in *A Bilateral Bicentennial: A History of Dutch-American Relations 1782-1982*, eds. J.W. Schulte Nordholt and Robert P. Swierenga (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1982), 171-98.

<sup>7</sup> *Papers Relating to Foreign Relations of the United States*. 1881 (Washington, D.C., 1882), 847-51, and 1889 (1890), 640-41.

<sup>8</sup> Thanks to Michael Douma’s unpublished paper “Holland, Michigan, and the Boer War” (Hope College, 2003) and Hans Ester, “Oubaas Penning,” *Transparant* 10, no. 2 (April 1999); Chris van Koppen, *De geuzen van de negentiende eeuw. Abraham Kuiper en Zuid-Afrika* (1992). *De Grondwet*, 22 February 1881: poem to endorse a petition to support the Boers.

where the lawyers and judges were all “Van’s”: Van Siclen, Van Allen, Vanderpoel and Van Vorst.<sup>9</sup> The requirement that members of the newly founded society needed to be descendants of the New Netherland Dutch before 1675, was clearly a class barrier. The society served to collect information about the Dutch in America, write its history, and promote the principles and virtues of their Dutch ancestors, and drew more than two hundred members in its first year. The Dutch consul general Planten provided replicas of historical artifacts which served as symbols of the courage the Dutch showed in defending civil and religious liberties.<sup>10</sup> Soon other chapters of the Holland Society were founded in other cities with a sizable Dutch-American population.

To solidify their Dutch roots, a group of fifty members visited the Netherlands in the summer of 1888 and were fêted by mayors and businessmen. The society delighted in drawing publicity to its rich dinners. They reenacted Dutch customs in food, drinks, smokes, ornaments, and songs. Apart from the valuable publication of Dutch primary sources from the colonial period, the patrician Holland Society members composed superiority songs such as the following:<sup>11</sup>

“I’m a Van of a Van of a Van of Van  
Of a Van of a way back line;  
On every rugged feature ancestral glories shine;  
And all our band in kinship stand  
With all that’s old and fine;  
I’m a Van of a Van of a Van of a Van  
of a Van of a way back line.”

These patricians used these foundation stories of New Netherland as ammunition in progressive politics. In 1903 Robert B. Roosevelt, former American minister to the Netherlands, founding member of the Holland Society, and uncle to President Theodore Roosevelt, used the commemoration of the first city charter of New York in 1653 to attack New York’s submission to the corrupt bosses in Albany. He drew from the Dutch heritage to claim the city’s “birthright of independence and self-reliance.”<sup>12</sup> This triggered a discussion to materialize this legacy by raising funds for a statue of William the Silent, which took more than twenty years to arrive and five more years to be erected on the campus of Rutgers University.<sup>13</sup> They also anchored the Dutch-American legacy to locations in the Netherlands. In 1914 the “Dutchophile” Congregational minister of Anglo descent, William E. Griffis, boasted of having erected ten monuments in the Netherlands in towns with links to American history.<sup>14</sup> The Society also initiated and sponsored the

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<sup>9</sup> David William Voorhees, *The Holland Society: A Centennial History 1885-1985* (New York: Holland Society of New York, 1985), 6. Of course, the St. Nicholas Society was founded fifty years earlier, in 1835, but this society was more a mock-society with a high degree of entertainment and socializing in the tradition of the Knickerbockers.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>11</sup> See article in *New York Times*, 11 January 1890.

<sup>12</sup> Robert B. Roosevelt, “The Oldest Charter of New York,” in *Yearbook of the Holland Society of New York*, ed. Theodore M. Banta (1903), 234. The Society continued to provide a platform for political networkings as became clear in 1924 when the president of the Holland Society of New York spoke at the Netherlands Society of Philadelphia annual banquet to encourage its members to help build a more efficient railroad connection with New York City.

<sup>13</sup> Voorhees, *Holland Society*, 66-68.

<sup>14</sup> *Addresses of the Netherlands Society of Philadelphia*, p. 76-81; W.E. Griffis, “Thankful America,” *The Outlook* 106 (10 January 1914): 88-90. See also Annette Stott, *Holland Mania*, 78-100. Griffis believed that he had to correct the fervent sectionalism displayed by New England, because he was convinced that the true unifying forces in the U.S. were found in the Middle States, which had a stronger Dutch influence. Recognition of the European contributions to the United States was a rather common feature; see the series of Herbert N. Casson in the 1906 volume of *Munsey* featuring a variety of twelve immigrant groups. The Dutch (mostly colonial) were portrayed in the November issue: “The Dutch in America,” p. 238-42. Scholarly attention for the Dutch element in America was given in the *American Historical Association Report for 1909* (1911) by the Dutch historian H.T. Colenbrander, “The Dutch

celebration of the expedition of Henry Hudson, who was commissioned by the Dutch East India Company in 1609, and had a replica built of the *Halve Maen*. However, the joint celebration of Hudson with Fulton's first steam ship to navigate the Hudson River obscured the Dutch element beyond recognition.<sup>15</sup>

### *Midwestern Dutch*

The first wave of Dutch immigrants arriving in Michigan in the 1840s did not need to explicitly confirm their loyalty, since most of them felt at home in America. They faithfully celebrated the 4<sup>th</sup> of July.<sup>16</sup> The twenty-fifth commemoration of 1872 was still very much a religious ceremony. Zeeland became aware of the importance of its history in 1879, when thirty-two men founded the Oude Settlers Vereeniging to write their settlement history. Its first serious celebration was the fortieth anniversary of the founding of their town in 1887.<sup>17</sup>

Resistance against Americanization was felt most in circles of the Christian Reformed Church. In 1887 one of its ministers in classis Holland stated that 4 July was a necessary evil. *De Grondwet* editor L. Mulder protested against this judgment and considered it a result of a misunderstanding among the Dutch about the gap between church and society, while he believed American society was a "positively Christian society." Moreover, Mulder regretted that this abject position broke the unity in the Dutch community by excluding others as had happened in Overisel where the CRC had withdrawn its presence because the religious element was absent.<sup>18</sup>

The most public platform for displaying the Dutch heritage was the Chicago Columbian exposition in 1893. The Dutch presence at the Chicago World's Fair consisted of a few minor exhibits of contemporary economic artifacts such as a herring schooner and a cocoa mill. The main attention was drawn to the 332 paintings displayed in 9,300 square feet. This exhibit of old and new masters was exuberantly received, and stood in stark contrast to the old-fashioned uniforms of the Dutch in the military parade, which did not fill the spectators with awe. Art surpassed history as the vehicle of ethnic pride. Commissioner-general George Birkhoff took the opportunity to draw attention on 31 August to Princess Wilhelmina's birthday as a day of festivities.<sup>19</sup> This day did not catch on until the next World's Fair in 1933. The preparation and presentation of the Dutch legacy at the World's Fairs of 1893 and 1933 triggered the founding of several Dutch clubs in Chicago, such as the elitist Holland Society in 1895 and the more humble Saint Nicholas Society in 1905, but none of them lasted long.<sup>20</sup> Their programs were heavily laden with historical references to William of Orange and fully exploited the common ideological basis of the Netherlands and the United States.

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Element in American History," 193-201, and Ruth Putnam, "The Dutch Element in the United States," 205-18. Colenbrander refuted the distorted views of Campbell.

<sup>15</sup> Lincoln Diamant, *Hoopla on the Hudson: An Intimate View of New York's Great Hudson-Fulton Celebration* (Fleischmanns, N.Y.: Purple Mountain Press, 2003).

<sup>16</sup> *De Hollander*, 5 Juli 1872. This showed in 1872 when the regional celebration of the 4<sup>th</sup> of July took place in the town of Zeeland, which was visited by many citizens of Grand Rapids. *The Hollander* noticed that the community had not celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of its settlement, but that it had not prevented the organization of Independence Day to be a success. Since the Netherlands did not celebrate a national holiday, the festivities on 4 July are already a sign of Americanization.

<sup>17</sup> *De Grondwet*, 11 March 1879 and 19 July 1887. *De Hollander*, 8 July 1874, gives the typical program of Independence Day in Holland, with music, drama, food, and patriotic speeches about the American Revolution. *De Grondwet* of 10 July 1883 called for a serious celebration of the principle of the sovereignty of the people, which had its precedent in Dutch history.

<sup>18</sup> *De Grondwet*, 7 June 1887.

<sup>19</sup> <http://columbus.gl.iit.edu/bookfair/ch21.html#735>

<sup>20</sup> Robert P. Swierenga, *Dutch Chicago: A History of the Hollanders in the Windy City* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 526-50.

### *More Distinction*

After the turn of the century, the claim of Dutch distinction became more explicit. In 1907, Western Theological Seminary professor Nicholas M. Steffens expressed the pride of his ethnic group when he addressed the crowd at the celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of the colony. He claimed that the Dutch had become excellent citizens because they had preserved the good parts of their Dutch character. He continued with a disdainful comment on the inferiority of the recent immigrants from East and Southern Europe: "Perhaps it is good that Italians, Hungarians, Greeks, Polaks, and Russians do not establish settlements, but are soon swallowed up by the mighty American spirit, but when immigrants arrive from countries, whose citizens have something to offer that is wise to preserve, than it is a blessing for themselves as for the Americans, if they come as the Hollanders came in AD 1847."<sup>21</sup>

At the same event the Reverend Matthew Kolyn defined the mission of the Hollander in America in a combination of all three myths: "We are persuaded that the Hollander in America has come to stay. His influence is to be powerful and lasting; it has been known and felt during the three centuries that have passed since his coming. His name is written large upon the pages of American history. His love for and devotion to the new fatherland have been unquestioned. In peace and in war, the Hollander in America has been a patriot of the noblest type." His argument was fully historical: the Dutch had not only founded New Amsterdam, but had come in the shape of the Pilgrims, who were thoroughly Dutchified, and in the person of William Penn, who had a Dutch mother, to fulfill an important role in keeping America pure and orderly.<sup>22</sup>

Similar stories reached far and determined the positive sentiment toward the Dutch in the Midwest. Vice consul Gerrit Klay of Orange City, Iowa, reported in 1931 that the obedient Dutch had not been involved in any criminal court cases in the past three years. "This is in accordance with a remark made by President Hoover not long ago: 'The Dutch descendants over here are never in prison and never in the poor house.'"<sup>23</sup> Though many Dutch like to read these remarks as signs of their moral superiority, they were actually results of a settlement pattern with a strong social cohesion, caused by the dominant family migration to rural areas within a tight religious frame work.

The young generation inculcated these ideas: William C. Walvoord exemplified the heroic Dutch past that the students embraced at Hope College. In February 1908 this Wisconsin student won the oratorical contest (see the *Anchor*) with a tale on the Siege of Leyden, "Heroism, sacrifice, and nobleness of purpose are qualities which characterize not only the defense of Leyden, but... [t]he American Revolution, qualities which are essential to every struggle for true freedom."<sup>24</sup> In the same year *Ladies' Home Journal* editor Edward W. Bok awarded a prize to Hope student George F. Huizinga for his essay on what the Dutch had contributed to the development of the American West.<sup>25</sup>

### *The Great War*

World War I increased the stakes of the Dutch in regard to American public opinion. The Dutch had to fear degradation since their neutral fatherland missed out on the heroic tale and was even associated with the enemy. This threat was also felt on the West Coast, where Henry A. Van Coenen Torchiana, a

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<sup>21</sup> N.M. Steffens, "Het zestigjarig feest," *Historical Souvenir of the Celebration of the Sixtieth Anniversary of the Colonization of the Hollanders in Western Michigan* (1908), 113.

<sup>22</sup> Matthew Kolyn, "The Hollander in America," *ibid.*, 55-64, quote on 59.

<sup>23</sup> Nationaal Archief, Den Hague, Inventory 2.05.13 Gezantschap VS, 406 Orange City, 1919-1934, report to the Minister in Washington, 5 January 1931.

<sup>24</sup> William C. Walvoord, *Windmill Memories: A Remembrance of Life in a Holland-American Community Before the Turn of the Century* (Cedar Grove, Wis.: Villager Publications, 1979), 57-58. The lecture was published in the *Anchor*, April 1908, 5-10.

<sup>25</sup> George Ford Huizinga, *What the Dutch Have Done in the West of the United States* (Philadelphia: privately printed, 1909). A *Banner* editorial by Henry Beets congratulated the winners, but regretted that the contest was not extended to include Calvin College as well (21 January 1909). Arnold Mulder received the second prize.



former cowboy turned businessman, did what one would expect from a consul-general: he gave an overview of the state of trade between the United States and the Netherlands in 1918. He embarked on a course of cultural diplomacy, since he was aware of the fact that “public opinion will act very largely as a jury of future trade relations.”<sup>26</sup> He had no doubts about the positive judgment of the American press of the Netherlands. Confidently he announced: “American public opinion will do justice to the Netherlands and its people for two reasons: Because this public opinion is American, and therefore Fair, and because the Netherlands people deserve it.”<sup>27</sup> He made a fine effort to raise personal sympathy for the venerable and learned prime minister, the agonizing young queen, and the well-beloved former Minister to the United States, Loudon, married to a most estimable American lady. He parried the criticism of Dutch trade with Germany during the Great War by claiming this was the right of a neutral power and necessary to provide consumption articles for its own population.

Van Coenen realized that a historical appeal to the United States for the many services rendered to it by Holland in the past would not work in this situation and he derived his arguments from common values of personal and political liberties. Moreover, he capitalized on anti-German feelings in the United States by suggesting that trade opportunities for Dutch products in America were promising if they were of established Dutch origin. And for his own regional audience he added that Californian ports were the logical and promising destination for the resurging colonial trade and he encouraged American businessmen to set up banks and transportation lines and invest in the Dutch East and West Indies.<sup>28</sup> Similar arguments confirming the enduring mutual attachment to liberty, peace, and justice were made on the East Coast, where Counselor of the Netherlands Legation in Washington, William de Beaufort, aimed to clear the Dutch reputation by stating, “Our common past has no drawback in the realization of our common present.”<sup>29</sup>

This emphasis on common values echoed the approach of Theodore Roosevelt, who toasted the Dutchman in America at the 1890 dinner of the Holland Society in New York by extolling the virtues of assimilation and using the colonial Dutch as his evidence. He said: “The thoroughness with which the Hollander has become Americanized, and the way in which he has ceased being anything but an American makes him invaluable as an object lesson to some of the races who have followed him to America at an interval of about two centuries.”<sup>30</sup>

The elaborate celebration of the centennial of the Dutch colonies in 1947 revisited the contribution of the Dutch to America. Willard Wichers headed the committee and got the Netherlands government heavily involved, so much so that some locals felt the Dutch had taken over the celebration. The Dutch used this event to strengthen the cultural ties with their most powerful liberator, whose people still lent material assistance to the impoverished Dutch. Philosopher Marten ten Hoor made a sophisticated effort to prove that the Dutch Calvinists had a democratic practice, even if they did not wholly subscribe to the principle of the sovereignty of the people. But the most important feature remained the display of objects to stimulate pride in the achievements of the Dutch pioneers and emphasize “the spirit of Ebenezer, the spirit which enabled our fathers, wherever they settled to build happy homes and become useful citizens.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> H.A. Van Coenen Torchiana, *The Future of Trade Between the United States of America and the Netherlands and Its Colonies: A Short Study* (San Francisco: Holland-American Chamber of Commerce, 1918), 9. See also the address of the Dutch minister in Washington to the Netherlands Society of Philadelphia, 23 January 1919 (*Addresses*, 217-31).

<sup>27</sup> Van Coenen Torchiana, *The Future of Trade*, p.11.

<sup>28</sup> A similar connection between ideology and commerce was made by Bremen skippers in 1846 when they advocated a steamboat connection between New York and their city which would bring many Germans with a democratic tradition to the United States. M. Walker, *Germany and the Emigration 1816-1885* (1964). Van Coenen combined a business prospectus for the Dutch East Indies with a statement that the Netherlands was not a small country in the title of his book *Tropical Holland: An Essay on the Birth, Growth and Development of Popular Government in an Oriental Possession* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1921). Van Coenen had been born in the East Indies.

<sup>29</sup> *Addresses Netherlands Society Philadelphia*, 1920, p. 247.

<sup>30</sup> *New York Times*, 11 January 1890.

<sup>31</sup> Marvin Lindeman, “A Non-Hollander Looks at Holland;” Willard C. Wichers, “Celebrating the Centennial of Dutch Settlement in Michigan. The Observances at Holland;” Marten ten Hoor, “The Dutch Calvinists and American

## Conclusion

How, when, and where did the Dutch-Americans use which strategy to prove they belonged in America? According to Overland the desire of the Dutch was weak: "Dutch immigrants themselves do not seem to have felt a great need to trumpet their own colonial presence."<sup>32</sup> His supporting evidence is a 1921 editorial in *Onze Toekomst* claiming that the main contribution of the Dutch in America was the planting of True Religion (i.e. the Christian Reformed Church) and he is only partially right: the stronger the religious identity of a group the less it has a need for an explicit ethnic identity. Most nineteenth-century Dutch immigrants had a strong religious attachment, which offered a sense of belonging and which neutralized the fear of being absorbed in America without leaving a trace. The Christian Reformed were more interested in justifying their existence than in making ethnic statements. For the Americanized Dutch with weak religious attachments the historical roots gained importance. Their efforts to solidify their position had been prepared by historical research and a rediscovery of the Dutch roots in the mid-nineteenth century. These circumstances bore the signs of patrician ethnic societies. Simultaneously the Midwestern Dutch reached a series of commemorative years that propelled self-reflection. Outside pressure was only felt during the First World War. The three regions with Dutch-American settlements all used history and ideology to identify themselves. Since the situation in each region differed, they used these arguments with a differing emphasis. On the East Coast, the Dutch of colonial lineage used their heritage to advance political goals. In the Midwest (and beyond) the more recent immigrants referred to Dutch history to advance moral values, while the most recent arrivals on the West coast employed the glory of the Dutch empire to stimulate commercial activities. The foundation and ideological myths were used most, while the Dutch contributions to America's wars were much less prominent.<sup>33</sup> The ideological myth was most rewarding since it did not need such strong historical facts—although the Dutch possessed an abundant share of that evidence—and could be more easily used in drawing parallels between Dutch and American history to stress common virtues.<sup>34</sup>

The colonial Dutch had been fully accepted and used the three myths mainly to counter belittling by Anglos. As the Dutch minister A. C. D. de Graeff told his Dutch-American audience in 1924: "So often in Washington society I am greeted socially by the ladies with the question: 'How is dear little Holland?' I am sure these people feel genuine sympathy for my country. However, I take exception.... It is not geographic dimensions, but strength of character of the people that fixes a country's place in the family of

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Democracy, *Michigan History* 37 (1947): 405-16, 458-61 and 353-66, respectively. See also Henry S. Lucas, *Ebenezer, Memorial Souvenir of the Centennial Commemoration of Dutch Immigration to the United States held in Holland, Michigan 13-16 August 1947* (New York: Netherlands Information Bureau, 1947), 40. Even the liberal Dutch daily *Algemeen Handelsblad* issued a special booklet to commemorate the emigration of 1847 as a tribute to the descendants of the Dutch immigrants. J.A. Schroeder, *Secession and Emigration 1834-1847* (Amsterdam: Algemeen Handelsblad, 1947).

<sup>32</sup> Overland, *Immigrant Minds*, 78.

<sup>33</sup> One example of Dutch-Americans fighting in the wars of the American Republic is the song by Isaac Rusling Pennypacker "The Dutch on the Delaware" adopted as the official song of the Netherlands Society of Philadelphia in 1894, which recalls that the Sons of the Beggars of the Zuyder Zee crossed the Delaware with Washington and fought against Robert Lee. *Addresses Made at the Annual Meetings of the Netherlands Society of Philadelphia. Bellevue-Stratford Hotel 1913-1930*, p. 11. This society was founded on 23 January 1892, on the day commemorating the Union of Utrecht in 1579. In 1913 the society sponsored the erection of a monument for Pieter C. Plockhoy in Zierikzee, honoring him as the founder of Swaanendael, Delaware, and as a "Pioneer of Christian Civilization."

The city of Holland observed Decoration Day to honor its dead soldiers of the Civil War (*De Grondwet*, 29 May and 5 June 1877). The Holland Soldiers' Union was founded in early 1875 and in 1894 a monument was erected at the Pilgrim Home Cemetery.

<sup>34</sup> William E. Griffis went as far as to describe Holland as a republic that invited a prince at its sovereign. (*Addresses* 1914, p. 70.) Griffis went around Holland to place ten tablets in various cities with sites of relevance to American history.

nations.”<sup>35</sup> This showed that the agenda of the representatives of the Dutch government matched with those of the Dutch-Americans in confirming their heritage, as they had done during the First World War.

In the Dutch case, not attacks from outside prompted the use of these strategies, but events in society. The Dutch echoed the positions in the dominant culture, in fact confirming the hegemonic nature of Anglo culture by supporting it with their own heritage. During the Spanish-American War in 1898, the Holland Society of Chicago used the Dutch struggle against Spain to support the “liberation” of Cuba.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, the Tulip Time festivals confirmed the Americanness of the Dutch-American subculture, promoting its virtues, drawing from a historical justification, and presenting a well-known stereotype in its first six decades.<sup>37</sup> These festivals strengthened the cohesion in their community, while simultaneously strengthening the ties with the consumer culture and emphasizing the business ethic of America. It confirmed American stereotypes of nostalgia, simple life, and primary colors, as Suzanne Sinke and others have noticed.

I wonder whether my lecture here today and the existence of the Van Raalte Institute and organizations such as the DIS and AADAS are also instruments in advancing Dutch-American identity? I trust they are. I appreciate them for their goals, but I also hope I have shown that critical self-reflection reveals some less praiseworthy patterns and purposes.

The purest form of identity politics was drafted by Christian Reformed minister Henry Beets, who was most pushing for Americanization, in a song titled “Song of the Holland-Americans.”<sup>38</sup> Beets composed this praise song of Dutch-Americanism on the occasion of the Semi-Centennial celebration of the Christian Reformed Church in 1907. Beets’s song was singled out by the publisher not only because it was considered real poetry, but especially he felt it would “fill a long felt want in Social gatherings of our people.” The song was the first entry in a collection of Dutch religious evergreens with English translations, but this one had little religious wording. It connected the colonial Dutch with the nineteenth-century immigrants in singing the praises of the United States. The second stanza draws the attention away from a glorious past to a promising future, while the fifth and final stanza prayed to “Infuse the best of all our past, the noblest of our traits, into the life, into the deed of our United States!” Though the lyrics created a distance from the old country and made an emotional appeal to embrace America, it also bonded the Dutch-Americans of all generations together, because they were the only ones to sing it. The song worked because the tune was that of the old Dutch national anthem “Wien Neerlands bloed in de aderen vloeit,” a typically nationalist song with some racist undertones, which was exchanged for the historical Wilhelmus of Nassau in 1933. From the records of the Holland societies, I learned that they always closed their meetings with a song. I suggest closing my lecture with the joint singing of this almost century-old articulation of Dutch-Americanness.

Come ye who boast of Dutch descent,  
Sons of New Netherland,  
And ye who reached our friendly shore

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 357-58.

<sup>36</sup> Overland, *American Minds*, 123.

<sup>37</sup> Suzanne Sinke, “Tulips are Blooming in Holland, Michigan: Analysis of a Dutch American Festival” in *Immigration and Ethnicity: American Society—“Melting Pot” or “Salad Bowl,”* Michael Sinnocenzo, et.al., (Westport, 1992), 3-14. As no Italian in Europe celebrates Columbus Day, nor Norwegians the Seventeenth of May, while a variety of nationalities join in the celebration of St. Patrick’s Day, Tulip Time was no original Dutch festival, but a 1929 invention combining a fair with economic self-promotion. Overland is quick to note that celebrating ethnicity remained a middle-class affair. The working class sought refuge in unions rather than in ethnic clubs, which reverberated with progress, success, and patriotism. Geneviève Fabre, Jürgen Heideking, and Kai Dreisbach, eds., *Celebrating Ethnicity and Nation: American Festive Culture from the Revolution to the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Berghahn, 2001). (Review in *Journal of American History* 90, no.1.)

<sup>38</sup> He perfected his argument for Dutch pride in his often recycled lecture, “Why we of Dutch descent claim a modest place in the sunshine of respect of our American nation with its various national origins,” of which several editions survive, most recently from 1934. Calvin College, Heritage Hall, Henry Beets Collection, box 24, file 3.

with western pilgrim band  
Unite with us in festive song,  
Song which the heart elates  
And sing the praises of our land  
Our own United States,  
Our own United States.

We love the land across the sea  
We glory in its past;  
We pray for its prosperity,  
May it forever last!  
But tho we love old Holland still,  
We love Columbia more,  
The land our sons and brethren fill  
From east to western shore,  
From east to western shore.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Henry Beets, *Herinneringen. Holland-American Songs. Holland Songs with English Text*. Series 1. (Chicago: Paul H. Wezeman, 1907). It was the opening song in the Semi-Centennial Commission's *Gedenkboek van het Vijftigjarig Jubileum der Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerk A.D. 1857-1907* (Grand Rapids, 1907); reprinted in Walter Lagerwey's collection, *Neen Nederland, 'k vergeet u niet* (1982), p. 62. It was sung at the four hundredth commemoration of the birthday of William of Orange on 24 April 1933 in Chicago, but not at the visit of Princess Juliana on 12 May 1942. The *Wien Neerlandsch Bloed* was sung at the sixtieth anniversary of the Holland and Zeeland colonies held in Zeeland in August 1907.