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GROWING UP DUTCH-AMERICAN:

CULTURAL IDENTITY AND THE FORMATIVE YEARS OF OLDER DUTCH-AMERICANS

Peter Ester

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of Older Dutch-Americans

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"*Ja*, I know. I remember
I don't remember things good now,
but the old days I still know good"

The Heritage of These Many Years
James C. Schaap

INTRODUCTION

In his captivating memoirs, published in 1944, Dutch-American novelist David DeJong writes about his emigration as a thirteen-year-old boy from Friesland to Michigan.[1] He reflects on his formative period in the Christian Reformed Dutch-American enclave of Grand Rapids, including both the good memories and the not-so-good memories, and on what it meant to be an "American of Dutch extraction." This is how he describes his school years: "The day after Labor Day we children were sent to a Christian school, one of the schools approved of and supported by our Dutch Christian Reformed Church. Poor as we were, our parents felt duty bound to pay a considerable tuition fee each week for the privilege of sending us to such a school, where we'd be safely separated from the evil teachings and temptations of the world. We realized that now we were living in a worldly, abysmally sinful country, but that even here it was possible to perpetuate our Dutch religious ways. We could still be directed toward sanctification in good old-country, Dutch fashion, even if our instruction was going to be in English."[2] DeJong remembers his childhood Sundays as quite hectic times: "Naturally, we children were expected to obey. So, to church we marched each Sunday morning early with our parents to attend the Dutch service lasting approximately two hours. Then when our parents went home, and we'd taken a five minute breathing spell, we filed into church again for the equally long English service. After the English service, my brothers would stay seated for Sunday school which lasted another hour, while I hurried home to help put the dinner on the table. After dinner we had perhaps an hour's respite, and off we'd go again to the afternoon Dutch service. Then home for a cold supper, and by six-thirty we'd be en route (just we children of course; our parents had the good excuse that they couldn't understand a word of English) to the evening service again."[3] And, of course, there was the omnipotent fear of the terrible consequences of committing sin. "One Sunday I put a penny in a slot machine for chewing gum. Three minutes later the gum tasted like the very excrement of hell to me. One spring Sunday my brother and I skipped just one of the four services to go look at the newly budding trees and singing birds instead. I didn't enjoy it, because I felt Satan stalking behind me as if on tennis

[1] David Cornel DeJong, *With a Dutch Accent: How a Hollander Became an American* (New York and London: Harper, 1944).
[2] DeJong, 220.
[3] DeJong, 256. His description relates to the introduction of English services in the Christian Reformed Church his parents belonged to, implying that each Sunday their church would conduct two services in Dutch and two in English. This option of Dutch *and* English services is an illustrative compromise between the first and second generation of Dutch immigrants.

shoes. I stole a red balloon from the five-and-dime on a sudden impulse, when a high wind seemed to dictate that I should sail a red balloon upon it. The balloon went straight up to God, bearing my sins, which would be read back to me on the great Judgment Day."[4]

DeJong's memoirs illustrate the way specific youth experiences have had an impact on his generation of Dutch-Americans, particularly the pressing issue how to reconcile Dutch culture and mores with the American way of life. He convincingly describes and analyzes how Dutch-American identity is related to its Calvinistic heritage, Dutch ways and culture, growing up in a Dutch-American community, the dominance of Dutch-American institutions (church, school), and the cultural subtleties and psychological boundary maintenance of being in but not "of the world."[5] His recollections demonstrate the relevance of personal accounts and storytelling for the understanding of generation-bound social phenomena, in this case the experiences of specific generations of Dutch immigrants in America in the first decades of the twentieth century. DeJong's memoirs nicely reflect how the individual, the community, and the era of growing up are interconnected.[6]

Immigration tales (memories, stories, oral traditions, letters) are an important contribution to picture the subjective side of immigrants' lives and the way they find common ground between their culture and mainstream American culture. As a form of oral history such immigration tales reflect the way specific generations cope with shaping, experiencing, and maintaining their identity and culture in modern American society.[7] How the oldest generation of Dutch-Americans reflects on its Dutch identity and the way these reflections are related to the formative years of their generation is the main theme of this study. Before going into details, I must briefly sketch some main features of Dutch-American identity, and the role of community and religion in identity formation and preservation.

DUTCH-AMERICAN IDENTITY AND THE ROLE OF RELIGION

In their classic study on ethnic Americans, Dinnerstein and Reimers (1999) show that the massive flow of immigrants from western and northern Europe in the nineteenth century has largely been absorbed into mainstream American culture.[8] Assimilation is the rule, rather than the exception. The longer immigrant groups have lived in the United States, the more they have given up their original culture and the more they have assimilated. The loss of what Dinnerstein and Reimers call "Old World culture" is above all observed in the abandoning of native immigrant languages in everyday life, in the church, in schools, in ethnic media, and in increasing intermarriage ("the ultimate form of assimilation").[9] These trends can be observed among Dutch-Americans as well *but* at a much slower pace. Most immigrant groups have been assimilated in three generations. Dutch immigrants "resisted (structural) assimilation until the

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[4] DeJong, 263.

[5] For a short introduction to DeJong as "Dutch-American renegade novelist," see James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America*: *A History of a Conservative Subculture* (Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf and Stock Pub., 2002), 163-69. DeJong's oeuvre, according to Bratt, constitutes "the most detailed, poignant record of the immigrant experience that Dutch America has ever produced" (Bratt, 163).

[6] Another fine example of the way personal development, growing up in the Reformed subculture, and major societal events are linked, is Henry Stob's splendid autobiography, *Summoning up remembrance* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

[7] Cf. David A. Gerber, *Authors of their Own Lives: Personal Correspondence in the Lives of Nineteenth Century British Immigrants to the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 2006); Bruce S. Elliott, David A. Gerber, and Suzanne M. Sinke, eds., *Letters across Borders: The Personal Correspondence of International Migrants* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006); David Fitzpatrick, *Oceans of Consolation: Personal Accounts of Irish Migration to Australia* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994); Walter D. Kamphoefner, Wolfgang Helbich, and Ulrike Sommer, *News from the Land of Freedom*: German Immigrants Writing Home (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

[8] Leonard Dinnerstein and David M. Reimers, *Ethnic Americans: A History of Immigration*, 4th ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

[9] Dinnerstein and Reimers, 186.

fourth and even fifth generation thanks to their church-related institutions and still cling to their (symbolic) ethno-religious identity" (Stokvis, 420).[10] Dutch immigrants in the mid-nineteenth century crossed the Atlantic as a *group* and settled as a *group* in their Michigan and Iowa enclaves.[11] They settled as Dutch secessionist Calvinists, bringing their own peculiar history, culture, religion, and identity. Part of their Calvinist way of life was to keep the sinful world at a distance and to carefully regulate cultural borders between them and the world. This unique combination of collective emigration and settlement, ethnicity, and religion was a major barrier to rapid assimilation and Americanization. Van Raalte, Scholte, and their followers surely wanted to become part of American society but in a self-directed way, i.e. by holding on to their Calvinist convictions and values. Cultural boundary keeping was the chief strategy in the self-controlled integration approach of Calvinist Dutch-Americans.

Over the years Dutch Calvinist immigrants built strong community networks of social institutions: Reformed (CRC and RCA) churches, Christian schools, colleges, welfare and mutual-aid societies, social clubs, Dutch (and later English) language press, and other media. These networks represent substantial social capital accumulated by Dutch-American communities but had a tendency to be inner-directed.[12] This religiously and ethnically based "exclusive" institutional infrastructure was a vital strategy in the conservation of the Dutch cultural heritage. The community, the church, and the school system were (and to a large extent still are) the preeminent institutional pillars of Dutch-American Calvinist settlements. The gradual transition to using the English language at home, in church, and (earlier) in school was the major step towards further acculturation and integration of Dutch Calvinists into American society. This transition was slower compared to other immigrant groups, which signifies a form of "decelerated" modernization.[13]

The distinguishing feature of Calvinist Dutch-Americans is the way their Reformed worldview mingles with ethnicity: they are Calvinists *but* Calvinists of Dutch descent. It seems that in essence the Dutch component is the more flexible part of this religion-and-ethnicity blending. Over time the attachment to Holland was gradually replaced by affection for America.[14] With each new generation, further affective erosion took place of the original strong bonds with the "old country"; the "strangers in a strange land" were not so strange anymore. In many cases this psychological and cultural transition from the old Dutch identity to the new American identity was accompanied by tensions and conflict, not only within but also between generations. Clashes over replacing Dutch by the English language—particularly in the church—clearly illustrate this point.[15] But in the end (also) the language issue was framed as a

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[10] Pieter R. D. Stokvis, "Ethnicity in the American Context: The Case of Dutch Calvinists," in *Roots and Rituals: The Construction of Ethnic Identities*, eds. Ton Dekker, John Helsloot, and Carla Wijers (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 2000), 417-30.

[11] Jacob Van Hinte, *Netherlanders in America*: *A Study of Emigration and Settlement in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries in the United States of America*, ed. Robert P. Swierenga, trans. Adriaan de Wit (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985); Hans Krabbendam, *Vrijheid in het verschiet*: *Nederlandse emigratie naar Amerika 1840-1940* (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2006); Robert P. Swierenga, *Faith and Family: Dutch Immigration and Settlement in the United States, 1820-1920* (New York/London: Holmes & Meier, 2000).

[12] See Peter Ester, "Still Bowling Together: Social Capital of Dutch Protestant Immigrant Groups in North America," in *Morsels in the Melting Pot: The Persistence of Dutch Immigrant Communities in North America*, eds. George Harinck and Hans Krabbendam (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2006), 21-32); Peter Ester, "Religion and Social Capital Bonding and Bridging in Dutch-American Calvinist Communities: A Review and Research Agenda," in *Dutch Immigrants on the Plains*, eds. Paul Fessler, Hubert R. Krygsman, and Robert P. Swierenga (Holland, Mich.: Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College, 2006), 181-96.

[13] And even more so among CRC than among RCA churches, a tendency that holds for many cultural innovations and adaptations (Krabbendam, *Vrijheid in het verschiet*).

[14] See Krabbendam, *Vrijheid in het verschiet*, 283-301.

[15] The issue, especially among the second generation of Dutch-Americans, was not so much w*hether* Dutch had to be replaced by English but *when*. See Krabbendam, *Vrijheid in het verschiet*, 207-30; Robert P. Swierenga, *Dutch Chicago: A History of the Hollanders in the Windy City* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

practical issue. Dutch immigrants realized that mastering the English language is a central survival and integration strategy and crucial for the upward mobility of the next generations. Maintaining and transferring the Calvinist faith and coping with both internal and external challenges, eventually, was of greater significance than the language it was voiced in. Hans Krabbendam in his 2003 Inaugural Lecture at the Van Raalte Institute argued that for Dutch-American Calvinist immigrants their Reformed convictions and ways of life were much more important than making ethnic statements with respect to their Dutch identity. "[T]he stronger the religious identity of a group the less it has a need for an explicit ethnic identity."[16]

Many observers of contemporary Dutch-American culture and lifestyle will, and in fact do, argue that for most Dutch-Americans being of Dutch descent is merely a symbolic part of their Calvinist identity.[17] Dutch-Americans are first and foremost Americans. Visiting Dutch-American communities does indeed reinforce the idea of mere symbolic representations of Dutch heritage. One is greeted with a folkloristic bonanza of commercialized Dutch memorabilia, yearly tulip festivals and Dutch parades (accompanied by obligatory street-scrubbing and clog-dancing), restaurants featuring authentic Dutch food (*erwtensoep* and *boerenkool*), museums illustrating local Dutch immigration history and displaying local Dutch paraphernalia, and visitor bureaus linking its city to a strong Dutch presence symbolized, of course, by the inevitable windmill and ditto wooden shoes. It is easy to ridicule such folkloric and cliché manifestations of Dutch identity. But that is not the way the professional sociologist looks at these symbolic ethnic expressions. "On the surface these manifestations are business boosters conforming to American stereotypes about ethnic peculiarities, below the surface these invented traditions reinforce ethnic identity and solidarity as well."[18] Symbolic manifestations of Dutch ethnicity are cultural identity markers too as they convey messages about how a group sees its own ethnic identity: historical and current. This is precisely the subject of my study: the way older Dutch-Americans recall the role that being of Dutch descent played in their personal history (their formative years) and how this affects their present feelings of being Dutch. As I will outline next, there are good, even urgent reasons to focus a study of Dutch ethnicity, of growing up Dutch-American, on the oldest still living generation of Dutch-Americans.

GENERATION REPLACEMENT AND LOST SOCIAL MEMORIES

With the passage of each generation of Dutch-Americans, a generation holding unique memories of the societal events and cultural idiosyncrasies that are characteristic of certain historic *epochs* disappears. For the historical and sociological understanding of Dutch-American culture, generational replacement implies the vanishing of direct witnesses of (and participants in) societal developments that were crucial for a particular era.[19] Historians and sociologists

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See also Jo Daan, *Ik was te bissie: Nederlanders en hun taal in de Verenigde Staten* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 1987).

[16] Hans Krabbendam, *Dutch-American Identity Politics: The Use of History by Dutch Immigrants*. Inaugural Lecture, Visiting Research Fellows Program, Van Raalte Institute, Hope College, 18 September 2003 [Holland, Mich.: Van Raalte Institute, 2003], 17.

[17] See Stokvis for the role of Dutch ethnicity among Dutch Calvinist communities in America and Frans J. Schryer, *The Netherlandic Presence in Ontario* (Waterloo: Wilfried Laurier University Press, 1998) for the Canadian case.

[18] Stokvis, 418. See also Suzanne Sinke, "Tulips Are Blooming in Holland, Michigan: Analysis of a Dutch-American Festival," in *Immigration and Ethnicity*, eds. Michael D'Innocenzo and Jospeh P. Sirefman (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1992), 3-14.

[19] The adjective "direct" should be emphasized here. We do have rather rich collections of letters written by various generations of Dutch immigrants to their families back home. But these are chronicled experiences that unlike living respondents cannot be re-questioned. See e.g. Ulbe B. Bakker, ed., *Zuster, kom toch over: Belevenissen van een emigrantenfamilie uit Friesland. Brieven uit Amerika in de periode 1894-1933* (*Sister, Please Come Over: Experiences of an Immigrant-family from Friesland* [The Netherlands]: *Letters from America in the Period 1894-1933* (Kollum: Trion G.A.C., 1999); Brian W. Beltman, *Dutch Farmer in the Missouri Valley: The Life and Letters of Ulbe Eringa, 1866-1950* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press,

should therefore treasure the oldest living generation of Dutch-Americans as they hold first-hand information and experiences that are by definition unique. This research imperative, however, is not very central to mainstream Dutch-American research. The systematic study of individual and collective memories of Dutch-American seniors is at best a marginal research interest. The downside of this generational neglect is the omission of studying the prime subjects and observers of major social, cultural, and religious events. Those persons that shaped or experienced major historical events are often not part of our study. This is a remarkable conclusion that becomes more pressing with the disappearance of each distinct older generation.

This study aims at correcting this generational neglect by investigating the manner in which the present generation of older Dutch-Americans reflects on its formative years, and more specifically on how this cohort experienced their "Dutchness," i.e. social, cultural, and religious practices, rituals, and events that constituted and reinforced their Dutch identity. For these purposes, a sample of older (Reformed and Christian Reformed) Dutch-Americans, living in Holland, Michigan, has been interviewed regarding their memories of how their identity as *Dutch* descendants was shaped during the period in which they grew up: the stories they were told about being Dutch, typical Dutch customs, manners, and habits they learned, Dutch folklore they witnessed, religious and church practices that were essential to being Dutch, companionship with other Dutch-Americans, participation in Dutch-American civil and church associations and leisure clubs, typical Dutch phrases they were taught, memories of the "old" country that were conveyed, and so on.

OLDER DUTCH-AMERICANS: AN UNUSUAL CIVIC GENERATION

Studying the individual and collective memories of the formative years (and its lasting life course effects) of the oldest cohort of living Dutch-Americans is of vital importance because we are dealing with a generation that is now quickly being replaced. The size of the cohort is constantly shrinking and cohort members are reaching the upper age levels, which in combination negatively affects research possibilities. There is a more substantive reason as well. The generation of Dutch-Americans born before World War II was part of a quite specific cohort of Americans, both in terms of the basic beliefs and values they hold and in terms of the societal events and developments they witnessed during their formative (and later) years. In retrospect it turned out to be a decidedly civic generation that was highly engaged in community affairs and well embedded in community life.

In a sweeping assessment of the American condition, Robert Putnam argues in his much-debated book *Bowling Alone* that with each new generation civic engagement is on the decline in American society.[20] Putnam's main message is that in the last quarter-century Americans have become increasingly disconnected from their families, friends, neighbors, communities, social institutions, and public life; in short, American communities are confronted with a serious and painful loss of social capital. Using a wide variety of, though rather conventional, indicators, Putnam shows that Americans are less and less partaking in the political game, are less involved in religious and secular social activities, their civic participation is going down, they attend fewer informal social gatherings, and their social connections have substantially thinned. The "cataclysmic" decline of social capital in American society according to Putnam is first and foremost due to generation replacement: "The more recent the cohort, the more dramatic its disengagement from community life. This is a strong

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1996); Herbert J. Brinks, ed.), *Dutch American Voices: Letters from the United States, 1850-1930* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1995); Henry S. Lucas, ed., *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs and Related* Works, rev. ed. (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1955; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); Johan Stellingwerff, *Iowa Letters: Dutch Immigrants on the American Frontier*, ed. Robert P. Swierenga, trans. Walter Lagerwey (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

[20] Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York, N.Y.: Simon & Schuster, 2000). See also Peter Ester and Henk Vinken, "Debating Civil Society," *International Sociology* 18 (2003): 659-80.

clue that the overall decline in civic engagement in America over the last several decades was rooted in generational differences" (Putnam, 251). The baby boomers and their successors have seriously withdrawn from civic engagement. The prewar generation—the generation born between 1910 and 1940—is the generation par excellence that was directed at advancing the common good, at shaping the civil society: "voting more, joining more, reading more, trusting more, giving more"(Putnam, 254). Thus, the oldest cohort of Dutch-Americans is part of an exceptionally civic generation.[21]

Yet there is more. The oldest generation is not only the most engaged in community affairs and embedded in community life, but they (particularly the core cohort born between 1925 and 1930) also witnessed a number of drastic and far-reaching societal events: including the (impact of the) depression years, World War II, postwar prosperity, Cold War, Vietnam, Civil Rights Movement, and the diffusion of major innovations such as the car, television, and later the computer and the internet. The present generation of older Americans also observed the rise of a booming consumer society, rapid urban sprawl and suburbanization, changing race relations, the expansion of higher education, and the growth of an affluent middle class. These events and developments had a tremendous impact on the beliefs, attitudes, and values of this cohort, an impact that lasted over the life course of its cohort members. The formative years of the prewar generation were marked by radical contingencies that equally impacted the Dutch-American pre-war generation. Their communities were rapidly opening up economically, socially, and culturally and increasingly subject to secularization forces, individualism, consumerism, and out-of-group marriages. Their churches were involved in complicated issues of how to assess their role in the world, how they had to respond to pressing societal issues and technological innovations, how to face revivalist, liberal, and ecumenical movements, how to respond to "worldly amusements," and how to prepare the next generation for the challenges and temptations posed by a rapidly changing American society.[22]

There are, in short, substantive theoretical and demographic grounds to study the way the generation of older Dutch-Americans look back at their formative years: their numbers are declining as their cohort is being replaced, they hold unique information on unique periods, and they were witnesses of major societal events during their lives. Before going into this further, I should introduce some sociological theory: what actually *is* a generation?

GENERATION THEORY

In order to understand the generational features of the oldest living cohort of Dutch-Americans, it is important to reflect a little on what constitutes a generation and on what makes a generation different from other (older and younger) generations. The issue of the emergence and dissolution of generations—particularly in relationship to social and cultural change—is a classic subject in the discipline of sociology. The foundations for a theory of generations were especially developed by Karl Mannheim (1893-1947), one of the most influential European sociologists of the previous century. In an eminent and still highly relevant article titled "Das Problem der Generationen," Mannheim advances a sophisticated conceptualization of the role of generations in modern society.[23] He stresses that a generation is not a mere statistical birth

[21] Putnam labels this cohort as the "long civic generation" (Putnam, 254).

[22] See, e.g., James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America*: *A History of a Conservative Subculture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984); Gerard Dekker, Donald A. Luidens, and Roger R. Rice, eds., *Rethinking Secularization: Reformed Reactions to Modernity* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1997); Elton J. Bruins, *The Americanization of a Congregation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); Robert P. Swierenga, "Walls or Bridges?: Acculturation Processes in the Reformed and Christian Reformed Churches in North America," in *Morsels in the Melting Pot: The Persistence of Dutch Immigrant Communities in North America*, eds. George Harinck and Hans Krabbendam (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 2006), 33-42.

[23] Karl Mannheim, "Das Problem der Generationen," *Kölner Vierteljahresheft für Soziologie* 7 (1928/1929): 157-85, 309-30. See for a translation in English: K. Mannheim, "The Problem of Generations," in *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, ed. Paul Kecskemeti (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), 276-322. José

cohort, but refers to individuals who are born in the same historical period (*Zeitgeist*), living in the same socio-cultural space, who are aware of sharing similar youth experiences in their formative years, who are bonded by a common view on current societal developments, and who above all share a feeling of *belonging* to a generation. Mannheim rejects the positivistic generation approach which links generational replacement to fixed periods (roughly every thirty years, the period needed to become an adult) and which defines generations in a genealogical way (parents and their children). In his view, a generation differs from other generations because their formative experiences—i.e. significant adventures (*Schicksale*) between the ages of 15 and 25—have lasting effects over a generation's life course in terms of how they view the world (attitudes, values, ethics, behavior). In this sense generations build a specific and unique social identity both as a result of how they perceive the world but also as a result of how the world views them. This conceptualization, therefore, presupposes that generation members subjectively identifying with their generation are linked by a common biography (a historic *Schicksalgemeinschaft*), have an elementary feeling of a joint destiny, and a basic sense of being different from other generations. Generation membership assumes generation *consciousness* and a belief that one's generation is *distinct* from other generations.

Generational awareness, therefore, is a necessary cultural condition for a generation to emerge, an awareness that separates it from other generations. Mannheim made this point very clear in his three-fold distinction between "generation location" (*Generationslagerung*), "generation as an actuality" (*Generationszusammenhang*), and "generation unit" (*Generationseinheit*). A generation location refers to individuals born in the same period and the same socio-cultural environment and thus exposed to a common and specific range of historical events. A generation location is a potential generation, which may or may not materialize.[24] The step from a generation location to a generation as an actuality depends on the recognition of common experiences during the formative period of individuals born in the same historic and cultural space or region, in the same "community of destiny."[25] It is within this generation as an actuality that generation units may emerge. These units are the most concrete manifestations of a generation; they develop a common vision on societal events, often are cultural vanguards, and form a crystallization point that attracts other members of the same generation as an actuality.[26] Generations—in the words of C. Wright Mills—develop on the intersection of history and biography, meaning that major societal, political, or economic events such as wars, revolutions, times of poverty or prosperity are fundamental to the formation of a collective generational awareness or *entelechy* as Mannheim would say.[27]

Mannheim's generation theory has been widely used in the social sciences, particularly with respect to understanding and explaining fundamental social and cultural changes in society.[28] In many publications Inglehart, for instance, has defended the thesis that modern

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Ortega y Gasset was a second very influential generation thinker who argued that generation "is the most important conception in history" (José Ortega y Gasset, *The Modern Theme* [New York: Norton, 1933], 15).

[24] This potentiality of generation formation becomes reality through a generation as an actuality which is defined as "constituted when similarly located contemporaries participate in a common destiny and in the ideas and concepts which are in some way bound up with its unfolding" (Mannheim, 306).

[25] Thus a generation as an actuality exceeds mere historical and co-presence of individuals: "Mere contemporaneity becomes sociologically significant only when it also involves participation in the same historical and social circumstances" (Ibid, 298).

[26] Mannheim related the actual formation of generation units to the velocity of social and cultural change: the "realization of hidden potentialities inherent in the generation location is governed . . . by the prevailing tempo and impact of social change. Whether a new generation style emerges every year, every thirty, every hundred years, or whether it emerges rhythmically at all, depends entirely on the trigger action of the social and cultural process" (Ibid, 310).

[27] C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1959).

[28] See David I. Kertzer, "Generation as a Sociological Problem," *Annual Review of Sociology* 9 (1983): 125-49; Isabelle Diepstraten, Peter Ester, and Henk Vinken, *Mijn generatie: Zelfbeelden, jeugdervaringen en lotgevallen van generaties in de twintigste eeuw* (Tilburg: Syntax Pub., 1999); Peter Ester, Henk Vinken, and Isabelle Diepstraten, "Reminiscences of an Extreme Century. Intergenerational Differences in Time

society is witnessing a structural shift from materialist to post-materialist values due to a gradual cohort replacement.[29] His well-known theory of the "silent revolution" states, that older generations have been socialized in periods characterized by economic insecurity and therefore hold materialist values such as physical sustenance and safety. Younger generations, however, were raised in relatively prosperous times and therefore give more priority to post-materialist values such as quality of life, self-expression, and esteem.

Numerous other researchers have studied the relationship between generational renewal and cultural change.[30] The basic idea underlying such studies is a classic one: old generations with distinct cultural values are replaced by new generations, which bring in their own values that differ from those of older generations. Mannheim's generation theory, in summary, has a classic status in the social sciences and features prominently in the rationale underlying this study of the ethnic-religious identity of older Dutch-Americans.

HYPOTHESIS AND METHODOLOGY

The thoughts and literature review presented so far lead me to hypothesize that the oldest generation of Dutch-Americans *feel* that they are different from other generations in the way their Dutch (ethnic-religious) identity was shaped during their formative years and in the way their identity was reinforced and maintained during their personal life course. They will particularly experience biographical differences in (the saliency of) Dutch identity with younger generations of Dutch-Americans. This generation of older Dutch-Americans grew up in very different times, under very different socio-economic conditions, and with a distinct set of ethnic, cultural, and religious values that are supposed to have had lasting effects on their life course, lifestyle, and ethnic self-identification. This study tests this basic hypothesis by picturing how the oldest generation of Dutch-Americans characterizes its "Dutchness," how its members link their Dutch identity to the formative years of their generation, and which identity differences they accentuate in comparing their generation with other (younger) generations of Dutch-Americans.

SAMPLE AND INTERVIEWS

The main subjects in this study are older Dutch-Americans from Holland, Michigan, the area where Van Raalte and his followers settled in the mid-nineteenth century. The Holland, Michigan area (still) has a very strong Dutch presence and because of this fact is an obvious region to conduct a study of Dutch-American identity.[31] Twenty-one respondents were selected

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Heuristics: Dutch People's Collective Memories of the 20th Century," *Time & Society* 11, no. 1 (March 2002): 39-66. See for a comparative approach: Peter Ester, Michael Braun, and Peter Mohler, eds., *Globalization, Value Change, and Generations*: *A Cross-National and Intergenerational Perspective* (Leiden: Brill Academic Pub., 2006).

[29] See Ronald Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles among Western Publics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977); Ronald Inglehart, *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990); Ronald Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic and Political Change in 43 Societies* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997).

[30] E.g., Henk A. Becker, ed., *Life Histories and Generations* (Utrecht: ISOR, 1990); Richard G. Braungart, "Historical Generations and Youth Movements: A Theoretical Perspective," *Research in Social Movements, Conflict and Change* 6 (1984): 95-142; Andries van den Broek, *Politics and Generations: Cohort Replacement and Generation Formation in Political Culture in the Netherlands* (Tilburg, Netherlands: Tilburg University Press, 1996); Paul Dekker and Peter Ester, "Political Attitudes in a Generational Perspective," *Acta Politica* 30 (1995): 57-74; Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, *From Generation to Generation: Age Groups and Social Structure* (Chicago: Free Press of Glencoe, 1956); Glenn H. Elder Jr., *Children of the Great Depression: Social Change in Life Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); Helmut Schelsky, *Die skeptische Generation: Eine Soziologie der deutschen Jugend* (Düsselsdorf: Diederichs, 1957).

[31] It has to be noted that Holland's demographic composition is rapidly changing. According to the U.S. Census 2000, over 20 per cent of the population of Holland is now Hispanic (70 per cent White).

from four local—originally "Dutch" churches—Reformed Church of America (RCA) and Christian Reformed Church (CRC): First Church and Third Church (both RCA), Pillar Church and 14th Street Church (both CRC).[32] These four churches cover a reasonable degree of inter- and intra-denominational diversity.[33] Four criteria were used to select potential respondents:

1. Born before 1935;
2. Being at least a third generation Dutch-American;
3. Having spent one's formative years in Holland, Michigan;
4. Being of good health and having a sound memory.

Churches and respondents were carefully selected with the help of Elton J. Bruins, Jacob E. Nyenhuis, and Robert P. Swierenga, research professors at the Van Raalte Institute. [34]

In mid-June 2007, respondents received a letter from the Van Raalte Institute explaining the goal of the study, introducing myself as the researcher, and asking them to participate in a personal interview with me (see Appendix 1). Later that month respondents were contacted by phone by the Institute's administrator to verify their willingness to participate and, if indeed willing, to set a date and time for a face-to-face interview. Nearly all approached respondents agreed to be interviewed, which is in itself a very positive sign (see Appendix 2).[35] All interviews were conducted by myself and took place in July 2007. Respondents' ages range between 72 and 92 (mean age is 81.3 years; ten respondents are male, eleven are female. Interviews lasted between one and two hours (mean length about 90 minutes). Respondents are well spread over the four local churches and the two Reformed denominations (10 RCA, 11 CRC). No claim for representativeness is made; the selected respondents are not a random sample. For a wider range of experiences of this generation of Dutch-Americans—including the ones that deliberately moved out of Holland—one needs a considerably larger and more diverse sample.[36] Such an approach, however, was not feasible given time constraints.

The questionnaire was semi-structured, leaving ample opportunity for open and follow-up questions. The questionnaire is included in Appendix 3. Most interviews took place in the morning at respondents' homes and were taped with a digital recorder.[37] I will not use respondents' real names in order to assure their anonymity and privacy. Confidentiality of the interviews will, of course, be respected.

The interview started with some demographic questions (age, sex, marital status, ethnic background of spouse, number of [grand] children). Next, a number of issues were addressed related to the saliency of the respondent's Dutch-American background:

- perceived distinctiveness of his or her generation of older Dutch-Americans;

[32] For historical and current information on these local churches, see Elton J. Bruins, *The Americanization of a Congregation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), for the history of Third Church; Michael De Vries and Harry Boonstra, *Pillar Church in the Van Raalte Era* (Holland, Mich.: Pillar Christian Reformed Church, 2003); Jacob E. Nyenhuis, *Centennial History of the Fourteenth Street Christian Reformed Church, Holland, Michigan, 1902-2002* (Holland, Mich.: Fourteenth Street CRC, 2002).

[33] See for a recent (survey research based) overview of differences and similarities between these two Reformed denominations, Corwin Smidt, Donald Luidens, James Penning, and Roger Nemeth, *Divided by a Common Heritage: The Christian Reformed Church and the Reformed Church in America at the Beginning of a New Millennium* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

[34] Richard Weerstra was very helpful in naming potential respondents from First Church.

[35] One respondent indicated that he was at most half Dutch and grew up in Brooklyn, N.Y.; consequently he did not think there was much, if any, Dutch cultural influence in his upbringing.

[36] Migration motives might include educational choices, employment reasons, or cultural push or pull factors. Particularly these last factors would justify a study of its own.

[37] Full transcripts were made of each interview, using Express Scribe software recommended by the British Library Sound Archive <http://www.bl.uk/nsa>. Many thanks to Rob Perks, Oral History Department, British Library for his practical suggestions. I asked respondents for their permission to tape the interviews. None of them objected.

- typical values and beliefs attributed to that generation;
- memories of respondent's Dutch-American upbringing;
- recollections of typical Dutch events;
- stories, customs, and manners during respondent's youth years;
- ethnic composition of (past and present) peer groups;
- importance of the church in respondent's childhood;
- the role of the (RCA or CRC) church in maintaining Dutch-American identity;
- the perceived effect of being of Dutch origin on one's later life, such as on fundamental beliefs and values;
- respondent's image of, and bond with, the Netherlands;
- respondent's view on Dutch-American identity among the youngest generation of Dutch-Americans;
- and, finally, expectations on the future of Dutch-American culture and identity.

The interviews, without exception, were very pleasant. Respondents evidently liked to talk about their childhood and youth years and their Dutch-American upbringing, and to reflect on their generation. Respondents were generally well prepared and often showed me various Dutch paraphernalia, memorabilia, and genealogical family histories. Older Dutch-Americans care about their church and culture and are eager—sometimes after a little encouragement—to talk about their youth, life course, and generation.

THE PERSONAL INTERVIEW AS ORAL HISTORY [38]

The methodology used in this study is an exercise in oral history. In letting respondents tell their life history, I attempt to reconstruct the ways their generation, their formative years, and their Dutch-American identity are interlinked. It is a method to understand how generations look back at their life course, and the major events and transitions that took place. Storytelling is and acknowledged approach through which respondents make sense of their personal history, a history that unfolds itself within the wider societal context of the formation and life course of their generation. "Oral history gives history back to the people in their own words" (Thompson, 308).[39] Oral history brings back the human dimension in the sociology of generation formation, and the personal aspect in subjective generational membership. Generations are not merely statistical birth cohorts, but groups of people that share a common history.

Particularly given the age composition of the respondents in this study, the role of memory is important. Obviously, people cannot remember all the events and transitions in their childhood and youth years that are related to their Dutch-American upbringing. There is always choice, subjectivity, and bias. But in this study I am not interested in the perfect accuracy of respondents' memories, but in the kind of stories they tell about their Dutch-American background, their formative years, and their generation. Oral history and its narrative methodology are about subjective significance and not about objective precision.

Doing oral history has also implications for the role of the interviewer. He or she needs to show a keen interest in the stories told by the respondent, not to debate or discuss, but to ask in order to get the story behind the story. To achieve this, one needs the right combination of empathy, sensitivity, and subtleness. If the researcher succeeds in doing so, fascinating and sometimes amazing stories will be the result. Listening to people's life stories is one of the most

[38] See, e.g., Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 3rd ed. (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2nd ed. (Walnut Creek, Calf.: Alta Mira Press, 2005); Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide*, 2nd ed. (London/New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[39] A nice example of oral history research on a related topic is Lynn Winkels Japinga, "'No One Has Ever Asked Me This Before': The Use of Oral History in Denominational History," in *A Goodly Heritage: Essays in Honor of the Reverend Dr. Elton J. Bruins at Eighty*, ed. Jacob. E. Nyenhuis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 105-20).

rewarding professional experiences for the social scientist.

RESULTS

The analyses presented are based on a merged data set in which the answers of respondents to the various questions were pooled and classified by respondent's (altered) name, sex, age, and denomination. Reporting the main findings of this study will be structured along the following themes: pride in Dutch heritage, the assumed uniqueness of the present generation of older Dutch-Americans, nature of Dutch-American upbringing at home, composition of Dutch-American peer group, the role of the church in one's youth, Sunday observance, the effects of Dutch-American socialization on one's later life, images of the Netherlands, the youngest generation and Dutch-American culture, and, finally, the future of Dutch-American culture. This structure follows my main hypothesis that the oldest generation of Dutch-Americans feels that they are distinct in terms of their "Dutchness," which can be traced to the nature of their upbringing, and the lasting effects of the formative experiences over the life course of this generation. As a rule I will quote respondents literally, and will not change their wording, style, or grammar.

Pride in Dutch Heritage

Being proud of one's ethnic heritage can be seen as a positive affect in the way people identify with their ethnic background. Appreciating one's cultural ancestry is a significant factor in how people connect to their ethnic group. Are older Dutch-Americans proud of their Dutch descent? Is having a Dutch background important and meaningful to them? This certainly appears to be the case, at first, though in a rather straightforward, unconditional way. "Certainly, I'm proud of it" (female, 85 yrs., CRC); "I surely am, there is nothing we shouldn't be proud of" (female, 87 yrs., CRC); "Oh, I'm proud of it. Oh yes" (female, 80 yrs., RCA); "I feel very proud of it" (male, 89 yrs., RCA); "Yeah, I am proud that I am Dutch. You know, we have a saying here: If you ain't Dutch, you ain't much" (male, 84 yrs., CRC); "Definitely. Definitely proud to be Dutch" (female, 87 yrs., CRC). The first reaction is typically a forthright positive one, but further explaining generally needed some extra reflection by respondents. "I don't know why I am so proud of it. I often wondered about that" (female, 87 yrs., CRC).

Analyzing the principal arguments underlying their positive attitudes towards their Dutch ancestry and background in more detail shows that distinct basic social, and particularly religious, values are the main determinants. The predominance of strong values is why older Dutch-Americans take pride in their Dutch heritage. "Most of the Dutch people had values. I think that, in our bringing up, we took those values to heart. Hard work, family, and church" (male, 84 yrs., CRC); "The Dutch have strong families" (male, 89 yrs., RCA); "It's my roots, and I love the Netherlands" (female, 80 yrs., RCA); "Good, honest, hard-working, Christian" (female, 74 yrs., CRC); "You know, we've always held God and the church as priority in our life over everything else, and that's the way I was raised, so I have to try not to depart from that" (female, 92 yrs., RCA); "I'm proud of the things we live by, I think our ethics are pretty strong. Ethics. You bet. And I just like my way, that I was brought up. We're clean" (female, 85 yrs., CRC); "I think, first of all, I have to thank my parents for bringing me up in the religion, the Dutch religion . . . and I think the Dutch people are very clean and neat. . . . We take care of our own, you help your own. My Dad always said: charity begins at home" (female, 87 yrs., CRC); "We were brought up to think that we were special . . . but we're good Americans" (male, 84 yrs., RCA); "For our religion and our stand that we take, and our customs, you know, and our cleanliness, I am proud to be Dutch" (female, 87 yrs., CRC); "I am grateful for it, yes. I think my heritage is worthwhile" (male, 76 yrs., CRC); "We're clean, we're hard workers, and we've accomplished what we strive for, and we've been successful in our jobs" (male, 76 yrs., RCA); "Well, I guess I identify very much with my relatives and friends and people in this community who are Dutch . . . basically I'm proud of the fact that I am Dutch, sure" (male, 76

yrs., RCA); "I've always been proud, I loved Holland, I had a wonderful boyhood here, Dutch cleanliness. It means something. On the other hand, I am not so wrapped up in it that I don't appreciate the diversity we're getting in Holland presently" (male, 83 yrs., RCA).

It is a special configuration of religious and social values, in short, that explains why older Dutch-Americans cherish their Dutch heritage and upbringing: strong religious beliefs and norms, strong work ethic, strong family values, and rigorous cleanliness.[40] As we will see in the next section, this peculiar cultural pattern of values and convictions is still widely shared by the present generation of older Dutch-Americans.

Older Dutch-Americans: A Distinct Generation?

An important aspect of classic generation theory, as outlined, is that a cohort becomes a generation because cohort members were born and raised in the same historical period, under the same socio-economic circumstances, and share a notion of being special and dissimilar from other birth cohorts. How different does the present cohort of older Dutch-Americans think they are? What are the beliefs and values they have in common and live by? Do they relate the distinctiveness of their beliefs and values to the way they were socialized in their formative years?

The evidence is quite convincing that my sample of older Dutch-Americans feel they share basic outlooks that set them apart from other, particularly younger generations. The beliefs and values they point at, are precisely those they specified in stating why they are proud of their Dutch heritage: (still) strong adherence to (Christian) Reformed doctrines and active church involvement, an omnipresent work ethic, the centrality of the family, and uncompromising cleanliness. Compared to the generation of their parents, the present generation of older Dutch-Americans may feel they are less strict in their way of life, the basic religious and cultural ingredients of the Reformed tradition—in their eyes—are still there. "Work ethic is a big thing for my generation. Most of us are still pretty much faithful in church attendance" (male, 79 yrs., CRC); "Most of us have stayed pretty much solid in our religion" (male, 72 yrs., RCA); "Religious values would be the predominant ones" (male, 76 yrs., RCA); "The importance of living a Christian life, the importance of a family and family life, and hard work . . . I wouldn't buy anything unless I had the money for it, I wouldn't buy anything on time" (female, 84 yrs., RCA); "We attend church, we keep the Sabbath day holy pretty much, although we've become a lot more lenient . . . we believe in work, work hard and rest on the Sabbath" (female, 73 yrs., RCA); "Church, family, hard work, and Dutch clean" (male, 83 yrs., RCA); "We all grew up by the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort" (female, 80 yrs., RCA) "We expect to work for what we get, and that is pretty much Dutch heritage; and frugal, yeah, we watch our pennies" (male, 78 yrs., RCA); "We don't go into big debts with credit cards and that kind of stuff, we borrowed cash" (male, 84 yrs., CRC); "We are known for our cleanliness, we keep our homes and yards and everything. As we say: cleanliness is next to godliness" (female, 76 yrs., CRC); "Yeah, I think we do, such as religious things and the upkeep of our homes and values; we're not spendthrifts but we're good givers to people in need" (female, 87 yrs., CRC); "Our work ethic . . . and the stringent requirements of the church, they have a indelible spot in my heart" (male, 84 yrs., RCA); "You work hard for everything. You don't expect anybody to give you anything. We don't go to the government . . . and like sending our children to Christian schools, my husband had a second job to pay for their tuition" (female, 87 yrs., CRC); "Christian values, neatness, and hard work" (female, 85 yrs.,

[40] The repeatedly observed emphasis on the importance of "clean" and "cleanliness" is remarkable. It needs further research beyond the scope of this project to examine whether this emphasis merely reflects a neat fetish or is also (almost psychoanalytically) related to more theological doctrines of "being pure" and living a "pure life" or even to ethnocentric notions of keeping the community free of outside influences. For a historical perspective on the Dutch massive devotion to cleanliness, see Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 375-97.

CRC); "Well, first and foremost, church attendance, and next the fair dealing with other people, and really feeling you have to provide for yourself and your family" (female, 92 yrs., RCA); "Hard workers. We had to work hard for everything we got. Long hours" (male, 80 yrs., CRC); "We didn't figure on anybody else helping us . . . the household of faith needed to look after each other . . . you provided for your family and that was your responsibility" (male, 76 yrs., CRC).

The self-understanding of the present generation of older Dutch-Americans—even if they became more flexible over their life course as we will see further on—is quite coherent and consistent: you lead a Christian lifestyle, you attend church, you work hard, you take care of yourself, your family, and your property, and you spend money carefully.[41] Did such a basic value system, according to the respondents, affect the way their generation has been doing in life? The issue underlying this question is a major premise of generation theory: the specific psychology of a generation—heavily influenced by their upbringing—conditions the life course of a generation. Here is how older Dutch-Americans experienced the impact of the specific value pattern of their generation. "Absolutely. Because there's no substitute for a spiritual upbringing. That's the key. I think my Dutch upbringing was a real gift" (male, 79 yrs., CRC); "I would think so. The work ethic is the biggest thing for me. I wouldn't be here if I didn't have a work ethic. I just feel that I've got to get out and go to work and do my part. I have been so blessed, this is my way of paying back" (male, 84 yrs., RCA); "I think so. The Dutch are known for their cleanliness, you know, and I think Holland being a Dutch city, basically is a clean city. People keep up their homes and their yards and everything" (female, 76 yrs., CRC); "I think an awful lot of us have been very successful. What would be the reason? I think we were aggressive, that's my feeling" (male, 72 yrs., RCA); "Well, I think they've kind of shaped the community here in Holland. Because they were in the majority, and could live in a way that was consistent with their values" (male, 76 yrs., RCA); "Both our parents and grandparents were Christians. It means a lot. It just becomes a part of you" (male, 84 yrs., CRC); "I think we still have our values, but I'm wondering if we've passed them all on to the younger generation" (female, 84 yrs., RCA); "Well, I guess so. I know that here in town those firms that have done well have said a lot of it was due to the work ethic of the Dutch employees they could hire. But, the truth is, by this time, a lot of the employees they hire are Mexican or most other ethnic group" (male, 83 yrs., RCA). Older Dutch-Americans believe they share similar values; values that they feel have had a strong impact on their lives and how they have been doing in life.[42] I will come back to this issue in more detail further on in this paper.

Church Life and Sunday Observance during Youth Years

Church, obviously, was the overarching social institution during the youth years of the present generation of older Dutch-Americans. The Reformed and Christian Reformed church provided identity, cohesion, and solidarity. It offered meaning, comfort, and structure. The church prescribed rules of conduct, rituals, and values, exercised social control and authority, and regulated the relationships with the non-Reformed world. The church pervaded all domains of life. It was *the* dominant institution. How do older Dutch-Americans look back at the role of the church during their formative years, the rules and norms they were supposed to obey, the Sabbath practices they needed to observe, and the strictness of the doctrines that were at the heart of the Reformed faith and tradition? Do they feel that observances were generally too harsh or were those feelings simply non-existent? Did they bend the rules? The role of the

[41] This is how Dutch-American author David DeJong describes the American alter image of the Dutch and their values in his 1944 memoirs: "clean folks, as the patronizing local newspapers invariably called us, thrifty, hard-working, sober, non-rebellious—believing strictly in the status quo, the Republican party, and in ourselves as the special children of God" (p. 254).

[42] Many of those values will be found among older non-Dutch-Americans as well: they are not unique features of older Dutch-Americans only. But that is not so much the argument here. Important is that my sample of older Dutch-Americans feels that those values are typical for *their* generation of Dutch-Americans.

church and the Reformed "do's and don'ts" in their youth were favorite subjects to respondents, to which they easily related, and which prompted many spontaneous reminiscences. This was clearly *their* subject, of which they have vivid memories, and that they could effortlessly express. Their memory lane is definitely paved with church-related stories. Church was—and to a large extent still is—the most significant force as older Dutch-Americans grew up.

Sunday was the most important day of the week and Sunday observance was a crucial and non-negotiable topic, among both CRC and RCA families. Being flexible with observing the Sabbath was a big taboo. You had to go to church, and you had to go twice. "We had to go to church, then Sunday School, and in the afternoon go to church again. And we couldn't play anything —you know, any . . . look at worldly things—it was very, very churchy" (female, 87 yrs., CRC); "We always went to church twice—the morning and the afternoon—and we had Sunday school' (female, 84 yrs., RCA); "Go to church twice on Sunday, and Sunday School. Catechism on Wednesday, and then mealtime, parents asking us a question. Heidelberg Catechism questions, and we would have to answer" (male, 84 yrs., RCA); "Had to go morning and night. And Catechism on Wednesday afternoon. Not Sunday School. See, early on the Dutch felt it wasn't as necessary, that came later" (male, 76 yrs., CRC); "We went to church twice, we went to Christian Endeavor, we went to Catechism on Wednesday night" (male, 78 yrs., RCA); "Oh, yeah, that was a given. And we raised our children that way too, I said to them, 'Going to church Sunday morning is not an option. You're going with us,' And they went along with that, and never argued" (male, 83 yrs., RCA); "We had to go to church twice. Oh, my, yes. Everybody went to church twice" (female, 88 yrs., CRC); "That's one thing that generation . . . said: 'Now, you have to go to church.' They didn't say, 'If you love the Lord, then you better be in church,' none of that kind of communication. We were taught to accept that. And we did" (male, 79 yrs., CRC); "We were told from the pulpit that we should go twice. In fact, some ministers would scold, from the pulpit, if you didn't. It wouldn't work today. It did work then" (male, 76 yrs., RCA). Church attendance rules were obvious when older Dutch-Americans were young: you simply had to go to church, and you had to go twice, that was a rule that could not be bent.

What about the rest of the Sunday? What were they allowed to do, and what were activities that were strictly forbidden? What in general were the Sunday mores? Here the rules were quite transparent too. Activities were not allowed if they involved other people working for you, such as shopping or going to the movies. You were supposed to behave in a quiet, serene, and subdued way, in accordance with the fact that Sunday is the Lord's Day. Here is how respondents remember the Sundays in their youth. "We were not allowed to go to a store on Sunday, we were not allowed to go to movies—these were almost cardinal sins, when we were growing up. Card playing: *verboden*. Made a big thing of discipline. A lot of people would not drive their cars on Sunday. If consistory thought someone had desecrated the Sabbath, they had to make amends for that" (male, 84 yrs., RCA); "I was not allowed to ride my bicycle on Sunday. We could play catch maybe in the backyard. We didn't go across the street to the ball field and play ball. No way. Not allowed to go to the beach or a restaurant either. Oh, heavens, no! No. no. no. We didn't do that until we were old enough to drive and snuck off by ourselves, you know" (male, 72 yrs., RCA); "Shopping was—no. And, I don't recall ever eating out on Sunday with the folks. Of course, in those days, you didn't go out to eat very often. Period. You didn't have restaurants on every corner" (male, 84 yrs., CRC); "Purchasing things on Sunday was a big no. But there really weren't any stores open on Sunday in Holland, even most of the gas stations were closed back when I was a kid" (male, 76 yrs., RCA); "We didn't shop on Sundays. We didn't do that . . . not even ice cream cones, or anything like that" (male, 78 yrs., RCA); "The rules were very strict. I could play catch in the yard, but don't take the bat out. No swimming on Sunday. No boat riding. But you could get in your car and go to see the relatives in Grand Rapids. No shopping on Sundays. In fact, when Meijers opened up on Sundays, there was a big notice in the paper, they were hoping that they wouldn't have to close right away

because there were many people that said, 'We're not going.' Well, everybody that said they were not going was there" (male, 79 yrs., CRC); "We couldn't go to the beach, we couldn't ride our bike, we couldn't go get an ice cream cone, nothing like that" (female, 89 yrs., CRC); "My parents were less strict. I could go to the beach or to the movies on Sunday. My parents educated by example more than by rules' (male, 83 yrs., RCA); "We never ate out on Sundays. Never. Sunday was a day of rest, and you were not supposed to take—just be quiet and not cause a commotion. And, of course, in the city of Holland, the stores were all closed on Sunday. There was never an open store on Sunday" (female, 80 yrs., RCA); "Well, it wasn't a temptation, there was nothing open!" (male, 76 yrs., CRC); "I was brought up to not purchase anything on Sunday. You do all of your shopping during the week, and you have in your house what you need during the Sabbath. That's how I was brought up, yeah" (female, 73 yrs., RCA); "Buying things on a Sunday? No, never. No! That was a no-no. Keep the Sabbath holy" (female, 80 yrs., CRC); "We had to watch our dress—we had to dress very conservatively. We couldn't wear low-necked or even sleeveless dresses or anything like that. That was out" (female, 87 yrs., RCA). One respondent summarizes the Sunday obligations very nicely: "We knew the rules, we knew the parameters" (male, 76 yrs., RCA).

It is interesting that quite a number of respondents remember that particular activities would be shifted from Sunday to Saturday. Potato peeling is an example a lot of them recall being done on Saturday. "I remember my Grandmother, on Saturday, preparing all the food, peeling the potatoes, no work on Sunday. I mean, everything ready" (female, 74 yrs., CRC); "My mother, she'd always peel her potatoes on Saturday night. We would never peel them on Sunday. She had everything ready Saturday night for Sunday dinner. If she was cooking meat, she had it all prepared, potatoes peeled; everything was made on Saturday" (female, 87 yrs., CRC).

Some respondents remember that rules—even strict rules on Sunday observance—were broken (even by themselves). "We knew what was right. But we did things! We would go, when we'd start driving, my girlfriends, we sneaked to Saugatuck, where we shouldn't be going, you know. They'd have a dance in the Pavilion. . . . We did things. Spend our Sunday School collection and go down to Fabiano's and eat a sundae and then come back to church when my folks picked us up! I was no saint" (female, 85 yrs., CRC); "You tried to beat the system, we were always thinking of what we could do that we weren't supposed to do. . . . Oh, we would say maybe, 'We're going to a friend's,' or something . . . you lied, you really did, so that you could get away, and do something that, you know . . . and the things that you wanted to do weren't all that bad, it's just that parents said you mightn't do that. None of my friends, I mean none, were allowed to go to a movie" (male, 72 yrs., RCA); "The stigma of movies. I don't think I saw my first movie until I was in ninth grade. We had to sneak in" (male, 84 yrs., RCA).

Rules were generally strict; Sunday rules were even stricter. Still, most respondents do not recall Sundays to be boring days. This is particular true for respondents who grew up on a farm. The chores still had to be done, the cattle had to be fed, the cows to be milked, etc. Farms were not dull places, not even on a Sunday. Sunday was a day of rest, and for people who made a living by hard physical work, Sunday was a welcome day to recuperate. Sunday leisure activities were limited, but religious reasons were one part of the story. You were not supposed to buy things on a Sunday but most people had little money anyway and because of the bad economic times (post-Depression) were forced to live frugal lifestyles. Moreover, back when respondents were young, no shops would be open on Sunday. There was no element of choice. Holland, Michigan, was still very much a Dutch community, with Dutch norms and values, a community that strictly enforced its Sunday- closing law.

Dutch-American Culture at Home: Ways and Traditions

As indicated, Dutch-American colonies were slower than many other immigrant groups in

assimilating to American society and its mainstream culture. The main causes were related to the specific Dutch emigration history, particularly the religious—*Afscheiding*—motives, Reformed theology, the group-wise emigration and settlement, and the unique linkage of religion, church, and ethnicity.[43] These factors implied that even later generations of Dutch immigrants would hold on to several "Dutch" practices, ways, and traditions. But with the further advancement of Americanization, later generations would—almost routinely—adopt American practices, ways, and traditions. Dutch immigrants came here to become American citizens, and not to stick to the culture of the old country. But this takes time, of course. Cultural adjustments do not take place overnight. In this section I will explore what was left of any peculiar Dutch habits and customs during the formative years of the generation of older Dutch-Americans. Did their parents tell them about the Dutch background of the family, did they feel that was important or not, are there typical Dutch words or Dutch lines they remember from their youth, were certain Dutch stories, folklore, or tales being told, and were typical Dutch dishes being served? The findings will show that most of the parents of my respondents were already well into having adopted American habits and customs. Some Dutch ways survived but were typically blended with American conventions. The Americanization of Dutch culture was well on its way during the formative years of this generation of older Dutch-Americans.

It is interesting that being Dutch-American and having a Dutch background was hardly explicitly addressed during the formative years of my respondents. At first this seems counter-intuitive given the strong Reformed values, beliefs, and norms that governed their youth. On second thought, however, the explanation is quite evident: almost *everyone* was Dutch, of Dutch origin, at that time. Ethnic references do not make much sense in a majority situation. Being Dutch "was just obvious . . . we were surrounded by so many of them" (male, 76 yrs., CRC); "I think we just took that all for granted, you know . . . the whole community was Dutch. We just knew we were Dutch" (female, 85 yrs., CRC); "You can't kind of avoid it, living in Holland" (male, 83 yrs., RCA); "Because it was so real in my family" (female, 92 yrs., RCA); "Every one of the CRC church kids went to the Christian school—so it was pretty much obvious that we were all from Dutch background. And [respondent jokes] we didn't have many Italians or Jews" (male, 84 yrs., RCA); "Now, let's see—how do you really develop that idea, that you are Dutch? Well, for one thing, you get it from going to church and Sunday School, definitely" (female, 80 yrs., CRC); "In Holland at that time most people were" (male, 78 yrs., RCA); "I don't think it ever came up. We just knew" (female, 76 yrs., CRC); "I never heard any pride expressed in being Dutch, in the family. 'You should be proud, you're a 100% Dutchman'—no, that just didn't get said" (male, 83 yrs., RCA); "We just grew up in it, you just sort of assumed it" (female, 84 yrs., RCA); "Well, I'll tell you, When I was young I was in the first [1929] Tulip Time parade" (female, 85 yrs., CRC). In a more or less ethnically homogeneous community, ethnicity is simply taken for granted.

Besides the "because-everyone-was-Dutch" argument, language did play a distinct role. Having parents who still could speak Dutch and who switched to Dutch in certain situations strengthened the awareness of being Dutch too. "When my parents didn't want us to know something, they'd talk Dutch. My grandparents couldn't speak English" (female, 85 yrs., CRC); "My Dad and mother talked in Dutch a lot in the home, when they had things they didn't want us to know, then they talked in Dutch. Of course, we picked up on some of it, but never could converse ourselves" (male, 84 yrs., RCA); "We had our Dutch church paper, the old *Wachter*" (male, 76 yrs., CRC); "When we sat at the kitchen table eating if our parents didn't want us to know what they were talking about, they talked Dutch" (male, 72 yrs., RCA); "My mother loved to speak Dutch but at home we would speak English" (female, 87 yrs., CRC); "When

[43] According to Bratt: "Having all the marks of the WASP profile, the Dutch did not melt into American society on schedule; in fact, they vociferously resisted the same. Socioeconomic dysfunction cannot explain the anomaly, for in these areas the Dutch have adjusted well enough. The reason must lie in considerable part in the realm of 'outlook,' 'religion,' and 'mind'" (Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America*, 220).

people visited my Grandparents at our home, they would speak Dutch. It was very apparent to me that my lineage was from the Netherlands and was Dutch" (male, 76 yrs., RCA); "Well, whenever my uncle from East Saugatuck came over, all he talked was Dutch" (male, 84 yrs., CRC); "My parents always spoke Dutch to each other. So much I couldn't even speak English and the teacher came over and said, 'If you don't teach this boy English, he's not going to learn in school'" (male, 79 yrs., CRC); "During the early 1930s, My Grandfather lived in Zeeland. When we would go there on Sunday we had to go to the Dutch service, we couldn't understand one thing that was going on" (male, 84 yrs., RCA); "My husband's parents spoke the English language with a little Dutch twist to it, and that kept us constantly aware of the heritage. Dress also. Very modest, very dark colors" (female, 92 yrs., RCA); "My Dad always prayed in Dutch, the Lord's Prayer in Dutch" (male, 79 yrs., CRC). In these cases language functions as a reminder and indicator of being Dutch-American, even if the history of one's Dutch background as such is not being part of the theme. Hearing Dutch even occasionally reinforces the notion of being part of a specific culture. This is even more so in cases respondents remember Dutch church services in their youth. Some do. "We had an American service in the morning and a Dutch one in the afternoon, but I always went in the morning" (male, 89 yrs., CRC); "My mother would go to church where they still had the Dutch language. I can remember that. They had one service of Dutch at that time" (male, 80 yrs., CRC); "For years I attended the Dutch service in Prospect Park. The English service was in the morning and the Dutch service in the afternoon. I can still remember words such as *hemel* (heaven) and *aarde* (earth). I liked the Dutch Psalms' (female, 87 yrs., CRC). Sometimes it was more indirectly. "Some of the Dutch people wanted to keep the Dutch in their churches. Not my grandfather. He was one that said, 'No. We're here in the United States.' And he could speak Dutch. But he wanted his kids to learn English, and be Americans, not be Dutch" (male, 83 yrs., RCA). And memories of Dutch words can pop up unexpectedly: "I went to Amsterdam Airport, when I saw the sign above the escalators that said '*Opgepast*' (be careful), that was used everyday in our home" (male, 76 yrs., RCA).

Most respondents do remember (some) Dutch words or lines that would be used at home during their childhood. I list just a number of examples: *vies* (dirty), *benauwd* (uncomfortable), *gezellig* (cozy), *kleine* (little one), *wees stil* (keep silent), *verboden* (forbidden), *hartelijk gefeliciteerd met je verjaardag* (happy birthday), and many words related to foods and sweets, such as, *banket* (almond pastry), *krakeling* (cracknel), and *pepermuntje* (peppermint), *koffie* (coffee), *erwtensoep* (pea soup), *karnemelkse pap* (buttermilk porridge), *sauzijzenbroodje* (pig-in-a-blanket), *appelmoes* (applesauce), *boerenkool* or *boerenmoes* (kale), *bloedworst* (black pudding), *hutspot* (hotch-potch), *balkenbrij* (pork, liver, and buckwheat flour), and *boerenjongens* (brandied raisins). Most respondents have clear recollections of their mothers (frequently or sometimes) preparing Dutch foods. "Balkenbrij, Oh, I still love it. I used to help my mother make it . . . it was hard, because she used buckwheat flour and ground liver and we had to stir it and it was real thick and heavy" (female, 84 yrs., RCA); "Oh, pea soup. We had a big family—my Mom was good at giving us good food. I mean, wasn't salads and that kind of stuff in those days, you know" (female, 85 yrs., CRC); "*Vetbollen*, in a pot of oil on the stove, dipped the dough in and got *vetbollen*, they're like donuts. And *boerenjongens* on the New Year. Beautiful" (female, 92 yrs., RCA); "Buttermilk porridge. My Dad liked buttermilk porridge. That was awful. That died when he did" (male, 78 yrs., RCA). A little tongue-in-cheek: "I don't think the Dutch are noted for their cooking. Pretty dull" (male, 83 yrs., RCA).

The Dutch are not noted for telling Dutch stories or tales either. Particularly in a subculture that resisted fast assimilation into American culture, one would expect it to have a richer tradition of storytelling, of tales on their homeland, their religious struggles, their emigration, etc. This, however, is not the case. "No. I can't remember that" (female, 87 yrs., CRC); "No. None" (male, 84 yrs., CRC); "Not really, no" (female, 88 yrs., CRC); "I don't remember a lot of that" (female, 92 yrs., RCA); "Some of my uncles and aunts did a little bit,

but not too much" (male, 89 yrs., RCA); "I don't think so. I don't think they considered themselves to be of the Netherlands anymore. They were Americans" (female, 74 yrs., CRC). Evidently, this generation of older Dutch-Americans did not grow up in a culture that emphasized the importance of telling stories and tales. In general, my interviews indicate that talking about the Dutch background of the family was not seen as an important issue. "They did not much talk about it. Because they weren't first generation, you know" (male, 83 yrs., RCA); "I don't think at that time, no, because there were so many Dutch around' (male, 76 yrs., CRC); "I don't know my parents ever stressed that too much" (female, 84 yrs., RCA); "My mother did, yeah. My father never talked about it that much" (female, 87 yrs., CRC); "Can't remember. . . . They were proud to be an American, I know that" (female, 87 yrs., CRC); "They were pretty much in America—but they didn't stick to the Dutch background very much, no" (female, 88 yrs., CRC). But the issue is whether the explanation of a weakly developed oral tradition is primarily a cultural one or has more to do with the circumstances under which people lived at that time. It was the period right after the Depression years in which people had to work extremely hard and put in long hours; conditions were poor, unemployment was high, there was little money to spend, and mere survival was the first priority.[44]

All in all it seems that a strong and much-discussed interest in their Dutch origins, in listening to Dutch family stories and Dutch tales, in developing specific Dutch-American cultural practices was not part of the formative years of the present generation of older Dutch-Americans. Apart from Tulip Time, there were no regular Dutch celebrations or Dutch events. The older generation of Dutch-Americans grew up in a fairly homogeneous Dutch community where cultural differences were much more defined along religious than along ethnic lines. Ethnic distinctiveness isn't very meaningful in the absence of ethnic pluralism, but religious "otherness" is. And the (Christian) Reformed Dutch communities and churches in the Holland, Michigan, area have certainly had their share of religious differences and separations.[45]

Later Life

A central assumption of generation theories is that common youth experiences, common exposure to major societal events during its formative years, have lasting effects on the life course of generation members.[46] These marked experiences set a generation apart from other generations; they imprint the way a generation looks at the world, at itself, and at other generations. Generations differ because they grew up in different social, economic, political, and cultural circumstances that noticeably shaped their attitudes, beliefs, and life chances. These experiences, so to speak, "stick" to a generation. For the present generation of older Dutch-Americans, the Depression years and World War II were two of the most radical events that deeply affected their youth years and consequently their later years. In this section I want to explore how older Dutch-Americans experienced the way their upbringing (i.e. the way they were socialized in basic Dutch-Americans values, norms, and mores) has influenced the next stages of their life course. Respondents were asked whether they feel their Dutch-American background and upbringing had an effect on their later way of life, on their beliefs about what is right and wrong, as well as on their beliefs about society and the world.

Do respondents believe that their Dutch-American background had an impact on their adult years, their later life? This clearly is the case. "Oh yes, I think so. Those values were taught when we were young and they sort of stick with you. They stay with you" (female, 84 yrs., RCA); "Sure. The work ethic. It is the work ethic" (male 84 yrs., RCA); "I would say so—I mean, you got the same thing they all say, they all say 'birds of a feather flock together' and if

[44] This issue of whether Dutch-American culture lacked an oral tradition is a highly interesting research topic, particularly in view of the fact that the Reformed world of old had a strong reading culture.
[45] Robert Swierenga and Elton Bruins, *Family Quarrels in the Dutch Reformed Churches in the Nineteenth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).
[46] See Diepstraten, Ester, and Vinken, *Mijn generatie*.

you're Dutch, you kind of get together" (male, 80 yrs., CRC); "It did, but I think over the years I've kind of mellowed out on it somewhat. When we first got married, I was as strict as my parents had been to me" (male, 72 yrs., RCA); "Definitely, definitely" (male, 78 yrs., RCA); "Oh yes. You listened to your Mom and Dad, and you thought what they said was the truth. That's the way it should go" (female, 89 yrs., CRC); "You know, I guess I was forty before I ever had a drop of alcohol" (male, 83 yrs., RCA); "It did. But I knew I didn't want to be that strict. I certainly wanted to lower the bars" (female, 73 yrs., RCA); "Oh yes, definitely. Such as church attendance, and attitude towards others. You were very careful what kind of work you did, and you were very loyal to whatever work you had to do. You did the best you could" (female, 92 yrs., RCA); "Oh, definitely. Well, not to be wasteful. You know, some people throw everything away—well, I'm not. I—what do you say? The expression is, 'I'm too Dutch to throw it away'" (female, 87 yrs., CRC); "Well, when it comes to Sunday observance, I still do prefer to keep it a church and family day, as much as I can. If we do need to make occasional purchases, we do it. But I'd rather not. I'd really prefer not to" (male, 76 yrs., RCA).

The Depression had a major impact on the respondents' families, impacts that deeply influenced this generation of older Dutch-Americans. Some of them have vivid memories of those tough years. "My Dad was not a businessman at all. Took such a beating in the depression, that he sort of lost . . . he was just glad he could go to work and come home with a loaf of bread. We had seven in the family, and I was the oldest. I remember the breadline. I remember when we were absolutely poor" (male, 79 yrs., CRC); "My father had bought a farm, and he was starting to go . . . but the Depression came and he lost the place, and then we moved from one house to another house. I remember that clearly, we moved from one house to another house. Very sad" (male, 80 yrs., CRC); "Because of the Depression, father has lost the farm he had bought. Those were hard times. That's why I think we, in our generation, appreciate where we are, we say, 'Did we ever expect that we'd be able to go South a couple months in the winter?' We didn't . . . as a boy, vacations were unheard of" (male, 76 yrs., CRC); "Our parents lived through the Depression, and they watched their pennies much more than we do, because they didn't know where the next one was coming from. We are much freer with that and our kids are freer yet" (male, 76 yrs., RCA); "Because of the Depression our parents had to work very, very hard. And they taught us the value of saving and having money before you buy something, you don't buy something unless you are prepared to pay for it. We still are that way. You don't waste anything" (female, 74 yrs., CRC). The Depression also affected school choices. Christian schools were a main issue during the youth years of my respondents, particularly among Christian Reformed people. Christian schools were seen as major institutions in guaranteeing orthodox Calvinist teachings, Reformed values, Bible knowledge, good citizenship, and in securing the chain of the three dominant Reformed links: home, church, and school. Christian schools were seen as "the feeders of the church."[47] But Christian schools, compared to public schools were expensive; tuition fees were stiff for ordinary households. But for many CRC members, having Christian schools was highly important and they were willing—literally—to pay the price. Then the Depression hit and it hit hard. Here is a story on the impact of the Depression on school choice. "Came time for me to enroll in school. Now the Depression has come upon us and my Dad and Mom said, 'Well you're going to a public school.' My father had been a member of the consistory, both a deacon and an elder. As soon as my brother and I were enrolled in the public school, he was not elected again. They told him right out, 'You will not be a member of this consistory until your boys are enrolled in Christian school.' They hammered about him for about five years, and my father finally broke down and sent us to the Christian school. Immediately he was again elected and back in the fold" (male, 84 yrs., RCA).

[47] Swierenga, *Dutch Chicago*, chapt. 7.

Do older Dutch-Americans also believe that their Dutch-American upbringing has influenced how well they personally have been doing in life? Here, opinions are somewhat more mixed. "I think so, yes. My father brought me up to be a good business man, and treat everybody the way you'd want them to" (male, 89 yrs., RCA); "I don't know. I'm just thankful for what I have" (female, 84 yrs., RCA); "Yes I do. There are a lot of people who are just as smart as me, or smarter than me. But I knew how to do the job, bring it to a conclusion. These are all things I learned from my parents, it was just imbedded in me" (male, 84 yrs., RCA); "Yes. Honesty. You have to have an honest business, people have to trust you. God's been so good to us" (female, 74 yrs., CRC); "I worked every Saturday, and I was able to pay my school tuition a year ahead. But how much credit can I take for how I have been doing? I didn't throw it away, but I can't take all the credit either" (male, 76 yrs., CRC); "During my working years, you had the church and you had the Christian school. I always had a job that paid good, but I didn't get rich at it, you know. It took all the money that we made to live. All of our kids are college graduates, and we helped them a lot" (male, 72 yrs., RCA); "Yeah, I think so. Well . . . well, I think the Lord has blessed us. We don't just spend recklessly. You try to be honest. I'm sure our upbringing had a lot to do with that" (male, 84 yrs., CRC); "Not really. I think that you are who you are. And that is genetic-wise, it is also environment-wise" (male, 79 yrs., CRC); "A little bit, right. You're supposed to work hard. But I don't know that you can just claim that it's inbred" (male, 83 yrs., RCA); "Oh, sure. We were taught to work. Everyone should have a job" (female, 73 yrs., RCA); "My values? Definitely. What shall I say, always integrity for work. You give an honest day's work for anybody, if you're employed by somebody. So, the work ethic. I still have that—I can't get rid of it. Can't get rid of that" (female, 80 yrs., RCA). For most respondents there is a relationship between Dutch-American upbringing and being successful in life but not necessarily in a direct way. It sure helps (particularly in the eyes of those that have been successful), but personal talents and situational factors count too.

Do older Dutch-Americans feel that their Dutch socialization influenced their personal beliefs about what is right and wrong? Are their moral convictions related to their Dutch upbringing? It seems so, but quite a number of respondents indicate that they have become more lenient and less strict compared to the generation of their parents. "Oh yes. I tried to bring up my family as a good Christian family, and I think that's been successful" (male, 89 yrs., RCA); "I'm sure it had a big influence, on most all moral issues. But a couple of drinks does not bother me as long as you do it in moderation. I still have some qualms about going to a baseball game on Sunday, but my parents would have thought I was going right to hell if I told them I did that" (male, 84 yrs., RCA); "Very much so. I was brought up with the Ten Commandments. But we know it is difficult to keep them" (female, 80 yrs., CRC); "I think we're more, much more accepting of other people, you know, my parents were prejudiced, I felt that, and I try very hard not to be" (female, 74 yrs., CRC); "Yeah, but I think some of it wasn't right. I mean, it was too strict, we reach out more" (female, 88 yrs., CRC); "Yes, very much so. . . . You see, the American life, where partying and drinking and so on . . . I mean, I like a glass of wine, and I'll drink a glass of beer, but I don't misuse it" (male, 80 yrs., CRC); "There was definite rights and wrongs. Never what you could slide by with" (male, 76 yrs., CRC); "Yeah. I think you can have it pounded into your head, but you still have to have the mind to decipher it: 'I believe this' or 'I don't believe this.' Later in my marriage I started to mellow: the kids were allowed to go to the pool on Sundays and we go out to dinner on Sunday. I changed myself" (male, 72 yrs., RCA); "Yeah, I would say. Some of our values change, you know. We do a lot of things today that my folks never did. We go out—we eat out quite a bit" (male, 84 yrs., CRC); "Oh yeah. I wouldn't buy anything on Sundays after we were married. We just didn't do that. That's the way we were brought up. We still don't go shopping on Sunday; I wouldn't fill up my gas tank on Sunday. You just don't do that. But on Sunday night after church we go out for coffee. We do that" (male, 78 yrs., RCA); "We sometimes go to a restaurant but we never take a boat out on Sunday" (female, 80 yrs., CRC); "I think my upbringing influenced my present beliefs. But I've

made my own commitments. That means there's changes, you know" (male, 79 yrs., CRC); "Well, we sometimes go eating out on Sunday. My parents never did that. And as far as movies are concerned, it has changed, because I don't think it's wrong to go" (female, 80 yrs., RCA); "I think we started eating out on Sunday when we vacationed in Florida. Then it was okay. But shopping on a Sunday, I still don't like that. It doesn't feel good" (female, 88 yrs., CRC); "I think society today is going downhill. I really do. They mow the grass on Sunday, plant their flowers on Sunday, go to the beach and swimming on Sunday, think nothing of it" (female, 89 yrs., CRC); "Oh yes, definitely. In the way you dress, the places you go, how you treat other people, what you do with what you have, attitudes" (female, 92 yrs., RCA); "I'm not as strict anymore. But church itself has changed so much too, you know" (female, 88 yrs., CRC); "Yes, yes. I still believe the way I was brought up. Maybe a little bit more liberal with some of our actions. In those days, how many people in the church were educated? It was the pastor. What he said was it. Today, we have much more educated church members. We are allowed to express ourselves with ideas. I think that's healthy" (female, 80 yrs., RCA), and an interesting change by the same respondent about inter- and intragenerational differences in emotional self-presentation: "I learned how to show I cared and loved. Be more friendly to people. My husband was a minister. And I told him to be less self-contained, to open up especially to his congregation. 'They are looking to you as their leader. But they also need to know that you love and care for them. You've got to show them.' And he began to loosen up. That was a big change."

The findings show that older Dutch-Americans clearly feel that their personal life course is deeply affected by the values, norms, and beliefs that were characteristic for the upbringing and socialization of their generation. But they changed too. Maybe not radically but they did. The changes have primarily to do with becoming less strict, especially compared to the Sunday observance by the generation of their parents. For most older Dutch-Americans, Sunday restaurant visits are no longer taboo. Compared to the generations of their parents, they have become less rigorous in this respect.

The present generation of older Americans is not known for having caused major political controversies with the generation of their parents. In the political arena, intergenerational relationships were generally at ease. That would be quite different for the political relationships between this generation of older Americans and their children: the baby boom generation.[48] Still, it is interesting to see how the older generation of Dutch-Americans frames the political stands of their parents and how these influenced their own political choices.[49] Was there a direct influence, and if so in which direction? "I'm a conservative Republican and that comes right from my parents. Oh yeah, we had that hammered in our heads. And of course, we were all businessmen, you know, and the big difference was union/non-union and we got to abhor unions" (male, 84 yrs., RCA); "Yeah, it did. They [the parents] could see it coming just like I see it coming . . . the world's going to pot, you know" (female, 80 yrs., CRC); "My Dad was a staunch Republican. Right now I'm unhappy with everybody. I don't like all this wrangling in the government. It seems like everybody wants their own way and they get nowhere" (female, 84 yrs., RCA); "We are Republicans. We still are. And our kids are. I do believe that what you were taught sticks with you. You don't change. There's a lot of bad in politics now. I think money buys offices nowadays. I stick with President Bush because I think he's a Christian" (female, 74 yrs., CRC); "I'm a Republican but my father was a strong Democrat. You watch your politics, you watch the ones that are running for it, and if they are true Christians, that's the ones that you pick" (male, 80 yrs., CRC); "I can get wound up over politics! I used to think I was fully Republican, but I am not so sure today. Our whole government is a mess in the United States. It really is. Invading Iraq? I'm not sure we should

[48] See Putnam, *Bowling Alone* and van den Broek, *Politics and Generations*.

[49] See Krabbendam, *Vrijheid in het verschiet*, chapter 9, for a historical analysis of party preferences of Dutch immigrants and their early shift from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party.

have ever gotten there. I'm tickled pink that I don't have kids over there, you know? And I voted twice for George Bush, and I say, 'What's he done for me?'" (male, 72 yrs., RCA); "My parents were Republican, I'm Republican. I think that's pretty Dutch. That's pretty Dutch. Whole Western Michigan is Republican and that's pretty Dutch" (male, 78 yrs., RCA); "My father was a strong Democrat. Well, you know, when you were poor, Franklin Roosevelt was the man that changed everybody's mind. But I believe in capitalism, I'm Republican" (male, 79 yrs., CRC); "My parents were Republican, No doubt. Some of Dad's proudest moments were bringing Gerry Ford when he was running for Congress to the Holland Furnace Company. I was very conservative when I was young, but I'm less so today. Of course, our current president doesn't help the conservative cause very much. I'm a switch voter" (male, 83 yrs., RCA); "Politics? I don't know. I've never been drastically or dramatically drawn in any other direction than what my parents were. Mom and Dad were always Republican. Most of this Western Michigan area has always been Republican, yeah. I think I only ever voted for one Democratic president, and that was John Kennedy. I remember feeling guilty about it" (female, 92 yrs., RCA); "I think my father was a Democrat. I voted straight Democrat before, sure. But now I don't anymore. You have to know who you're going to, and a lot of times we didn't do that" (female, 85 yrs., CRC); "I always vote a split. Split ticket. I look at the person, I look at their credentials, try to figure out their values, and I will vote for that person" (female, 80 yrs., RCA); "I vote Republican just as my parents" (female, 73 yrs., RCA); "Politics was not a big deal in our family, and I've never taken a strong interest in that. In most of the presidential elections from high school on, I think the Republicans swept this part of the country" (male, 76 yrs., RCA); "Being Dutch-American, Reformed or Christian Reformed, and Republican, that's standard equipment in Holland" (male, 72 yrs., RCA). The conclusion is rather apparent. Politically, the present generation of older Dutch-Americans does not deviate markedly from the choices of their parents, their preferences are based on values and traditions, and the dominance of the Republican vote is obvious.[50] Though there is political discontent as well, the intergenerational stability and continuity of the Dutch-American vote is remarkable.[51]

Dutch Algebra: Ethnic and Religious Backgrounds of Spouses, Relatives, and Friends

Endogamy is the tendency to marry within one's group or subculture. Sociologically seen, in-group marriage strengthens cultural cohesion, regulates group affiliation, facilitates social control and power over group resources, and helps groups and subcultures to survive in demanding environments.[52] Groups and subcultures that (directly or indirectly) favor in-group marriage tend to be inner-directed and closed, and are much stronger in bonding than in bridging with the greater society. Marrying within the group allows subcultures to keep the outside world (and its cultural influences) at a distance. Endogamy limits the sensitivity and willingness to innovation and change. For many generations endogamy was pretty much the standard practice in Dutch-American settlements, which enabled them to slow down assimilation and to direct adjustment to mainstream American society. The peculiar linkage of Dutch ethnicity and Reformed religion within these settlements was a major cultural advantage in facilitating in-group marriage. Moreover, endogamous arrangements were rather

[50] According to an investigation by the *Grand Rapids Press* (31 October 2004), Ottawa County—the district that surrounds Holland—"arguably one of the most conservative counties in the nation . . . has not voted for a Democrat for president since the time of Abraham Lincoln."

[51] It has to be emphasized that in this study I am dealing with Dutch-Americans who spent most of their adult life in Holland, Michigan. It would be highly interesting to contrast my findings with a sample of Dutch-Americans who grew up in Holland (and in the two main Reformed Churches) but left (for various reasons) and spent their later life elsewhere or who left their childhood church and switched to another congregation or denomination. See also note 37.

[52] See Marco H. D. van Leeuwen, ed., *Marriage Choices and Class Boundaries: Social Endogamy in History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) and Ruth Shonle Cavan, "Concepts and Terminology in Interreligious Marriage," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 9, no. 4 (winter 1970): 311-20.

unproblematic in communities such as Holland, Michigan, as they were predominantly Dutch. Though my sample of respondents is far from being representative, it is highly interesting to see that in-group marriage is almost customary among this generation of older Dutch-Americans. Of the twenty respondents that are (or were) married, only one respondent married a non-Dutch partner, and one has a spouse from a mixed Dutch background. In regard to denomination, seventeen of the twenty-one respondents stayed in the denomination (CRC or RCA) of their parents. The other four changed from either CRC to RCA or vice versa, usually taking the denomination of their spouses after marriage.[53] The older generation of Dutch-Americans is fairly homogenous in terms of its ethnic and denominational composition. I asked a sub sample of twelve respondents about the partner and denomination choice of their children. It turns out that (still) a majority of their children married a Dutch-American partner and attends churches in the Reformed tradition. This is particularly true for children that stayed in the southwestern Michigan area. However, higher education and the geographical mobility that it often brings, changes the parameters of ethnic and denominational partner choices.[54]

From a generational point of view, peer group composition is crucial, not only during the formative years of a generation but also later in the life course. What was (and is) the ethnic and religious base of the intimate personal network of our generation of older Dutch-Americans? Were and are most of their close friends Dutch-American too? One should realize that there is only a limited element of choice in this matter. Holland, Michigan, was, of course, rather homogeneous regarding its ethnic composition when the respondents grew up in the 1920s through 1940s. I first asked respondents whether most of their friends were Dutch-American (say at high school age). "Yes, I would say. At least 85 per cent, especially in this area" (male, 84 yrs., RCA); "I would say all of them. All of them" (male, 79 yrs., CRC); "Oh, yeah, most of them" (female, 80 yrs., CRC); "In this community, I think you'd have to say yes" (female, 92 yrs., RCA); "Oh, yeah. Oh, everybody in the school, they were all Christian Reformed, all Dutch, you know'"(female, 85 yrs., CRC); "Yes, they were. The only difference we had I guess was the Reformed and the Christian Reformed" (male, 89 yrs., RCA); "Well, I never went to high school; in the country school, most of them were Dutch (male, 84 yrs., CRC); "I would say so, yeah. Because, you know, nearly everybody went to church, everyone in school was either Reformed or Christian Reformed" (male, 76 yrs., RCA); "Oh, yeah. All of them. And of course, I went to Christian school, so I kind of stood out because I was a Reformed and almost all of my friends were Christian Reformed back then" (male, 72 yrs., RCA). The answers reflect that Holland, Michigan, during the formative years of this generation was far from being ethnically and religiously diverse: most if not all of your friends were Dutch, Reformed and/or Christian Reformed.

Part of an implicit or explicit endogamy strategy is the existence of an informal rule that prompts one to date your "own kind." Was such a rule operative during their years of adolescence when respondents tried their luck on the relational market? Were they supposed to date Dutch boys and girls only, preferably from their own denomination? This is a somewhat delicate issue—as it is related to ethnocentrism—and here is how respondents reacted. "I think that was generally the case. I don't think anybody thought about it, it just happened" (female, 84 yrs., RCA); "I don't know. I think it was more—marry a good Christian" (female, 74 yrs., CRC); "Well, we always did date our own kind you know, more or less. We pretty much stuck to the Dutch. Church is all Dutch background . . . and that's where we get them from" (male, 80 yrs., CRC); "Kind of. I mean, yeah. 'Well, he's not Dutch,' that's what they would say, you know. They wanted you to stay in the Dutch area" (female, 87 yrs., CRC); "Oh, you know, at that age, I don't think I was aware of that . . . I did go for a person who was a good Christian.

[53] Two respondents shifted from CRC to RCA and two from RCA to CRC.

[54] Intergenerational trends in ethnic and denominational partner choices among Dutch-Americans are worth a study of its own.

And I felt the Dutch people were very good people" (female, 92 yrs., RCA); "Certainly, and from our own church too. I married a girl from Reformed church, and my parents [CRC] had real doubts about that. It was almost like marrying a Catholic girl" (male, 84 yrs., RCA); "We could date who we wanted. But they had to be church-going kids. Dad said, 'Long as they go to church'" (female, 87 yrs., CRC); "Basically, yes. I knew a Polish boy, and we liked each other a lot. But I knew he was Polish and Catholic: I knew that my mother might draw the line right there. . . . Catholic people were looked down upon in the community, they were somehow going to go to hell" (female, 80 yrs., RCA); "I had a boy that asked me to go to a dance, and I told my mother that I was going, and she said, 'Oh, no, you aren't.' And I said, 'Why not?' And she said, 'Because he is Catholic and you are not to date him.' It was that severe" (female, 73 yrs., RCA); "Not so much, I think. It was not referred to as 'Dutch,' but we should stay within our religion" (male, 76 yrs., CRC); "I would say so. Oh, yes. We were definitely encouraged to do that, yes" (female, 73 yrs., RCA); "This was not a big deal in my family, but it certainly was a big deal in families around us" (male, 76 yrs., RCA); "That was a big thing. You didn't date a Catholic. Oh, no, no, that's not good. You stayed there" (male, 72 yrs., RCA).

It appears, on balance, that the informal rule of dating within your own group was more related to religion than to ethnicity. Being of the (Christian) Reformed faith was more important than being Dutch. But in real life the two were, of course, nearly inseparable. Holland, Michigan, in the formative years of this generation of older Dutch-Americans was largely a Dutch community and that—almost by definition—meant Reformed and Christian Reformed church people. You looked for a (Christian) Reformed boy or girl, you certainly ended up with a Dutch date. The dating market was an ethnic-religious market but the religious component was the thing that really counted.

At later stages in one's life course, personal friends are likely to be more a matter of choice based on experience and preference. Is the ethnic and denominational composition of older Dutch-Americans' current close friends more diverse than during their younger years? I asked them whether most of their present friends are Dutch-Americans. This is how they responded. "I would say most are. We have some that aren't Dutch. Most of our friends are through church and school" (male, 84 yrs., CRC); "Yes they are" (female, 73 yrs., RCA); "Most of them are Dutch-American" (male, 89 yrs., RCA); "All of them. They all are" (male, 79 yrs., CRC); "Not all of them, no. I have many friends from other churches. They're not Dutch. But being here in [retirement home], I would say maybe 85 per cent are Dutch" (female, 80 yrs., RCA); "Yeah, they're like me" (female, 87 yrs., CRC); "Most of them. I would say all of them" (female, 92 yrs., RCA); "Most of them, yes. But we have Spanish friends too" (female, 74 yrs., CRC); "I would say my close friends here are . . . no, they're not all Dutch. But it doesn't matter to me" (female, 84 yrs., RCA); "Yes. You're mostly with your own, your church families and so on, kind of stick to them" (male, 80 yrs., CRC); "Probably. A lot of my friends are from my own church" (female, 76 yrs., CRC); "The majority are" (male, 72 yrs., RCA); "Most of them are Dutch, but I have some Spanish friends" (female, 87 yrs., CRC); "Yeah, most of them" (female, 88 yrs., CRC); "Yes, but not that I want it to be that way. Many attend the same church" (male, 76 yrs., RCA); "Yes. I think it's the church. We're very active in church" (male, 78 yrs., RCA). The conclusion is clear: most present close friends of older Dutch-Americans are Dutch-American too. Again, it is not so much a deliberate ethnic choice but friendships are primarily made through the church. Church is the common denominator. Church is where you make your friends. Church is what matters.

The Netherlands

With each next generation, the emotional attachment of Dutch-Americans with the Netherlands became weaker. Even though Dutch-American immigrant culture resisted fast assimilation,

economic and social ties with the Netherlands inevitably eroded.[55] The same holds for the relationships between the CRC and RCA and their respective denominational counterparts in the Netherlands: the nature and intensity of mutual contacts is quite different now compared to the late nineteenth and early or mid-twentieth century.[56] The churches grew apart and follow(ed) their own courses. The project of gradual and often unconscious Americanization of Dutch immigrants was accompanied by a declining orientation towards Dutch society among subsequent generations. Immigration was not only a physical act but also a psychological and cultural act. Later generations of Dutch immigrants simply had fewer family bonds with the Netherlands. This is especially the case in places like Holland, Michigan, that experienced only modest direct immigration from the Netherlands in the (second part of the) twentieth century. One may assume that for the average Dutch-American whose family has been over in America for several generations and with few relatives in the old country, the psychological attachment to the Netherlands is not very salient. Is there evidence among our sample of older Dutch-Americans that their personal identification with the Netherlands is quite superficial? Is the Netherlands also psychologically a distant country?

The findings show that many respondents still feel a bond with the Netherlands, though indeed a rather unarticulated and loose one. The bond with Dutch society primarily reflects a symbolic relationship, representing the country where one's forefathers came from.[57] "I think I appreciated being there because my family had come from there" (female, 84 yrs., RCA); "I think you feel a bit closer than you would with another country. Mainly because you're family with it" (male, 84 yrs., CRC); "We feel a special bond, yeah. That's where we're from. That's where we came from" (female, 74 yrs., CRC); "I wish I could go there. That's what I always think" (female, 87 yrs., CRC); "Yes, I think we do. And I think most people do, of my age" (female, 92 yrs., RCA); "Well, my ancestors came from there. They did. And you do have a connection" (female, 85 yrs., CRC); "It's just another country because I haven't been connected with it for so many years" (male, 89 yrs., RCA); "I do. Yes definitely, because of the people I know. Any chance I get to go back to the Netherlands, I do" (female, 80 yrs., RCA); "Well, not just another country, no. I feel kin to it" (female, 87 yrs., CRC); "Um, well, just another country" (female, 73 yrs., RCA); "I think so. No, I think I do. I feel closer to it than I would to any other country over there" (female, 76 yrs., CRC); "To me it is just another country, though we enjoyed going there. We don't have any relatives there" (male, 78 yrs., RCA); "Yeah, I have a special bond. Certainly. But if you were to ask me, if I had a free trip to Europe, where would I go? It'd probably be to Italy or Southern France" (male, 83 yrs., RCA).

Furthermore, I asked my sample of older Dutch-Americans about the first image that comes to their mind when thinking of the Netherlands. Their primary associations pretty much stay in line with national Dutch folklore: "windmills," "wooden shoes," "tulips," "canals," "dikes," "bicycles," Amsterdam as city of sin (window prostitutes), but also a nation that "took a beating from the Nazis and stayed steadfast," "a small and struggling nation," "an extremely small nation that had just remarkable influence at one time or another," and a country that is "falling away religiously." There is also humor: "Years ago I thought they were either Reformed or Christian Reformed in the Netherlands, but then when I went there . . ." (male, 76 yrs., CRC). Most of these images do not go beyond the standard tourist repertoire of Dutch stereotypes and do not explicitly relate to emigration tales or histories. In thinking about Dutch society, Dutch-Americans do not associate beyond the mainstream American typecast about the Netherlands. About two-thirds of my sample has visited the Netherlands. None of the

[55] See Krabbendam, *Vrijheid in het verschiet*, 283-301.

[56] See Henry Zwaanstra, *Reformed Thought and Experience in a New World: A Study of the Christian Reformed Church and Its American Environment: 1890-1918* (Kampen: Kok, 1973), and James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America*, 1984.

[57] An example of symbolic attachment was the highly celebrated visit of Princess Margriet to Holland, Michigan, on the occasion of the 150 year anniversary of the city's founding by Van Raalte.

respondents stays actively in touch with current developments in the Netherlands. It seems, in conclusion, that most older Dutch-Americans do feel a certain attachment to the Netherlands but it is an attachment that remains superficial. It certainly is a positive feeling, but not one that is deeply rooted. Affection for the Netherlands is primarily of a symbolic nature.

The Next Generation and Dutch-American Culture

Discussing the beliefs of the next generation about the significance of preserving Dutch-American culture is important for two reasons. It tells us how distinct the generation of older Dutch-Americans feels they themselves are in this respect. This element of self-attributed distinctiveness is one of the cornerstones of generation theory. But it also tells us about a likely future of Dutch-American culture in the Holland area: will the next generation—i.e. in the eyes of the older generation of Dutch-Americans—be involved in keeping up Dutch-American ways and traditions or is conserving Dutch heritage and Dutch culture simply irrelevant to them? This is how the oldest generation of Dutch-Americans thinks about the feelings of the youngest generation about having a Dutch background. Are those feelings different from their own? "I think so. I don't think it means as much to them as it did to us" (male, 89 yrs., RCA); "Yes. They think nothing of going to the movies on Sundays, planning big beach parties, and having things like that we wouldn't have thought of doing
. . . I think they're not as faithful as they should be," "Yes, they're getting more Americanized as they go along. I don't think they're interested at all . . . they're interested in the church, but not in their Dutch background" (male, 80 yrs., CRC); "I think there's a mixture there, some say, 'Well, I'm not going to worry about that' and others say, 'Hey, we should preserve some of these heritage things'" (male, 76 yrs., CRC); "Yeah, I don't think it's as important to them as it was to us, growing up. I think they just wash it aside, you know, they don't pay attention to that. We were reminded. Dutch heritage back then was a pretty important part of our lives. Today it isn't. A lot of that comes from the parents themselves, today. Me included" (male, 72 yrs., RCA); "Well, yeah. The things they do on Sundays isn't necessary. To begin with, most of them don't speak Dutch or understand Dutch. And, they go to high school and college, and nationality doesn't enter a lot of times" (male, 84 yrs., CRC); "I don't think they put that much emphasis on the Dutch background as I do. We, in our generation, were always thinking of getting ahead. Money was the thing. Nowadays students are thinking how can we help the society" (male, 79 yrs., CRC); "I don't think they see any importance. I feel kind of sad that they don't" (female, 89 yrs., CRC); "I think so. Of course, we aren't as homogeneous a group as we used to be, we've been leavened quite well. I think this Tulip Time is kind of a good thing, keeps them reminded of their Dutch background" (male, 83 yrs., RCA); "They do not hold much to it. It's not important to them, no. The world has become so small, we're in touch with all kind of nationalities. They look to the world as the world. We never talk about being Dutch anymore" (female, 92 yrs., RCA); "I think so. The farther away you get, the less inclination you have towards thinking Dutch, or thinking about the Dutch" (female, 73 yrs., RCA); "No. I don't think so. Well, it's because it is so mixed now" (female, 88 yrs., CRC).

The conclusion appears rather obvious: older Dutch-Americans believe that the younger generation is much less conscious of being Dutch than they were; it is simply irrelevant to them. The older generation clearly feels they are different from the younger generation as far as the saliency of Dutch culture and identity is concerned. But what about their own children and grandchildren? Does the same conclusion apply here too? So it seems. "No, no. They don't talk about that much. It means more to me" (female, 87 yrs., CRC); "A little, I think a little bit different, but not much. I don't think that they bring it up as often as I did" (male, 89 yrs., RCA); "Oh yeah, my daughter she's really big into it, but I don't see the rest of them . . . " (male, 72 yrs., RCA); "Well, I don't know, because they don't talk about it. It's just not the thing to do today. I mean, maybe they realize they're Dutch-American; that's about it" (female, 85 yrs., CRC); "Sometimes I bring up a little something, how, when we were kids, how we did

things, but . . . no, they're not interested. Grandma better just be quiet. Yeah, I wish they would take more interest in their heritage" (female, 87 yrs., CRC); "I don't think they have a clue" (male, 79 yrs., CRC); "I don't think it's a big deal, no" (female, 76 yrs., CRC); "No, I don't think so, but that's the way things go" (male, 84 yrs., CRC); "My children, they're Americans. The Dutch means nothing" (male, 84 yrs., RCA). But self-criticism applies too: "I don't know that I communicated Dutch heritage to my kids. I guess I just felt so American, and so part of this country. I think I never told stories about the few things I know of my ancestors. I think that a lot gets lost in each generation in terms of communicating the past, unless you really work hard at it" (male, 76 yrs., RCA).

The conclusion is straightforward. According to the older generation of Dutch-Americans, their children and grandchildren are hardly or not at all interested in their Dutch ethnic background and heritage. Ethnicity, in their eyes, seems to have reached the stage of irrelevance. What is the implication of this indifferent ethnic psychological climate for the future of Dutch-American culture? That is the subject of the next section which reports the final phase of this study.

The Future of Dutch-American Culture

The Holland community is changing. Rapidly changing. Once an almost mono-cultural Dutch enclave, Holland is quickly turning into a multi-cultural community, which along with a still substantial Dutch population has a significant number of Hispanic and Asian inhabitants as well. More than one out of three of all the Holland residents is Hispanic, and about 50 per cent of the population of Holland under the age of eighteen is Hispanic.[58] Combined with the fact that many of my respondents stated that the next generation of Dutch-Americans is less interested in their Dutch heritage and their ethnic background, the cultural psychology of Holland will change considerably. Holland will be less Dutch. Holland will literally be more colorful. How do older Dutch-Americans feel about these developments and changes? Do they fear that Dutch-American culture will gradually fade away and even vanish, or do they think that somehow Holland will remain Dutch? How will the future look? Here is what older Dutch-Americans believe about what will happen to their community and its Dutch character. "I don't think it's going to totally fade away. It's diminishing though; we're becoming more of a melting pot. We used to be a Dutch community, but we're not anymore. We have Hispanics, we have Asians, we have blacks. . . . It's okay! I don't think you can live in your own little world. But there is not a lot of interaction between the groups" (male, 89 yrs., RCA); "It's going downhill. That's my feelings" (male, 80 yrs., CRC); "It will be gone. I think it will be gone. One more generation. . . . I think that's kind of sad, there's something to heritage" (male, 72 yrs., RCA); "Yes, because there's a lot of Spanish here, and none of that when I went to school. . . . I don't really think most of us are real happy about it. I mean, that's not very nice to say, I guess, but . . . because, it's changed Holland, and we don't like that kind of change" (female, 76 yrs., CRC); "I really feel, maybe twenty years from know, they'll hardly remember that this was a Dutch community. . . . It will gradually be gone. It's sad. It's very sad" (female, 87 yrs., CRC); "I personally do not feel sad about it. But some people are very irritated about that. . . . In our day and age, we've got to be accepting of other people. Learn more about them. Holland has done a good job of that, we have not pushed them out. That's part of our Dutch heritage" (female, 92 yrs., RCA); "It will come back, at a certain time in your life, ancestors mean a lot to you. It did to me" (female, 85 yrs., CRC); "I think that eventually it will fade away, because of the openness of our society, and the people get around and move in and out. I think it is inevitable. It's going to happen but maybe more slowly than if you're in, maybe other places" (female, 80 yrs., RCA); "I hope not. I wouldn't like to see that. But we try to be hospitable. We try to be friendly. Their lifestyles are just different" (female, 73 yrs., RCA); "No I am not really sorry. Well, I'd rather stick to our limits you know. Holland's changed just enormously. I work at the

[58] *Holland Sentinel*, 3 June 2007.

hospital delivering flowers, and the number of Spanish babies far outnumbers the Caucasians"(female, 88 yrs. CRC); "I see it happening. . . . Well, people aren't neat and clean like they used to be, they don't have regard for the Sabbath day, or for the church. I can see it dropping away. I feel very sorry about that. . . . The Dutch are dying, they're dying, there are a lot less Dutch here than what used to be" (female, 87 yrs., CRC); "I think it'll fade away. I think so . . . I think it is just the way things go. It doesn't bother me so much" (male, 76 yrs., RCA).

It is interesting to note that a number of respondents indicate that the Tulip Festival is important in keeping Dutch culture alive. "Our Tulip Festival is what really keeps us with the Dutch. That would be a big change, if it wouldn't be there. I think it would just fade away if we didn't have it" (male, 78 yrs., RCA); "Well, it will change, but there'll be a remnant of it left here. They have Tulip Time, and I think they do a terrific job" (male, 79 yrs., CRC); "It depends on how they maintain Tulip Time and the attractions they have here. Are we going to continue growing that many tulips that we do? And also, the wooden-shoe makers, you know, if that all continues, that will be something" (female, 80 yrs., RCA). These observations on Tulip Time are interesting, because they indicate that when the original cultural expressions of being Dutch disappear, the tourist representations and manifestations of these expressions become much more central to the survival of Dutch culture. Not the culture itself but its portrayal.[59] Real culture is substituted by symbolic or portrayed culture.[60]

Respondents are clearly aware of the demographic and social changes that are taking place in Holland and its impact on Dutch-American culture. The Dutch ways and customs will become less prominent and many respondents believe that eventually Dutch culture will fade away. And many respondents feel sad about it, as it regards their culture, their identity, and their heritage. But some take a more matter-of-fact stand: that is the way things go. The Tulip Festival is seen as a vital and necessary contribution to keep Dutch culture alive. But all agree that Holland is changing, rapidly changing.

CONCLUSIONS

This study, I hope, showed the relevance of researching the formative experiences and youth memories of older Dutch-Americans with respect to the shaping of their ethnic-religious identity. Given the current replacement of this generation, time is simply running out for tapping their experiences and memories. The findings indicate that the present generation of older Dutch-Americans feels that they were clearly socialized in what it means to be Dutch-American, i.e. in Dutch-American values and norms. Key words are: Christian lifestyle, church involvement, pronounced work ethic, strong family values, and cleanliness. The Depression particularly was a major event in the biographical history of this generation, an event that has markedly influenced the life course and the societal outlooks of its members. They feel, in line with classic generation theory, that their cohort is quite special in this manner and different from later (i.e. younger) generations. It is also clear, that their experiences and memories reflect attachment and affection. Older Dutch-Americans cherish their Dutch-American upbringing, and treasure their Dutchness—even if only symbolically.

Of the two basic ingredients of their cultural identity—Dutch descent and Reformed religion—faith is far more important than ethnicity. Though historically these two factors are obviously interlinked, being of the (Christian) Reformed faith is much more determining for the cultural self-understanding of older Dutch-Americans than being of Dutch extraction. Their Dutch descent is literally a thing of the past; their faith and religion are things of the present and the future. As indicated, Krabbendam points at an interesting underlying cultural paradox: the

[59] This is what is happening to Amish culture, for instance. See Peter Ester, *De stillen op het land: Portret van de Amish-gemeenschap in Amerika* (Kampen: Agora, 2001), and John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze* (London: Sage Publications, 1990).

stronger the religious identity of an immigrant group, the less it needed an explicit national or ethnic identity.[61] The Dutch roots of Dutch-Americans help to explain their historic genesis, but their Reformed faith, religion, and churches justify their cultural identity and existential consciousness.

Still, being Dutch is important to older Dutch-Americans, though their *Dutch* identity generally is quite superficial. The "Dutch" cultural folklore exhibited in Dutch colonies such as Holland, Michigan, and Pella, Iowa, may be seen as illustrative. But, I think it is necessary to go beyond this observation of mere ethnic superficiality by pointing at the phenomenon that Herbert Gans has labeled "symbolic ethnicity."[62] This form of ethnic identification, Gans writes, "is characterized by a nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation, or that of the old country; a love for and a pride in a tradition that can be felt without having to be incorporated into everyday behavior."[63] Many of the ethnic symbols and signs used by later generations of American immigrants are re-invented in the American context and blended with American ideals, codes, and traditions.[64] Old and new cultural expressions are combined, leading to novel cultural manifestations. In the words of Pieter Stokvis: "It is a 'hyphenated' culture marked by an ambivalent identity" (Stokvis, 418). Contemporary Dutch-American culture may first seem stereotyped, folklorized, and trivial expressions of being Dutch, but on further thought they function as cultural reinforcers of *Dutchness*—of Dutch identity—within the *American* context. These ethnic expressions strengthen Dutch consciousness and cultural cohesion and as such are instrumental to the preservation of Dutch-American culture.[65] Many respondents feel and fear that Dutch-American culture will fade away, and to a large extent that will be the case. But new cultural manifestations do and will take form. Contemporary Dutch ethnic expressions reflect the way Dutch-American culture has assimilated into mainstream American culture. These expressions are cultural markers of what Dutch identity means in modern American society, more than one-and-a-half centuries after Van Raalte, Scholte, and their followers set foot on American soil. Each new generation of Dutch-Americans will stew its own Dutch morsels in the American melting pot. This is precisely why the intergenerational study of Dutch-American ethnic and cultural expressions is such a fascinating subject.

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[61] Krabbendam, *Vrijheid in het verschiet*, 296.

[62] Herbert J. Gans, "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America," in *Theories of Ethnicity: A Classical Reader*, ed. Werner Sollors (New York, New York University Press, 1996), 425-59. First published in *On the Making of Americans: Essays in Honor of David Riesman*, ed. Herbert J. Gans (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979), 193-220.

[63] Gans, 436.

[64] Oscar Handlin has argued that many immigrants groups had a weakly developed national identity in their country of origin, and only after they settled in America acquired a sense of national consciousness. See Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations That Made the American People*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

[65] In a broader sense, MacCanell speaks about "staged authenticity." Dean MacCanell, "Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings," *American Journal of Sociology* 79, no. 3 (1973): 589-603.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. LETTER TO RESPONDENTS

June 25, 2007

Dear Mr/Mrs,

I am writing to ask you to participate in an important research project for which you are uniquely qualified. Let me introduce myself and explain my research project, which will begin this summer.

I am a Professor of Sociology at Tilburg University in the Netherlands, but I will be at Hope College in Holland, Michigan, this summer. I am greatly honored to be the recipient of the 2007/2008 Netherland-America Foundation Visiting Research Fellowship, which was awarded to me by the Van Raalte Institute at Hope College.

I plan to conduct a study of the role that growing up as a Dutch-American played and still plays in the lives of older Dutch-Americans. I am interested in how being of Dutch origin influenced the childhood and later years of your generation of Dutch-Americans. I am interested in the influence that being a Dutch-American had on your beliefs, your values, and your way of life.

For this study I will personally interview approximately twenty Dutch-American senior citizens from the Holland community during the months of July and August. The people to be interviewed are members of either the RCA or the CRC churches in Holland. Your name was suggested by (INSERT NAME: Elton Bruins/Jack Nyenhuis/Bob Swierenga/Richard Weerstra), and I would like to request an interview with you. The interview will take about ninety minutes of your time. Karen Schakel, the secretary of the Van Raalte Institute, will call you to make an appointment.

The topics I would like to discuss with you are:
1. What role did being Dutch-American play in your childhood years and in your later life?
2. How did your parents and family talk about your Dutch heritage?
3. What were typical examples of Dutch culture during your youth?
4. Did being of Dutch origin influence the way you look at life now, at religious issues, and other things you feel are important in society?

Your personal beliefs and experiences are central to this study of Dutch identity among the older generation of Dutch-Americans. I do hope that you will be willing to participate in this important study.

Along with being a professor at a Dutch university, I am an elder in my local Protestant church and moderator of the church council. I am married to an American named Amelia and we have a four-year-old daughter named Megan.

I would like to thank you very much in advance, also on behalf of Jack Nyenhuis, Director of the Van Raalte Institute, Hope College.

Sincerely,

Peter Ester
Netherland-America Foundation Visiting Research Fellow

APPENDIX 2. LIST OF RESPONDENTS

Respondents' names have been changed in order to ensure their anonymity and privacy.

NAME	SEX	AGE	FORMER PROFESSION/JOB	DENOMI-NATION *
Gene Achterhof	M	76	College Faculty	RCA
Juliana Brouwer	F	88	Housewife	CRC
Hester De Boer	F	87	Housewife	CRC
Elaine DeZwaan	F	74	Bookkeeper/housewife	CRC
Lois Dykstra	F	80	Administration/housewife	CRC
Gertrude Engelsman	F	87	Receptionist/office clerk	CRC
Marian Geerlings	F	84	Elementary school teacher	RCA
Lenora Huizenga	F	80	Teacher, Pastor's wife	RCA
Harvey Kamphuis	M	84	Vice-president Sales/Banker	RCA
Lucille Klingenberg	F	85	Office clerk/housewife	CRC
Thomas Kuipers	M	76	Boat construction	CRC
Marie Lubbers	F	92	Pediatrician's assistant/housewife	RCA
Dale Mast	M	83	Insurance company	RCA
Paul Nagelkirk	M	72	Lab technician	RCA
Laverne Nykamp	M	84	Machine & tool factory	CRC
Shirley Postma	F	76	Administrative employee	CRC
Albert Schipper	M	89	Rendering company	RCA
Lavina Steketee	F	73	Housewife	RCA
John VandenBosch	M	80	Specialized automotive mechanic	CRC
Victor VanderPloeg	M	78	Funeral home	RCA
Adrian VanDyke	M	79	Development & building company	CRC

Mean age = 81.3 yrs.

***** CRC = Christian Reformed Church; RCA = Reformed Church in America

APPENDIX 3. GROWING UP DUTCH-AMERICAN QUESTIONNAIRE

Introduction

I would like to thank you for this interview. I am very much interested in what your Dutch-American background means to you, how being of Dutch Heritage affected your youth and later life, and in your memories what role Dutch culture played in your youth.

Everything you tell me is strictly confidential. No information will be used that can be linked to your person.

I want to start with some personal facts:

Demographics

Name of Respondent: _____

Date of Interview: _____

Gender: O Male O Female

Age: _____ Years

Church Affiliation: _____

Church Affiliation of Parents: _____

Profession (main): _____

Married (Was): O Yes O No

If yes, spouse Dutch-American? O Yes O No

Number of children: _____ Children

Number of grandchildren: _____ Grandchildren

Were you born in Holland, Mich.? O Yes O No

If not, what age move to Holland? _____ Years old

If yes, did you spend most of your youth years in Holland, Mich.? O YES O NO

If not, where did you live during your youth years? _____

How many generations has your family been in America? For example, are you third, fourth, or fifth generation Dutch-American?

I am _____ generation Dutch-American.

Your Dutch Background

1. I would like to start with a general question. How important is your Dutch Background to you? Do you feel proud of it, or does it not matter to you?

   Could you explain that to me?

Your Generation of Dutch-Americans

2. Do you think that the Dutch upbringing of your generation of Dutch-Americans influenced the way your generation has been doing in later life?

3. Are there typical features your generation of Dutch-Americans has in common, such as particular beliefs or values they share?

Your Youth Years

Now I would like to ask you to think about your youth, say when you were going to high school.

4. When you were young, how did you first come to know your family was of Dutch heritage?

5. Did your parents feel it was important to teach you about the Dutch background of your family?

6. If so, how was that done?

7. Is there a specific example you remember that your mother or father spoke about the Dutch background of the family?

8. Were there any Dutch events that were celebrated by your family at that time?

9. How did you feel about that?

10. Were there typical Dutch words or sentences that would be used at home during your youth?

11. What about typical Dutch customs or manners that were part of your youth?

12. Do you remember your mother preparing particular Dutch dishes, cakes, desserts?

13. Did your parents or your relatives tell you Dutch stories, folklore or tales?

Your Youth and Your Friends

14. Were most of your friends Dutch-American when you were young? Again, say when you were of high school age?

15. Which clubs or associations were you a member of in your youth?

16. Were most of the other members Dutch-Americans too?

17. When you were young were Dutch-American boys and girls supposed to date primarily other Dutch-American boys and girls, so within their own ethnic group?

Your Youth and the Church

18. How important was the church in your youth?
19. How often did you go to church?
20. Were most of the church members Dutch-Americans?
21. What was typically Dutch-American about the church you belonged to as a youngster?
22. Would you say that in general the church your family belonged to when you were young was important in maintaining Dutch culture?

Your Later Life

23. Would you say your Dutch-American background had an effect on your later way of life?
24. Do you think that your Dutch-American upbringing influenced how well you have been doing in life?
25. Do you feel that your Dutch upbringing influenced your beliefs about what is right and wrong?
26. Do you think that your Dutch upbringing influenced your beliefs about our society and the world?
27. Are most of your friends Dutch-Americans?

The Netherlands

28. What is the first image that comes to your mind when you think of the Netherlands?
29. Do you feel a special bond with the Netherlands or is it just another country?
30. Did you ever visit the Netherlands?
31. Do you stay in touch with developments in the Netherlands or is that not important to you?

The Next Generation

Now two questions about the youngest generation of Dutch-Americans

32. If you look at the present generation of young Dutch-Americans, do you think they feel different from your generation about having a Dutch background?
33. What about your own children and grandchildren? Do they think differently than you do about their Dutch heritage?

The Final Question is on the future of Dutch-American culture. It may be a difficult one.

34. Do you think that, say, over the next two generations, Dutch-American culture (habits, customs, beliefs, values) will vanish, or will future generations of Dutch-Americans cherish Dutch culture?

That was the last question. Thank you very much!

Duration of interview: _________ minutes

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Peter Ester

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The A. C. Van Raalte Institute is a department of Hope College. Hence, its mission relates directly to and supports the mission of Hope College, an undergraduate liberal arts institution offering academic programs in the context of the historic Christian faith. The Institute is closely related to another department of Hope College, the Joint Archives of Holland.

The mission of the Institute is to honor the memory and the vision of the Reverend Dr. Albertus C. Van Raalte, the founder of Holland, by studying his life and work. From this mission also is derived the scholarly investigation and publication of materials concerned with the immigration and the contributions of the Dutch and their descendants in the United States of America. Furthermore, the Institute is dedicated to the study of the history of all the people who have comprised the community throughout its history.

The Institute derives its vision from a letter dated 27 November 1846, by A. C. Van Raalte, written shortly after his party landed in New York. As he was headed westward, he declared "I hope that a large colony can be established here in America which will focus its work on the Kingdom of God." His vision also extended far beyond the boundaries of Holland, Michigan, to other colonies and to immigrants throughout the United States. The bold Christian vision that he had for the church, education, and community continues to have an impact on the "colony" that he founded on 9 February 1847, and on the college which he helped to establish fifteen years later.

The Institute carries out its educational mission not only through research and publication, but also through the sponsorship of lectures and presentations by its members and its invited guests. Through liaison with scholars and educational and cultural institutions in the Netherlands and other countries, the Institute seeks to promote the understanding of the history of this community. From time to time, the Institute will host visiting scholars from these countries to enable them to engage in research in our local archives and to provide a broader perspective to our own endeavors.