

Speech by Minister of Foreign Affairs Maxime Verhagen at the presentation of the book *NL-USA: Four Centuries of Dutch-American Relations*, by the Roosevelt Study Centre in the Koorkerk in Middelburg, 2 September 2009

Your Royal Highness, Your Excellency, Mr. Roosevelt, ladies and gentlemen,

Next week New York is going orange, and today Middelburg is adorned in red, white and blue. This year we have been commemorating the landfall of the first Dutch ship, under the command of Captain Henry Hudson, on the shores of Manhattan four hundred years ago. The Dutch immigrants and others who followed in Hudson's wake built a New Amsterdam and laid the foundations for the world's most fascinating metropolis: New York City. A city of millions that continues to capture the imaginations of millions more around the world. Amid the host of skyscrapers, parks and bridges, and in the streets of Brooklyn, the Bronx and Midtown Manhattan, the city's Dutch past is still palpable. It is *that* part of our shared history that we are highlighting this year.

It is amazing what this celebration has unleashed! Exchanges, exhibitions, lectures and other events drawing thousands of participants on both sides of the Atlantic. And we are not just looking back. The people of the Netherlands and the United States stand together on the solid ground of their shared past, their sights set on the future. This year has given us a wonderful opportunity to deepen our relationship across the board: we have a context in which government bodies, businesses, knowledge institutions, artists and members of the public can interact and form bonds. This NY400 year will certainly have far-reaching economic, political, cultural and architectural effects. Our two countries and our peoples have grown closer in so many ways this year.

Ambassador Hartog-Levin, I'd like to welcome you to the Netherlands. You could not have come here at a better time. All these commemorative events have generated new energy, and a positive spirit, and you and I will be working around the clock to keep up the momentum. Our shared history has fostered a bond of true friendship that still thrives today. I greatly look forward to working with you and I wish you the very best in your new position.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Roosevelt Study Centre was inspired by the year of Holland on the Hudson to publish an impressive book entitled *Four Centuries of Dutch-American Relations, 1609-2009*. I would like to congratulate the Roosevelt Study Centre, and in particular the three editors Hans Krabbendam, Kees van Minnen and Giles Scott-Smith, on their amazing accomplishment. We just heard about the origins of the book, and the incredible effort that went into creating it. The result of all that work is a beautifully rendered 1,200-page survey of a shared history. It covers every aspect of US-Dutch relations: from diplomats in Washington D.C. and The Hague complaining about having too *little* to do (a complaint you won't hear today, I might add) to Anne Frank, who became an icon in the United States long before she did in the Netherlands; from trade and investment to cooperation within NATO; from literature, dance and film to the introduction of jazz into Dutch society, this book provides a comprehensive overview of Dutch-US relations during the past four centuries. Congratulations on a job well done!

I would like to look back at the earliest years of our history. In their contribution, historians Frijhoff and Jacobs shed light on the Dutch roots of New York and America. As befits historians (and I should know, because I am one myself), they have taken a nuanced approach and avoid overemphasising the role played by any one group. Who had the greatest influence: the English, the Dutch or the cavalcade of other immigrants who shaped early life on the Hudson? It is like a child approaching maturity: the parents pull back and the child – fortunately – has the wherewithal to make it on its own. Because the colony was situated in a remote part of the world, relationships between the various groups of immigrants and the indigenous population generally developed autonomously. But there is no denying that the Dutch left their mark, and that Dutch influence is still visible in modern-day American society. Frijhoff and Jacobs write that the pragmatic tolerance that characterised the Dutch Republic underlies the respect for personal freedom of conscience that was more prevalent in New Netherland than in other colonies. Though, as elsewhere, in the Dutch colony there were restrictions on the public profession of personal beliefs.¹ Adriaen van der Donck, one of the leading figures in Russell Shorto's acclaimed book,²

¹ Willem Frijhoff & Jaap Jacobs, 'The Dutch, New Netherland and Thereafter (1609-1780s)' in Hans Krabbendam, Cornelis A. van Minnen & Giles Scott-Smith ed., *NL-USA: Four Centuries of Dutch-American Relations*, Amsterdam, 2009, pp. 34-35.

² Russell Shorto, *The Island at the Centre of the World: the Epic Story of Dutch Manhattan and the Forgotten Colony that Shaped America*, New York, 2004.

passionately championed colonial self-rule and better conditions for the colonists and indigenous people. In his ideas we recognise the roots of American democratic principles.³

The friendship that quickly grew between our two countries was not inspired solely by our mutual dislike of the English. Our forebears recognised that they shared many of the same values, and that is what sealed the friendship. John Adams, the second president of the United States and former ambassador to The Hague, wrote in his *Memorial* to the Dutch government: 'The originals of the two republics are so much alike, that the history of the one seems but a transcript of the other'.⁴ Adams was probably thinking of the Declaration of Independence, which in form and content strongly resembled our *Acte van Verlatinghe* (Act of Abjuration), a declaration of independence signed nearly two centuries earlier. Both documents set out ideological arguments for independence. Both documents contain long lists of grievances against the ruling powers, in our case the King of Spain and in America, the King of England. The drafters reasoned that their call for independence was legitimate precisely because those rulers were neglecting the interests of their subjects. First the Americans drew inspiration from our texts, and then in 1814 the drafters of our Constitution looked across the Atlantic. Many of the basic rights enshrined in our Constitution come directly from the US Bill of Rights: freedom expression, religion, assembly, the press and petition and freedom from torture.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The values that our peoples have shared for centuries still guide our friendship today. I am referring to our desire for freedom, the importance we attach to democracy and human rights, and our shared passion for entrepreneurship and trade, initiative and responsibility, respect for hard work and privacy. Because we share these values, we feel comfortable with each other, understand each other and work together well. I can assure you that in the two and half years I have served as minister it has always been a pleasure doing business with Americans. In fact, I actively seek opportunities to cooperate with the US.

In the area of human rights, for example. In a world increasingly characterised by a moral deficit, where the universality of human rights is challenged on many fronts, we must stand together in support of the fundamental rights that have shaped our own societies. Every person on earth has a right to live with dignity. Human rights apply to everyone, everywhere,

³ 'Advocaat Van der Donck Was Pleitbezorger van de Nieuwe Wereld' (Lawyer Van der Donck: Defender of the New World), in *Advocatenblad*, 8 May 2009.

⁴ Wayne te Brake, 'The Dutch Republic and the Creation of the United States', in *NL-USA: Four Centuries of Dutch-American Relations*, p. 204.

at all times. I have made human rights a cornerstone of Dutch foreign policy. Secretary of State Clinton has also indicated that *people* are central to US foreign policy. She recently said: 'Our foreign policy must produce results for people'. And: 'We intend to stand up for human rights everywhere.'⁵ I am delighted that the US has indicated its intention to assume an active role in the United Nations Human Rights Council. US engagement is urgently needed there. In three weeks' time, Secretary Clinton, our Brazilian colleague Celso Amorim and I are hosting an event in the margins of the UN General Assembly in New York to draw attention to the cause of ending violence against girls around the world. We hope and expect to mobilise other government ministers to support this goal: with deeds as well as words. The way children are treated in many parts of the world is horrific and cannot be tolerated in the twenty-first century.

The Netherlands and the US also work closely in the areas of peace and security. We are partners in the Middle East peace process, allies in NATO, and we stand shoulder to shoulder in Afghanistan. We are deeply aware of the importance of doing a good job in Afghanistan and thus denying the Taliban the chance to undo all the progress that is made. We cannot afford to leave behind a country that is a breeding ground for terrorists who pose a threat to us, our freedom and our way of life.

Transatlantic cooperation still drives progress around the world, even now when global relations are shifting. Europe needs to pull its weight because our alliance cannot be taken for granted. Naturally, the United States takes a strategic approach to forging new partnerships on the world stage. And Europe should be doing the same. I am convinced that the major challenges of our time – problems that no single country, not even the US, can hope to solve alone – can be dealt with effectively only if the US and Europe join forces. Problems like climate change, terrorism and conflict in the Middle East. There is little we cannot achieve through transatlantic cooperation. Together the US and Europe can still be a decisive force in the world. A decisive force for good.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Senator Edward Kennedy was interred last Saturday. He was already a senator when I left pre-school. I am in awe of his long and productive career, which endured despite the tragic deaths of his two brothers. When Ted Kennedy addressed the Democratic Convention in Atlanta in 1988, he said: 'We are the trustees of a dream'. He referred to his brother Robert

⁵ Press Release: Foreign Policy Address at the Council on Foreign Relations by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, 15 July 2009.

and to Dr Martin Luther King, who were murdered *because* of that dream twenty years earlier, within months of each other.

The trustees of a dream. It is a wonderful description of people who strive for good in this world. People who feel responsible for others. People who are willing to shoulder their responsibility. People who show moral courage. We should *all* strive to be trustees of that dream! Our shared past and our shared values are the foundation on which the United States and the Netherlands can continue building and shaping that dream. I am convinced that together we can uphold the ideals that have played such a prominent role in our history. Freedom, democracy and human rights. In the words of Senator Kennedy: 'We do not have to settle for things as they are.'⁶ May that idealism continue to be reflected in the relationship between our two countries for a long time to come.

Thank you.

⁶ 'Now is the Time', speech by Edward Kennedy, Atlanta, Georgia, 19 July 1988