Seventy-five people attended the conference assessing the historical overview of 400 years of close relations across the Atlantic produced by ninety authors in Four Centuries of Dutch-American Relations, 1609-2009. The conference was organized by the Roosevelt Study Center, the Free University, the John Adams Institute, the Netherlands American Studies Association and Erfgoed Nederland. This combination of organizations advanced the balanced mix of general and specialist topics.

The grant offered by the U.E. Embassy has been used to bring six leading American historians to the Netherlands to reflect on the description of Dutch-American relations offered in the comprehensive history written by a predominantly Dutch group of scholars. This exchange worked very well, as the paragraphs below will show. The American experts helped to make the Dutch assessment of the bilateral relations become more realistic. We were proud to welcome the American consul general, Mrs. Julie A. Ruterbories, to the reception and speakers’ dinner.

At the opening of the conference the Dutch Secretary of European Affairs and International Cultural Relations, Mr. Frans Timmermans recalled the striking parallel of an early embrace of individual rights in Dutch and American history. Reflecting on the program of NY400 he saw its value in the reflection on Dutch identity, in increasing the volume of transatlantic contacts and contracts and a corrective revival of Dutch enthusiasm for the United States. He moderated Dutch expectations for American interest in the Low Countries: Holland is not on the mental map in the U.S. The book *Four Centuries of Dutch American Relations* is a welcome resource to present American and Dutch readers with a catalogue of bonds that have endured. He encouraged historians to stay close to their craft and resist the politicization of writing history.

This last comment was well received and dutifully observed. The first speaker, Willem Frijhoff emeritus of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, directly took up the issue of identity by drawing attention to the construction of a ‘Dutch’ identity after the Dutch had surrendered New Amsterdam to the English. He emphasized the integration of New Netherland in the Atlantic World, which was elaborated by Claudia Schnurmann of Hamburg University and Victor Enthoven of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

The first speaker emphasized that researchers of this area and period should avoid the pitfall of nationalist history, which was especially strong in mercantilist states France and England. She and Enthoven shared telling examples of continued trade between merchants in the Dutch Republic and the colonies which represented an informal empire of trade in bulk and consumer goods and led to intercolonial diplomacy. In the eighteenth century Dutch traders facilitated the American colonists to evade the protective English Acts of Navigation and indirectly helped them to boost their own position. The continued presence of Dutch traders kept open the back door to escape British duties.

Wim van den Doel of Leiden University led the ties into the nineteenth century. The transnational elements continued to play a major role, thanks to an increase in global trade and industrialisation. He took issue with making the transatlantic migration too unique: equal numbers of immigrants left or circulated within Asia.

Bruce Kuklick of the University of Pennsylvania questioned whether Americans had a clear understanding of the Dutch, since the term Dutch shifted in meaning throughout the four centuries that the book covers: politically it included the Austrian Netherlands (now Belgium), in the seventeenth century; the central government was weak, and ethnically it was diverse region. Culturally many Americans took Flemish and Dutch painters as one group. He saw the value of the book in the effort to create Dutchness out the interaction with a significant other: the United States. He suggested an alternative road to retrieve this Dutchness and that is by following the meaning of the word Dutch in the American use of the English language. He claimed that World War II made the Dutch turn away from the continent and towards America for a positive model for their own identity.
Michael Wintle from University of Amsterdam also looked closely to the Dutch identity formation in the nineteenth century despite the fact that actual interaction between the two countries was so limited. Transport lines of the Dutch shipping companies were highly efficient and emigration from the Netherlands acted as a safety valve for religious tensions.

Yet, the impact of American culture on the Netherlands remained restricted before World War II as Doeko Bosscher from the University of Groningen proved from the few cases of actual exchange and illustrated with his own family history. Jan de Vries (UCLA) and Ruth Oldenziel (Eindhoven University) confirmed this conclusion. De Vries showed how Dutch and American family forms and material culture remained recognizably similar when both societies moved toward the breadwinner-homemaker household model in the nineteenth century. The two societies differed in the speed of shifting to the new industrious revolution and the attendant consumer practices of the past 50 years. The Netherlands showed a stronger persistence of the breadwinner-homemaker model than the U.S. Oldenziel illustrated this distance by focussing on the limited attraction of the American kitchen in the Netherlands.

In a special session sponsored by the Netherlands Institute for Heritage Joel Grossman (City Archaeologist of New York) and Jaap Jacobs (author of *New Netherland: A Dutch Colony in Seventeenth Century America*) discussed the material and mental legacies of the Dutch in New Netherland.

Duco Hellema of Utrecht University explained how the recent Dutch foreign and security policy is more oriented towards the United States than during the Cold War years. Ruud Janssens and Marianne van Leeuwen (both of the University of Amsterdam) introduced a critical analysis of the working of alliances, which depend on commitment and loyalty. Alliances allow differences of opinion. The Dutch-American alliance should be taken in a European context. Occasionally the Dutch used their American card to thwart desires of their European neighbors.

The economic relationship was the focal point of the session led by Bob Reinalda of the Radboud University Nijmegen. He analysed the Dutch government’s postwar shift from Germany and towards the Atlantic economy and how the active Dutch participation in international forums increased their influence. Keetie Sluyterman (Utrecht University) and labor historian Tom Etty looked at what happened in the Dutch economy. They explained why Dutch companies wanted to enter the huge, but complex American market (innovation) and how American companies in the Netherlands operated from an anti-union tradition.

The final session compared and contrasted ‘Religious America with ‘Secular Holland’. This lively session was led by James Kennedy (University of Amsterdam). Philip Jenkins (Pennsylvania State University) revealed the dark reputation of the Netherlands in traditionalist circles in America and how immigration keeps religion alive. Secularization leads to smaller families, which undermines organized religion. Hijme Stoffels (Vrije Universiteit) presented historical examples of Dutch protestant ties with the U.S. and compared those with real and virtual encounters of Dutch citizens and various forms of American religions. Corwin Smidt (Calvin College) zoomed in on the traditions of Dutch-Americans and in what way they could act as a bridge or interpreters between the two countries. Since they differ greatly from the majority of the Dutch, one should not expect too much from this mediation.

The lively discussions during the conference generated at least six themes for future research: the developments of Dutch families, the strength and limitations of national boundaries, the role of informal (commercial) ties, the impact of other regions, the moral standards of alliances.

The final part of the conference linked history to the contemporary debate about immigration policies in Europe. Christopher Caldwell author of *Reflections on the Revolution In Europe: Immigration, Islam, and the West* was interviewed and questioned on his book by journalist Joris Luyendijk.

All participants can look back on a rich and fruitful conference, which proved that Dutch-American
studies are as viable as ever. The Dutch press was especially interested in the religious aspects of the Dutch American relations. Both the *Nederlands Dagblad* and the *Reformatorisch Dagblad* published interviews with the main speakers and reported on the conference. (see attachments)

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