

Joyce D. Goodfriend, Benjamin Schmidt & Annette Stott (eds.), *Going Dutch: The Dutch Presence in America 1609-2009*, Leiden: Brill, 2008, € 99.00 / US\$ 129, pp. xvii + 367, ISBN 978 90 04 16368 3

Review in *Journal of American Studies*, 43 (2), August 2009

Genetically, so the story goes, New York cats have more in common with cats from Amsterdam than they do with cats from London. It might seem trivial, but it is an appropriate motif for how the Dutch presence in the United States lingers on, sometimes in unseen but nevertheless traceable ways, several centuries since the original Dutch colonies paved the way for the European colonisation of the northern part of the continent. Occasionally Dutch identity is still used as a useful statement against Anglo dominance, as when Paul O'Dwyer, the Irish-born head of New York council in the early 1970s, snubbed the English influence by claiming Dutch settlement on Manhattan island in 1625 to be the origins of the city. But on the whole, the Dutch have been 'ghosted' out of American history (in the words of contributing author Judith Richardson) and the Dutch legacy has either been mocked, disparaged, or ignored completely by the "English-speaking victors" (p.2).

This collection of twelve essays goes a long way to rectifying this neglect by gathering together a series of insightful studies and observations that collectively demonstrate the extent of the Dutch influence in and interaction with America. There exist in-depth studies of the Dutch-American relationship, but up till now they have been focused on specific time periods or topics, and a general work that links these separate sections into a coherent analysis of the several centuries of interaction has on the whole been lacking. The subjects covered here range from art (Rembrandt) and architecture (Rem Koolhaas) to religion, social science (Fred Polak and Future Studies), and the persistence of a Dutch-American subcultural identity in the Mid-West. The emphasis is therefore very much on Dutch cultural traits, values, products, memories, images, and patterns of behaviour, and how these have been used and maintained in an American context. Each essay provides a slightly different answer to the question "how have the Dutch fared in America?" (p.1) Yet the question that features throughout this volume is more quizzical: What is Dutchness, exactly?

As this volume makes clear, there is no single version of Dutchness around which a straightforward narrative could be constructed. The concluding essay to the volume by Willem Fijhoff, appropriately entitled ‘Dutchness in Fact and Fiction,’ meditates at length on the patchwork nature of Dutch identity and how it has changed over time according to social and political need. During the New Netherland period of the seventeenth century Dutchness meant no more than a community pragmatically accepting a social system based on recognisable norms and values, and it was only with the coming of the British that the Dutch narrowed down their sense of identity to involve an identifiable ‘ethnicity’. Over time this insistence on difference has been nurtured in some places (the small communities of the Mid-West) but has dissipated in others (New York), although traces remain and the historical memory can easily be revived if the need arises (as O’Dwyer demonstrated).

The editors claim to have put together no more than a series of “snapshots” (p.16) of Dutchness, in doing so paving the way for future research to get a grip on the big issues. Yet this is a commendable, nicely put-together volume in its own right, and it adds a lot to a still neglected field. It is unlikely that the 1609-2009 anniversary of the first Dutch contact with North America will displace the dominant narrative of Anglo supremacy, but neither should it be dismissed as a mere sideshow. If in doubt, just check the cats of New York.

Giles Scott-Smith, Roosevelt Study Center / Roosevelt Academy, Middelburg, The Netherlands