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## Ethnic Identities in a Transnational Context: The Dutch American Reaction to the Anglo-Boer War 1899–1902

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### Abstract

Dutch Americans viewed the Afrikaner struggle for independence against the British as parallel to their own struggles to maintain a Dutch Calvinist identity in the face of Americanisation pressures. The war's international impact went beyond politics and economics, and included a significant cultural component, as it contributed to a transnational rejuvenation of ethnic consciousness. Dutch Americans drew on the pro-Boer movement in the Netherlands, and adapted it for their own purposes.

**Key words:** Dutch Americans; Boer War; transnationalism

Emily Hobhouse's photograph of Lizzie Van Zijl, the most controversial and infamous image of the South African Anglo-Boer War, first appeared in print in England on 27 June 1901.<sup>1</sup> Less than a month later, on 20 August, the image reappeared in the Dutch American newspaper *De Grondwet*. 'Lizzie Van Zijl, about eight years old', the caption read, 'one of our small skeletons. Her legs are disproportionately long. Many thin out in this way . . . It is sad to see the children . . .'.<sup>2</sup> Such pictures, and the accompanying first-hand accounts of the war's innocent, emaciated and feeble victims left indelible marks on the hearts and minds of Boer sympathisers around the globe. But the Anglo-Boer War gripped the popular imagination of Dutch Americans perhaps more so than any other people, and few were as emotionally attached. A contemporary, the Iowan Jacob Van der Zee, wrote that 'During the closing months of the nineteenth century England had no enemies fiercer than the Hollanders of Iowa'.<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere, in Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin – indeed wherever Dutch in the United States were to be found – there was talk of the Boers.

The Lizzie Van Zijl photograph as it appeared in *De Grondwet* was of poor resolution; the blurred image muted its horror and masked the emotion of the victim. In this regard the image was symbolic of the second and third hand nature of the reports Dutch

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1. M. Godby, 'Confronting Horror: Emily Hobhouse and the Concentration Camp Photos of the South Africa War', *Kronos*, 32 (November 2006), 43.
2. *De Grondwet*, 20 August 1901. Original Dutch reads, 'Lizzie Van Zijl, omstreeks 8 jaar oud een onzer kleine geraamten. De beenen zijn buiten verhouding lang . . . Het is treurig de kinderen te zien. . .'
3. J. Van der Zee, *Hollanders of Iowa* (Iowa: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1912), 349.

Americans received from South Africa. It was for them, however, the first photographic view of the war's camps. In May 1901, months before the photograph appeared, a student at Hope College in Holland, Michigan, L. Boeve wrote, 'In the [concentration] camps I see the destitute and forsaken women and children'.<sup>4</sup> When he wrote these lines, Boeve had likely not seen any literal images of the concentration camps. What he 'saw' was what he had imagined. The Lizzie Van Zijl photograph confirmed the fears of Dutch Americans like Boeve. It was an image of suffering and death, symbolising the defeat of the Boers at the hands of the British. But the image was also a symbol of the despair and defeat in Dutch American circles, for the war was their war, in the Boers they saw themselves, and in the images of death, Dutch Americans feared their own demise.

The initial inspiration for Dutch American pro-Boer sentiments came from the Netherlands where a widespread protest movement criticised its own government's refusal to intervene in the war. Anti-war and pro-Boer propaganda re-surfaced in Dutch American communities. The sentimental and nationalistic work *De Oorlog in Zuid Afrika* (The War in South Africa) by Louwrens Penning was a favourite choice for pro-Boer literature.<sup>5</sup> This and other texts like August Niemann's *Pieter Marits: Lotgevallen van een Transvaalschen Boerenjongen* (Adventures of a Transvaal Farmer Boy) passed into the hands of Dutch Americans.<sup>6</sup> Dutch American pro-Boer sympathy began, therefore, with concern about common kinship with Dutch around the world; it then added universal calls for independence, self-government and freedom from oppression.

But the depth of Dutch American sympathy for the Boers requires more explanation than an appeal to blood kinship and a common concern for liberty. For a more complete understanding of the situation, we must recognise the extent to which Dutch Americans imagined themselves as Boers and drew analogies accordingly. Grand Rapids, Michigan, consul to the Netherlands, John Steketee, spoke in 1900: 'Aside from being bound by blood ties, of tongue and race [Dutch Americans] have been stirred by tales of sufferings which were almost exact repetitions of their own early experiences in this country.' Dutch Americans in the nineteenth century commonly compared themselves to the Pilgrims at Plymouth: both groups were exiles who wanted to build a Calvinistic city on a hill. Now the analogy went a step further. Steketee explained further that common characteristics, the 'same rugged honesty [could be seen in the] pioneers of New England, the pathfinders on the shore of [Holland, Michigan's] Black Lake, and the husbandmen of South Africa'.<sup>7</sup>

The key point is this: Dutch Americans viewed the Afrikaner struggle for independence against the British as a parallel to their own struggles to maintain a Dutch Calvinist identity in the face of Americanisation pressures. The analogy was easy to make. Dutch Americans saw in the Boers the toughness and determination of their ancestors and the associated rawness that comes from fighting it out with nature. As the Afrikaners

4. 'Whither are we Drifting', *The Anchor*, May 1901, 394–397.

5. L. Pennings, *De Oorlog in Zuid Afrika* (Rotterdam, 1899).

6. A. Niemann, *Pieter Marits: Lotgevallen van een Transvaalschen Boerenjongen* (Amsterdam: Gebr. Koster, Derde Druk). These titles, among others, the author discovered and purchased in West Michigan bookstores and antique shops as late as 2006. These primary sources are the forgotten remnants of a short-lived pro-Boer movement in West Michigan reading culture.

7. *Grand Rapids Evening Press*, 14 April 1900.

conquered the veld, so the Dutch Americans felled the forests of Michigan and Wisconsin and ploughed the fields of Iowa and Illinois. The South African *voortrekkers* of the 1830s the Dutch Americans saw as a parallel to their pietist ancestors who fled the Netherlands in the 1840s to settle on the American frontier. Dutch Americans at the turn of the century imagined the generation of 'old settlers' to be paragons of the virtues of individualism and self-reliance. At a time when Dutch Americans worried about the inevitable loss of their native language, the threat of American secularism, and the dissolution of traditional ethnic circles, they followed the Boer resistance to British imperialism as the story of their own existential threat. Boer defeat, for many, symbolised the inevitable defeat of Dutch American culture. The spread of civilisation, progress, and imperialism threatened ethnic distinctiveness across the globe.

The historiography of the Anglo-Boer War contains only the briefest mention of the Dutch Americans. An extensive war literature appeared in the decade immediately following the South African conflict. But serious historical treatment – the balancing of arguments – was thin for the next half century. Academic historians were interested mostly in questions of political economy and the origins of the war.<sup>8</sup> But when the war re-emerged as a popular topic of scholarship in the 1970s and 1980s, the approach to the subject changed. Interest in the topic was fuelled partly by concerns to identify the origins of Apartheid. The new historiography also took into consideration the wider international dimensions of the war.<sup>9</sup> Monographs by Thomas Noer (1978) and Richard Mulanax (1994) described American diplomatic relations during the Anglo-Boer War. While the US government remained hands-off, ethnic elements in the United States, including the particularly aggrieved Irish, rallied against the war. The United States also played an economic role in the war by providing some 10,000 horses to the British army.<sup>10</sup> Studies of European interest in South Africa further emphasised the fact that the Anglo-Boer War was no local squabble. For example, the war precipitated a deluge of anti-imperialist newspaper in Great Britain, severely damaging British claims for empire as a moral prerogative.<sup>11</sup> What is more, some 2,700 European volunteers fought on the Boer side.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the war even upset alliances in Europe, and brought British colonials from Australia, Canada, and New Zealand into service in South Africa, reshaping colonial identities along the way.<sup>13</sup> This international focus continued with another surge of

8. B. Nasson, 'Waging Total War in South Africa: Some Centenary Writings on the Anglo-Boer War, 1899–1902', *The Journal of Military History*, 66, 3 (July 2002), 813–828.

9. Examples include: R.B. Mulanax, *The Boer War in American Politics and Diplomacy* (New York: University Press of America), 1994. In addition, Louis Changuion's *Uncle Sam, Oom Paul, en John Bull: Amerika en die Anglo-Boerenoorlog, 1899–1902* (Pretoria: Protea Boekhuis, 2001), focuses on the role of the US as a potential arbiter for peace, as perceived from the South African perspective. Changuion briefly mentions Dutch and German American interest in the war.

10. J. Wassermann, 'A Tale of two Port Cities: The Relationship between Durban and New Orleans during the Anglo-Boer War', *Historia*, 49, 1 (May 2004), 27–47.

11. D.W. Kruger, *Die Ander Oorlog: Die stryd om die openbare mening in Engeland gedurende de tweede Vryheidsoorlog* (Cape Town and Johannesburg: Tafelberg, 1974), 245.

12. A. Davidson and I. Filatova, *The Russians and the Anglo Boer War* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1998).

13. C. Wilson, *Australia's Boer War: The War in South Africa, 1899–1902* (London: Oxford University Press, 2002); C. Miller, 'Loyalty, Patriotism and Resistance: Canada's Response to the Anglo-Boer War, 1899–1902', *South African Historical Journal*, 41 (2000), 312–323.

scholarship for the centenary of the war.<sup>14</sup> More than ever, historians tried to put black Africans back into the war and seek new angles of understanding the cultural repercussions and historical memory of the war.<sup>15</sup>

The discourse of the Dutch American pro-Boer movement remained mostly within ethnic circles, had little impact on national politics, and was therefore quite easy for historians to neglect. Language has also been a barrier to scholarship. Apparently neither Noer, Mulanax, or Tilchin (three historians of the relations between the US and South Africa during the Anglo-Boer War) could read Dutch, since none of them cited Dutch language sources. At any rate, turn-of-the-century Dutch American periodicals have not been translated nor are they widely available.<sup>16</sup> For example, only a few microfilm copies of Dutch American newspapers of the period remain in specific ethnic archival centres like the Joint Archives of Holland, Michigan, and Calvin College's Heritage Hall in Grand Rapids, Michigan.<sup>17</sup> While historians in the Netherlands have shown interest in the causes of Dutch migration to the United States, they mostly left the story of what happened to the Dutch in America to the historians from the Dutch American communities themselves. A handful of Dutch American historians mentioned the Anglo-Boer War in their works, but did so only briefly, and to say only that the war sparked Dutch ethnic consciousness. Dutch Americans born after the 1930s were rarely fluent speakers of Dutch. The historians among them, meanwhile, were primarily concerned with issues of assimilation and religious denominationalism.<sup>18</sup>

This article contributes to a growing literature on the global impact of the Anglo-Boer War. It shows that the war had an important role to play in shaping identities across national borders. That is, in addition to international (mostly political) relations between nations, the war contained an element of the transnational (the flows of people, goods, and ideas across national boundaries). Transnationalism as a concept was popularised in academic discourse in the 1990s. Its emergence reflects a development in scholarship in

14. I. Snyman, I. Liebenberg, G. van der Westhuizen, and M. Roos, eds. *A Century is a Short Time: New Perspectives on the Anglo-Boer War* (Pretoria: Afriscot, 2005).
15. B. Nasson, *Abraham Esau's War: A Black South African War in the Cape 1899–1902* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); *The South African War, 1899–1902*. (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1999); G. Cuthbertson, A. Grundlingh, and M-L. Suttie, eds. *Writing a Wider War: Rethinking Gender, Race, and Identity in the South African War, 1899–1902* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press; Cape Town: D. Philip, 2002).
16. T.J. Noer, *Briton, Boer, and Yankee: The United States and South Africa, 1870–1914* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1978), 61. Dutch Americans are not mentioned in Mulanax's book, while Thomas J. Noer gives only two sentences to Dutch Americans in his 1978 *Briton, Boer, and Yankee*. Noer cites the Dutch American Howard Hillegas, a journalist who toured South Africa in 1898. Henry S. Wilson's 'The United States and the War', in P. Warwick, ed. *The South Africa War: The Anglo-Boer War 1899–1901* (London: Longman, 1980), 315–332, misinterprets the Dutch Americans entirely. Wilson summarises the Dutch position based on a single article from the *New York Times*, and apparently he views all Dutch Americans as east coasters with close ties to British-descent Americans.
17. A recent digitalisation initiative by the Roosevelt Institute in the Netherlands will soon make these newspapers accessible and searchable.
18. J. Van Hinte, *Netherlanders in America: A Study of Emigration and Settlement in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries of the of America*. Ed. R.P. Swierenga. Trans. A. de Wit (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985 [originally Groningen, 1928]); H.S. Lucas, *Netherlanders in America. Dutch Immigration to the United States and Canada, 1798–1850* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1955); G.F. DeJong, *Dutch in America, 1609–1974* (Boston, MA: Twayne, 1975).

global histories beyond a traditional focus on politics and diplomacy to an interest in the primarily social, cultural, and economic aspects of exchange and movement across borders.<sup>19</sup> Dutch ethnic identity was built on the nation-state model, but in the Dutch global diaspora, new forms of Dutch identities were built through real and imagined transnational connections.<sup>20</sup> For Dutch Americans, news of the Anglo-Boer War was an important exogenous factor which shaped their views of group identity.

### Dutch identity around the globe

The struggle of the Boers stimulated Dutch ethnic identities. Martin Bossenbroek in his work, *Holland op z'n breedst. Indië en Zuid-Afrika in de Nederlandse cultuur omstreeks 1900* [Holland at its Widest/Peak, Indonesia and South Africa in Dutch Culture around 1900] demonstrated that the Netherlands at the turn of the century built a powerful nationalistic self-consciousness connected to its imperial possessions in Indonesia and its interests, material or otherwise, in South Africa.<sup>21</sup> Although there never existed a Dutch World in the same sense as historians speak of a British World or a British Empire, this did not prevent the Dutch from speculating on the possibility. Pan-Dutchism was on the mind of Netherlander R.P.J. Tutein Noltenius when he made a turn-of-the-century trip through America. 'Our land', he wrote about the Netherlands,

cannot be better served than by the going out of many: because one never completely leaves: one stays connected to the mother country. Truly, it would be different with our brothers in South Africa if the Dutch voice sounded powerfully elsewhere than just in the low land by the sea. And maybe the time is not far that we ourselves will need foreign supporters.<sup>22</sup>

With these words Tutein Noltenius anticipated the world wars. As he dreamt of Dutch allies, he would have been well served to look to the American interior. In Grand Rapids, Michigan, the Reverend James Zwemer also looked to define the extent of the Dutch world in time and place. 'The Holland empire', he spoke in the fall of 1899,

is bounded on the north by Dr. [Edward] Hofma [a Polar explorer from Grand Haven, Michigan], on the east and south by Oom Paul and on the west by every mother's son of us. This Dutchman began to be educated six generations before he was born.<sup>23</sup>

19. D. Lowry, "'The World's no Bigger than a Kraal': The South African War and International Opinion in the First Age of 'Globalization'", in D. Omissi and A.S. Thompson, eds. *The Impact of the South African War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 268–288.
20. S.M. Sinke, 'Crossing National Borders: Locating the United States in Migration History', *OAH Magazine*, 19, 3 (May 2005), 58–63.
21. M. Bossenbroek *Holland op z'n breedst. Indië en Zuid-Afrika in de Nederlandse cultuur omstreeks 1900* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1996).
22. R.P.J. Tutein Noltenius, *Indrukken en aanteekeningen tijdens eene reis door de Verenigde Staten van Noord-Amerika*. (Haarlem: HD Tjeenk Willink, 1900), 280.
23. Grand Rapids *Herald*, 15 November 1899.



This rhetoric was typical of the early decades of the twentieth century, which witnessed the peak of Dutch America, when the Dutch language most proliferated and Dutch ethnic churches were thriving and expanding. It was also a period when Dutch Americans struggled most with the knowledge of their own apparently inevitable assimilation. The Anglo-Boer War gave Dutch Americans more reason to think about and hold on to their ethnic identities. The resurgence in Dutch identity was a wide, transnational event with significant implications.

For the nearly 200 years after New Amsterdam fell to the English in 1664, migration from the Netherlands to the American Colonies and later the United States was relatively minor; the colonial Dutch eventually assimilated into the fabric of East Coast society. In 1847, a new wave of Dutch immigrants arrived and settled primarily in the Midwest. The majority were Protestants whose Orthodox Calvinist churches became the focal points of their ethnic communities. Migration continued at a few thousand per year for most of the rest of the century. By century's end Dutch Americans had formed hundreds of Reformed and Christian Reformed churches.<sup>24</sup> These immigrant communities were bound together by common religion, family connections, and an ethnic press. In 1900, total membership in Dutch Reformed churches in the Midwest exceeded 100,000.<sup>25</sup> Dutch Americans were eager to be recognised as American patriots while remaining in touch with their ethnic culture and their Calvinist heritage. News of a war in South Africa arrived when Dutch Americans struggles with assimilation were at a peak.

Dutch American sympathy for the Boers is remarkable for how suddenly it came about, since before the war, few knew much at all about South Africa. When the British fought the Boers for the first time, back in 1881, Dutch Americans had begun fundraising campaigns for the Boers. They also compared the conflict to the Eighty Years' war, that long struggle of the Dutch against the Spanish.<sup>26</sup> The First Anglo-Boer War ended quickly, however, and news from South Africa was sparse for the next two decades. Although reports about the Boers resurfaced in the back pages of the Dutch-language newspaper, *De Grondwet*, by 1896, there is little supporting evidence that the average Dutch American would have been well informed about South African affairs before 1899.<sup>27</sup>

One exception to this rule was the consul of the Netherlands in San Francisco, James De Fremery, a great supporter of Dutch culture across time and place. In an 1896 editorial in the *Oakland Enquirer*, De Fremery called attention to 'Jameson's raid' and to the Boers' defensive actions against the British 'Uitlanders' in the Transvaal. For an American audience uninformed on the circumstances in South Africa and influenced by the biases of British media, De Fremery tried to clear the record for his Dutch Afrikaner kin. He provided a history of the events preceding the tensions. The British entered the Transvaal as miners, he said, and demanded representation, but they

24. Smaller numbers of Dutch Catholics formed congregations in Wisconsin as well.

25. J. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America: History of a Conservative Subculture* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1984), 222.

26. For examples of general sympathy see: *Holland City News*, 5 March 1881. For examples of fundraising see: *De Grondwet*, 1 March 1881 and 22 March 1881. For comparison of South Africa's War to the Eighty Years' War see *De Grondwet*, 8 March 1881.

27. *De Grondwet*, 4 February 1896.

refused to be naturalised and give up British citizenship. Therefore, claims of unjust 'taxation without representation' did not apply to the British who were foreigners in the land. De Fremery argued that in conclusion the Transvaal should 'defend her independence' and should receive support from 'sister republics' like the United States and the Netherlands.<sup>28</sup>

De Fremery was in 1896 still a lone wolf howling in the wilderness. In the years to come, however, a deluge of pro-Boer print media and word of mouth brought the political unease in the Netherlands to Dutch American circles. Dutch Americans learned that despite the Netherlands' official stance of neutrality in the war, the country's prime minister Abraham Kuyper was promoting the Boers' cause.<sup>29</sup> Kuyper was a powerful influence in Dutch American circles, especially in the Christian Reformed Church and especially in the final years of the century following his 1898–1899 lecture tour through the United States. The Netherlanders spoke of kinship and common blood with the Afrikaners. The Protestant Bible Belt in the Netherlands, the same provinces from which many Dutch Americans had emigrated, showed the greatest pro-Boer sympathies.<sup>30</sup>

A Dutch language publication of the Republican Party in Michigan explained how Dutch Americans had come to view the war in its early stages. 'The sympathy of we Dutch folk with the Boers is great and deeply rooted. It is natural, and finds its explanation in origin, language, religion, sense of freedom, independence, and by that, still a traditional hate of England.'<sup>31</sup> Others tried to play down this hatred. One of the main pro-Boer voices in Holland, Michigan, Hope College Professor and Reverend Henry Dosker, attempted to clarify the pro-Boer position in an article dated May, 1900: 'We stand on the side of the Boers, not because we are Dutch, but because it is the right thing to do. We are against England not because we hate England, but because English is in the wrong'.<sup>32</sup> History, however, provided the Dutch Americans with many examples of how the English had been in the wrong. Dutch Americans took full advantage of historical analogies. An article in the Hope College student newspaper, *The Anchor*, presented a greedy, bloated John Bull acting in the same brutal fashion in South Africa as he had in the Opium War, the Sepoy Rebellion, and the war with the American colonies. Even Henry Dosker could not avoid the parallels: 'We American remember the notorious prison ships of the war of the Revolution', he said.<sup>33</sup> For many, it seemed evident that past atrocities were indicative of present and future injustices.

28. University of Leiden, the Netherlands, Special Collections Closed Stacks, Printed Ephemera, Call number: KL.GES 1896: James de Fremery, 'The Transvaal: Reflections on Jameson's Raid', reprinted as a pamphlet, originally published in the *Oakland Enquirer*, 11 February 1896.

29. M. Bossenbroek, 'The Netherlands and the Boer War', in K. Wilson, ed. *The International Impact of the Boer War* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 123.

30. M. Bossenbroek, 'The Netherlands and the Boer War: Their Wildest Dreams: The Representation of South African Culture, Imperialism and Nationalism at the Turn of the Century', in Keith Wilson, ed. *The International Impact of the Boer War*, 129.

31. Holland, Michigan Museum Collections, Holland Historical Trust, Boer War Topical File, Anonymous author, 'McKinley en de Boeren'.

32. *De Grondwet*, 15 May 1900.

33. *Holland City News*, 15 December 1899.



### Dutch Americans learn about South Africa

During the first year of the war, Dutch Americans had much to teach themselves about South Africa and its history and present conflict.<sup>34</sup> They could generally agree that the English were underhanded and the Boers were honest. But the finer points of Boer character were up to debate, as Dutch Americans worked quickly to try to understand their distant ethnic kin. As the war got underway, a dichotomous assessment of the Boers developed. On the one hand, the Boers were seen to be basically good, long-lost cousins who were advanced in agricultural techniques and who governed their affairs wisely. On the other hand, Dutch Americans believed the Boers to be distant and uncivilised curiosities tainted by an alien, African world.

For example of the latter, much was made of the claim that the Boers were not pureblood Dutch. Gerrit Van Schelven, editor of the *Holland City News*, wrote that African and French Huguenot blood in the Boers' bloodlines affected their temperaments. He suggested, furthermore, that perhaps their nomadic tendencies and incivility could be traced to black blood.<sup>35</sup> Others saw Boers as 'huiselijk' (domestic) as well as anti-political and rather dumb.<sup>36</sup> The Boers had lived so long without a central government that could efficiently levy taxes or create laws, another said, that force became the only way to deal with them.<sup>37</sup> One unsympathetic Michigan newspaper portrayed the Boers as dumb enough to repeatedly fire at a British scarecrow.<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile, Dutch Americans defended the Boers against the idea that they were a roadblock on the way to progress. The Boers were neither 'unprogressive nor tyrannical' John Gunstra of Lamont, Michigan, wrote; they were of the 'same stock' as the Dutch Americans. The war, he continued, is only a 'war of grabism'.<sup>39</sup>

Dutch Americans supposed that the Boers' exotic surroundings had affected their appearances as well as their behaviour. They stereotyped the Boers' as an unsophisticated and rough-edged ethnic group. Van Schelven described Paul Kruger as having 'the long arms and large hands of the race'; and as the 'chieftain' of his tribe.<sup>40</sup> In a full front page article dedicated to the Boers, the *Grand Rapids Herald* described the average Afrikaner man as standing 6'2" tall; families were as large as '15, 20 or 24' children.<sup>41</sup> Presentation of 'types of Boers' included only rugged men, all of whom were either riding a horse or brandishing a firearm, invariably with facial hair and a big hat.<sup>42</sup> Upon this one fact there was much agreement: Boers had a cowboy-esque roughness and an ability to handle a gun.<sup>43</sup> One Holland, Michigan, citizen felt that the incapable British made the Boers look good by contrast. He wrote,

34. For example, one Dutch American presented the Dutch consulate in Grand Rapids with a model torpedo boat, suggesting that such could be used against the English in South Africa. He was surprised to learn that the Transvaal is landlocked. *Grand Rapids Herald*, 10 Jan. 1900.

35. *Holland City News*, 15 December 1899.

36. *De Hope*, 27 September 1899.

37. *Holland City News*, 22 December 1899.

38. *Ottawa County Times*, 9 February 1900.

39. *Grand Rapids Herald*, 18 September 1899.

40. *Holland City News*, 17 October 1899.

41. *Grand Rapids Herald*, 12 November 1899.

42. *De Grondwet*, 3 October 1899.

43. *De Grondwet*, 6 March 1900; *Holland City News*, 2 February 1900.

It does not require a high order of marksmanship to top over men clad in knickers with bosoms built on the bollon order. The central feature of the [British] uniforms look as though the 'bishop sleeves' worn by women a few years ago had been converted into abbreviated trousers for the warriors at the front, and the underpinning is so long and drawn out as to present the appearance of a golf stick in boots... They would provoke an unloaded gun to action.<sup>44</sup>

Most importantly, however, Dutch Americans stereotyped the Boers as hard-working, God-fearing and simplistic. The conventional Dutch Calvinist could sympathise greatly with this image.

Dutch Americans were quick to see similarities in beliefs, governing structure, and styles of worship between the Dutch Protestant Churches in South Africa and their own Reformed and Christian Reformed Churches in the United States. In 1899, the editor of the *Holland City News*, Gerrit Van Schelven wrote, 'The Church in Transvaal is divided into two branches, the Reformed and the Christian Reformed, similar as it is here'.<sup>45</sup> So much was written about the Boers in the Dutch American press that by six months into the war it was common knowledge that the Boers were a particularly religious nation.<sup>46</sup> It would be difficult for any Dutchman to oppose the cause of an Afrikaner people who were routinely labelled 'deeply religious' when that was the image Dutch Americans had of themselves.<sup>47</sup>

Many Dutch Americans came to view the war in biblical metaphors as well. Perhaps the most common was the 'David v. Goliath' motif, as evidenced in these lines from an editorial in 1899: 'As David and Goliath, and as Samson, the British will also be slain by the Boers'.<sup>48</sup> While Dutch Americans viewed the Boers as a God-fearing people, they saw the British, on the other hand, as a nation of reckless sinners. They compared England to Babylon and Rome.<sup>49</sup> It was not uncommon then for a Dutch American to view the war as 'a fight between a godless might on one side and justice on the other side'.<sup>50</sup> 'God help the Transvaal!' they wrote.<sup>51</sup> An anonymous student at Hope College also viewed the war from a religious perspective. 'May heaven smile upon the Boers', he wrote, 'and confound the armies of the despot; and put them to shame who dare interfere with the liberties of a quiet and peace loving people'.<sup>52</sup>

Ministers of the RCA and CRC gave sermons supporting the idea that it was morally justified to support the Boers. One Dutch American cleric, the Rev. E.J. Blekkink, prayed that 'God will be on the side of the Boers and drive England out of the whole of South Africa'.<sup>53</sup> In May 1900, the Rev. J.W. Beardslee, in a discourse on how Paul was an ideal soldier for Christ, gave an aside to mention the selfish cause of England in the war.<sup>54</sup> The

44. *Ottawa County Times*, 27 April 1900.

45. *Holland City News*, 17 November 1899.

46. *De Grondwet*, 8 May 1900.

47. *Holland City News*, 5 January 1900.

48. *Holland City News*, 22 December 1899.

49. *De Grondwet*, 14 November 1899.

50. *De Grondwet*, 23 December 1899. Original Dutch reads, 'strijd tusschen een goddeloose macht ter eener zijde en het recht ter andere zijde...'. .

51. *De Hope*, 27 September 1899.

52. *The Anchor*, November 1899, 31.

53. Joint Archives of Holland, E.J. Blekkink Collection, W88-0111. Book of newspaper clippings, clipping titled 'Prays for Boer's Victory'.

54. Joint Archives of Holland, J.W. Beardslee Collection, W88-1009. Sermons and an address, 'The Ideal Soldier', Holland, Michigan, 27 May 1900.

Rev. John Karsten, as well, can be added to a list of ministers who discussed the war from the pulpit. In a sermon on 31 December 1900, Karsten spoke about the advances of the nineteenth century. Then in a handwritten line added to the text of his speech he noted how he lamented the ongoing war in South Africa. For Karsten, the war was a setback in the march of civilisation.<sup>55</sup> Dutch churches signed petitions against the war even before the war began, and then the churches raised funds for the war's victims.<sup>56</sup>

### Reporting on the war

News from the Netherlands and from South Africa dominated the newspapers read by Dutch Americans in an era when the newspaper was the fundamental and most effective medium of mass expression. The reports were often repetitious, but they built on the story in a dramatic fashion, like a serialised Victorian novel or a modern soap opera. The pain of



Figure 1. One of a series of political cartoons featured in the Grand Rapids *Herald*.

55. Joint Archives of Holland, John Karsten Collection, W88-060, Box 1, Sermons 1870–1900.

56. Grand Rapids *Herald*, 5 September 1899.

the war could be felt as it played out in real time. Dutch Americans experienced a range of emotions, from excitement during the opening salvos of the war when the Boers managed improbable victories, to frustration when British forces overwhelmed their opposition (see Figure 1). Finally, they expressed horror and anger about the war's innocent (white) victims.

Dutch American newspapers were by default pro-Boer, and they 'differed only in the severity of their denunciations of English policies'.<sup>57</sup> *De Grondwet*, in particular, was a national Dutch American periodical with subscribers and correspondents from Iowa to California and even Canada. Iowa's Dutch newspapers, *De Vrije Hollander*, *De Volksvriend*, and *Pella Nieuwsblad* were also passionate organs of pro-Boer support.

Two English-language newspapers, the *Holland City News* and the *Ottawa County Times* informed Dutch American readers in west Michigan. Gerrit Van Schelven, the editor of the weekly, Republican-thinking *Holland City News* and its daily edition, the *Holland Sentinel*, was an amateur historian interested in the background to the war in South Africa. Van Schelven included national reports and summaries of events in South Africa. In his editorials, he raged at the British and called for immediate intervention to halt the war. He also printed reports from Transvaal Society meetings, of which he was a member. Van Schelven's *Holland City News* showed a strong commitment to war coverage; it printed material about South Africa until war's end.

*The Ottawa County Times*, on the other hand, was of a Democratic Party persuasion, and while traditionally a voice of minority opposition, the *Times* chose not to counter the local pro-Boer movement. The *Grand Rapids Democrat* took a similar stance in linking US President McKinley's imperialistic aims in the Spanish-American War with England's fortunes in South Africa. Instead, both newspapers identified with the 'gallant little army' of farmer-soldiers who confidently stood opposed to an imperial power.<sup>58</sup> Both newspapers largely conformed to the views of the war held by the local Dutch-dominated Republican base, and attacked the US government for its failure to intervene in South Africa and end the war. According to the *Times*, the logic for this failure was simple: the Republican politicians at the national level were liberty-crushing imperialists of a mind-set no different than that of England.<sup>59</sup> The Republicans, the newspaper suggested, might also be in a secret alliance with England to support each other's global imperialism.<sup>60</sup>

The Dutch-language *De Grondwet*, also printed in Holland, Michigan, informed immigrants across the United States and Canada. In 1901, *De Grondwet* claimed a subscribe base of 6,000.<sup>61</sup> This Republican weekly never held back in its display of partisanship. Indeed, the sheer amount of material that *De Grondwet* printed about South Africa during the early stages of the war was impressive. The war was the number one, front-page story for nearly a year. In fact, once the editor even apologised for the war coverage taking up too much space!<sup>62</sup> *De Grondwet* expressed sympathy for the Boers in a multitude of ways. Reports of the war spoke of 'onze stamgenoten' (our tribesmen, blood

57. Harry Boonstra, 'Dutch America Newspapers and Periodicals in Michigan, 1850–1925' (MA thesis, University of Chicago, [1967] 1979).

58. *Ottawa County Times*, 23 February 1900.

59. *Ottawa County Times*, 20 October 1899; 11 May 1900; 24 August 1900.

60. *Ottawa County Times*, 23 February 1900.

61. *De Grondwet*, 25 June 1901.

62. *De Grondwet*, 17 October 1899.

relatives), praised the victories of the Boers and lamented British successes. Anti-English writings that disgraced John Bull's foreign policies were also not uncommon.<sup>63</sup> *De Grondwet* as well as the *Grand Rapids Democrat* printed The Transvaalsche Volkslied, the anthem of the South African Boer state of the Transvaal.<sup>64</sup> It compared the strength of Paul Kruger to that of Napoleon and called him the Moses of the Transvaal.<sup>65</sup> The newspaper also reported on personal, familiar links to South Africa, such as that the 80-year-old brother of President Kruger had been secretly living for years in Adrian, Michigan.<sup>66</sup> Letters to the editor urging Boer unity and decrying English atrocities were too numerous to print. Poetry was a favourite way to express passionate feelings about these issues. In 1900, stories about the Boxer Rebellion and the US presidential election displaced the Boers from the front page.

Correspondents to *De Grondwet* showed that the pro-Boer movement was also strong among Dutch Americans in Iowa. A correspondent from Orange City wrote 'nearly the entire populace here is for Transvaal'.<sup>67</sup> The city councils in Orange City and Pella each passed resolutions in support of the Boers. These resolutions appealed to human liberty. Orange City's resolution compared the English interference in the Transvaal with 'the action taken by George the Third against the New England colonies'.<sup>68</sup> A pro-Boer commissie of Dutch American in Sioux Center Iowa continued to raise money for South Africa even after the war had ended.<sup>69</sup>

Newspapers printed at Holland's Hope College, also responded to the war with pro-Boer sympathies. The student editors of *The Anchor* stated that their periodical 'fearlessly places itself on the side of the Boers; and in doing so represents the consensus of opinion of the studenty'.<sup>70</sup> Pro-Boer student contributions confirmed this statement. One student described situation in South Africa in these terms: 'Idealism is at war against materialism, right against love for the dollar'.<sup>71</sup> The weekly Dutch-language, *De Hope*, also printed at Hope College, reached a wider, more diverse audience than the *Anchor*. Like *De Grondwet*, *De Hope* claimed a national readership of Dutch Americans. *De Hope* estimated a readership of 10,000, most of whom were members of the Reformed Church in America in the West. The editor during the war was the brilliant Samuel Zwemer, then teaching in Holland between appointments as a missionary in Asia. As an organ of the Reformed Church, *De Hope* commonly avoided addressing the political aspects of the war, but it did display a perspective in line with contemporary Calvinism and it did promote common-blood unity with the Afrikaners. Although the front page was traditionally restricted to religious issues, war-related items took up considerable interior column space. The paper featured consistent reports of the war and reader-submitted pro-Boer poetry. *De Hope's* editorial staff was highly sceptical of British intelligence on the war. They questioned

63. *De Grondwet*, 13 February 1900.

64. *De Grondwet*, 7 November 1899; *Grand Rapids Democrat*, 16 December 1899.

65. *De Grondwet* 27 March 1900; 8 May 1900.

66. *De Grondwet*, 20 February 1900.

67. *De Grondwet*, 15 May 1900. Original Dutch reads 'Bijna de gehele bevolking hier is voor Transvaal'.

68. Van der Zee, *Hollanders in Iowa*, 312.

69. *De Volksvriend*, 21 May 1903.

70. *The Anchor*, November 1899, 31.

71. *The Anchor*, December 1901, 293–294.

whether reports in the national press could be trustworthy if they were taken from British sources.<sup>72</sup>

Many Dutch Americans in the Reformed Church also read the *Christian Intelligencer*, the RCA's national weekly out of New York. Because the *Christian Intelligencer* was edited by members of the RCA East, its positions reflected those of a much more Americanised audience than the Dutch immigrants in the Midwest. This allowed for a more tempered pro-Boer stance. Unlike the rapid Midwestern Dutch periodicals, the *Christian Intelligencer* usually printed just one lone paragraph per issue about the war. Comfortably situated in the developed East Coast, RCA members in New York and New Jersey belonged to a more established order. They were disappointed with the seemingly unnecessary and fratricidal war, but they still thought civilised England was unworthy of such criticism as others had given.<sup>73</sup> The editors even allowed an occasional pro-English piece. Yet for Dutch Americans in the Midwest, the *Christian Intelligencer* was important because it showed that even old stock Americans and Anglophiles could support the Boers.

### Organising an anti-war movement

As the war began, the United American Transvaal League formed with the intention of bringing together various pro-Boer factions in America. Transvaal League meetings typically consisted of prayers, speeches by famous or influential persons, an offering collected for the Boers, and patriotic songs. One of the largest such meetings was held on 27 October 1899 at the Fountain Street Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where some 2,500 persons were in attendance. Here a speaker exclaimed, 'Dutch blood is not yet cold!'<sup>74</sup> A speech by the Reverend J.B. Hulst was perhaps the most memorable. Hulst spoke about a then current term 'benevolent assimilation': England, the cat wanted to 'benevolently assimilate' the Boers, the mouse.<sup>75</sup> Dutch Americans were certainly in the majority at this Grand Rapids meeting, but it was intentionally a multi-ethnic affair, with contingents representing many groups who felt that they had been wronged by the British. Local Polish, German, and Irish Americans, in particular, joined in to rally around the theme of freedom and independence. As the pro-Boer movement gained support across the Midwest, British officials warned the US government that Dutch and Irish societies may be planning raids on British possessions in Canada.<sup>76</sup>

72. *De Hope*, 16 August 1900; 20 September 1899.

73. *Christian Intelligencer*, 31 January 1900.

74. *De Grondwet*, 31 October 1899. The *Grand Rapids Democrat* of 28 October 1899 claims 2,000 in attendance.

75. *Grand Rapids Democrat*, 28 October 1899.

76. *Holland City News*, 29 December 1899. Timothy Nyhof and Catharina de Bakker, 'The Dutch Community in the Kildonans (1893–1911), the English Churches and the Boer War', *Canadian Journal of Netherlandic Studies*, 26, 2 (Fall/Automne 2005), 1–14. In Canada itself, Dutch populations were proportionately smaller and even less able to influence their government's pro-English policies. For a small group of Dutch immigrants in Manitoba, however, opposition to the Anglo-Boer War provided the decisive motivation to found their own Christian Reformed Church and abandon any attempts at religious cooperation with other Canadian denominations in the province.



A second United American Transvaal League mass meeting was held in Grand Rapids on 18 December 1899.<sup>77</sup> Tickets for the events were sold at 25 cents each with proceeds going to the Boers. That night, a total contributions raised for the cause were \$940.86.<sup>78</sup> The plan was to send this money to 'Oom Paul' Kruger by way of Amsterdam and a Dutch 'special messenger' – presumably someone with connections and the ability to supply the Boers behind British lines, circumventing British restrictions on trade with the enemy.<sup>79</sup> A young rising star of local Dutch American Republicans, state representative Gerrit J. Diekema, gave an oration at this meeting.<sup>80</sup> Diekema continued on the pro-Boer lecture circuit with a speech in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. There, Diekema explained that he had been influential in opposing an Anglo-American alliance and that he had asked President McKinley to mediate the war. Like in Grand Rapids, the crowd in Milwaukee was multi-ethnic, but with many Dutch Americans present. The *Holland City News* reported that the ethnic groups in Milwaukee were standing 'shoulder to shoulder against oppression'.<sup>81</sup> Dutch Americans participated in American Transvaal League meetings in Chicago in September, 1900, and again in Grand Rapids in May 1901.<sup>82</sup>

Grand Rapids, the centre of the Dutch in the Midwest, was also the site of a minor battle of the Boer War. In December of 1899, pro-Boer and anti-British chatter filled the air. Grand Rapidian Frank Gillons, a son of English parents, took offence and demonstrated his anger by impeding the progress of Dutch wood hauling teams. To do so, Gillons drove his team of horses down a busy city street no faster than a child's walk. When a Dutchman attempted to pass with his wagon, Gillons lashed the man, Peter Goudzwaard, on his head with a horsewhip. Gillons was arrested for assault and battery when he attempted to whip a second man who presented his sheriff's badge.<sup>83</sup>

In Holland, Michigan, churches opened their doors to anti-war speakers and local clubs discussed the Afrikaner issue. Hollanders gathered at Central Avenue Church to 'protest against the tyranny'.<sup>84</sup> Half the speeches were in Dutch. At a meeting of the Century Club, Gerrit van Schelven read a paper about Paul Kruger, Henry Dosker presented a paper titled 'The Transvaal', and Jennie Kanters presented sketches and cartoon of Paul Kruger.<sup>85</sup> Others venues for pro-Boer meetings in Holland including the Lyceum Opera House, where at a rally as late at January 1901, 432 seats were sold at 25 cents a piece.<sup>86</sup> Here a petition was signed to be sent to the President, condemning the war and offering 37 dollars to make the concentration camps healthier.<sup>87</sup> Holland, Michigan's Hope College was a centre of pro-Boer activity. The college President G.J. Kollen was staunchly pro-Boer, and Gerrit Diekema, the political spokesman who frequently addressed issues of South

77. *De Grondwet*, 23 December 1899.

78. *Holland City News*, 25 December 1899; *De Grondwet*, 17 April 1900.

79. *Holland City News*, 29 December 1899.

80. H. Ippel, 'The Anglo-Boer War Dutch-American Reaction, 1899–1903', *Origins*, 11, 2 (1993), 21; Joint Archives of Holland, Gerrit J. Diekema Papers, Collection number H88-0039.

81. *Holland City News*, 3 November 1899.

82. *New York Times*, 16 September 1900; 26 May 1901.

83. *Grand Rapids Herald*, 21 December 1899.

84. *De Grondwet*, 14 November 1900. Original Dutch reads: 'willen tegen de tyrannie protesteren'.

85. *Holland City News*, 3 November 1899.

86. *Holland City News*, 22 January 1901.

87. *De Grondwet*, 7 January 1902.

Africa, was on the college's board of trustees. The General Dutch League (Het Algemeen Nederlands Verbond) held a pro-Boer meeting on camps in the summer of 1900.<sup>88</sup> The college invited relevant speakers to address the issues of the war. One such speaker lectured about South African history for an hour and a half in front of an audience in Winants Chapel.<sup>89</sup>

South African emissaries arrived to rally the support of Dutch Americans, but most came too late to significantly impact the pro-Boer movement. Early in the war, the South African Montagu White encouraged Dutch American efforts by emphasising the resolve of the Boers: 'the fight for independence would not end when the British flag waved over the capitol building of Pretoria', he said.<sup>90</sup> Orange Free State Volksraad member, C.H. Wessels visited Iowa to strong reception. Two former Boer soldiers and prisoners of war, J. Gerhardus Wust and Lambert Vander Veer visited Holland, Michigan, in May 1901 to speak about the war. In June 1901, the Reformed Church in America's General Synod, influenced by another Boer exile, the Rev. J.H. Van Broekhuizen, addressed the issue of concentration camps. A report of an RCA committee then adopted the following resolution: 'We are deeply pained by the intelligence . . . that women and children have been imprisoned and kept in camps, without proper shelter, or any provision for nourishing food.'<sup>91</sup>

Sending soldiers to South Africa would have been an ultimate expression of transnational ethnic solidarity, but the difficulty of actually reaching the Transvaal or impacting the course of the war discouraged nearly all who entertained the idea. *De Grondwet* reported in December 1899 that Peter Van Schaak of a Chicago Dutch society was to lead 48 men to the fight in South Africa. He hoped to pick up volunteers from other cities.<sup>92</sup> In Holland, Michigan, the Chicago example was used for how the local Dutch should act.<sup>93</sup> But various claims that contingents of Dutch Americans were headed to the conflict in South Africa, proved to be untrue.<sup>94</sup> It is unclear, in the end, how many Dutch Americans made it to South Africa.<sup>95</sup> Jacob Van der Zee lists three from Iowa: A. Kline, H. Dekker, and M. te Veltup.<sup>96</sup> Three Hope College students also claimed they wanted to go to South Africa to fight alongside the Boers. Short of money, they appealed to 'patriotic Hollanders or liberty-loving Americans' for support.<sup>97</sup> There is no indication, however, that these students ever received such support or left for South Africa.

Dutch Americans discouraged the young men from volunteering for the war, and instead appealed to their elective representatives in the US congress to persuade the federal government to get involved in the war diplomatically. For the Dutch in West Michigan,

88. *De Grondwet*, 17 July 1900.

89. *De Grondwet*, 12 June 1900.

90. *De Grondwet*, 24 April 1900. Original Dutch reads, 'De strijd voor onafhankelijkheid zal niet ten einde komen in Zuid Afrika zelfs dan niet wanneer de Engelsche vlag over Pretoria's gebouwen waperen'.

91. Minutes of the RCA General Synod, June 1901, 1131.

92. *De Grondwet*, 26 December 1899.

93. *De Grondwet*, 2 January 1900.

94. Van der Zee, *Hollanders in Iowa*, 308.

95. *De Grondwet*, 9 January 1900; *New York Times*, 1 January 1900.

96. Van der Zee, *Hollanders in Iowa*, 359.

97. *Holland City News*, 3 November 1899. The three students were J. Nywening, J. Steunenburg, M. Stormzand.

William Alden Smith, the US Representative from Grand Rapids was the crucial go-between. Smith, along with Webster Davis, the assistant minister of domestic affairs under the McKinley Administration, called on the government to recognise the Orange Free State and the Transvaal as independent nations and then act as a mediator between the two sides, British and Boer. In the House of Representatives, Smith urged the US to send a consulate to Pretoria.<sup>98</sup> Webster Davis wanted to go a step further; he felt that if the US were to be truly neutral during the war, it should cease trading with the British. In a speech at Holland, Michigan's Central Avenue Christian Reformed Church in May of 1900, Davis argued this point. If the United States was to claim neutrality, he said, then 'Let America be truly neutral'.<sup>99</sup>

Dutch Americans in Michigan were largely Republican, and yet they harboured feelings about the war that were antithetical to the policies of the Republican administrations of William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt. The Republican McKinley refused to aid the Boers, to oppose England by force, political threat or diplomacy, or economic trade restrictions. In the presidential election of 1900, Dutch Americans asked themselves the question, 'Has President McKinley made himself worthy of re-election? Or can we, as Americans of Dutch descent, expect something better...?'<sup>100</sup> Although McKinley's opponent in the election was a well-known anti-imperialist, William Jennings Bryan, many Dutch Americans remained steadfast to their political party and reluctantly voted to put McKinley back in office. Indeed, in Michigan's heavily Dutch American populated Ottawa County, McKinley received a 2,100 vote majority.<sup>101</sup> A pro-Republican pamphlet printed in Holland explained why many Dutch Americans could sympathise with McKinley despite his inaction on the South African question. McKinley 'took the case of the Boers to heart', it said, and 'prayed for them without postponement and in good trust'.<sup>102</sup>

When McKinley was assassinated in the later summer of 1901, the nation mourned sincerely and patriotic feelings were at their height. The Dutch American Henry Beets, a key figure in the Christian Reformed Church, published a McKinley biography in Dutch before the end of the year. In an otherwise mostly sympathetic treatment of McKinley, Beets chastised the late president as an 'empty spectator' who could have put an end to the bloodshed in South Africa.<sup>103</sup>

But in the wake of McKinley's death, as Vice President Theodore Roosevelt assumed the Presidency, Dutch Americans saw new hope. Roosevelt, of course, was of Dutch ancestry. Perhaps, Dutch Americans thought, Roosevelt would be concerned enough for the

98. *Holland City News*, 2 February 1900.

99. *De Grondwet*, 5 June 1900.

100. *De Grondwet*, 18 September 1900. Original Dutch reads, 'Heeft President McKinley zich een herkiezing waardig gemaakt? Of kunnen we, als Amerikaansche burgers van Hollandse afkomst iets beters verwachten...?'

101. *De Grondwet*, 13 November 1900.

102. 'McKinley en de Boeren', Boer War Topical File. Original Dutch reads, 'name de...Zaak der Boeren ter harte, voldeed aan het smeekgebed en deed het zonder uitstel en ter goeder trouw'.

103. H. Beets, *Het Leven van Pres. Wm. McKinley* (Holland, MI: H. Holkeboer, 1901), 180. Original Dutch reads 'ledig toeschouwer'.

pan-Netherlandic identity, that he would now speak out against the war in South Africa. *De Grondwet* saw it in ethnic terms: Roosevelt would use his influence to help the Transvaal, because a man of Dutch blood, he would be more inclined to act than the Scots-Irish McKinley.<sup>104</sup> Roosevelt's athletic past, his remaining youth and vigour, along with his accomplishments in academics and war, made him a popular figure, especially among the Dutch Americans. But Roosevelt knew as well as McKinley that he could not risk interfering with England's foreign policy, especially since England had respected the Monroe Doctrine and remained quiet in the Spanish-American War. The excitement Roosevelt bought to the anti-war contingent soon faded as it became evident that the new president would do nothing to directly affect the course of the war.

### Financial contributions to the Boers

In addition to their political activism, Dutch Americans gathered financial contributions to send to the Boers (see Figures 2 and 3). These funds came from rallies and meetings, from collections at church services, and from fund drives.<sup>105</sup> Collections were fairly substantial. Grand Rapids Dutch consul John Steketee had gathered over \$7,000 for the Boers by April, 1900.<sup>106</sup> In the first four months of the war, the Iowa Transvaal Committee collected over \$1,300 in donations from across the Great Plains states. 'All good Hollanders', wrote Jacob Van der Zee, 'wore "Oom Paul" buttons on their coat lapels, and many a child born during those stirring months was named after Paul Kruger, Piet Joubert, Piet Cronje and other Boer generals'.<sup>107</sup> Van der Zee estimated that the Iowa Dutch must have given over \$10,000 during the course of the war. Financial aid for the Boers was often funnelled through societies in the Netherlands.<sup>108</sup>

A gendered element of the pro-Boer fundraising is evident. Elite men gathered in exclusive clubs to discuss the war. For example, there was the Holland Society in Chicago and the Knickerbocker Society in Grand Rapids. Men also organised and held the stage at mass-meetings. But Dutch American women were crucial in on-the-ground fundraising drives and in appeals to civilised morality. A collection started by Hope College student Anna Riemens called the 'Snowball' fund gathered small contributions of usually 20 to 25 cents (mostly from women) to send to South Africa via the Netherlands. The proceeds were meant to support women and children affected by the war. Dutch American women showed solidarity with Afrikaner women. Sympathisers from West Michigan and the Chicago area poured money into Riemens' collection. At its peak, the 'Snowball' collection accumulated \$819.95 in a single week, with over 85 women from Holland alone listed as contributors.<sup>109</sup> One collection raised between 900 and 1,000 dollars for Boer women and

104. *De Grondwet*, 1 October 1901.

105. *Christian Intelligencer*, 29 January 1902.

106. *Grand Rapids Evening Press*, 14 April 1900.

107. Van der Zee, *Hollanders in Iowa*, 310.

108. *De Grondwet*, 16 January 1900.

109. *De Grondwet*, 12 February 1901; 19 February 1901.



Figure 2. Oom Paul as an advertising symbol which appeals to Dutch Americans.

children in British concentration camps.<sup>110</sup> Another sent aid to the 4,000 Boer prisoners held by the British on Bermuda.<sup>111</sup>

110. *De Grondwet*, 27 August 1901.

111. *De Grondwet*, 17 December 1901.



Figure 3. Raising dollars for the Boers in Grand Rapids, Michigan, December 5, 1899.



### Pro-Boers on campus

While the female students at Hope College led the collection efforts, the college men of male-only Dutch Language Ulfilas Club led efforts to publicise the war on campus. The club expressed sympathy for the Afrikaners as early as 1896 when they sang ‘Het Transvaalsche Volkslied’ at a club meeting. But in the years leading up to the Anglo-Boer War, the club faded, then disbanded during the 1899–1900 academic year. For this reason, no minutes were recorded for the club during that school year. But the general rejuvenation in Dutch pride that year influenced a group of students to restart the Ulfilas Club for 1900–1901. In 1901, it was reported that not only had the society been ‘resuscitated’ but it was ‘working with a force and vigor never before witnessed within [Hope College’s] walls’.<sup>112</sup> By 1902, membership had climbed to 15, a significant number given the total enrolment at the college was only around 80 students.<sup>113</sup>

From 1900 to 1902, the club devoted a significant portion of its time to the issue of the Anglo-Boer War. It debated the role of Paul Kruger in Europe, and addressed the controversial question about whether American mules should be sold to England for use in the war. The club even staged a play called ‘Op Het Boeren Commando’ (On the Boers’ Command). The members of the Ulfilas Club used the school’s newspaper, *The Anchor*, to express their pro-Boer views. In fact, two of the editors of *The Anchor* during the war years were also members of the Ulfilas Club. Editor J. Steunenberg, president of the club, wrote, ‘It is no longer a question of franchise, but it is a racial question, “Which race is to be supreme in South Africa, the Dutch or the English?”’<sup>114</sup> He was convinced further, that the British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain was on a ‘war of extermination’ which would not end until every Boer was killed. Fellow student Cornelius Vander Mel also penned a polemic article in which he compared the Boer struggle to the Dutch fight for liberty in the face of Spanish oppression in the seventeenth century. Vander Mel presented this article ‘The British-Boer War’ as a speech at the state oratorical contest in Lansing, Michigan.<sup>115</sup>

Certainly the Anglo-Boer War received more attention on Hope’s campus than did the American actions in the Philippines. One student questioned the relative silence about ‘our war’ in the Philippines. ‘Are our countrymen of less concern to us than Afrikanders [sic] or Chinese?’ the student asked.<sup>116</sup> Indeed, talk of the Boers could be found in all quarters. The 1901 ‘A’ Class (Senior Class) poem titled ‘The Battle of Spionkop’ recalled a popular Boer victory. Again historical allusion to the Dutch race was evident. ‘Ancestral spirit filled the Boers, and saved them from a total wrack’. The poem’s dominant lines read:

‘Thus beats the heart of every Boer;  
We’ll fight and pray for liberty  
Til in our songs of praise, we shall,  
Proclaim, God gave us victory!’<sup>117</sup>

112. *The Anchor*, March 1901, 6.

113. *The Anchor*, January 1902, 315; Joint Archives of Holland; *Hope College Bulletin*, Vol. 37, 1900.

114. *The Anchor*, November 1899, 30.

115. *The Anchor*, May 1901, 10.

116. *The Anchor*, February 1901, 5.

117. *The Anchor*, July 1901, 199–203.

### An unfortunate end

In the fall of 1899 and the spring of 1900, Dutch Americans cheered each Boer victory. But by the end of 1900, it was becoming increasingly clear to all parties that a Boer victory in the war stood little chance (see Figure 4). News of the war became scarce. As the British surrounded the Boers and pressed them into a guerrilla campaign, they also controlled information leaving South Africa, so the Boers were largely unable to have their voice heard by the outside world. Dutch Americans grew increasingly saddened by the war and many lost interest. One Holland, Michigan, poet wrote in December 1900, that the Boers were now ‘exiles and beggars’.<sup>118</sup> In April 1901, the editor of *De Grondwet*, John Mulder, wrote a common refrain, ‘Messages this week from Transvaal are very thin. The thinner the better’.<sup>119</sup> Essentially, all news from South Africa was bad news. The ever optimistic Ulfilas club even altered its tone. ‘Is the independence of the Boers in Transvaal in a hopeless situation at this moment?’ a club member wrote in January 1901.<sup>120</sup>

By 1901, as there was little positive news from South Africa, Dutch American collections for the Boers suffered. The previously overwhelming ‘snowball collection’ of Anna Riemens faded, managing just a few dollars a week by August 1901. The collection continued, however, to gather meagre donations until the end of the war. Collections at Dutch American churches also dried up.<sup>121</sup> In 1901, *De Grondwet* expressed its disappointment in the lack of collections at prayer services.<sup>122</sup> When the war came to an end in 1902, Hope College students expressed disappointment that ‘our South African kinsman’ had surrendered and lost their independence.<sup>123</sup>

Dutch Americans sympathised deeply with the Boers, but they felt helpless to intervene.

They cheered Boer victories in the early, exciting months of the conflict, but after that Boer defeat seemed too certain. They treated the Boer War as they did their own assimilation into American culture, by resisting when and where possible and hoping for the best outcome, but falling short of extreme measures. The march of civilisation, the threat of anglo-saxonism and pressures on Dutch culture appeared in South Africa and the United States, albeit in different ways.

When a Dutch American from Iowa won a prestigious Rhodes Scholarship in 1905, an editorial in *De Vrije Hollander* commended him for his academic success, but said he should be ashamed for having accepted an award ‘from the man who was the author of the war against the Boers’. The money was ‘stolen from the Boers, bespattered with their blood and with the blood of innocent children who starved in the camps’.<sup>124</sup>

For the generation of Dutch Americans which lived the Anglo-Boer War, it was an unforgettable moment of ethnic identification. New images of Dutch identity came from

118. *De Grondwet*, 25 December 1900.

119. *De Grondwet*, 16 April 1901. Original Dutch reads, ‘Berichten uit de Transvaal deze week zijn heel dun . . . hoe dunner hoe beter’.

120. Joint Archives of Holland, Ulfilas Club Collection, H88-0425. Minutes, January 14, 1901. Original Dutch reads, ‘Is de afhankelijkheid der Boeren in de Transvaal in een hopelose toestand op dit ogenblik?’

121. Joint Archives of Holland, Collection W94-1063: South Blendon Reformed Church, box 2: financial records.

122. *De Grondwet*, 27 August 1901.

123. *The Anchor*, July 1902, 436–437.

124. *De Vrije Hollander*, 18 March 1905. Cited in van der Zee, *Hollanders in Iowa*, 322.

abroad, across border, and challenged the Dutch Americans to rethink who they were. The next generation, however, knew little of the story. I once spoke about the 'Boers' with my grandmother, born in 1923 to Dutch immigrants in Grand Rapids, Michigan. She told me something along these lines, 'My parents used to talk about the Boers, but I never knew what they were talking about'. She was surprised to hear me talk about the subject,



Figure 4. Grand Rapids *Herald* cartoon commentary on the war's human toll.

something she had not heard much about since her childhood. The legacy of the Anglo-Boer War among Dutch Americans has been forgotten. But for the few short years of conflict, they stood for the Boers, and the war stood for their identity.

The Anglo-Boer War, therefore, impacted a people a world away from the fighting, in a place without direct political or economic ties to South Africa. For a more thorough understanding of the war's consequences, historians should take into account the cultural effects of the war on peoples in other, sometimes distant countries. Ideas, particularly images of war, can pass across borders and shape social and ethnic identities.<sup>125</sup>

125. The author would like to thank the anonymous referees for their useful comments on a draft of this article.