

**Ethnicity, Immigration and Integration,
Challenges and Opportunities:
Amsterdam and New York City**

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Introduction

I want to especially acknowledge Fred Martin, an executive with the Triangle Foundation and Impuls, and Dr. John Mollenkopf of the CUNY Graduate Center, who have been my collaborative partners for several years now. They have brought prominent Dutch officials to America, where they have engaged in serious dialogue with New Yorkers and Brooklynites about common urban issues, where we learn from each others' experiences and share insights, ideas and new ways of thinking about our urban environments and their many challenges. And I wish to acknowledge Paul Scheffer, a renowned journalist and professor of urban sociology at the University of Amsterdam, as well as senior public officials and housing leaders for the City of Amsterdam. Fred Martin has given me guidance on key policy issues for discussion, so let me begin.

On History, Immigration and a Constitutional Framework

Regarding this major question of Immigration and its impacts, the great city of Amsterdam, and the Netherlands are challenged to embrace and learn from your own history and traditions, and to place your contemporary situation within a broader historical, social and cultural context of your own glorious record of managing diversity. When Amsterdammers do that, I believe you will have much less concern about your current immigration, issues and you will be much better equipped to manage your current challenges of integration, citizenship, and what it means to be Dutch in this early 21st century.

The Netherlands has experienced wars, invasion, domination, immigration and integration by the Holy Roman Empire, France, England, Spain and others for the past 1000 years. Commercially and economically, the Netherlands has been one of the world's leaders, and originators of the stock market, capitalism, and the multinational corporation, with the founding of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and the Dutch West India Company (WIC) in the early 1600s.

The Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, French and British initiated the world's largest forced immigration, and integration program through the operation of the worldwide African Slave Trade for 400 years, making that commerce the cornerstone of capitalism, globalization, colonialism, imperialism, international trade, which was brought about by wars of conquest, peace making, and diplomacy In European capitals deciding the fate of indigenous populations thousands of miles away.

Amsterdam was one of the earliest, and remains one of the most powerful, strategic commercial nodes in the global economy over these past 500 years. At one time more

than half of Amsterdam's residents were foreign born or their children, as is exactly the case today with New York City's 8 million population. Today New York City and Amsterdam each have over 150 nationalities and ethnicities from Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America, Middle East, Asia and Europe.

This rainbow of humanity is immigrant and citizen, new national identity and old, passport people but not fully accepted as, nor do they embrace Dutch citizenship. There is a cacophony of these multiple identities swirling within even larger, dynamic contexts of evolving definitions of Dutch nationality, European Union identity, and the meaning of global citizenship. No wonder there is concern and confusion in this time of transition...

As one listening in on today's debates in the Netherlands and Amsterdam, it occurs to me that you may have acquired a case of historical and cultural amnesia. And one of the questions accompanying this malaise is how and why did this happen? Part of the answer may be that the convenience and intellectual comfort zone which the cloak of amnesia affords, allows you to ignore, erase or rewrite your dramatic, sometimes painful history of triumph, tragedy and challenge. But the philosopher George Santayana warns us that those who do not learn from their history are doomed to repeat it.

Dutch history tells me that Amsterdam, and the Netherlands have been, and continue to be a nation of immigrants, of mixed ethnicities, nationalities, cultures, and religions. And some of your present trepidations about "the others" in your midst, may cause you to undervalue and overlook one of your greatest assets, and a defining characteristic of your own true self as a people, a city and a nation. Your cultural, ethnic, religious and international diversity and creativity has been gifted to you in large part, because you are a magnet of immigration, a similarly powerful force of attraction for New York and America.

Dutch subjects declared their independence in 1579 from King Philip II of Spain, one of the earliest countries in Europe to take such a bold step towards nationhood. This was 200 years before American subjects declared their independence from King George III of England in 1776 in a similar grasp towards freedom. Over 200 years ago, New Americans set out a seminal articulation of their freedoms, values, rights, responsibilities, meaning of citizenship, and meaning of being American.

For Americans, our Constitution is a precious, cornerstone document of our democratic society. We cling to and fight over it daily, which means it is very much alive, especially for oppressed racial minorities such as African Americans, who are still struggling very hard, to hold America to its promises written in that very special document. Understand Amsterdam: any people that sets itself up as a beacon of democracy in the face of

autocracy, oppression and tyranny, will naturally become a magnet for an influx of humanity fleeing to higher ground.

In speaking with a number of Dutch officials, citizens, professionals, academicians and students, it appears that the Dutch Constitution is not held in similar regard to the US Constitution. Thus in the Netherlands at present, it appears that there is no popularly embraced national framework for defining citizenship rights and responsibilities, power sharing, and a framework for governance of society. This absence of a societal playbook thus makes it harder for society's groups and subgroups, particularly newer immigrants, to know the rules of the game, and how to get along in the larger society.

The Dutch and Americans: Different Paths to Ethnic Diversity

In the Netherlands, immigration and racial and ethnic diversity were caused by several factors including historically, the consequences of feudalism, wars, conquest, and subjugation, resulting in numerous transborder flows of soldiers and migrant civilians. The consequences of slavery and colonialism, and subsequent immigration policies permitted Indonesian and Dutch Antillean immigration. A more recent factor is the Dutch labor force demands, labor shortages unmet by the domestic labor force, and ease of transborder labor movement under the European Union. Thus much of the Dutch labor market is or was supplied by other regions, countries, and former and current colonial possessions.

Labor demand linked to supply, driven by less favorable social, economic and political conditions in the sending countries, drove labor to more favorable labor markets in the Netherlands. Netherlands immigration policies and practices; the metropole - periphery relationship which is the product of imperialism and colonialism, and gives the colonized entry and access to the mother country, has produced large populations from former and present colonies of Indonesia and the Dutch Antilles. Also, national policy, attitudes, tolerance levels, and political culture also help define which non-Dutch populations are allowed into the country, when, and on what terms and conditions.

American Factors of Diversity

In the USA, immigration, racial and ethnic diversity are caused by a very different set of "new world" factors. Before the arrival of Europeans, the American continent had vast stretches of land inhabited by native American indigenous populations for thousands of years, with a variety of traditional nomadic, hunting, and agrarian cultures and ethnicities. Beginning in the early 1500s, the earliest Spanish, French, Dutch and British commercial enterprises with their soldiers and settlers first negotiated and purchased land, then changed their tactics, and through war, conquest, and disease, exterminated most of the native Americans.

Euro-American colonizers seized native American lands for agricultural and industrial development, expansion and settlement, filling in the center of this new bicoastal nation with a diversity of Europe's ethnic and national populations, incentivized by settler land grants, and flight from religious, economic and political oppression in Europe as their populations ran towards freedom in America. These diverse European immigrants filled in America's national borders, which originally started on the Atlantic coast. But through war, negotiation and purchase from Native Americans, followed by the British, French and Spanish settlers claiming vast lands in North America, the USA's boundaries spread clear across the continent to the Pacific Ocean, a stretch of 3,000 miles, one new nation, nearly the size of all of western Europe.

Enslaved Native Americans were not an effective cheap labor supply. They died from disease, and could easily escape colonial settlements to the lands beyond settler outposts. And European immigrants even under the worst conditions were indentured servants with term limits on their labor contracts, and eventual freedom to negotiate their wages.

The African Slave Trade became the permanent solution which created the globally dominant American agrarian economy, with its free African labor supply meeting the demands of America's Southern States' vast agricultural plantation economy which supplied the raw cotton, sugar, indigo, and tobacco which spurred Western Europe's industrial revolution and the global economy.

In addition to the African slave plantation economy of the agricultural sector, there were additional vastly lucrative industries in shipbuilding, transportation, merchant marine and naval operations, port development and management, insurance, banking, the stock market, and trading in human cargo of and estimated 30 million Africans during a 400 year African Holocaust from the 15th to 19th centuries.

The Portuguese, Spanish, French, Dutch and British ran these first global enterprises. In the early 1600s, Dutch ingenuity created the world's first multinational corporation, The Dutch East India Company (VOC). Shortly thereafter, its sister company, the Dutch West India Company (WIC), was founded. It established colonies and transported African slaves to the New Netherlands, (New York State region), Nieuw Amsterdam (present New York City), Breukelen (Brooklyn), New York and other destinations.

In many places throughout colonial America, there were more Africans than European colonists in the American Southern, Caribbean and South American plantation regions. And from the beginning, the African Slavery question was a central national debate with regional factions for and against it. In fact two regional (North versus South) political compromises are written into the US Constitution of 1787. One is a "3 / 5ths" political compromise counting 3/5ths of the African slaves for purposes of white male political

representation in the US House of Representatives. Africans had no citizenship or political rights in the Constitution. African civil rights were not established until the post-Civil War Constitutional Amendments a century later in the 1860s.

The other Constitutional compromise was to allow legal importation of African slaves for 20 years after the 1787 Constitution was ratified. In practice, with little enforcement, slave importation continued right up until the US Civil War, which was a regional conflict between Northern and Southern States. It was fought to end slavery, and preserve national unity after the Southern States seceded from the US, asserting their right to continue slavery.

Wars, famines, economic depressions, and political and religious repression in Europe caused a mass exodus of European immigrants to America, seeking the promise of greater economic advancement and political and religious freedom. English Pilgrims from England, sailed to America out of their refuge in Leyden, Holland, and on to Plymouth, England, aboard their ship, “The Mayflower” to America. And Henry Hudson in 1609, and the Dutch West India Company (WIC) fleets sailed from the Port of Amsterdam to America.

In the 19th century Chinese immigrants were brought to America as contract laborers under slavery conditions to help build the US railroads and to work in the service economy. Today’s large Hispanic population goes back to time when what is now the southwest US consisting of California, Arizona, and New Mexico was then part of the Spanish Empire, until the US instigated a war with Spain and annexed those lands in 1848.

Today 40 million African Americans are 90% native born US citizens, with 10% African and Caribbean populations. There are 40 millions Hispanic Americans, majority foreign born in Mexico, Central and South American, including large non-citizen and illegal immigrants. Of the 300 million total US population, the 75% white population is descended from European immigrants. Thus the Netherlands and America have two very different sets of factors which explain their current immigrants and populations of color in their midst.

American and Ethnic Responses to Immigration

As noted above, the US and Netherlands have different historical and cultural contexts, and thus different perspectives and responses in addressing immigration issues. Nonetheless, it is possible for their immigration policies to follow some similar sets of principles including: a) national labor force needs and trends; b) family reunification considerations; c) political asylum and humanitarian considerations; d) national, state and local absorption capacity; e) availability of immigration support services; f) shared

intergovernmental budgetary support and resources; g) governmental capacity to process the various stages of naturalization; h) national security interests; i) non-discrimination policies with regard to race, ethnicity, gender, religion, nationality; and other considerations

The US is a nation of immigrants. And some of the greatest advocates for tough immigration policies are naturalized immigrants who played by the rules, and waited years to obtain their US citizenship. There is some paranoia among white Americans and Black Americans about illegal immigrants becoming a burden on public services in health, education, welfare and municipal services, with taxpaying citizens paying the bills while illegal immigrants are not paying their fair share for government services.

Some African Americans feel that immigrants are undercutting Blacks in the labor market, competing against them in certain sectors, and taking their jobs. Some Blacks in inner cities are resentful of immigrants from other races and ethnicities who own small businesses in black neighborhoods where the only thing Blacks can do is be a customer and hand over their money to a “foreigner.” To add insult to injury, some immigrant store owners, are viewed as invaders, and economic oppressors who don’t take the time to learn English and become “American.” This results in culture clashes and misunderstandings, in some cases has blown up into major racial confrontations, such as the Korean Grocer’s Boycott by Black protesters in Flatbush, Brooklyn in 1990; and the Los Angeles riots in the 1990s which targeted some Asian store owners in Black neighbourhoods.

Thus there are tensions not just between majority and minority members of society, but between racial and ethnic minorities as well. Some Blacks believe that white and Asian immigrants who have just arrived, quickly adopt the same racist attitudes towards Blacks as white Americans. At the same time, Black youth committing crimes against immigrant merchants reinforces immigrants’ negative stereotypes about Blacks. There is Black and white xenophobic reaction towards immigrants with different dress, language, and culture. Some Americans demand that these foreigners learn to fit in, notwithstanding that they don’t know how to fit in without help, and a positive attitude on their own part to make the effort. Immigrants often lack the confidence and connections to reach out to the larger community to educate majority society as to their immigrant culture, mores, traditions and behavior.

Unlike the social situation in their native countries, some immigrant youth in their new country, are no longer under the social control and influence of the immigrant adults in their community. Majority culture, practices and laws can sometimes undermine immigrant family values and social structures. Some immigrant youth act out, become antisocial, try too hard to be American or Dutch, engage in anti-social and criminal activity, and perpetuate poor images of their community in the larger society, thus

reinforcing negative stereotypes and increasing prejudice towards immigrant communities.

However, many Black Americans have a “social safety valve” against anti-immigrant feeling, and that is the context of their own painful memory of a 400 year history of American racism, discrimination, brutality and their struggle for human and civil rights which they are still fighting to achieve in today’s American society. Much progress has been made but there is still a long way to go. Thus Black Americans have a great appreciation and sensitivity to the challenges immigrants face in becoming Americans.

Americans seem to be less conflicted about their national identity, definition of being American, defining who and what is an American, the standards of accountability which American values and citizenship require. In general, Americans know their rights, are proud of their rights, and practice and assert their rights as citizens. On the other hand, the Dutch mass consciousness seems to be in the midst of a debate about questions of citizenship and national identity, and appears much more ambiguous on these issues.

But Americans are also complacent and cynical about the role of government, don’t hold it accountable enough, and have much lower levels of electoral participation compared to the Dutch and Europeans. Some of this political deficit is due to structural barriers to political participation, perceived lack of political choice in an American two party system, and a winner take all presidential system. While the European body politic functions as a multiparty, parliamentary democracy.

New York has its own problems with immigrants groups, and is not a field of tulips. In perception and reality, there are many problems within and across racial, ethnic and national groups. Within the broader Afro Caribbean communities, there are significant differences between Anglophone and Francophone / Haitian communities. And small island Anglophone Caribbeans politically resent the sometimes domineering posture which larger groups such as Jamaicans and Trinidadians may seem to adopt. And there is often political and economic tension and competition between African Americans and Caribbean Americans.

Dominican immigrants and Puerto Rican US citizen communities are very large in New York City, they are politically competitive, and have conflicting social attitudes. Some Dominican immigrants are more entrepreneurial, and stereotype Puerto Ricans as being lazy and on welfare, in much the same way that some Caribbeans perceive of African Americans. Mexicans, Central and South Americans have their own enclave neighbourhoods and social and economic networks, and don’t seem to integrate much with Dominicans and Puerto Ricans.

Race is also a looming factor in the Hispanic community (Hispanic is not a race but a culture and language.). Many Afro Latinos feel racially discriminated against by the larger Hispanic community, where there is much emphasis on skin color, hair texture and there are high degrees of racial classification. Some Afro Latinos cite serious racial discrimination in their homelands of Panama, Columbia, Brazil, and Puerto Rico.

In New York, there appear to be major class, national, religious, historical and political divisions among Asian immigrant groups, such as Japanese, Chinese, Taiwanese, Koreans, and Filipinos; Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis; and numerous Arab Middle Eastern nationalities and cultures.

There is a Jewish diasporan population ranging from secular, non-religious to ultra orthodox Jews from various nationalities in Russia, Poland, Eastern Europe, Sephardic, and Middle Eastern Jews. They do not all believe in the establishment of the Jewish State, and have major cultural, ethnic, religious, class and political differences.

Among persons of color populations, the African diasporan communities, with the oldest foothold in American society, and for historical reasons and intellectual and political traditions of leaders such as W.E.B. DuBois, Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X et.al., seem to have the greatest grasp of a Pan-ethnic or Pan African identity, inclusive of African Americans, Africans, Caribbeans and Afro Latinos under one supranational identity. For many, this Pan Africanism is linked to, and is not in place of their identity and identification as American citizens, a status earned through 400 years of struggle for human and civil rights.

Socioeconomic Problems and Solutions in Ethnic Communities

There are major parallels, as well as some differences with regards to socioeconomic conditions among African Americans, as well as in immigrant communities of color in both New York and Amsterdam. Problems include: disproportionate crime and incarceration, high school dropout rates, and high unemployment rates. Several factors both internal and some external to these ethnic communities explain this dysfunction.

An absence of adult males in the home, declining adult social control of youth; lack of individual initiative by the youth; a youth culture that devalues education; lack of good parenting skills; lack of social supports in school and community; structural and institutional racism in the educational system, job market and government agencies; unequal school facilities and discriminatory funding; poorly trained teachers, tracking and labeling of students, lack of parental involvement; discriminatory policing practices; antagonistic police community relations; lack of job training programs; structural unemployment due to macroeconomic forces; a spatial mismatch between workers' residences and job market locations, are among the explanations.

Education is one of the most empowering tools for the upliftment of ethnic minorities. Many solutions are tied to improving the public school system, closing the achievement gap between white and non-white youth (some Asian youth being the exception); and better preparing minority youth for higher education and the job market. Major public school reforms are underway under NYC Mayor Bloomberg. Solutions include: more equitable facilities funding, better teacher training and recruitment, increased salaries for teachers and principals, bonus pay for improving pupil performance, performance report cards for public schools, closing failing schools; and removal of low performing principals, teachers and schools, after due process.

Reducing the education bureaucracy, streamlining rules and regulations, introducing innovative educational models of achievement such as charter schools, engaging the business community more in public education; running the school system more efficiently on a business model, increased youth employment, tutorial, cultural and recreational programs; and increased school health and mental health services to combat barriers to learning, are among additional solutions.

Hiring more persons of color in law enforcement and the judicial system, improving police community relations, punishment alternatives to incarceration for appropriate crimes; reducing the school to prison pipeline, dismantling the prison industrial complex, and imposing a moratorium on prison construction; education, training and employment requirements in return for welfare payments; time limits on welfare; and increased job creation and access, are further solutions which address socioeconomic dysfunction.

Unlike the Netherlands, in New York and America, social welfare programs are not available to most adult immigrants, but are available for their children, mainly public education and health services. The critique of the Dutch system is that a social welfare system that makes no reciprocal demands on the recipient in return for social welfare support, disincentivizes that individual from seeking work, demeans their self worth, and creates a government dependency syndrome. This does nothing to empower an individual to improve their condition, and the only true beneficiaries are the bureaucrats and social agencies that profit from such a system. From 1996 onward, America instituted national reform of its welfare system and reduced its welfare rolls significantly, including major client reductions among Black and Hispanic populations.

Crime, Justice and Interracial Tensions

The level of intergroup racial tensions in New York City appears to have decreased under Mayor Michael Bloomberg, while at the same time, the number of sensational incidents of police shootings of minority unarmed civilians does not seem to have diminished by much. explanations for this anomaly include: minority leadership being tired and weary of protest; and Mayor Bloomberg is less confrontational and reaches out more to the

Black community than previous Mayors Giuliani and Koch. On the other hand, police officers have been shot and killed by minorities, thus improving police-community relations is a complex issue.

New York has a very large police force (nearly 40,000) to control civil protests; diverse New York citizenry have a low tolerance for incivility; government and civil society leaders quickly respond in the media and at the community level, and criticize racial incidents so they don't fester and blow up; New Yorkers have a healthy respect for civil rights and civil liberties and many lawyers are available to defend those rights when people exercise the right to protest police brutality, racial crimes, and unpopular government decisions.

Based on a number of incidents, New York police need better training in how to handle the mentally disturbed; and New York needs more culturally and ethnically diverse police officers, more reflective of the general population. Recently, Amsterdam and the Netherlands has had its own share of high profile incidents involving the police, immigrants and Dutch citizens, which has disturbed the national consciousness on the issues of crime, justice, immigration and police relations.

American Concepts of Citizenship and Nationality

The US Constitution protects the rights of minorities from the tyranny of the majority. Except that with respect to Black Americans, often historically this has not been the case. The US Constitution rejected the power and tyranny of an autocratic monarch, and consciously and systematically diffused and decentralized power throughout its intergovernmental framework. The American consciousness has an abiding respect for diversity, and does not have a dual citizenship mentality, as seems to be the case for many formerly colonized, first generation immigrants to European countries such as the Netherlands. The general perception is that once an American citizen, one must have undivided political loyalty to America.

The American mind acknowledges that out of respect for the diversity of a people and nation woven together from many cultures, who subscribe to a common set of values and principles in the Declaration of Independence and US Constitution, "e pluribus unum"- out of many one. In America, it is acceptable, indeed almost fashionable to be a hyphenated American. Many choose to acknowledge their prior cultural and national heritage which they bring to this grand vision called America, thus we are African American, Italian American, Irish American, German American, Hispanic American, Chinese American, etc. – but emphatically American. On the other hand, in the Netherlands one problem vividly discussed is that many ethnic minorities do not seem to readily embrace Dutch nationality and citizenship, and the crucial question is "why not?"

Some Dutch ethnic minorities I spoke with, answer that they are not made to feel equally “Dutch” by the white Dutch citizen majority.

On Tolerance of Religion and Diversity

The American Constitution grants freedom of religion, which allows people to freely practice their own religion without fear of persecution; and it forbids the government to establish a state sponsored religion. This freedom also allows people of various religions to wear their own traditional religious dress in public and in the workplace without fear of provoking a negative response, though de facto harassment can and does exist. In New York the more visible religious attire includes orthodox and ultra-orthodox Jews in black hats, and long black coats, long sideburns, and yarmulkes; orthodox Muslims, men and women, wearing body length garments, kufis, and head scarfs; Sikhs wearing turbans; and Africans wearing traditional and Islamic garments. Muslims have even won the right to wear modified traditional religious garments in prison.

Nearly 40% of New York City adults are foreign born, and including their children they constitute a majority of the City’s 8.2 million population. Rather than being apprehensive about different attire, most New Yorkers appear to take a deep breath and marvel at our sartorial splendour and diversity. In many cosmopolitan American cities, there is a certain diversity of dress not only for religious reasons, but for personal stylistic expression, some of it perhaps extreme by general standards. But people seek the anonymity of the urban environment where there is higher tolerance for diversity in dress, behaviour, culture, and language precisely because the urban environment offers the freedom to be different. This very diversity is part of what gives cities their character, creativity, rhythm and spirit.

In democratic societies, diversity of dress is accepted within legally enforced standards of decency which will vary from one society to another. Whether people wear religious or non-religious attire, the differences in dress are not acceptable cause for verbal or physical harassment. Of note, in this post 911 world of heightened security concerns, the need to conduct a legal search of a person’s clothing, whether non-religious or religious, would likely be upheld in courts of law.

But these and similar actions have been challenged by civil liberties lawyers in New York and elsewhere, on ground of racial profiling, unwarranted search and seizure, or violation of freedom of religion. The American judicial system and the diverse American people are the ultimate arbiters of appropriate modes of dress in public, taking into account both public safety and public standards concerns, as well as the privacy and religious rights of the individual under the US Constitution. Until now, the American public has shown a high degree of tolerance for a great diversity of public dress reflecting America’s diversity of cultures, religions, nationalities, and lifestyles.

Conclusion

In significant measure due to growing diversity in our respective societies, both New York and Amsterdam are today managing a similar set of challenges around, race, ethnicity, class, immigration, national identity and religion. New York in its founding and evolution, has been a great beneficiary of the Amsterdam and Dutch culture, history, economy and influence. Hopefully, Brooklyn and New York are repaying our Amsterdam and Dutch legacy by sharing our insights, experiences and solutions to help solve problems, and bring diverse peoples together, while at the same time respecting their differences. Sharing our experiences and working together, we will successfully manage our diverse cities, societies and nations in this dynamic, global new world of the 21st Century.

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