

**Friso Wielenga.** *A History of the Netherlands: From the Sixteenth Century to the Present Day*. Translated from the Dutch by Lynne Richards. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015. Illustrations, maps. 344 pp. \$114.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4725-6960-8.

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**Commissioned by** Hubert P. Van Tuyll (Georgia Regents University)

This handbook of the history of the Netherlands is the English edition of the simultaneous original publications in German and Dutch in 2012. As Friso Wielenga reveals in the introduction, this handbook does not intend to give a comprehensive overview of all developments that have taken place in the Netherlands since 1500. Instead, the focus of this book is on the political history and socioeconomic contexts of the Netherlands. Domestic political developments as well as Dutch foreign affairs are described in considerable detail. With a brief exception in the author's discussion of the Golden Age, there is very little on the cultural and social history of the Netherlands.

The book is divided into several chapters that correspond with major eras in Dutch history since the mid-sixteenth century. After a brief introduction, chapters 2 and 3 examine the complex Dutch struggle for independence and the Golden Age from the early seventeenth century to 1702. Chapter 4 discusses the decline of the Dutch Republic during the "long" eighteenth century until the end of the Napoleonic era. Chapter 5 covers the period from the inauguration of the Dutch kingdom in 1815 to the constitutional amendment of 1917. The final chapter discusses the rest of the twentieth century as well as the early twenty-first century.

An epilogue highlights several major themes in Dutch history.

The handbook is useful in several important ways. First, Wielenga convincingly challenges the myth that Dutch politics have always been shaped by consensus and compromise. He shows that Dutch political affairs since the era of the Revolt against Habsburg Spain have also been frequently influenced by periods of crisis and social tensions. Examples of political turmoil and upheaval include the near civil war conditions during the conflict between Maurits of Nassau and Johan van Oldenbarnevelt in the early seventeenth century; the violent deaths of the brothers De Witt in 1672, which abruptly ended the first stadholderless era; popular unrest aimed against the established regents in the early eighteenth century; the revolutionary events and coup d'états during the 1790s; and tensions between Protestants and Catholics in the nineteenth century.

A second strength of the book is that it is well informed by recent scholarship. The book is a good introduction to some of the rich scholarship in Dutch about the Netherlands from the sixteenth to the early twenty-first century. For an English-speaking audience, this publication is a useful way to gain access to some of this historiography.

A third strength of the book is that it highlights Dutch-German relations. This is not so surprising since the author is director of the Centre for Dutch Studies at the Westphalian Wilhelms-University in Munster, Germany. However, the discussion of Dutch-German relations through four centuries is an important reminder of the significance of the ties between these two countries. German migrants have played an influential role in the shaping of Dutch society, varying from Lutheran migrant-workers in the Golden Age to entrepreneurs, such as Anton Dreesmann who founded the (now-defunct) department store of V&D in the late nineteenth century. The author could have gone further here in analyzing Dutch-German relations from a cultural perspective.

A fourth strength of the author is his emphasis on the role of Catholics in Dutch history. Although the image of the Netherlands in the English-speaking world is often that of a solid Calvinistic country, Wielenga persuasively argues that Catholics have outnumbered Protestants in the Netherlands since the era of the Revolt. However, the influence of the Catholic population remained limited until the first half of the nineteenth century when the constitution of 1848 finally separated church and state in the Netherlands. With the rise of political parties in the 1870s, Catholic voters became an influential voting bloc that decisively shaped Dutch politics until the late twentieth century.

At the same time, scholars specializing in Dutch colonial and postcolonial history will be disappointed in this book. Although the author does discuss the main events in the Dutch East Indies, there is very little coverage about the Dutch in the Atlantic world. The rise and fall of the West India Company (WIC) in the seventeenth century is briefly described but Dutch colonialism in Surinam and the Caribbean in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries receives hardly any attention at all. The topics of slavery, the slave trade, and abolition, which have recently received considerable attention in Dutch public debates about the

past, are not mentioned at all. While the decolonization of the East Indies is examined in some detail, the independence of Surinam in the 1970s and the complex political status of the Dutch Caribbean is not explored. Furthermore, the migration and integration of people of Surinamese and Caribbean descent to the Netherlands in the second half of the twentieth century is also missing. Likewise, the arrival of people of Dutch-Indonesian descent and the Moluccan soldiers and their families in the Netherlands during the 1950s are nowhere to be found. Wielenga also does not discuss the terrorist activities of the second generation of Moluccan youth in the 1970s, a brief but violent episode in recent Dutch history. In general, the author has very little to say about the changing cultural and ethnic makeup of Dutch society since the end of World War II. The migration and integration of “guest workers” and their families from Morocco and Turkey is only mentioned indirectly in the context of the rise of populist leaders Pim Fortuyn and Geert Wilders. The unintentional impression the reader is left with at the end of the book is that contemporary Dutch society is ethnically and culturally homogenous.

Overall though, *A History of the Netherlands* is a valuable overview of five centuries of Dutch political and socioeconomic history. The author is to be commended for accomplishing this task in a readable and manageable format.

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