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The patriots

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A Key to Dutch History: The Cultural Canon of the Netherlands.

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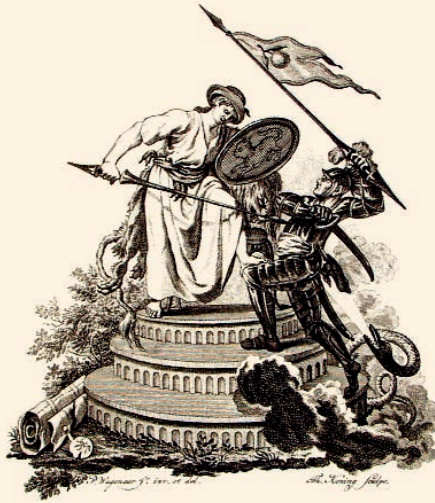
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1780 - 1795

The patriots

Political conflict about modernising the Republic

By the second half of the eighteenth century, the Golden Age of the Republic definitely seemed to be over. As a trading nation, the Republic had been surpassed by England. Although the financial sector was growing, it was unable to cope with increasing unemployment. The voice of the Republic was barely listened to in international politics. This was made painfully clear in the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War (1780-1784), in which the Republic could offer little resistance to the English.

A new political group came to the fore during this crisis. Citizens who up until then had had almost no say in the administration of the towns and the country itself. They regarded Stadholder (governor) William V as a kind of dictator and the ruling class as his puppets. They held the Stadholder responsible for the crisis in which the country found itself. These critical citizens called themselves the *Patriots*. Some members of the ruling class sided with the patriots.

On 26 September 1781, an anonymous, illegal patriot pamphlet was published, addressed "To the people of the Netherlands". It had an explosive effect on the political discussions. Two parties became clearly defined: the supporters of Stadholder William V, and, on the other side, the patriots. Both sides made full use of political pamphlets. The country was inundated by an avalanche of magazines – such as the influential *De Kruyer* – single-page flyers and cartoons. All of these analysed how the Republic was organised and why it was failing, and put forward solutions. Gradually, new elements were brought into the discussions. This was the start of a national feeling, pride in one's own country, a feeling that began to play an increasingly larger role. People no longer simply thought of themselves as inhabitants of a town or region, but also as citizens of the fatherland, which, according to the patriots, should therefore be organised as a political unity.

One moot point in this issue was how the citizens would be represented politically.

Patriot citizens organised themselves into ‘*vrijkorpse*’, volunteer corps, a kind of militia to take over the country. Stadholder William V no longer felt safe in the patriot town of The Hague and he retreated to Nijmegen until the Prussian king sent in troops in 1787 to restore order.

The Prussian king’s sister, Wilhelmina (wife of the Stadholder) had requested him to take this action. The patriot militia could not stand up to the well-trained Prussian soldiers. Eight years later (in 1795) the Republic came to its end after all, when the revolutionary French came to the aid of the (underground) patriots to overthrow the old regime.



Het gevangen houden van haar Eeningh. Hoogheid Koningin de Prinsesse van Oranje enz. in het huis van A. Leuwelhouck, aan de Goejanverwellesluis den 28^{en} Janij 1787.

Sub-topics

Primary education sector

The patriot figure Joan Derck van der Capellen tot den Pol and the Orangist heroine Kaat Mossel
Princess Wilhelmina stopped at Goejanverwellesluis
The struggle for democracy

Secondary education sector

The end of the patriots in 1787
A century of democratic revolutions
The Society for Public Welfare and education for the people
Popular political ideas in the Enlightenment
The American War of Independence

Past and Present

Contemporary patriotism in the Netherlands and the US

In the Treasure Chest

Replica of a patriot or Orangist pamphlet
Cartoon
Liberty cap

References

Places to Go

Amsterdam: Amsterdam Historical Museum
Dordrecht: Simon van Gijn Museum-aan-huis

Books for young people

Theo Hoogstraten, *De verdwenen grenadier* (12+)

Background literature

Arie Wilschut, *Goejanverwellesluis: De strijd tussen patriotten en prinsgezinden, 1780-1787* (Verloren Verleden 9), Hilversum 2000
Simon Schama, *Patriotten en Bevrijders: Revolutie in de Noordelijke Nederlanden 1780-1813*, Amsterdam 1989

Websites

home.casema.nl/wilschut/ahvvn.htm
(complete text of the ‘To the people’ pamphlet)