Educating the Nation: Jo Spier, Dutch National Identity, and the Marshall Plan in the Netherlands

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Introduction

In the visual history of the Marshall Plan, the image of a Dutchman climbing the U.S. Dollar sign to a more prosperous future is well-known and holds a prominent place in the history of the Marshall Plan to the Netherlands. The iconic image (see figure 1) appeared on the cover of a small booklet, Het Marshall-Plan en U (The Marshall Plan and You) which had been designed and illustrated by Dutch artist Jo Spier, a well-known and highly popular illustrator in the Netherlands in the period before WWII, and regarded by many as one of the best, if not the best, illustrator of his time (Van der Heyden 13).

Published in November 1949, the booklet saw a second edition in March 1950, a third one in May of the same year, and reached an estimated 2.5 million Dutch people (one-fourth of the Dutch population at that time). Also, after its successful appearance in the Netherlands, the booklet was translated into English and was used in the United States to a very similar purpose: while the Dutch were being educated about the benefits of accepting American aid and the necessity for European cooperation, the American people, many of whom were opposed to the project, likewise needed to be educated on the goals and practices of the Marshall Plan and persuaded.

1 The booklet’s success is also illustrated by the fact that an exhibition on the Marshall Plan in the Netherlands, which opened in Amsterdam in early 1951, was entitled “Het Marshall-Plan en U” (See for instance IJmuider Courant, 5 maart 1951, 2. Krantenviewer Noord-Hollands Archief, http://nha.courant.nu/issue/IJC/1951-03-05/edition/null/page/2).

2 There are two different versions of Het Marshall-Plan en U, in both the Dutch and the English edition. Contrary to what Tity de Vries has written, however, this was not a matter of the English version differing from the Dutch (De Vries 44). In the second edition of both the English and the Dutch version, two errors from the first edition were corrected. First, the original edition had mentioned Switzerland as one of the beneficiaries of Marshall aid; the second error involved the representation of Turkey.
that their tax money was being spent to a good cause: “Winning the hearts and minds of fellow Americans … meant circulating more than a million pieces of pro-Marshall Plan publications—booklets, leaflets, reprints and fact sheets. The primary focus was on elite opinion, but the grassroots were cultivated too” (Machado 20). One of these publications, then, was *The Marshall Plan and You*. The Americans’ appreciation of the booklet as well as its popular success are evident from its continued usage by the Library of Congress and The Marshall Foundation (both, for instance, have the booklet on their website) and by the United States Missions abroad (the United States Mission in Italy, for example, used several images from the booklet in their 2007 brochure “The Marshall Plan at 60”).

This article will discuss Jo Spier’s contributions to Dutch-American cultural diplomacy, *Het Marshall-Plan en U*, as well as another Marshall Plan booklet *Als We Niet Hélemaal van de Kaart Willen Raken* (“Lest we Fall off the Map Entirely”), a promotional booklet about the Technical Assistance Program in the Netherlands. Specifically, this essay will consider Spier’s representation of Dutch national and cultural identity. The deployment of “Dutchness” is shown to have been a prominent strategy in the promotion of the Marshall Plan in the Netherlands, not just in the official governmental narratives that Spier helped produce but in other media as well, including the “Marshall films” by the famous Dutch filmmaker Herman van der Horst.