What do we see when we climb the hill?

Essay competition

The Pilgrim Fathers celebrated their first Thanksgiving exactly 400 years ago. A year earlier, these originally English Pilgrims left from the Netherlands after a 12-year stay here, to start a new life with freedom of religion in America. This Thanksgiving Day marked their first successful harvest following a disastrous winter that half the group did not survive. Thanksgiving Day is a day of contemplation on which millions of people across the world reflect.

The Pilgrim Fathers’ journey is also considered as being the start of the foundation of the United States. That time also marked the start of a stream of immigrants, which led to the colonisation of Native American territories in America. The development of America included wars and pandemics of unintentionally introduced new infectious diseases. The first ship transporting African slaves also arrived in America during the time of the Pilgrim Fathers. This remains a topical theme today (see the Black Lives Matter movement). A globalisation wave of society, with all its advantages and disadvantages, had started. Viewed over a timeline of 400 years, the Pilgrim Fathers’ story also generated all kinds of social developments and associated themes.

The universities where this memorable journey started – Leiden, Delft and Rotterdam (RL, TUD and EUR) – and Harvard University (the departments of History and History & Literature), Massachusetts where the journey ended, are calling on their students to share their vision during the commemoration of 400 years of Thanksgiving, and to use this 400 years of global development as a reference framework to address the huge challenges we face in the future.

400 years ago, the Pilgrim Fathers wanted to create a better world in which there was space for freedom of religion and freedom of expression in a society elected on a democratic basis. The painting of Robert Weir depicting the departure of the Pilgrim Fathers on the Speedwell from Delfshaven on 22 July 1620, commissioned by the American Congress, has been on display in the Rotunda at the Capitol as part of American history since 1843. Their journey can also be described as the first step in globalisation. The problems of the current era – the coronavirus, wealth inequality and climate change – are directly attributable to waves of globalisation. Globalisation has negative aspects, and we certainly should reflect on these. But it also offers many positive aspects and opportunities if we handle it in the right way. Indeed, if we are to resolve the above challenges, a global approach is the only solution. These are amazing challenges to which universities can offer a meaningful contribution.

Thanksgiving is also about hope; after the presidential election in November 2020, President Joe Biden started seeking renewed trans-Atlantic cooperation. At the inauguration of President Biden on 20 January 2021, the poet Amanda Gorman conveyed this in her beautiful poem ‘The Hill We Climb’. This is the engaging metaphor for our essays. What do we see at the top of ‘The Hill’ of our world? Amanda Gorman showed that, even in difficult times, there are new vistas, or as she said in the final sentence of her poem: “there is always light.” The important question now is:

Learning from 400 years of Pilgrim Fathers’ America, what does the future of globalisation hold?

This can be viewed from a range of perspectives, and all disciplines play a role in this. That is why we would like to invite you to give your vision on the above question and receive from you a powerful and critical essay of up to 1,000 words in English, with a systematic view of our future challenges.
We would like to receive your contribution by, but no later than, **30 September 2021** via e-mail address essaycompetition@eur.nl

The essay competition is open to all students at Leiden, Delft, Erasmus (MC) and of the departments of History and History & Literature at Harvard University.

**Jury:**
- The jury consists of scholars from the participating universities.

**Award:**
- Voucher for a cultural student journey to Boston and Harvard, Massachusetts, USA – the state where the Pilgrim Fathers ended their journey or Leiden, Delft and Rotterdam, the Netherlands, where the journey started.

**Ceremony:**
- The prize awarding and the presentation of the best essay(s) will take place in the Oude or Pelgrimvaderskerk in Delfshaven, Rotterdam on 25 November 2021, Thanksgiving Day.

**Criteria for assessing the essays are:** The essay should:
  - be written in style in English
  - ideally holds original ideas/be visionary
  - contain critical content
  - be urgent.
  - be inclusive/promotes fellowship

**Organizing committee:**
- Prof. Harry Geerlings, EUR, Port Professor
- Dr. Bart Kuipers EUR-UPT, Port Researcher
- Ms. Marjan van Schijndel, Stichting Vrienden van de Oude of Pelgrimvaderskerk
- Mr. Sicco B. De Vries, Stichting Historisch Delfshaven

In cooperation with Erasmus University Rotterdam, Erasmus Medical Centre, Leiden University, Delft University of Technology and Harvard University - departments of History and History & Literature.