Toespraak Burgemeester Krijnen
Onthulling paneel Black Liberators – 27 november 2026

Your Excellency, Ambassador Popolo,
Dear children and grandchildren of the African American liberators,

Often, when we speak about history, we speak about major events, dates, facts and figures.
But sometimes, history reveals itself in something small and profoundly human: two people who meet and fall in love, and leave behind a story that reaches across generations.

Today, let me tell you about Edward Moody.
Edward was an African American truck driver from New Jersey. During the war, his work was part of the immense logistical effort that made the liberation of Europe possible. Following the liberation of southern Limburg, he was stationed in Maastricht, supplying the troops that advanced towards Germany.

Edward and three other soldiers stayed with the Wetzels family. They played cards together and they sang songs. And soon, Edward and Lenie, one of the daughters, began a relationship.
In 1945, they expected a child. Shortly afterwards, Edward was sent back to the United States.
He never got to know his son, Ed, who is with us here today.

Edward’s story is one of many. For too long, the contribution of African American Liberators remained largely outside of the narrative of our Liberation. That has changed. We have started to learn about the 400 African American soldiers who helped build the Margraten cemetery and who buried thousands of fallen soldiers. Much of that greater awareness we owe to Dr. Jefferson Wiggins, after whom this park is named, and to the writer Mieke Kirkels.

We have also learned about the African American soldiers who helped liberate Venlo in March 1945. And perhaps less widely known: Maastricht Aachen Airport was originally built with the support of an African American Aviation Engineering Regiment.

These stories change our understanding of the Liberation. And they remind us that history is never complete. Every time we listen, read and learn, we add new chapters to it.

African American soldiers came here, gave their youth and risked their lives, fighting for freedom in a distant land. They did so at a time when they themselves could not fully share in that freedom.

Today, we honor them: the African American servicemen, as liberators who helped secure our freedom. The panel we are about to unveil gives them a lasting place in the Liberation narrative of Eijsden-Margraten and Limburg.

I am incredibly proud of how this park and the new panel came into being: through open dialogue and cooperation.

- It began with Mieke Kirkels and Dr. Wiggins, whose book, *From Alabama to Margraten,* opened a door to a history that had remained in the background for too long.
- The NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies proposed naming this park after Dr. Wiggins. In 2023, we were honored to open it in the presence of Mrs. Janice Wiggins.
- Earlier this year, our council unanimously voted to create a new panel. Dutch historian and archivist Frans Roebroeks and American historian and author Robert Edsel worked together to shape its text.
- This process was strengthened by sincere conversations between Ambassador Popolo and children and grandchildren of the Black Liberators.

The attention to this part of our history has already led to new initiatives. It has brought families, historians, local residents and institutions into conversations with each other. I have seen how much these conversations mean to everyone involved, and how much there is still to learn.

To the children and grandchildren of the Black Liberators who are here today: it means a great deal that you are here. You carry your own stories, shaped by your family history and by growing up in Limburg after the war. Those stories belong to the history of our region, just as much as those of your parents and grandparents. We want this park and this panel to give those stories the place and recognition they deserve.

Your Excellency: in just over a year as Ambassador, you have shown us your deep personal commitment to the values we share. Thank you for your support.

Your presence, and that of Mrs. Popolo, also reminds us of the friendship between the Netherlands and the United States, going back for 250 years.

That friendship is much more than a political or military alliance: it lives in Margraten, where Dutch families have cared for the graves of the fallen for more than eighty years. It lives in the memories of liberators and their families. And it lives here, in this park.

Both this park and this panel came into being through research, dialogue and cooperation.
It reminds us that history becomes richer, and more honest, when we make room for voices that have not always been heard.

That is what we recognize today: a more inclusive history of our Liberation, and a commitment to keep listening, learning and remembering.