

## REVIEW ESSAYS

### "The Clash of Civilizations": The Selling of Fear

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#### **The Clash Of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order**

by Samuel Huntington

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SAMUEL HUNTINGTON'S *CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS* stirs within the reader two responses: paranoia and hostility. Paranoia because he arouses fear and suspicion through the "us and them" mentality; and hostility because these feelings of insecurity manifest themselves in expressions of anger toward those whom we fear and suspect. He appeals to the lowest common denominator in humanity: the tendency toward tribalism. He makes this impulse the basis of what he calls civilization.

With the end of the cold war, Huntington maintains, a new world order will emerge. This order will be based on civilizations rather than ideologies. The major contemporary civilizations he identifies are: Sinic (Chinese), Japanese, Hindu, Islamic, Western, Latin American, and African. He singles out the Sinic and Islamic civilizations for particular scrutiny as opponents of the West. He shows a passing interest in the others and completely ignores the African. While he does not acknowledge Christian Orthodoxy as a separate civilization in his schemata, he does acknowledge its role through Russia in global politics.

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Finally, he does not count Judaism among the Civilizations (48).

Civilizations are the new paradigm, Huntington argues, through which to understand global conflict and cohesion. Civilizations are made up of cultural identities at the broadest level. Religious identity, for Huntington, is one of the most potent forces for cultural unity. He acknowledges that the term civilization is both neutral and normative. Neutral, as it refers to an achieved social order, and normative, in that it is contrasted to savagery or barbarism. With subtlety he establishes a hierarchy of civilizations with the "democratic" West at the top and the "assertive" Sinic and "bloody" Islamic near the bottom. It is on the basis of this rather general and simplistic construct that Huntington explains the nature of future conflicts. In this sense, his view of civilization is monolithic rather than diverse, and it is static rather than dynamic.

The word culture itself implies dynamism. Originally culture in the English language was associated with the tendency of natural growth or cultivation. In this sense, culture is a metaphor for cultivating human development. Therefore, it is a dynamic social process. Furthermore, Enlightenment historians of the eighteenth century maintained that there is a plurality of cultures among social and economic groups within the same civilization (Williams 1993: 89). For instance, when one speaks of Islam, one is not referring to a civilization in the singular but civilizations in the plural that manifest tremendous geographic, linguistic and ethnic diversity.

Huntington separates culture from ideology, by arguing that future conflicts will be sparked by cultural factors rather than ideological differences (28). Civilizations, according to him, are solely cultural and not political entities (44). Can ideology be separated from culture? Does culture have ideological underpinnings? The evolution of the word culture in the English language is imbued with ideological connotations (O'Sullivan *et al*: 68-70; Williams 1993: 87-93). Ideology, like culture, is also a product of social relations. In fact some linguists suggest that language itself is ideological (O'Sullivan *et al*: 142). Therefore, any social discourse using language is by definition ideological. Is there social discourse that does not use language? Unless Huntington means that culture is devoid of ideas, it is not possible to disconnect the two concepts of culture and ideology for simplistic generalizations.

Huntington not only makes constructs of civilizations that are questionable but he also separates the notion of culture from ideology, which is a proposition that is not defensible. He proceeds next down a slippery slope to predict the behavior of those civilizations. Furnishing statistical data, he clinically and axiomatically constructs conclusions on their behavioral patterns. For instance, he resolves that "Muslims have problems living peaceably with their neighbors....The Evidence is overwhelming" (256). In fact, significant portions of his *Clash of Civilizations* and most of Chapter Ten are akin to the type of determinism one finds in books like *The Bell Curve* (1994). Is Huntington making new revelations through his conclusions? Do his conclusions verify old suspicions about Islam? Is this just hype drawing on social Darwinism on the

cultural front? It would be very poor scholarship on my part to suggest that since Richard Herrnstein (co-author of *The Bell Curve*) and Samuel Huntington are associated with the same university, therefore Harvard promotes the scientifically questionable genre of deterministic research. While it will be sensational, and those who wish to discredit Harvard will find use for such comments to suit their interests, it is not scholarship---it is a spectacle. Yet Huntington engages in precisely this type of sensationalism with regard to Islam.

Unlike Charles Murray, Richard Herrnstein and Philip Rushton who engage in biological determinism predicting behavior through intelligence capacities of races, Huntington applies this type of thinking to the cultural front. This desire to rank groups by some intrinsic worth is not new and goes back to ancient Greece. More recently it has been used to justify slavery, cultural genocide of aboriginal peoples across the world, the mass extermination of Jews and Gypsies in the second World War, and the segregation of races in United States and South Africa. Stephen Jay Gould, in *The Mismeasure of Man* (1981) explores the scientifically dubious basis for this determinism and its tragic implications. If Huntington's cultural determinism becomes the basis from which we are to judge another society, we shall fail to achieve meaningful understanding of its culture and thereby engender hostilities. His approach denies both individuality and humanity in the "Other." In the long run, such false constructs lead only to tragic mistakes and conflict. Consider the immediate aftermath of the Oklahoma City bombing. Arguably, Muslims were unjustly the second victims of the bombing. With the help of an unthinking and ill-informed press and police forces, much of the public had already concluded that it was Muslims who were the culprits. Indeed Muslims traveling across borders were detained and interrogated. Even Muslim children going to school were victimized by their non-Muslim classmates. Yet, as it turned out, right-wing militia groups, who likely have a connection to the fanatical Christian movements in the US, were responsible for the Oklahoma bombing. These are the repercussions of this type of deterministic hype.

According to Huntington, civilizational identities will be the basis from which cohesion, disintegration and conflict will take place. As a result of the end of the Cold War, he asserts, people are asking: "who are we?" (21). He answers: "We know who we are only when we know who we are not and often only when we know whom we are against" (21). In other words, "people define their identity by what they are not" (67). One wonders: in a world where poverty is increasing rather than decreasing, where the gap between the haves and have nots is widening, when people are thinking about where the next meal will come from---how many of the world's approximately 5 billion people are asking the question: Who are we? Assuming that a significant proportion is, how many would define themselves on the basis of whom they are against? Here there is no clear answer. It depends on our assumption of human nature. For Huntington people build self-identities on the basis of differences (125-

130). On the other hand, I believe people define themselves on what they hold in common with the "other". Only this way can a civilization or collective identity emerge. Clearly, Huntington's and my views of human nature differ. The question is: which of our views will lead to greater understanding of the "other" and minimize conflict?

Huntington responds by arguing that at a time of crisis "people rally to those of similar ancestry, religion, language, values and institutions." A superficial examination of conflicts seems to concur with this conclusion. Huntington often quotes the example of the former Yugoslavia to confirm this medieval tribalism. He contends: "unless a group can do as the Bosnian Muslims did and convincingly portray itself as a victim of genocide and thereby arouse Western sympathy, it can only expect to receive significant assistance from its civilizational kin" (268). If the rape and murder of Bosnians (Muslims or otherwise) was indeed an act to gain sympathy, one would think that Western governments have intelligence networks which would have effectively shown the rampage to be merely a performance. Instead, citizens (and not governments from the Western world) organized not only to provide clothing and medical support but lobbied in international circles to prevent mass extermination of innocent civilians in Bosnia. Women's groups from the West organized to support women in Bosnia by seeking to bring to justice the perpetrators of crimes of rape and abuse, and by establishing post trauma support and counseling services. These are not examples of tribal loyalties but common understanding of human rights. The involvement of women's groups also shows an intimate and common understanding by one group of women of the agony and pain associated with the degradation of another group of women at the hands of soldiers during war. Indeed, in Huntington's *Clash of Civilization*, the global women's movement and the challenge to patriarchy are notably absent.

Another resounding example of this type of effort is the support by the Canadian Jewish Congress for Sikh army veterans who were prevented by other veterans from entering the Royal Canadian Legions. Their turbans violated a rule which required removal of head-gear while in the Legion Hall. Whatever the motivations of the Legion membership, nobody could deny that during the War many Sikh soldiers gave their lives for the protection of the British Empire. The Canadian Jewish Congress intervened to support Sikh veterans on the grounds of human rights. Again Huntington's tribal kinship principle does not hold. In fact, amongst the political far right, the Congress may have lost support because of its stance with the Sikh veterans.

Since identity is based on differences, Huntington makes a case for maintaining cultural purity of Western countries and restricting immigration (186, 198-206). His map entitled "The United States: A Cleft Country? Projected Percent of Population That Will be Black, Asian, Native American, or Hispanic in 2020 by County" is sufficient to provoke hysterical paranoia among the racial purists (205). He asks of Americans: "are we a Western

people or are we something else?" He answers:

The futures of the United States and of the West depend on Americans reaffirming their commitment to Western Civilization. Domestically this means rejecting the divisive siren calls of multiculturalism. Internationally it means rejecting the elusive and illusory calls to identify the United States with Asia.... Americans are culturally part of the Western Family; multiculturalists may damage and even destroy that relationship but they cannot replace it. When Americans look for their cultural roots, they find them in Europe (307).

Further in the same chapter, he concludes: "A multicultural America is impossible because a non-Western America is not America" (318).

One gets the strong sense that Aboriginal or Black Americans do not fit into Huntington's vision of America. Are they also not Americans worthy of an identity? His silence on the Afro-Americans resonates as loudly as his conclusions on Aboriginal Americans. About indigenous cultures in North America he asserts that they "were effectively wiped out" (46). Yet again Aboriginal people are marginalized, ironically, by a European immigrant to their land. One wonders what Huntington has to say to his colleagues at the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development at the Kennedy School. The research produced through this project contradicts one of Huntington's major assumptions about economic development: namely, society through modernization achieves increased economic, military and political power resulting in cultural and religious resurgence (76). However, the research being done within the American Indian Project points in the exact opposite direction: traditional cultural and institutional factors influence positive economic development (Cornell and Kalt 1991). In other words a "cultural resurgence" is not the end but rather the starting point. Effective development only takes root if it is soundly based within the cultural and institutional fabric of the community.

In many respects Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* is a cant lamenting the loss of Western global hegemony. In his first chapter ("The New Era in Global Politics"), he presents a series of world maps showing the extent of western global dominance. The first map shows the height of Western rule in the 1920s. The final map depicting the situation in the 1990s, shows the decline of Western dominance. He argues that the central problem of relations between the West and "the rest" is the inability of the West (particularly the United States) to promote a Universal Western culture as it did in the 1920s. Fundamental components of that Western culture include the following values: democracy, free markets, limited government, human rights, individualism, and the rule of law. Confucianism and Islam, he contends, are antithetical to these values. This begs the question: how many European countries firmly held to these values in the 1920s?

Huntington makes much of Turkey as a Muslim nation with a secular constitution seeking to gain acceptance by the West. However, he seems unaware that in the 1870s, when much of Europe was still ruled by monarchies and democratic government was a fledgling infant, the Young Ottoman movement sought to bring about a constitutional reform within the Ottoman Empire. In part, it was political and foreign policy pressures from the West which prevented the emergence of a constitutional government in the Ottoman Empire (Kassam 1994: 18-20). This event seriously challenges Huntington's assertion that Islamic societies have an inborn reluctance to accept democracy. Huntington does admit, however, that Western countries have not held very tightly to their values when dealing with "the rest." He affectionately entitles this hypocrisy in value versus effective action as the "friendly tyrant problem" (198). He reasons that this gap between value and its implementation is the problem of universal application resulting in an "unavoidable" double standard in practice of these principles (184). As a result there are bound to be exceptions like El Salvador, Haiti, Iraq (before it ceased to serve Western interests), Iran (before it ceased to serve Western interests), Nicaragua (before it ceased to serve Western interests) or Indonesia, all of whom are part of "the rest" and as friendly tyrants are worthy of Western arms and support to crush their own citizens.

For Huntington the more pressing problem is that of an "unfriendly democracy" like Pakistan, Turkey, India or Algeria whose citizens may democratically choose not to serve Western interests. This twist of events he terms the "paradox of democracy" (197). Here we see at work an ethical dilemma which reflects base utilitarian tendencies in Western foreign policy. Democracy ceases to be a "self-evident" and absolute principle and becomes relative when it does not suit our interests. We will promote democracy so long as the countries that implement it remain friendly and acknowledge their cultural debt to the West. For Huntington the reason for this unfriendliness lies in their culture (198). Perhaps a more convincing reason for their unfriendliness lies in the recent memory of these societies which suffered under the "friendly tyrants" who had access to weapons from the West which efficiently terminated the lives of their loved ones.

Huntington's recipe for preserving the "uniqueness" of Western values includes: greater integration amongst Western powers at the exclusion of "the rest", Westernization of Latin America, restraining military development in Islamic and Sinic countries (312). This plan of action does not strike one as emerging from a new paradigm of world order as Huntington claims to have found. Rather it reflects old policies and values dressed up, albeit scantily, to look like a new idea. "The rest" have in the past and will in the future call this type of foreign policy, "imperialism." Huntington then contradicts himself by cautioning the West from intervening in the affairs of other civilizations (319). It is difficult to Westernize Latin America and prevent the development of military strength of Islamic and Sinic countries without intervening in their

affairs!

Arguably, the single greatest threat to Western Civilization that Huntington fails to grasp firmly is the corporatist wave currently consuming democracies. Corporatism is the tendency to co-opt public government to serve corporate interests. Huntington often alludes to this but does not develop it in any meaningful manner. Values of rampant individualism and the cult of the unchecked market system, touted by Huntington and others, are undermining Western Civilization at a fundamental level. Herein lies the real paradox of democracy: representative democracy is merely an illusion when public policy is largely geared not to citizens but to the interests of businesses which exercise the most effective lobby, and when individual profit replaces the common good. Given that Huntington acknowledges that states are influenced not only by local values and culture but also by institutions and organizations (34), how could he not see the corporatist threat? In fact, he states that "the essence of Western Civilization is the Magna Carta not the Magna Mac" (58). But he does not consider how many American citizens even know what the Magna Carta is. Huntington admits that Western governments could not sustain pressure on Asian regimes for human rights violations because it was contrary to the agenda of American and European businesses (194-195). Huntington seems to have the wrong end of the stick, wherein he ignores the devil within and focuses on some Islamic or Sinic phantom without.

John Ralston Saul, in his *The Unconscious Civilization* (1995), argues that it is in fact the corporatist ideology of privatization and weak government which is hijacking Western Civilization. He reminds us that it was Adam Smith, not Karl Marx, who warned against the destructive excesses of the market through privatization of virtually the entire state. Adam Smith speaks of the "idle class" who seek to reap what they have never sowed. Today this idle class is best represented by the currency speculators who reap on the backs of others' labor and occupy corporate castles that rival the palaces of Europe in floor space. Unlike Huntington, Saul finds ideologies alive and well. Ironically, the Western culture that Huntington seeks to preserve is, in fact, a new ideology whose temple is the market place and mammon its deity.

Is Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* a new paradigm? Thomas Kuhn in his *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1996), the seminal text that expounds on the notion of paradigm, describes the attributes of those who invent a new paradigm. He says: "almost always the men who achieve these fundamental inventions of a new paradigm have been either very young or very new to the field whose paradigm they change" (90). Samuel Huntington is neither new to his field nor young. His *Clash of Civilizations* is an exercise in fortune telling on the basis of a cracked crystal ball. Given the obvious warts in Huntington's analysis, whose interests are served by the selling of hostility toward, and paranoia of, other cultures? Huntington gives us the answers in his text. He begins by stating that "this book is not intended to be a work of social science"; rather it aspires to be a new paradigm "useful to policy makers" (13). Henry



Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski on the book's back cover resoundingly endorse Huntington's analysis. Huntington uncritically buys into the proposition that another cold war with Islam will serve to strengthen European identity (212). Are the giants of Western Civilization (like Kant, Beethoven, Shakespeare, Blake and many more) so weak as to need a false enemy? The answer is an emphatic NO! These individuals engaged in the struggles of life and not some manufactured paper tiger. Who benefits from these perceived threats? The danger of an imminent attack justifies the existence of military bases in the Middle East. It keeps military budgets fat and plump and subsidizes the country's industrial base, albeit inefficiently. It gives new meaning to anachronistic military organizations like NATO. Huntington directs the John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies. How do academics, who have devoted their entire lives to the suspicion of an "evil empire" which will attack the free world, justify their careers in a changing global context? A new McCarthy-style "pinko" or "red" has to be found to counter the subversion of Western Civilization. It was Max Weber who warned against institutions that act like "iron cages" which work for self-promotion. While Huntington stirs pity for those who need to remake their careers in light of the collapse of the Soviet Empire, spreading fear and hostility are not the way of achieving it.

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