

**Course:** Poli Sci 2H03

**Subject:** Clash of Civilizations – Samuel Huntington

**Instructor:** Dr. Vermilyea

**Section:** Evening, T01

**Date:** Oct.31, 2012

### **Clash of Civilizations**

- Huntington ignores economy
  - What matters is culture
- Great conflicts will be based on cultural issues
- Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in global affairs
- People are no longer the objects of history/colonialism
  - People are starting to have their own voice and shape history following the Cold War
- Division between 1st, 2nd, and 3d world is becoming irrelevant
  - Instead of grouping countries in terms of economic terms, must group them in terms of culture and civilization

### **What does Huntington mean by civilization?**

- Civilization is a cultural entity
- Villages/regions/ethnic groups/nationalities/ethnic groups all have distinct cultures in some way
- Civilization is the highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest form of cultural identity
  - Defined by common objectives, language, history, customs, institutions, and the objective self-identification of people
- Western civilization has 2 major variants:
  - European
  - North American
  - Both encompassed by broader cultural civilizations
- Points mainly to Muslims as people clashing with the West
  - Proof that their traditions are antithetical to the basis for Western ideals
    - e.g., individual freedom, separation of religion from politics, protection of minorities from tyranny of the majority
  - Huntington is hostile to Islam

### **Why will civilizations clash?**

- Civilizational identity will become increasingly important
  - Shaped by interaction among 7 or 8 major civilizations
    - Include Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic/Orthodox, Latin American, and possibly African
- 6 main reasons for the clash of civilizations:
- (1) Differences among civilizations aren't just real, but very basic
  - Differentiated by history, language, culture, tradition, and religion
  - Product of centuries and won't soon disappear
  - More fundamental than political/economic differences
- (2) the world is becoming a smaller place
  - Globalization
  - Interactions between people in different civilizations is increasing
    - As these interactions increase, civilization consciousness between different groups increases
  - Rather than the idea that cross-cultural contact will improve relations, it will create increasing hostility between groups and fundamental differences

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- (3) economic modernization and social change
  - People are being separated from their longstanding local identities
  - A nation state is being weakened as a source of identity
    - Religion is filling this gap
    - Increasing presence of fundamentalism
- (4) growth of civilizational consciousness enhanced by dual role of West
  - West is at peak of power
    - Confronts non-Westerners who increasingly have the desire to shape the world in non-Western ways
    - At the same time, we see a return to the "roots" phenomenon in non-Western civilizations
- (5) cultural characteristics and differences are less mutable than economic differences
  - Less compromise between issues of culture than between economic/political issues
  - Who you are is very important
    - Defined by culture
  - More than ethnicity, religion discriminates sharply and exclusively between people
- (6) economic regionalism is increasing
  - Importance of regional economic blocks is likely to increase in the future
    - e.g., EU, NAFTA
  - Will reinforce civilization differences
  - Can only work if they are rooted in a common civilization
  - "us" vs. "them" mindset
- Other reasons for clash:
  - Western Christianity and European history share common roots
  - Orthodox and Muslims civilizations are more Ottoman
    - Less advanced
    - Less likely to develop stable democratic systems

### **West vs. the rest**

- Western states are very powerful
  - Western military power is unrivaled
- Global political insecurity issues are subtle between these international institutions
  - Idea of Western countries going to war with each other is almost unthinkable
- Western culture permeated rest of the world
- Western ideas of individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, human rights, equality, liberty, the rule of law, democracy, free markets, and the separation of church and state have little resonance with all the other civilizations
  - Permeation is not as complete as we argue
    - Fundamental values of other cultures differ significantly from Western culture
    - Western efforts to propagate such ideas result in intense actions and reaffirmations for local cultures and indigenous cultures
- Responses of the rest (3) against the West
  - Isolation from Western corruption/penetration
    - Economically inefficient
  - Attempt to join the West and accept its values and institutions

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- Attempt to balance the West by developing economic and military power and cooperating with other societies against the West, while promoting indigenous values and institutions

### **Conclusions**

- Doesn't argue that civilization identities will replace others (like nation state identities)
- Differences between civilizations is real and important
  - Civilization consciousness is important and identity is increasing
- Politics of international relations was historically a Western claim, will become de-Westernized
  - Non-Western states will become actors and not simply objects
- The violent conflicts between groups in different civilizations are most dangerous source of escalation that will lead to global wars
- Interest in the West to promote cooperation, particularly between European and North American counterparts
  - Incorporate Eastern Europe and Latin America
  - Must strengthen international institutions that reflect legitimate Western values
    - Must involve non-Western states in deliberation
- Long-term solutions require other ways of thinking
  - Western civilization is both modern and Western, non-Western civilizations are attempting to become more modern but not Western

### **Criticisms of Huntington**

- How he defines civilizations
  - Huntington claims that they're the highest culture grouping of people and the broadest identity grouping people have
    - Defines civilizations by their enduring core, values, and modes of thinking
      - Argues that these are unchanging core values
- Why civilizations clash
  - Gets into idea that it has roots in human psyche and culture
- Why has this book become so influential?
  - Capacity to believe narratives depends on how well they serve our individual and collective interests
  - This narrative serves to take attention away from economic divisions or inequalities
    - Instead of focusing on concrete economic divisions that we can do something about, the article focuses on abstract civilizational divisions
- Edward Said's critiques
  - Huntington's authorities are not the cultures themselves, but a small number of authorities picked by himself
    - Did not include the voices of the people he claims to talk about
  - Assumes that civilizations are monolithic and homogenous
    - Even though he denies this in his conclusions, his argument is based on this premise
  - Unchanging duality between "us" and "them"
  - Doesn't write a neutral descriptive prose
    - Perpetuates divisions
      - He is partisan - advocate for one civilization over others

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- "oriental gates" - defining other cultures in relation to his own position
  - Get the impression that all Muslims think about is how to destroy the West
  - Doesn't give proper reasoning for this conflict other than they're separate
- Is it wise to produce such a simplified map of the world?
  - Doesn't his argument deepen and prolong the conflict?
  - This simplification results in exaggeration
- Not easy to define what a culture is
  - Cultures are not homogenous

**Binta and the Great Idea[Video]**

- Ironic cosmopolitanism - in order to be cosmopolitan, you must have an ironic distance between your culture