

Clash of Civilizations Activity

In this unit, you reviewed Samuel Huntington's article "Clash of Civilizations." Huntington's theory is not without critics. In this assignment, you will perform an Internet search on criticisms of "The Clash of Civilizations," then decide for yourself if his argument holds true. **Are we becoming a world organized by cultures? Will some cultures be more at odds than others? Rather than cultural regions, should we be more concerned with conflicts within multicultural nations? To help you get started, there are links to criticisms below.** Submit your completed assignment when finished.

Clash of civilizations: The West against the rest?

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2008/05/03/clash-civilizations-the-west-against-rest.html>

If Not Civilizations, What? Samuel Huntington Responds to His Critics

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/global-commons/1993-12-01/if-not-civilizations-what-samuel-huntington-responds-his-critics>

The Clash of Ignorance

<https://www.thenation.com/article/clash-ignorance/>

Summary of

The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order

By Samuel P. Huntington

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The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order is an expansion of the 1993 *Foreign Affairs* article written by Samuel Huntington that hypothesized a new post-Cold War world order. Prior to the end of the Cold War, societies were divided by

ideological differences, such as the struggle between democracy and communism. Huntington's main thesis argues, "The most important distinctions among peoples are [no longer] ideological, political, or economic. They are cultural" (21). New patterns of conflict will occur along the boundaries of different cultures and patterns of cohesion will be found within the cultural boundaries.

Part One: *A World of Civilizations*

To begin his argument, Huntington refutes past paradigms that have been ineffective in explaining or predicting the reality of the global political order. "We need a map," Huntington says, "that both portrays reality and simplifies reality in a way that best serves our purposes" (31). Huntington develops a new "Civilization paradigm" to create a new understanding of the post-Cold War order, and to fill the gaps of the already existing paradigms. To begin with, Huntington divides the world into eight "major" civilizations:

1. *Sinic*: the common culture of China and Chinese communities in Southeast Asia. Includes Vietnam and Korea.
2. *Japanese*: Japanese culture as distinctively different from the rest of Asia.
3. *Hindu*: identified as the core Indian civilization.
4. *Islamic*: Originating on the Arabian Peninsula, spread across North Africa, Iberian Peninsula and Central Asia. Arab, Turkic, Persian and Malay are among the many distinct subdivisions within Islam.
5. *Orthodox*: centered in Russia. Separate from Western Christendom.
6. *Western*: centered in Europe and North America.
7. *Latin American*: Central and South American countries with a past of a corporatist, authoritarian culture. Majority of countries are of a Catholic majority.
8. *Africa*: while the continent lacks a sense of a pan-African identity, Huntington claims that Africans are also increasingly developing a sense of African Identity.

Following the explanations of the separate civilizations in the new paradigm, Huntington describes the relations among civilizations. Before 1500 A.D., civilizations were separated geographically and the spread of ideas and technology took centuries. Huntington argues that research and technology are the catalyst for civilization creation and development. By 1500 A.D., evolution in ocean navigation by Western cultures led to rapid expansion and eventual domination of ideas, values, and religion.

Twentieth century relations among civilizations have moved beyond the unidirectional influence of the west on the rest. Instead, "multidirectional interactions among all civilization" has been maintained (53). In other words, cultural influence is interdependent; western civilizations influence and are influenced by smaller, less powerful civilizations around the world.

Huntington then refutes the idea of a Western cultural hegemony and the concept of an established universal civilization. He states that "global communications are dominated

by the West" and is "a major source of the resentment and hostility of non-Western peoples against the West" (59). The notion of a single, universal culture is not helpful creating an explanation or a description of global political order. However, Huntington also argues that as modernization increases cross-cultural communication, the similarities among cultures also increase. The key to this chapter is Huntington's severance of modernization from Westernization. While the world is becoming more modern, it is simultaneously becoming less Western, an idea he expands upon in part two of the book.

Part Two: *The Shifting Balance of Civilizations*

Huntington starts this section by arguing that Western power and influence is fading. There are contrasting views on the West's hold on power. One side argues that the West still has a monopoly on technological research and development, military strength, and economic consumption. The other side argues that the relative power and influence of Western countries is declining. Huntington adopts the latter view and describes three characteristics of the Western decline:

1. The current Western decline is a very slow process and is not an immediate threat to World powers today.
2. Decline of power does not occur in a straight line; it may reverse, speed up, or pause.
3. The power of a state is controlled and influenced by the behavior and decisions of those holding power.

Also in this section, Huntington asserts the increased role and importance of religion in world politics. Religion is the societal factor that has filled the vacuum created by a loss of political ideology. Major religions around the world "experienced new surges in commitment, relevance and practice by erstwhile casual believers" (96). Huntington goes on to say that replacing politics with religion was also the result of increased communication among societies and cultures. People "need new sources of identity, new forms of stable community, and new sets of moral precepts to provide them with a sense of meaning and purpose" (97). Religion is able to meet these needs.

Chapter five, *Economics, Demography and the Challenger Civilizations*, discusses the relative rise in power and influence of non-Western countries. Huntington specifically focuses on Japan, the Four Tigers (Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore), and China as countries, which asserted cultural relevance through economic successes. "Asian societies are decreasingly responsive to United States demands and interests and [are] increasingly able to resist pressure from the U.S. or other Western countries" (104). The ability of Asian countries to successfully modernize and develop economically without adopting western values supports Huntington's assertion that the world is becoming more modernized, but less Westernized.

Muslim societies, unlike Asian societies, have asserted cultural identity through the

reaffirmation and resurgence of religion. Huntington argues that the resurgence of Islam "embodies the acceptance of modernity, rejection of Western culture, and the recommitment to Islam as the guide to life in the modern world" (110). Religion is the primary factor that distinguishes Muslim politics and society from other countries. Huntington also argues that the failure of state economies, the large young population, and the authoritarian style of governance have all contributed to the resurgence of Islam in society.

Part III: *The Emerging Order of Civilizations*

During the Cold War, the bipolar world order enabled countries to identify themselves as either aligned or non-aligned. In the post-Cold War world order, countries are no longer able to easily categorize themselves and have entered into an identity crisis. To cope with this crisis, countries started "rallying to those [cultures] with similar ancestry, religion, language, values, and institutions and distance themselves from those with different ones" (126). Regional organizations have formed that reflect political and economic alliances. These include Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the European Union (EU) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Huntington also describes the idea of "torn countries," or countries that have yet to entirely claim or create an identity. These countries include Russia, Turkey, Mexico, and Australia.

Huntington discusses the new structure of civilizations as centered around a small number of powerful core states. "Culture commonality legitimates the leadership and order-imposing role of the core states for both member state and core external powers and institutions" (156). Examples of core states are France and Germany for the EU. Their sphere of influence ends where Western Christendom ends. In other words, civilizations are strictly bound to religious affiliation. Huntington argues that the Islamic civilization, which he identified earlier in the book, lacks a core state and is the factor that disallows these societies to successfully develop and modernize. The remainder of this section goes into great detail to explain the different divisions of core states throughout the world.

Part IV: *Clashes of Civilizations*

Huntington predicts and describes the great clashes that will occur among civilizations. First, he anticipates a coalition or cooperation between Islamic and Sinic cultures to work against a common enemy, the West. Three issues that separate the West from the rest are identified by Huntington as:

1. The West's ability to maintain military superiority through the nonproliferation of emerging powers.
2. The promotion of Western political values such as human rights and democracy.
3. The Restriction of non-Western immigrants and refugees into Western societies.

Non-Western countries see all three aspects as the Western countries attempt to enforce and maintain their status as the cultural hegemony.

In the chapter *The Global Politics of Civilizations*, Huntington predicts the conflict between Islam and the West to be a "small, fault line war," and the conflict between the America and China having the potential to be an "intercivilizational war of core states" (207).

Islam and the West

Huntington goes into a brief historical explanation of the conflictual nature of Islam and Christianity and then lists five factors that have exacerbated conflict between the two religions in the late twentieth century. These factors are:

- the Muslim population growth has generated large numbers of unemployed and dissatisfied youth that become recruits to Islamic causes,
- the recent resurgence of Islam has given Muslims a reaffirmation of the relevance of Islam compared to other religions,
- the West's attempt to universalize values and institutions, and maintain military superiority has generated intense resentment within Muslim communities,
- without the common threat of communism, the West and Islam now perceive each other as enemies, and
- increased communication and interaction between Islam and the West has exaggerated the perceived differences between the two societies (211).

Asia, China, and America

Economic development in Asia and China has resulted in an antagonistic relationship with America. As discussed in previous sections, economic success in Asia and China has created an increased sense of cultural relevancy. Huntington predicts that the combination of economic success of the East Asian countries and the heightened military power of China could result in a major world conflict. This conflict would be intensified even more by alignments between Islamic and Sinic civilizations. The end of chapter nine provides a detailed diagram (*The Global Politics of Civilizations: Emerging Alliances*) which helps explain the complexity of the political relationships in the post-Cold War era (245).

Huntington defines the Soviet-Afghan war and the First Gulf War as the emergence of civilization wars. Huntington interprets the Afghan War as a civilization war because it was seen as the first successful resistance to a foreign power, which boosted the self-confidence, and power of many fighters in the Islamic world. The war also "left behind an uneasy coalition of Islamic organizations intent on promoting Islam against all non-Muslim forces" (247). In other words, the war created a generation of fighters that perceived the West to be a major threat to their way of life.

The First Gulf War was a Muslim conflict in which the West intervened; the war was widely opposed by non-Westerners and widely supported by Westerners. Huntington states that "Islamic fundamentalist groups was a war against 'Islam and its civilization' by an alliance of 'Crusaders and Zionists' and proclaimed their backing of Iraq in the face of 'military and economic aggression against its people". The war was interpreted as a war of us vs. them; Islam v. Christianity.

To better understand the definition of the fault line between civilizations, Huntington provides a description of characteristics and dynamics of fault line conflicts. They can be described by the following:

- Communal conflicts between states or groups from different civilizations
- Almost always between people of different religions
- Prolonged duration
- Violent in nature
- Identity wars (us vs. them), eventually breaks down to religious identity
- Encouraged and financed by Diaspora communities
- Violence rarely ends permanently
- Propensity for peace is increased with third party intervention

Part V: *The Future of Civilizations*

In the concluding sections of his book, Huntington discusses the challengers of the West, and whether or not external and internal challenges will erode the West's power. External challenges include the emerging cultural identities in the non-Western world. Internal challenges include the erosion of principle values, morals, and beliefs within Western culture. He also contributes to the debate between multiculturalists and monoculturalists and states that, "A multicultural world is unavoidable because global empire is impossible. The preservation of the United States and the West requires the renewal of Western identity". The ability for the West to remain a global political power, it needs to adapt to increasing power and influence of different civilizations. Without adapting, the West is destined to decline in power and influence, or it will clash with other powerful civilizations. According to Huntington, the West clashing with another civilization is "the greatest threat to world peace, and an international order".

Are we becoming a world organized by cultures? Will some cultures be more at odds than others? Rather than cultural regions, should we be more concerned with conflicts within multicultural nations?

Despite the inherent effects of globalization, the power of reaction has grown, and the world has shifted back towards being a multicultural world. Whether global empire is impossible, as Huntington contends, is a matter of debate, as continuing technological innovation may potentially continue to compress time and space to a point where a monocultural society is the final result.

Many of the criticisms levied at Huntington's ideas include dissatisfaction with his generalisations and his identification of Islam's role in modern society. Huntington's perceptions regarding the role of culture and religion in shaping the coming centuries' power dynamics are lambasted in some articles for a devotion to the abstract and devaluation of secular perspectives. Value, for some, is derived from observing modern trajectories through the lens of power balances (powerful vs. powerless), secularism, reason, and justice. While there is merit in these criticisms, to be sure, much of Huntington's views are arguably potent in how they are predicated on certain historical precedent. For all of humanity's motivations of resources, political struggle, and reason, many past events have carried momentum from fanaticism and cultural identity, even if they were incited by more secular and objective causes. It is remiss, then, to ignore Huntington's theses as being too general or too abstract.

A good question to ask at this time is whether Huntington, since he first promulgated his perspective, has been entirely wrong. Has he? To be sure, much of 21st century politics thus far has been a battle of culture and religion, because even though humans aren't inherently categorized or required to categorize, inevitably we all pigeonhole ourselves for the sake of our own mental processes; for us to find identity, we must identify with one thing and against another. These are potent forces, overwhelming in the strength at times. The power dynamics of East and West have continued, the former only shifting its center from the Soviet Union to the People's Republic of China, and cultural war is now waged between Muslim and European (Christian and Secular alike), Han and Uighur, Populist and Elitist; it is not a question of whether we are becoming a world organized by culture, but whether we were ever going to break free. These trends that we are observing in our every day lives are not out of line with Huntington's perspective in their entirety, except perhaps that religion is not quite the overarching factor he deigned it to be. Religion, perhaps, is more ethereal in nature than any could pinpoint it as, for religion's many centrifugal qualities can be derived from any fanatical ideology; often, devotion to ideology such as socialism, fascism, communism, statism, or the like boils down to religious devotion.

The greatest powers, the greatest cultures, will eventually conflict; this is observable fact. Whether the world can hold multiple great powers is inconsequential; conflict is predicated on the belief that the world can't, whether that is true or not. It comes as no surprise, then, that Huntington was prescient about East vs. West and Islam vs. Christianity being the big conflicts of the 21st century. Some cultures are simply more predisposed, it seems, to conflicting with one another, especially when their views are not compatible. Already, human organizations often feel the need to expand, expand, expand at the expense of others, for the world simply cannot hold too many great powers, at least in the estimation of many. When cultures, then, hold views that cannot coexist (collectivism vs. Individualism, communalism vs. Property rights, monotheism vs. Polytheism, secularism vs. Religious devotion), open violence will eventually ensue. For Islam and Christianity (particular Protestant Christianity) and Western Secularism, views are not compatible; much of the Muslim world holds to religious traditionalism and collectivism, especially in light of reactionary views taking root in that sphere, while the West and Christianity either believe in secular individualism or more relaxed worship. Islam is not definitely incompatible with the rest of the world, but changes to the culture of the Muslim world are necessary for coexistence. East and West are definitely destined to conflict as one values collectivism to the extreme and the other values individualism to the extreme.

With all that having been said, multiculturalism, attempting to have these myriad belief systems cohabit the same globe, is both an inevitability and a problem. Multiculturalism is the

natural circumstance of nation-states organized around cultural groups; that is how the world has existed for millennia and how it will continue to exist should globalization fail in creating a monoculture. The problem of multiculturalism lies in multicultural states; numerous examples of these states failing can be observed in society, collapsing when the centrifugal pressures became too great: the Austrian Empire, the Roman Empire, the Ottoman Empire, Gran Colombia, et cetera. The great fear, then, is that these Western societies that have promoted multiculturalism will fall victim to their own deeds, having sown the seeds of division and conflict themselves. These tensions will pull apart states into nation-states, and that is something to worry about; the global circumstances are not terribly different than they have been in the past, only differing based off of new weaponry and power dynamics shifting from region to region.

Huntington was rather prescient. Many of his arguments remain defensible, credible, even. Globalization will, for the foreseeable future, continue to knock on Huntington's door in hopes of disproving his theses, but the historical precedents and trends seem to reflect truth, to some extent, of Huntington's perspective on religion and culture being inevitable in producing violent conflict. Criticisms have been valid, but they can be addressed. Ultimately, merit should be acknowledged in both Huntington's and other's arguments.