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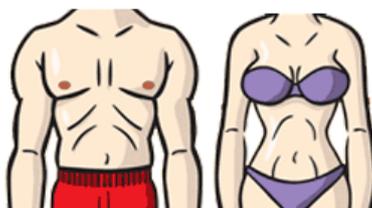
Samuel P. Huntington's Clash of Civilizations

by James Graham
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In the post Cold War world few articles have influenced how Western and especially American policymakers view the world more than Samuel P. Huntington's 1993 article, The Clash of Civilizations. Published in the influential Foreign Affairs journal the article suggested the world was returning to a civilization dominated world where future conflicts would originate from clashes between 'civilizations'. The theory has been broadly criticised for oversimplification, ignoring indigenous conflicts and for incorrectly predicting what has happened in the decade since its publication. The claim made by many that September the 11th has vindicated Huntington is simply not supported by the evidence. Published while a post Cold War world was searching for a new prism to view international relations through ensured it has however proved influential.

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Huntington's thesis outlines a future where the "great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural" (Huntington 1993:22). He divides the world's cultures into seven current civilizations, Western, Latin American, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu and Slavic-Orthodox (Huntington 1993:26). In addition he judged Africa only as a possible civilization depending on how far one viewed the development of an African consciousness had developed. These civilizations seem to be defined primarily by religion with a number of ad hoc exceptions. Israel is lumped together with the West, Buddhist states and the whole religion is completely ignored.

Huntington argues that the end of ideological confrontation between liberal democracy and communism will see future conflict occurring along the borders between civilizations at a micro level. At a macro level he predicts conflict occurring between states from different civilizations for control of international institutions and for economic and military power (Huntington 1993:29). He views this mix of conflict as normal by asserting that nation-states are new phenomena in a world dominated for most of its history by conflicts between civilizations. This is a dubious statement as inter-civilizational conflict driven mainly by geo-political factors rather than cultural differences is an equally if not more persuasive way to view much of history.

The theory at least differentiates between non-Western

Who is Samuel P. Huntington?



Samuel P. Huntington

- ➔ Born April 18, 1927.
- ➔ Harvard based since 1950.
- ➔ Founder and co-editor of the quarterly journal, *Foreign Policy*.
- ➔ Currently Eaton Professor of the Science of Government at Harvard
- ➔ C.V. reads like a description of the US foreign policy machinery.

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civilizations rather than grouping them together. He also explains how the West presents pro-Western policies as positive for the entire world and that the very idea of a universal culture is a Western idea. This he argues is evidenced by most important Western values like human rights often being the least important values to other civilizations.

His escape from a Eurocentric bias is however only temporary. He completely fails to account for indigenous cultures even though one can argue they collectively comprise a separate civilization (Fox 2002:430). The article also predicts future conflicts will be started by non-Western civilizations reacting to Western power and values ignoring the equally plausible situation where Western states use their military superiority to maintain their superior positions. The policy prescriptions he suggests to counter this perceived threat equate to increasing the power of the West to forestall any loss of the West's pre-eminence. Thus he suggests the Latin American and Orthodox-Slavic civilizations be drawn further into the Western orbit and the maintenance of Western military superiority (Huntington 1993:47).

- ➔ Recieved \$US 4,719,832 over 15 years from the John M. Olin Foundation, a right wing think tank that grew out of a chemicals and munitions business. [More info here.](#)
- ➔ Policy adviser to U.S. Presidents Lynson Johnson and Jimmy Carter.
- ➔ Has his own [Yahoo category](#) alongside Marx and Aristotle!

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