

## Multiculturalism Now: Civilization, National Identity, and Difference Before and After September 11th

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*David Palumbo-Liu*

The events of September 11th and following have been shocking beyond belief. For me, part of the shock has been the almost instantaneous contradiction in public-speak: the simultaneous evocation of the notion that the world has changed, that the war we will fight will be a “new” war, and the rearticulation of only slightly modified Cold War rhetoric and “civilizational” discourse. Indeed, in his address before Congress on 20 September, George W. Bush declared, “This is civilization’s fight.” In so doing, he evoked, consciously or not, Samuel Huntington’s well-known theory about the “clash of civilizations,” a theory that has been used to explain why the

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Parts of this study are taken from my book, *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (1999), but they have been reframed for the current context.

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attacks took place and also how the United States should respond. Huntington's thesis, if taken in toto, has dramatic ramifications for minority studies, minority rights, and political dissent in general.

This essay takes the form of both a description and an exhortation, as indicated by its title. I will first try to outline some of the recent historical contexts of what we call "multiculturalism" and in particular address the way multiculturalism, while usually understood within the United States in terms of "domestic" minorities, has always had an important international dimension. Today's new civilizational model goes beyond the cultural internationalism of the 1970s and even beyond the language of the nation *per se*.<sup>1</sup> What we find, rather, is the imbrication of nationalist and civilizational thinking, and that is what makes the case today so difficult to disentangle. National interests seem indistinguishable from "a way of life," and national policy seems synonymous with large, civilizational imperatives. While the convergence of national and civilizational thinking is nothing new (indeed, one could say that the former usually implies the latter), the specific historical conditions under which this is taking place today bring the civilizational into the national in a particularly potent and dangerous way for minority rights. Thus, added pressure is put on critical multiculturalism to address the imperatives of the moment and to rebut the particular assumptions of the new civilizational thinking. By "critical multiculturalism" I mean a multiculturalism that focuses on the material historical productions of difference rather than on "culture" as a ready-made thing.

One question has to be asked at the beginning: On what grounds was a distinct American identity to be founded? It was during the period of the Second World War that the modern attempt to understand national identity took hold. It began most visibly in the work of anthropologists. As early as 1939, Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict, two students of Franz Boas, founded the Committee for National Morale. When the war came, they were enlisted by the Office of War Information and the Office of Strategic Services

1. Throughout, I will be borrowing this term from Akira Iriye, who defines "cultural internationalism" as the efforts of "individuals and groups of people from different lands" to "develop an alternative community of nations and peoples on the basis of their cultural interchanges. . . . I call the inspiration behind these endeavors, as well as the sum of their achievements, 'cultural internationalism.'" He specifies what he means by "internationalism": "an idea, a movement, or an institution that seeks to reformulate the nature of relations among nations through cross-national cooperation and interchange." Akira Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 2-3.

to help the U.S. plan its war strategies. Dealing with the enemy, as well as discovering the constancy of American identity, required particular attention to the notion of "culture." "Culture" would serve to explain and define what was then called "national character." This, indeed, was the birth of American studies, which was declared "a branch of cultural anthropology."<sup>2</sup> It was during the war, and for those purposes, that Mead wrote a classic text probing the American national character entitled *And Keep Your Powder Dry*. For her, "character is . . . an abstraction, a way of talking about the results in human personality, of having been reared by and among human beings whose behavior was culturally regular."<sup>3</sup> In a later essay, "National Character and the Science of Anthropology," Mead explains what was to be included as evidentiary forms. To study national character "means to interpret the people of a nation as distinguished from their history, literature, arts or philosophy." She defines the project's nature as "a form of applied science, by which skills developed in the field work on primitive, preliterate societies were used for rapid diagnosis study . . . [to] provide some kind of prediction of the probable behavior of the members of a given national group."<sup>4</sup> The rapidity of the study was necessitated by the war: "We had to tackle the enormous problem of a world on the verge of self-consciousness, a world on the verge of a new period in history."<sup>5</sup>

The application of "character" to policy and morale is clear:

This book may seem to have harped on a single note, what we as Americans are and what we must do if we are to fight with all our hearts and with all our strengths, and what anthropology as a science can offer to implement that fight, to say to every American, "Here is a tool you can use, to feel strong, not weak, to feel certain and proud and secure of the future." Because I am an American, because I am an anthropologist, I have stressed these things which I know. I have outlined American character as it looks against the background of seven other cultures which I have studied with as microscopic an attention as my canvas here has been broad and rough. I have stressed

2. See Richard Sykes, "American Studies and the Concept of Culture: A Theory and Method," *American Quarterly* 15, no. 2.2 (summer 1963): 253–70.

3. Margaret Mead, *And Keep Your Powder Dry: An Anthropologist Looks at America* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1942), 21.

4. Margaret Mead, "National Character and the Science of Anthropology," in *Culture and Social Character*, ed. Seymour M. Lipset and Leo Lowenthal (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), 15–16.

5. Mead, *And Keep Your Powder Dry*, 3.

the strengths and weaknesses of Americans and the importance for winning the war, of using our democratic structure in a fashion which will use its strengths and discount its weaknesses.<sup>6</sup>

The comparative aspect of this study is as important as its purpose: American character is to be discerned through careful comparative studies. The basic questions asked by cultural anthropology were applied to Americans themselves—what makes ours a *distinct* “culture”? Most especially, the liberal definition of American national character stressed an *ethos* to which theoretically anyone could subscribe: Hence, immigrants could adopt that ethos if they did so in good faith and in so doing become Americans. But this required first separating out the irredeemably foreign from the domestic.

After the war, there was a persistence of such interests in defining the American character as that thing which was “exceptionally” American.<sup>7</sup> It was to be something essential and enduring, despite having to respond to external factors such as immigration and social and political change.<sup>8</sup> “Character” now was redefined as “identity” and used to find some constant element, some way to found a moral order “despite the restructuring of American society by large-scale, impersonal, morally neutral bureaucracies.”<sup>9</sup> In finding a balance between an unchanging “identity” and the need to adapt to a rapidly changing world, we find an essential definition of modern America. While intense urbanization, corporatization, and bureaucratization were found at home, for international relations America had to adapt to its new role as world power with new geopolitical imperatives. This required understanding the world from outside America’s traditional, and somewhat provincial, boundaries. Benedict’s key phrase from 1946, “A world made safe for differences,” tells it all: “The tough-minded are content that differences should exist. They respect differences. Their goal is a world made safe for differences, where the United States may be American to the

6. Mead, *And Keep Your Powder Dry*, 260–61.

7. For an interesting analysis, see Seymour Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (New York: Norton and Co., 1996).

8. Probably the single most influential writer is Erik Erikson. See, for example, his texts *Identity and the Life Cycle* (1959) and *Childhood and Society* (1950), especially the chapter “Reflections on the American Identity.”

9. Christopher Shannon, *A World Made Safe for Differences: Cold War Intellectuals and the Politics of Identity* (Lanham and Boulder, Colo.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), xiii. For works dealing with these issues, see David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*, and the various works of Erving Goffman.

hilt without threatening the peace of the world, and France may be France, and Japan may be Japan on the same conditions.”<sup>10</sup> Besides the wonderfully unconscious rhetoric of being “American to the hilt without threatening the peace of the world,” note, too, the countries Benedict names, for they will come to be precisely the representatives of the new economic order: the United States, Western Europe, and Japan. Benedict carries forward Mead’s notion of distinct national cultures but unconsciously articulates precisely the new consortium of world powers who will be joined in multilateral endeavors in the 1970s.

But even before this period, the range of “difference” had been historically circumscribed. Akira Iriye has documented the persistent tension between international cosmopolitical aspirations and the realities of racial and other differences. After Bandung, as the three worlds came into existence, what Iriye calls Third World “multiculturalism” came to threaten, or at least call into question, the capaciousness of Euramerican cultural internationalism. This occurs exactly during a period that saw the increased importance of culture as a mediator of difference. As Iriye notes, “What was . . . significant [in the 1970s] was the emergence of cultural themes as important keys to international affairs. It was as if the waning of the Cold War and the crisis of the world economy were calling forth cultural agendas with greater vigor than ever before, the more so because these agendas now included what came to be known as multicultural perspectives.”<sup>11</sup>

This point of tension between cultural internationalism and what Iriye calls “Third World multiculturalism” is found in the contrast between the next two statements. In 1972, the Hazen Foundation’s report, *Reconstituting the Human Community*, notes a “clear historical trend away from unilateral cultural relations, or the dissemination and imposition of a unified value system with implied universal and absolute validity, toward reciprocal cultural relations.”<sup>12</sup> That is, we see the emergence of a set of multilateral negotiations around the idea of world culture and a lessening of cultural hegemony. And yet during roughly the same period, we find a statement that trenchantly

10. Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946; reprint, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989), 14–15. But, importantly, in *A World Made Safe for Differences*, Shannon notes, “The idea of a world made safe for differences allows for the retention of indigenous cultural symbols, provided they are abstracted from the often restrictive, normative contexts that originally gave them meaning, and then instrumentalized in the service of the greater psychic freedom of the individual” (12).

11. Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order*, 165.

12. Quoted in Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order*, 170.

specifies who, exactly, would be included in such cultural international discussions. Note especially the role intellectuals are to play. In 1967, Anthony Hartley writes in *Interplay*:

A mutual concept for responsibility must unite countries with a *high standard of living* where competition for power once divided them. . . . If the *civilization* of the late twentieth century fixes itself in rigid patterns of thought, it will break and crumble to dust. But it is the business of the intellectual to provide a remedy for this mental ossification by drawing the attention of his rulers to the existence of new problems and the need for new attitudes of mind facing them. In 1967 the speed of communication and the increasing cosmopolitanism of the intellectual community allow this task to be carried out on a level above old national oppositions and ideological feuds . . . contrary to Marx's celebrated phrase, to understand the world is also to change it.<sup>13</sup>

What we find, then, in this period is the increased pressure on multilateralism for international economic and cultural relations, which entailed a rearticulation of civilizational thinking along the axis of developed capitalist states. Hartley's brand of new thinking was multilateral but distinctly confined to perpetuating a civilization of only certain countries. But as countries such as the United States were to be made more flexible and adaptive to such multilateral arrangements in order to facilitate the development of multinational capital, there arose the question of the governability of such flux. How would such rearrangements, their effects on national policy, and, crucially, the impact of various already existing subaltern pressures on national politics, policymaking, and the academy be managed? To address these domestic pressures, there was a resurgence of national-character thinking. Let me stress that it is exactly this dichotomy between an international economic profile which calls for "cultural internationalism" and the deployment of national-identity thinking to undergird order at home against a potential crisis in democracy brought about by strident minority demands which is under question in the present day, albeit modified in one important way, which I will get to in my conclusion.

In the United States, under the Nixon administration, liberal elites worried that there was "a growing lack of congruence between . . . 'economic and political worlds,' the former being characterized by an increasing

13. Hartley is quoted in Stephen Gill, *American Hegemony and the Trilateral Commission* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 139; my emphasis.

global integration, the latter persistently fragmented, with political decisions largely made at the level of the nation-state.”<sup>14</sup> There was strong opposition to Nixon-Kissinger unilateralism, which was considered outmoded and dangerous for evolving liberal international economic order. (This has certain manifestations on the international cultural front. For instance, Nixon said he “eschewed gushy optimism of any kind,” adding, “some Americans think that we can rely on peace by sending a few Fulbright scholars abroad . . . but that doesn’t bring peace. We can avoid war if we are realistic and not soft-headed.”)<sup>15</sup>

In 1973, the Trilateral Commission was convened by David Rockefeller in order to forge “diverse interests for a common *civilizational* purpose.”<sup>16</sup> The United States, Western Europe, and Japan were its constituent states, and Zbigniew Brzezinski its first director. That key word, *civilizational*, comes up again and provides a foreshadowing of one of the most important works by one of the commission’s advisors. But we are not ready for the “clash of civilizations” just yet. Let me first address Huntington’s work for the commission, which focuses on the domestic scene in ways that will be crucial for his later work. Indeed, the commission specifically asked its resident intellectuals to prognosticate on the current state of democracy.

In the 1975 publication of the commission, *The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission*, Huntington remarks, “The essence of the democratic surge of the 1960s was a general challenge to existing systems of authority, public and private. In one form or another, the challenge manifested itself in the family, the university, business, public and private institutions, politics, the government bureaucracy, and the military service. People no longer felt the same obligation to obey those whom they had previously considered superior to themselves in age, rank, status, expertise, character, or talents. . . . Each group claimed its right to participate equally—in the decision which affected itself.”<sup>17</sup> In short, while lauding the active participation of more and more diverse populations on the one hand, Huntington is concerned that there may be too much of a good thing: “The vitality of democracy in the 1960s raised

14. Gill, *American Hegemony and the Trilateral Commission*, 133.

15. Nixon is quoted in Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order*, 160.

16. Gill, *American Hegemony and the Trilateral Commission*, 123; my emphasis.

17. Samuel Huntington, “The United States,” in *The Crisis of Democracy: Report on the Governability of Democracies to the Trilateral Commission*, ed. Michel Crozier, Samuel Huntington, and Joji Watanuki (New York: New York University Press, 1975), 76–77. Hereafter, this publication is cited parenthetically as *Crisis*.

questions about the governability of democracy in the 1970s" (*Crisis*, 64). This increase in political participation is "primarily the result of the increased salience which citizens perceive politics to have for their own immediate concerns" (*Crisis*, 112).

So what's wrong with that? Isn't this precisely the picture of a robust democratic society? Not exactly, for this vigor is largely made up of minority voices and viewpoints demanding attention to their particular needs. This puts pressure on the political institutions of the state: "In the United States, the strength of democracy poses a problem for the governability of democracy in a way that is not the case everywhere. . . . We have come to recognize that there are potentially desirable limits to the indefinite extension of political democracy. Democracy will have a longer life if it has a more balanced existence" (*Crisis*, 115). This ominous phrase is indeed his concluding statement. While the Trilateral Commission focused on multilateral, "civilizational" issues, it also instructed its members to keep their respective national houses in order. Ironically, such order would be mobilized against the excesses of American character: "The roots of this surge are to be found in the basic American value system and the degree of commitment which groups in society feel toward that system" (*Crisis*, 112). And I again would stress the contradiction between international civilizational thinking and domestic national-identity thinking. We also need to remember that this authoritarian and antidemocratic criticism of minority voices becomes the backbone of Huntington's "civilization" book two decades later.<sup>18</sup>

The activism of the 1970s that Huntington decries created, among other things, the conditions for the emergence of multiculturalism in the 1980s. But just as much as the multiculturalism of the eighties and nineties can be seen to be the result of gains of the Civil Rights era, the Third World and antiwar movements, the rise of the New Left, and the burgeoning of the feminist and gay and lesbian movements, it should also be placed within the context of the continuance of development of multilateralism, here taking the shape of economic neoliberalism, which accommodated and even celebrated diversity for its own purposes. As Secretary of Labor, Elizabeth Dole issued a publication lauding diversity in the work force and urging sensitivity to difference. She noted that making a skilled labor force out of nontraditional elements was the key to a healthy economy and the maintenance

18. Dominick LaCapra points out that this is a perversion of traditional liberal political thought, which was used to curb the excesses of sovereign states internationally. Here, he argues, Huntington has deployed the same rhetoric of containment to suppress democratic activity *within* the nation-state (personal communication).

of social security. Similarly, big businesses initiated sensitivity training and special programs to promote diversity. I say this not to reduce multiculturalism to its worse appropriation by the corporate state but rather to underscore once again the need to grapple with a historical and intense dialectic around negotiating *difference* and *culture*, the need to constantly struggle to define multiculturalism's terms and values against such takeovers.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, on the one hand, we have the interests of multinational corporate and state interests urging for "diversity" and reconfiguring multiculturalism to be consonant with the neoliberal agenda. This tendency can perhaps no better be summed up than in Bill Clinton's sublime statement that his favorite novel was *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. On the other hand, we have the insurgent, contestatory demands of a critical, and sometimes radical, multiculturalism that calls for a rethinking of issues of recognition, distribution, and rights. And it is here that we find the deployment of national identity, national character, national values, and national interests to countermand those contestatory movements.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, it is in the triangulation of multi- and transnational corporatism, nativism, and what I will provisionally call "progressive humanism" that we find ourselves.

In the 1990s, the world became read as a confrontation between the new transnational capitalism and the resurgence of nativist, local, tribal fundamental identities, and people were asked to make a choice between these two (bad) alternatives. It is precisely the reputed collapse of the nation-state that is deemed either the cause or the effect of these moves toward either civilizational or tribal collectivities. Since neither of these identities was desirable for national policy, what was required is the resuscitation of the nation, but along the most simple, conservative, and antiprogressive lines. Nevertheless, although the third term, what I have called *progressive humanism*, drops out, it is precisely that term that I will evoke in the conclusion of this essay as central to any critical and progressive multicultural project. This was the period that saw the publication of books such as Joel Kotkin's *Tribes: How Race, Religion, and Identity Determine Success in the New Global Economy* (1993), Robert Kaplan's *The Ends of the Earth* (1996), Benjamin Barber's *Jihad vs. McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism are Reshaping the World* (1995), and Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996). I hasten to add that Kotkin's book ema-

19. See the "Critical Introduction" to my edited volume, *The Ethnic Canon: Histories, Institutions, Interventions* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

20. The fact that these notions were deployed by Patrick Buchanan, who also argued against multilateralism and corporatism, makes clear the opposition of the two trends.

nates from a liberal standpoint that bemoans the decay of a liberal collective identity, and Barber's is distinguished by his insistence on participatory democracy and a liberal civil society. That is, their books emanate from different ideological perspectives than Huntington's. Nevertheless, all these books share the sense that the world was now to be read postnationally and postideologically, and in terms of either large "civilizational" or "tribal" tendencies. Each tries to grasp this new global configuration, split between market forces, the end of the Cold War, and reaction to both in intense, sometimes primordial affiliations.

As I noted above, the events of September 11th were immediately read within Huntington's "clash of civilizations" theory. There are, of course, many things to say about this provocative book; again, I will focus only on the elements of multiculturalism, democracy, and national identity. I want to puzzle out how civilizational thinking, now that it seems to be back, is related to multiculturalism, and what new kinds of multiculturalism might be needed to address our new historical situation. *The Clash of Civilizations* subordinates economic concerns to a purely cultural thesis that argues that multiculturalism is the bane of America's existence. Indeed, his long book spends three hundred pages organizing the world according to civilizations in order to launch an attack on domestic cultural politics.

The basic thesis of the book is that in the post-Cold War world, the great conflicts will not occur between nations nor through ideological conflict (capitalism vs. socialism) but through "civilizational conflict." The world is made up of Sinic, Japanese, Hindu, Islamic, Western, and Latin American civilizations. To this list he adds "African" but immediately adds a parenthetical comment, "possibly."<sup>21</sup> The historical occasion for the book motivates the author's alarm. If clashes are to be civilizational, the West had better wake up. Huntington describes a world in which "the West" is losing ground universally, while other areas of the world are gaining various sorts of advantages: "The balance of power is shifting: the West is declining in relative influence; Asian civilizations are expanding their economic, military, and political strength; Islam is exploding demographically with destabilizing consequences for Muslim countries and their neighbors; and non-Western countries generally are reaffirming the value of their own cultures" (*Clash*, 20).

21. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 45–47. Hereafter, this work is cited parenthetically as *Clash*.

He specifies both the “quantitative” and “qualitative” advantages of all that lies outside the West: “Quantitatively Westerners thus constitute a steadily decreasing minority of the world’s population. Qualitatively the balance between the West and other populations is also changing. Non-Western peoples are becoming healthier, more urban, more literate, better educated” (*Clash*, 85). Ironically, the rest has benefited from modernization (Westernization) while the West has declined. Crucially, after extracting the benefits of Western modernization, these non-Western civilizations have realized the importance of indigenous traditions. Huntington is not bothered by this (aside from his dismay that these countries have not had the good grace to be thankful)—this return to “native traditions” is exactly what he will instruct the West to do. He describes the “second generation” of modern national leaders: “Most of the much larger second generation, in contrast, gets its education at home in universities created by the first generation, and the local rather than the colonial language is increasingly used for instruction. . . . The graduates of these universities resent the dominance of the earlier Western-trained generation and hence most often ‘succumb to the appeals of nativist oppositional movements.’” He continues: “We are witnessing an ‘end of the progressive era’ dominated by Western ideologies and are moving into an era in which multiple and diverse civilizations will interact, compete, coexist, and accommodate each other. This global process of re-indigenization is manifest broadly in the revivals of religion occurring in so many parts of the world and most notably in the cultural resurgence in Asian and Islamic countries generated in large part by their economic and demographic dynamism” (*Clash*, 95). For Huntington, the West requires a similar “resurgence,” a withdrawal from certain global positions and a retrenchment of fundamental values.

Turning now inwardly, Huntington does not like what he sees. The fear of civilizational clashes is nearly dwarfed by a fear that the West has eroded to such a degree *internally* that it cannot respond to external threats. Indeed, he claims that “the central issue for the West is whether, *quite apart from any external challenges*, it is capable of stopping and reversing the *internal* processes of decay” (*Clash*, 303; my emphasis). Now, finally, after some three hundred pages, we move to the central argument of the book. We have been prepared for this by Huntington’s covert emphasis on religion (via the more neutral idea of “civilization”). Civilization or religion, it all comes down to a belief in the absolutism of national culture and identity. From this perspective, the real enemy is within, made up of those individuals who would deprive the West of precisely that particular fundamental cultural

identity to which all civilizations must hold if they are to survive: “Western culture is challenged by groups within Western societies. One such challenge comes from immigrants from other civilizations who reject assimilation and continue to adhere to and propagate the values, customs, and cultures of their home societies” (*Clash*, 304). He then proceeds to define what, exactly, the fundamental identity of the West is. The West is, simply, the United States:

Historically American national identity has been defined culturally by the heritage of Western civilization and politically by the principles of the American Creed on which Americans overwhelmingly agree: liberty, democracy, individualism, equality before the law, constitutionalism, private property. In the late twentieth century both components of American identity have come under concentrated and sustained onslaught from a small but influential number of intellectuals and publicists. In the name of multiculturalism they have attacked the identification of the United States with Western civilization, denied the existence of a common American culture, and promoted racial, ethnic, and other subnational cultural identities and groupings. . . . The multicultural trend was . . . manifested in a variety of legislation that followed the civil rights acts of the 1960s, and in the 1990s the Clinton administration made the encouragement of diversity one of its major goals. (*Clash*, 305)

He does not mince words: “Rejection of the Creed and of Western civilization means the end of the United States of America as we have known it. It also means effectively the end of Western civilization” (*Clash*, 307). If, as he argues, “in this new world, local politics is the politics of ethnicity; global politics is the politics of civilizations” (*Clash*, 28), then the local politics of ethnicity have to be erased so that the U.S. nation (or, as Huntington equates, the West) can compete for survival globally. The consequences of not doing so are catastrophic: “The leaders of other countries have, as we have seen, at times attempted to disavow their cultural heritage and shift the identity of their country from one civilization to another. In no case have they succeeded and they have instead created schizophrenic torn countries” (*Clash*, 306). This leads us to revisit the earlier citations regarding the “second generation”: These people have done what is only natural and proper—they have rejected the West and returned to their indigenous heritage. If they had not, they would have suffered the consequences of “schizophrenia.” Huntington’s study, therefore, wipes out any legitimacy for multi-

culturalism. His agenda is clear from the very title of his book—his argument will exhume essentialist (even fundamentalist) notions of civilization in order to rally the West to reclaim its territory (diminished as it is). Externally, this means strengthening the West against foreign incursions and erosion of international policy (that is, American interests); internally, it means wiping out any element that would differ from and thereby challenge Anglo-Saxon hegemony.

Huntington develops this line of reasoning in a later essay published in *Foreign Affairs*, “The Erosion of American Interests” (1997). He suggests that one of the factors contributing to this erosion is the absence of a clearly defined enemy against which to consolidate the nation. Following the path laid out in *The Clash of Civilizations*, he claims the contemporary need to find an “opposing other” in the absence of a cold war, which readily provided one in the form of the Soviet Union. Why must we find an “other”? Again, to consolidate the nation against its enemies within: “Given the domestic forces pushing toward heterogeneity, diversity, multiculturalism, and ethnic and racial division, however, the United States . . . may need an opposing other to maintain its unity.” Huntington believes the most likely candidate is China, but he notes, with some disappointment, that “China is too problematic and its potential dangers too distant in the future.”<sup>22</sup>

Indeed, in 1997, the very other needed to consolidate the United States in the face of widening chasms created by ethnic and other minorities turns out to be those ethnic minorities *themselves*, who are more visible and vocal than ever before because of “changes in the scope and sources of immigration and the rise of the cult of multiculturalism” (Erosion, 32). *They* are the others against whom “we” may set our identity politics, for they have taken over the entire set of apparatuses essential to the running of the state: “The institutions and capabilities—political, military, economic, intelligence—created to serve a grand national purpose in the Cold War are now being suborned and redirected to serve narrow subnational, transnational, and even nonnational purposes. Increasingly people are arguing that these are precisely the foreign interests they should serve” (Erosion, 37). In 1997, there is thus a double erosion of the national character carried out on the one hand by multiculturalists (largely made up of ethnic minorities) who skew America off course and weaken its resolve and, on the other hand, by newly internalized others, diasporics who retain allegiance to their

22. Samuel P. Huntington, “The Erosion of American Interests,” *Foreign Affairs* 76, no. 5 (September/October 1997): 32. Hereafter, this essay is cited parenthetically as Erosion.

homelands and work from within the United States to focus its interests in their favor. Indeed, we see that the two groups might indeed be the same—ethnic Americans are now recast as diasporics, un- or non-Americans, in a rehearsal of the logic of the Japanese American internment. This recasting is made explicit here:

The growing role of ethnic groups in shaping American foreign policy is reinforced by the waves of recent immigration *and by* the arguments for diversity and multiculturalism. In addition, the greater economic wealth of ethnic communities and the dramatic improvements in communications and transportation now make it much easier for ethnic groups to remain in touch with their home countries. As a result, these groups are being transformed from cultural communities within the boundaries of the state into diasporas that transcend these boundaries. (Erosion, 38; my emphasis)

In sum, “diasporas in the United States support their home governments” (Erosion, 38).

This evocation of American identity is directly in contradiction with both liberal democratic ideology and the version of American identity promulgated in the postwar period, one which, as we remember, championed the notion that the American ethos could be adopted by new immigrant groups, who would then become Americanized. Huntington turns the clock back on that notion—he finds such a possibility remote at best, and only if these new immigrant, ethnic, and diasporic groups agree to be politically inactive.

Crucially, in the present incarnation of civilizational thinking, the dichotomy between national identity and international civilizational thinking has collapsed, the two positions intermingling and recombining into a potent ideological position, now mobilized by the events of September 11th. To the enemy within (ethnic and diasporic populations) is now added a viable enemy without, something Huntington pined for in order to solidify the nation just a few years before. The enemy will be civilizational: It will be Islam. In this process of addition, we find a dangerous mathematics, confused and potent. And while our president urges us to remember that Arab Americans are Americans, too, and that this is a war against terrorism, not Islam, the bombing and invasion of Afghanistan, with all its “collateral damage,” makes such distinctions hard to maintain.

Indeed, the influential Defense Policy Board, whose members include Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Deputy Secretary of Defense

Paul Wolfowitz, Henry Kissinger, Newt Gingrich, Dan Quayle, James Schlesinger, and former Director of the CIA James Woolsey, has argued vigorously for extending the war to Iraq. But this movement to continue the Gulf War started nearly four years ago, when, in January 1998, a group letter was sent to President Clinton urging him to reorient foreign policy toward eliminating Saddam Hussein. The signatories of that 1998 letter include some of the very most powerful individuals in the current Bush administration, people who are guiding the war against terrorism: Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, Robert Zoellick (now U.S. trade representative), Richard Armitage (now deputy secretary of state), John Bolton (now under secretary of state), Paula Dobriansky (now under secretary of state), Peter Rodman (now assistant secretary of defense), Elliott Abrams (now a senior National Security Council official), Zalmay Khalilzad (now a senior National Security Council official), and Richard Perle (now a key Bush adviser).<sup>23</sup> It has been noted that there is a dangerous fissuring of the Bush administration, now split between a hawkish Department of Defense, which is employing civilizational thinking, and the Department of State, which is pragmatically trying to hold together the alliance of Arab states, Britain, and the United States. Without informing the U.S. State Department, the Department of Defense sent former CIA Director Woolsey to Britain to find evidence of Iraqi participation in terrorism; and without clearing it with the State Department, in his speech announcing the bombing of Afghanistan, Bush added his famous reference to the possible need to extend the war to other organizations and other nations.

Thus, despite the rhetoric that this is not a war against Islam (a move insisted on by Colin Powell so as to keep the fragile support of Arab states within the “coalition”), there is a dangerous convergence of civilizational thinking on the part of the rightmost wing, now provided with an *international* other to take the place of the Soviet Union—it is Islam, and national identity thinking, which targets ethnics, immigrants, diasporics. Each fuels the other.<sup>24</sup> But it should be stressed that the deployment of civilizational rhe-

23. Indeed, Michael Klare has pointed out that U.S. targeting of Iraq since the Gulf War of 1989–90 has had more to do with protecting Saudi oil from Iraq than with Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait. The bombing of Afghanistan in 2001 is thus linked to a long-standing history of U.S. involvement in Saudi Arabia going back to 1945, and the history of ARAMCO (the Arabian American Oil Company) there. See Klare, *Resource Wars: The New Landscape of Global Conflict* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2001), and his article “The Geopolitics of War,” *Nation*, 5 November 2001, 11–15.

24. For an interesting rebuttal to such attempts to show U.S. support for Muslims, espe-

toric on the part of policymaking hawks is done to forward a *national political* agenda, not a cultural civilizational one. They had already staked out national policy goals in 1998 and before. The civilizational ploy is thus used to mobilize support for a war they had planned four years before September 11, 2001.

Let me conclude by emphasizing the danger of exhuming Huntington's thesis in toto, with his presumptions fully intact. This is not a remote possibility but one which is already being realized. For as things unfold, we already see the attempts to curtail civil liberties, privacy, freedom of speech and association. We see the attempt to limit student visas and to allow racial profiling. As of today (30 November), over six hundred individuals have been "detained" by Ashcroft's Justice Department; the United States is considering granting citizenship to those who inform on suspected terrorists, and colleges are being asked to comply with the PATRIOT Act and allow intense surveillance of international students and suspected "terrorist" activities and speech; the president has mandated that suspected terrorists be tried in military courts of law. The line between voicing dissent and aiding and abetting terrorism (or otherwise threatening the State) is now fading. Not only is dissent being framed by some as sedition, but even skepticism, doubt, and critical thinking are taken as treasonous.

The recent report by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA), the inaugural project of its "Defense of Civilization Fund," uses the events of September 11th as a way to reintroduce the notion that the demise of America is a result of the loss of a core curriculum on America and Western civilization and its supposed replacement by multicultural education (described here as "a smorgasbord of often narrow and trendy classes and incoherent requirements that do not convey the great heritage of *human* civilization").<sup>25</sup> The group, founded by Lynne Cheney, wife of the vice president, and Senator Joseph Lieberman (last year's Democratic vice presidential candidate), has issued the pamphlet for distribution to three thousand U.S. campuses. Entitled "Defending Civilization: How Our Universities Are Failing America and What Can Be Done About It," the slim report argues that there is a stark contrast between public opinion (largely gleaned from state-

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cially as they come out in statements by Paul Wolfowitz, see "Wolfowitz's Remarks on Terror Questionable," *Jakarta Post*, 18 October 2001.

25. Jerry L. Martin and Anne D. Neal, *Defending Civilization: How Our Universities Are Failing America and What Can Be Done About It* (Washington, D.C.: American Council of Trustees and Alumni, 2001), 5, my emphasis. This work is available on-line at <http://www.goacta.org>. Hereafter, it is cited parenthetically as *DC*.

ments by the president and from Congress) and the range of opinions found on college campuses (“The Ivory Tower” [DC, 8]). The “failure” here is the failure to participate fully and uncritically in promoting the war—the report finds an uncomfortable level of “moral equivocation” (DC, 1) on American campuses, calling them the “weak link” in our national efforts. The authors of the report tell us that to fight this weakness, American history and Western civilization must be reinstated and expanded in our colleges, but the center of gravity is indisputably “America”—indeed, the United States is the only country from the West mentioned, the only country mentioned at all: “We call upon all colleges and universities to adopt strong core curricula that include rigorous, broad-based courses on the great works of Western civilization as well as courses on American history, America’s Founding documents, and America’s continuing struggle to extend and defend the principles on which it was founded” (DC, 7). Such a curriculum will be “America’s first line of defense” (DC, 6). It will ostensibly erase the moral doubts and reticence of students and faculty—if skeptics only knew these things, they could not possibly act as they are. Yet like the use of the word *civilization* noted throughout this essay, the ACTA is opportunistically using *civilization* to revive a very narrow notion of the nation and to promulgate a very narrow set of acceptable opinions—that is, what *is* America and how should its actions be judged.

The report is itself quite slim, seven pages total. It’s the appendices that are its meat: eight comments by politicians supporting the war, followed by 115 comments by university students, faculty, and administrators. Each is used as evidence of unacceptable “moral equivocation.” If the USA PATRIOT Act is adopted in its widest sense, it may not be long until comments like the following are used for other, prosecutorial purposes:

#2 “We offer this teach-in as an alternative to the cries of war and as an end to the cycle of continued global violence.”

#19 “[We should] build bridges and relationships, not simply bombs and walls.”

#27 “We have to learn to use courage for peace instead of war.”

#32 “[I deplore those] who are deploying rhetoric and deploying troops without thinking before they speak.”

#66 “There is a lot of skepticism about the administration’s policies of going to war.”

#81 “If Osama Bin Laden is confirmed to be behind the attacks, the United States should bring him before an international tribunal on charges of crimes against humanity.” (DC, 13–25)

Certainly the knowledge of American history is important, but not if it includes any criticism of the United States. Among the pronouncements condemned by the ACTA is the following from the dean of the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University: "There is a terrible and understandable desire to find and punish whoever is responsible for this. But as we think about it, it's very important for Americans to think about our own history, what we did in World War II to Japanese citizens by interning them" (*DC*, 2). Thus a new sense of illegal public discourse has been born even as the suspect process that brought Bush into office has fallen from view—the report of the electoral commission has been effectively stifled, and news magazines and television pundits pronounce Bush now fully anointed as a "real President." *Democracy* and *Americanism* have taken on very particular meanings. The struggle will be to debate the terms openly and democratically.<sup>26</sup>

The conditions for a participatory democracy are worsening as the imperative to protect our *civilization* trump all other considerations. In this case, the rights and privileges of minorities of all stripes are at risk. The antidemocratic motif laid down in Huntington's 1975 essay is now reinforced by the current crisis. American national identity has now been blended with civilizational identity as the United States tries to rally its allies against terrorism. The resulting policies have profound national consequences. The inflammatory rhetoric of civilizations, unfortunately deployed by both extremes, serves only to obscure the real issues at hand, for in both cases the other side of civilization can remain only a cipher of irrational violence. That is not to say that every cause of this violence can be rationalized neatly; however, the caution should be against letting our analyses of this crisis rest on theories whose ramifications threaten whatever progress we have made in terms of tolerance, justice, and equality. Furthermore, the evocation of a civilizational war masks the inherently unilateral nature of the armed conflict now under way. To stand outside one civilization or another is to render oneself invisible or to be labeled sentimentalist or amoral. This should not be the only choice.

The third term which seems to have dropped out is, again, what I have provisionally called *progressive humanism*, and I think it is to some notion of humanism that we must turn to get away from the assumptions and dangers of narrow civilizational thinking. It would be a humanism that is

26. The 4 October 2001 issue of the *London Review of Books* featured a broad range of contributions to a roundtable discussion of the events; it has subsequently been attacked as "anti-American."

not mystified or abstract but realist and historical materialist. To have this, it is essential that multiculturalism be international in scope, that it widen its boundaries outside that of any particular nation, and even beyond diaspora studies, to an international frame. While the ACTA deplors the increase in courses on the Middle East (from nearly zero on many college campuses) and argues the need for more American and Western civilization courses (which are required for high school graduation already), the events of September 11th argue, to me, that a general and broader knowledge of the world is necessary. This will require no small amount of work, but if we could each, when thinking multiculturally, think of subnational, national, and regional cultures beyond our borders and even continents, and how those cultures have been produced historically, ideologically, materially, and in interaction with each other, we will have made some small move away from the mystification of civilizations, on both sides.