

# Samuel Huntington

What will be the source of the next great conflict?

**Key Concepts:** Culture & Civilization  
**Key Work:** *Clash of Civilizations?* (1993)  
 [book - 1997]

**“The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.”**



**The History of Conflicts**

Huntington plots out a broad history of how conflicts have developed since the **religious wars** of the mid-17<sup>th</sup> Century. He uses this trajectory (trend) to argue that we are entering a new phase of conflict.

- After the *Peace of Westphalia* in 1648 (which established the modern international system of nations), we entered a period of **Conflict between Monarchs**, i.e. the Kingdom of France goes to war against the Kingdom of Britain and Prussia in the Seven Years war.
- After the French Revolution in the 1790s, focus shifted to **Conflict between Peoples**, i.e. the *Levée en masse* (a form of national conscription) in France saw the whole country mobilize to defend itself from foreign aggression.
- After the Russian Revolution in 1917, we saw the emergence of **Conflicts of Ideologies**. The political differences between *Communism, Fascism, and Liberal Democracy* (none of which corresponded directly with nation states) was the motivation for both WWII and the Cold War conflicts. But these were primarily wars “**within**” Western Civ.
- But what now? Now that the Cold War has ended, do we shift to **Conflicts of Civilization?** In this uncertain future, Huntington argues that ‘Non-Western’ peoples and governments “no longer remain the OBJECTS OF HISTORY”, but are now “movers and shapers of history.”

**This begs the question.... What is a CIVILIZATION? They have a few different features:**

- Huntington says that a Civilization is a “**Cultural Entity**”. It’s the “highest cultural group of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have short of that which distinguishes humans from other species.” In other words, it’s the broadest level of identification with which a person can **intensely identify**.
- These civilizations are seldom sharp and usually dynamic. i.e. they are constantly changing, growing, even dying. Huntington says that “they rise and fall, they divide and merge”, some “disappear and are buried in the sands of time.”
- They might be made up of several nation states (as in Western Civ) or just one (as in Japanese Civ). They may also have sub-divisions which “blend and overlap”, but nonetheless remain meaningful.

He identifies 7 or 8 “Major Civilizations” – namely,  
**1. Western, 2. Confucian, 3. Japanese, 4. Islamic, 5. Hindu, 6. Slavic-Orthodox, 7. Latin American, and possibly 8. African.**



**Huntington’s 6 Reasons Why Civilizations Will Clash**

<p>2. <b>Differences between Civs are not only real, they are basic.</b> They go down to the layer of history, language, religion, culture, and tradition.</p>	<p>1. <b>The world is getting smaller.</b> More interaction between Civs = increased awareness of differences <b>between</b> Civs and similarities <b>within</b> Civs.</p>	<p>3. <b>Economic modernization and social change</b> are separating people from longstanding local identities. Religious and cultural identity fills the gap left by weakened national identity</p>
<p>4. The ‘West’ at the peak of its power confronts ‘<b>non-Wests</b>’ that increasingly have the <b>power, will, and resources</b> to shape the world in non-western ways.</p>	<p>5. <b>Cultural characteristics are less mutable</b> (changeable), therefore less easily compromised and resolved than political or economic ones. It’s not “<i>Which side are you on?</i>”, it’s “<i>Who are you?</i>” that matters.</p>	<p>6. <b>Economic regionalization is increasing.</b> This will reinforce civilization-consciousness. In the post-Cold War period, cultural commonalities increasingly overcome ideological difference.</p>



These conflicts, Huntington argues, can occur at two levels:  
**Micro** (local level) – Adjacent groups along the fault line where civilizations meet.  
**Macro** (big picture) – competition between states from different civilizations

### Huntington on Human Rights (L.O. 6.2)

One way of understanding Huntington's positions on HR is to see his warning that *"There will be no universal civilization, but instead a world of different civilizations, each of which will have to learn to coexist with the others."* This is the sentence which closes his essay. While it seems possible from a perspective 25 years later to think that Human Rights can be the force that allows this coexistence, Huntington rejects this.

Within C of C, he makes a powerful claim (which you'll need to decide your position on) that *"the efforts of the West to promote its values of democracy and liberalism as universal values, to maintain its military pre-dominance and to advance its economic interests engender countering responses from other civilizations."* Here, we can read '**universal values**' as referring to the universality of the UNDHR? How would you respond if this happened to you? Similarly, he also argues that Human Rights accompanies the fault lines of culture when he argues that, *"With the Cold War over, the underlying differences between China and the US have reasserted themselves in areas such as human rights, trade and weapons proliferation."* Later he argues that *"Western ideas of individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, **human rights**, equality, liberty, the rule of law, democracy, free markets, the separation of church and state, often **have little resonance** in Islamic, Confucian, Japanese, Hindu, Buddhist or Orthodox cultures."*

His argument goes that, if the 'West' spends lots of time and effort trying to spread those values, it will produce a backlash against "**human rights imperialism**" that will, therefore, have a greater focus on "indigenous values". In other words, attempting to spread Human Rights universalism will only make 'non-Western' people dig their heels in and assert their own identity more forcefully. (Is this a process that Eriksen would recognize?).

Huntington cites (refers to) a review of 100 comparative studies of identity, that argues that *"the values that are most important in the West are least important worldwide."* The basic premise of all of his arguments about the precarious position of Human Rights in the 'non-Western' world is that *"When it has developed in non-Western societies it has usually been the product of Western colonialism or imposition."* If Human Rights are core to 'Western Civilization' and less important to everyone else, the inevitable result is a split between "**THE WEST AND THE REST**"

### Huntington on the IMF

In the same way that he argues HR is a Western imposition, he also argues that other Western institutions have a similar goal. *"Decisions made at the U.N. Security Council or in the International Monetary Fund that reflect the interests of the West are presented to the world as reflecting the desires of the world community. The very phrase 'the world community' has become the euphemistic collective noun (replacing 'the Free World') to give global legitimacy"* to their actions. i.e. the IMF is a way of imposing Western economic interests like HR does for Western values.

### Torn States

Huntington argues that boarder areas of civilizations are points of inevitable conflict. There are, he admits, some countries that don't fit into either one civ or another, or are shifting their civilizational identity. He calls these 'Torn States' The examples he cites are Mexico (adjacent to the US-Western Civ) and Turkey, (wedged between Western Europe, the 'Islamic' Middle-East, and the 'Orthodox' Russian civilizations). He says that Russia is "Globally the most torn state, and is trying to decide if it's truly 'Orthodox' or 'Western'". Has this debate been settled in Putin's aggressive stance against the West?

#### How can torn states redefine their civilizational identity?

1. Get the political and economic **elites** within the state to generate support and enthusiasm about the move
2. Make sure that the **public** is willing to go along with the change
3. Make sure that the dominant groups in the civilization that **they're trying to join** are willing to accept them.

Are these insights really valuable, or is this just the way in which you go about changing anyone's mind, or integrating any individual or group into a new society. As yourself, does this have any relevance to migration, or is it only for 'civilizations'?

### Kin-Country Syndrome

Any state from a specific civilization that gets involved in war with people from a different civilization naturally try to rally support from other members of their own civilization. Huntington calls these "Kin-countries". States that were part of the civilization, Huntington argued, were like kin (family), and, more importantly, behaved like kin (overlooking minor differences because they were being threatened from outside their own group). For Huntington, Kin-countries were a crucial part of the 'remaking' of global politics in the post-Cold War era. In his essay, Huntington uses the case of the First Gulf War to illustrate this point, but many critics have argued that this was a poor example to choose.

### The Question of the Question Mark???

The 1993 article has a clear "?" in the title, but the subsequent book 4 years later omits the "?" Is this important? Does it suggest that the author is far more confident in his thesis now when compared with a few years earlier? Does it shift away from 'speculation' to 'certainty', or should we even care?

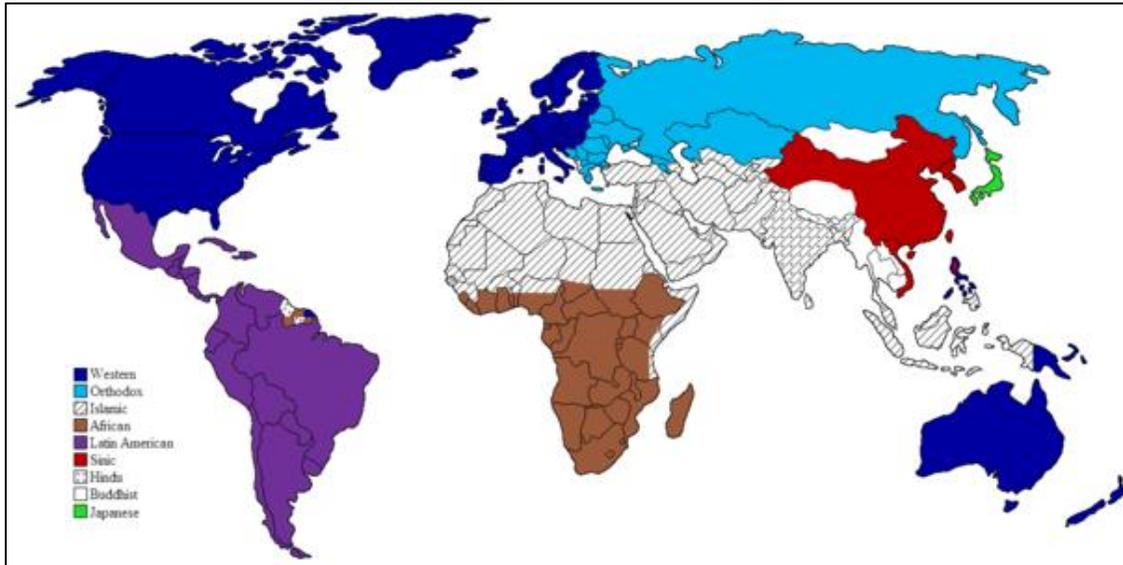
### How influential has Huntington been? - His footprint...

Huntington seems to have 'predicted' a lot of things, nowhere more so than the 9/11 attacks (generally speaking). This doesn't mean that he got everything right!

While many US politicians were influenced by his ideas, neither the Clinton, Bush, or Obama administrations really embraced the 'policy implications' of H's ideas.

Since his election in November 2016, however, Trump has been far more receptive to these ideas (well, let's not delude ourselves, his 'National Security Advisors' have been more receptive.) His first NSA, **Michael Flynn** wrote a book called *"The Field of Fight: How We Can Win the Global War Against Radical Islam and Its Allies"*. After Flynn was fired, H.R. McMaster was far less interested in this approach. However, his replacement, **John Bolton** has a far more **bellicose** approach to Islam and sees it as a major threat. Look at Trump's security policy... The '**Travel Ban**', or building the '**Wall**' with Mexico (to stop terrorists/migrants??), or the deterrence power of '**Child Separation**' at the border? If you want a good summary of this 'footprint' try the **New Yorker Magazine's** article: *"The Trump Team's Holy War and the Remaking of the World Order. Terrifying stuff....!*

## The map of Huntington's 8 World Civilization



### General Criticisms

- Is C of C a “**poor guide to a complex world**”? In such a globally complicated world is it useful to make sweeping generalization, which will then be taken up ‘uncritically’ by others?
- Religion underpins much of the civilization differences that H identifies, but doesn’t the religious **fundamentalism** within Islam, Judaism (etc) have more in common with the fundamentalism of Christian ‘Evangelicals’ in the “**Bible Belt**” in America. In 1958 only 18% of Americans said they would vote for an atheist for president, though this rose to 58% in 2016.
- Others argue that the real trend is that **small states** everywhere (i.e. in all “civilizations”) are responding to threats posed by a ‘**regional hegemon**’, (i.e. they don’t want one country in their region being too powerful)
- While H’s thesis is historically and philosophically well-grounded, **it lacks empirical data**. Wars within cultures were more deadly in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a fact that runs contrary to H’s model.
- Specifically, some argue that the alliance system during the First Gulf War actually **disproves**, rather than **supports**, Huntington’s arguments.

### Said’s Criticisms of the Clash of Civilization

If you want to really get to grips with Said’s criticisms, there’s two easy ways:

- Read his response to Said (written in the immediate aftermath of 9/11) called “The Clash of Ignorance” in The Nation, a long running US weekly magazine. (<https://www.thenation.com/article/clash-ignorance/>)
- If you’re a little lazier, you could listen to a lecture Said delivered directly criticizing the C of C. Search YouTube for “The Myth of the Clash of Civilizations” (particularly the opening 20 minutes). Said presents an alternative perspective that can be summed up as:
  - H pre-supposes that there needs to be a continual conflict.
  - H argues from the perspective of “**Pentagon Planners**” and “**Defence Contractors**” who need a “**new vocation**” after the end of the Cold War.
  - If you base your argument on “Journalism and Popular **Demagoguery**” (a manipulative appeal to people that plays on their emotions and prejudices rather than rationality) you will inevitably come to **distorted** conclusions.
  - H is a “**partisan advocate**” for his (Western) Civ over all others, wanting to properly “**manage**” these conflicts between the West and the rest, rather than **resolve** them.
  - S notes how H’s argument is based on the growth of people who are seen as speaking “on behalf of an entire culture” which is surely impossible to do
  - H ignores the importance of “**Counter Cultures**” which are a part of all cultures. If H only draws on the ‘Official’ expressions of culture, then he is missing out too much.
  - S asks “isn’t the C of C just a **recycled version of the Cold War thesis**”, just fought on many different fronts and against many more systems of values?
  - Because ‘culture’ and ‘civilization’ mean different things to different people, and that within each culture there’s always an ongoing contest over the meaning of those words, we’re not living through a ‘Clash of Civilizations’, but a “**Clash of Definitions**”. (JD – or at the very least a ‘Clash of Academics’!)

All in all, he thinks that H will aggravate, rather than mitigate future conflicts – a bad move!

### Huntington and Islam – Islamophobia or Pragmatism?

Huntington spends a disproportionate amount of time in the original essay discussing Islamic civilization and its “**Bloody Borders**”. This obviously opens his discussion up to charges of Islamophobia (implicit in Said’s criticism). However, given the fact that he could be viewed as having predicted the 9/11 attacks and potentially even the rise of ISIS, is this a logical conclusion or an example of real and pervasive Islamophobia? You’ll need to consider the evidence for yourself?

He argues that the “*centuries old military interaction between the West and Islam is unlikely to decline. It could become more virulent. The Gulf War left some Arabs feeling proud that Saddam Hussein had attacked Israel and stood up to the West.*”

Huntington also argues that “*on both sides the interaction between Islam and the West is seen as a C of C*”, and cites an Indian Muslim author who argues that the next “*confrontation... is definitely going to come from the Muslim world. It is in the sweep of the Islamic nations from the Maghreb to Pakistan that struggle for a new world order will begin.*”

For a more up-to-date view on American Liberal Islamophobia, try Khaled A Beydoun’s article in The Guardian, “*US liberal Islamophobia is rising – and more insidious than right wing bigotry*”, or google the massive row that emerged between Sam Harris and Ben Affleck on ‘**Real Time with Bill Maher**’.

**Media:** It’s interesting that Huntington also understands the central role of media when he argues that, “Populist politicians, religious leaders and the media have found it a potent means of arousing mass support and of pressuring hesitant governments. Is this somewhat reminiscent of Said’s argument in “Covering Islam”, namely both observe the power the media has!

## Thinker's Background

- Huntington was born in 1927, the son of a writer and a publisher.
- He had a prodigious, precocious intelligence, graduating university at 18 and completing his PhD in Harvard at 23!
- For most of his career he was an Academic, teaching mostly in Harvard, but was also a public intellectual.
- Huntington's support for LBJ's war in Vietnam earned him the nickname '**Mad Dog**', primarily because his observation that '**forced-draft urbanization**' (bombing and defoliating to force people to move to the city) might help the United States win the war. More recent scholarship argues this is a distortion, and that he was a **Dove** talking to the government, but a **Hawk** talking to the public. It is also argued that he favoured political settlement, but wouldn't speak out against his own government.
- In his 1968 book, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, he argued that, as societies modernize, they become more complex and disordered. Like AGF, he criticized **modernization theory**, though on different grounds.
- His teaching was punctuated by periods in 'Public Service', serving on the **National Security Council** in the Carter Administration.
- During the 1980s Huntington advised the South African government on how to handle its reform of (rather than the removal of) its **Apartheid** State. On his advice, the SA government established a powerful state security apparatus (known as 'securocrats') to "protect" the state against an anticipated upsurge in political violence Huntington thought the reforms might cause.
- His last book, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity*, was published in 2004. It examines the possible "**cultural threat**" posed to the US by large-scale "**Latino**" (predominantly Central American) immigration, which Huntington warns could "*divide the United States into two peoples, two cultures, and two languages*". Has this, too, come to pass?
- He died in 2008 in Massachusetts, USA

One of the tricky things about reading Huntington for students in 2018-19 is the fact that he is making **predictions**, and we know which have and haven't come to pass. A lot of his discussion of International Affairs (contemporary at the time) now see quite dated, almost like modern history than current affairs. Is this a problem?

## Personal Response

(A.) Look back at the 6 Reasons why Civilizations clash and ask yourself, "Which 3 of these reasons seems the most compelling or persuasive to you?" Similarly, are there arguments that are easier to discount or counter?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

(B.) Now that you have a better idea of Huntington's argument, and Said's counter-argument, you'll have to take some kind of position on the issue. Is it possible to find a compromise between such **DIAMETRICALLY OPPOSED** positions? What do you back and what do you contest?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**Reading Tip:** Whether you agree with Huntington or not, one good way to get to grips with what he does and doesn't argue is to read just the **last two pages** of his article. That will help you to better understand the policy implications of this theory. When you've done that, go and google Emma Ashford's article "What we get wrong about the Clash of Civilization". Is she charitable to Huntington?

## Links to other aspects of the course

Ideas around identity and cultural exchanges turn up in multiple areas of the Politics & Society Course. As you consider Huntington's reasons why Civilizations might clash, ask yourself, "*Which other key thinkers might object to each reason?*"

On what basis might they object?

1. How does he link to the idea of Human Rights and whether or not they are a Western ideas imposed on the East?
2. While the conflict with Said is obvious, do H's arguments about the lack of 'universal' civilization also run directly into conflict with Appiah's view of Cosmopolitan values?
3. Huntington argues that conflicts continue to exist, shifting their character, but not stopping. Does this have any resonance with Hobbes's description of the 'state of nature', where it is a constant "war of all against all"?
4. Can we draw parallels between how Huntington describes the reversion to civilizational identity, with the way in which Thomas Hylland Eriksen sees globalization leading to the reversion to 'identity politics'?

**Favourite Moment:** There is some elegant writing within the C of C essay. One nice turn of phrase is the way in which Huntington describes the '**Iron Curtain**' as being replaced with the '**Velvet Curtain**' as the most significant divide in Europe. Here 'velvet' represents the opulence and wealth of Western culture, which appear so starkly different to Soviet scarcity.