

For the Last Time: Civilizations¹

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In the summer of 1993, Samuel P. Huntington, Albert J. Weatherhead III University Professor at Harvard, published an article he called “The Clash of Civilization?” and published it in *Foreign Affair*, a leading conservative organ of the political right in Washington, DC.² Not since the 1940’s and the publication of George Kennan’s “X” on containment, the journal subsequently boasted, had an article received so much detailed and global attention.

Huntington’s proposal, subsequently expanded into a book,³ was rather simple. With the age of competing ideologies over, a *fait accompli* diagnosed and proclaimed by Huntington’s kindred soul Francis Fukuyama about a decade earlier,⁴ it was now an age of civilizational conflict. The West has won the historical game, he agreed with Fukuyama, but that victory has generated civilizational *ressentiment* among the rest of the world, the Muslims and Asians in particular. So they are resorting back to their civilizational identities and thus opposing the West. The result: “The Clash of Civilizations.” In his own words:

Indigenization and the revival of religion are global phenomena. They have been most evident, however, in the cultural assertiveness and challenges to the West that have come from Asia and from

Islam. These have been the dynamic civilizations of the last quarter of the twentieth century. The Islamic challenge is manifest in the pervasive cultural, social, and political resurgence of Islam in the Muslim world and the accompanying rejection of Western values and institutions. The Asian challenge is manifest in all the East Asian civilizations—Sinic, Japanese, Buddhist, and Muslim—and emphasizes their cultural differences from the West and, at times, the commonalties they share, often identified with Confucianism. Both Asians and Muslims stress the superiority of their cultures to Western culture. In contrast, people in other non-Western civilizations—Hindu, Orthodox, Latin American, African—may affirm the distinctive character of their cultures, but as of the mid-1990's had been hesitant about proclaiming their superiority to Western culture. Asia and Islam stand alone, and at times together, in their increasingly confident assertiveness with respect to the West.⁵

Huntington had practical advice for his Washington policy makers and other readers. They better recognize civilizational boundaries as the defining categories of the new world and thus order their foreign affairs accordingly. With a Machiavellian precision to his voice, taking whoever is the American President for Lorenzo de Medici, Huntington gives civilizational advice as how to be accommodating to some alien civilizations, confrontational to others. Eastern Europe and Latin America have hopes of being accommodated, whereas the Confucian and Islamic civilizations ought to be confronted with full military might.

In this essay, which reads like a State Department policy directive, Samuel Huntington seemed in effect to outline the intellectual contour of a new imperialist agenda for the United States. As proof and evidence of his civilizational re-orientation of American foreign policy, Huntington points to the global scene in which in his estimation the con-

flicts in Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, the Indian subcontinent, the Middle East and North Africa, as well as the rest of Africa and Latin America are all on the “fault lines” of civilizations and cultural identities. He singles out Islam and Asia as the primary sites of conflict with the Western Civilization and its accomplishments. He thus concludes with specific recommendations as to how the West can preserve its unique identity and its historical achievements by incorporating Westernized societies, opposing ant-Western civilizations, and instigating hostilities among non-Western civilizations in order to exhaust each others’ energy. Machiavelli at large.

Foreign Affairs?

The publication of Huntington’s essay in *Foreign Affairs* and its ostensible international agenda soon convinced everyone that he had indeed targeted a global matter of extreme urgency facing the triumphant West and that he ought to be responded to accordingly. The primary targets of Huntington’s assessment, Muslims and Asians, obviously took him quite seriously and began to respond. Huntington’s own colleague at Harvard, Roy Mottahedeh, in fact wrote a critical response in which he pointed out some of the inconsistencies and counter examples in Huntington’s thesis, taking his Poli-Sci. cavalier treatment of history very politely and bashfully to task.⁶ But far more important than academic and journalistic responses, translations of Huntington’s essay began to appear in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and many other languages, consolidating the thesis of civilizational

confrontation in political and ideological circles, and confirming the (false) supposition that the Harvard Professor of Poli-Sci had indeed addressed an issue of international magnitude.

As a piece of self-fulfilling prophecy, Huntington's essay was the delivery of its own promise. By "accusing" the Asian and Islamic civilizations to feel superior to the Western civilization he achieved, ipso facto, a number of simultaneous objectives, all fictive, all misleading, all dangerous. He consolidated the very idea of civilizational thinking, confirmed the very idea of "the West" in its moral and material facticity, cornered the Muslims and the Asians in reciprocating in kind and thinking of themselves in their presumably superior civilizations, and arranged the global chess game in such a way that not just the folks in the US State department but their counterparts in every ministry of foreign affairs throughout the Asian and the Islamic countries began to think that they were up to some serious game plan Huntington had devised. It was a perfect trap and because of the hegemonic language of its delivery from Washington DC everyone fell for it.

What was totally concealed to the international observers of and respondents to Huntington's resurrection of the dead horse of civilizational thinking was that the target of Huntington's essay and subsequent book was not any global audience at all. It was an entirely domestic issue that had harassed Huntington, along with a wide ranging spectrum of knee-jerk reactions to developments domestic to the United States and yet indices of far more global developments. In his limited, Poli.-Sci kind of way, advisory capacity, Hun-

tington had an entirely domestic concern, successfully disguised in foreign terms.

Huntington's conception of the clash of civilization is part and parcel of a larger conservative reaction to massive demographic changes *inside* the United States that have made themselves particularly palpable on American University campuses where Huntington and most his conservative cohorts first notice the phenomenon. Waves of successive labor migrations into the United States from Asia and Latin America in the 1970's and 1980's began to make their presence particularly palpable in early 1970's. Statistically, these waves of labor migrations began noticeably to change the demographic composition of the United States in major metropolitan areas in favor of colors and cultures ostensibly different from the WASP ruling elite. Of the total immigration of more than 4.4 million in the 1970's, 1.8 million were from Latin America and the Caribbean and 1.6 from Asia, both more than two times the third largest body of immigration, a little more than 800 thousand from Europe. The combined immigration of Asian and Latin Americans amounted to 3.4 million or more than 90% of total immigration. In the 1980's the same trend continued. Of the total immigration of more than 7.3 million, more than 3.4 came from Latin America and the Caribbean, and more than 2.7 came from Asia, both close to four to five times the third largest body of immigration, more than 760 thousand from Europe.⁷ Again the combined number of immigration from Asia and Latin America was 6.1 million or more than 83% of the total immigration. That means that for every European who immigrated in the 1970's, 3.9 Asian and Latinos

did the same, and that for every European who immigrated in the 1980's, 8.02 Asian and Latinos did the same.

The more recent statistics are even more alarming to the custodians of the Western Civilization. According to the most recent statistics about the state of California, a principal target of Asian and Latino immigration, by the year 2040, some 70% of the total population will consist of Asians, Pacific Islanders, non-Hispanic Blacks, and Hispanic. The non-Hispanic whites will figure not more than 30% of the total population. Thirty years ago, in 1970 and at the commencement of the new wave of labor migration, the demographic configuration was exactly the opposite. The racially categorized and culturally constituted Whites were close to 80% of the population, while Asian and Pacific Islanders a little more than 20%.⁸

These demographic changes, and the even more drastic changes that they are anticipating, began to alarm the defenders of the Western Civilization that their very civilizational identity was at risk. It was all but inevitable that the material basis of the evidence will soon assume cultural and civilizational terms of debate. North America, as the latter-day extension of Western Civilization, was losing ground to alien cultures and civilizations.

Before the Storm

Before we read the signs of civilizational debate rising in the 1980's at the wake of these demographic changes, it is quite instructive to look at an essay like Northrop Frye's on Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* (1974) and see

how it is almost completely devoid of any contemporary reference. Frye examines Spengler's book for a special issue of *Daedalus* dedicated to "Twentieth-Century Classics" with a cool and care-free language of a great academic intellectual. He in fact at one point notes with admiration the prolonged influence of Spengler:

What seems to me most impressive about Spengler is the fact that everybody does accept his main thesis in practice, whatever they think or say they accept. Everybody thinks in terms of a "Western" culture to which Europeans and Americans belong; everybody thinks of that culture as old, not young; everybody realizes that its most striking parallels are with the Roman period of Classical culture; everybody realizes that some crucial change in our way of life took place around Napoleon's time The decline, or aging, of the West is as much a part of our mental outlook today as the electron or the dinosaur, and in that sense we are all Spenglerians.⁹

That bit of scholarly precision and its accompanying historical memory, that the very idea of "The West" is of a very recent vintage, completely disappears from the horizon of the generation of radical right that Huntington will soon come to represent.

Clouds Gather

More than a decade after the publication of that essay by Northrop Frye, the massive demographic changes in the United States had threatened to tear apart the very assumption of a cultural fabric that held the whole together. The first prominent alarm was sounded by Allan Bloom in his *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education*

has failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students (1987). The book became a sensational bestseller in the United States. Saul Bellow wrote a laudatory introduction to his fellow-Chicagoan and used the example of his own *Herzog* to remind his contemporary American readers how illiterate they were and how erudite he and Allan Bloom are. Bloom's own prolonged essay was a highfalutin, old-professoriate, bickering about how illiterate the students are and that they no longer make them the way they used to. Democracy was in danger because the students no longer entered the university with a minimum that their professors could expect. We foreign professors were particularly to blame, so were critical theories from Europe, and so were the universities that were catering to Women and Gender Studies, or Black Studies, etc. Bloom's regret was that "It is difficult to imagine that there is either the wherewithal or the energy within the university to constitute or reconstitute the idea of an educated human being and establish a liberal education again."¹⁰

Not an iota of critical intelligence ever alerts Bloom in this diatribe as to what exactly could have happened in the world that suddenly the IQ of his students in Chicago plummeted so drastically. There was either something constitutionally flawed in the human gene pool after the 1960's or there must have been another explanation. It never occurred to Bloom and Co. that the student body they were facing in their classrooms in Chicago or elsewhere in the major metropolitan areas of the United States was constitutionally different from those on the same campuses generations earlier. It never occurred to Bloom that the very idea and ideal of

“an educated human being” or a “liberal education” were fabrications of very specific period and purpose; that the material bases that had articulated those moral ideals had now drastically changed from those that had occasioned the Enlightenment modernity; that those very material mutations had now resulted in a situation that if Bloom and Bellow were jointly given a brand new laptop computer and told that their dear lives depended on their opening it up, plugging it in, and then accessing the internet (with unfathomable vistas of knowledge immediately at their finger-tips) they would be in very grave danger; and yet any one of these illiterate students of his would sing and dance in and out a software in a way that would make Bloom and Bellow’s heads spin. Different material realities and thus *different* literacy.

The antiquarianism of Bloom was responding to the frustrating experience when a Professor’s knowledge becomes utterly irrelevant to the world in which he is supposed to teach and thus he begins to blame the world. Soon after the publication of Bloom’s diatribe, Robert L. Stone edited a collection of essays, *Essays on the Closing of the American Mind* (1989), collectively celebrating Bloom’s diagnosis.¹¹ What becomes evident in this collection of essays is a collective orchestration of conservative will to adhere to those outdated ideals by way of condemning the world that has no longer any use for those ideals. Both Bloom and his accolades categorically fail to establish a link between precisely those ideals of a “liberal education” and “an educated human being” and the catastrophic consequences of the selfsame project that engendered and cele-

brated them: That the Enlightenment had the Holocaust in its belly and colonialism in its trail. By delegating Holocaust to an evil accident and framing colonialism out of the picture, Bloom is symptomatic of an innocent liberalism that becomes particularly incensed when students no longer read the Plato and Rousseau that he has translated and that, *horribile dicto*, could not care less.

Allan Bloom's bestseller unleashed an avalanche of similar attacks by the American right. Charles J. Sykes wrote *Profscam: Professors and the Demise of Higher Education* in 1988, Peter Shaw *The war Against the Intellect: Episodes in the Decline of Discourse* in 1989. Soon followed Roger Kimball's *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education* (1990) and Page Smith's *Killing the Spirit: Higher Education in America* (1990). Charles J. Sykes did not feel satisfied by one stab, so he came back with another, *The Hollow Man: Politics and Corruption in Higher Education* in 1990. Dinesh D'Souza followed suit with his *Illiberal education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* in 1991. William Bennett made a splash with his *De-Valuing of America: The Fight for Our Culture and Our Children* in 1992. Martin Anderson went for the juggernaut in his *Imposters in the Temple: America Intellectuals are Destroying Our Universities and Cheating Our Students of Their Future* in 1992. Richard Bernstein caught up with the band wagon in 1994 with his *Dictatorship of Virtue: Multiculturalism and the Battle for America's Future*. What is immediately evident about these texts is of course their very colorful titles and subtitles, jour-

nalistic, bombastic, combative in their verbosity. The nervous meltdown was electrifying in late 1980's, early 1990's.

The sum total of all these combative arguments was that the American higher education had been destroyed by a corrupt professoriate, an illiterate student body, and a complacent administration. But while Bloom's book opened the complaints and suggestion box of the American Right one contemptuous volume after another, the picture became clearer with the opening of another front.

It was only two years after the publication of Bloom's *Closing of the American Mind*, and in the middle of the collapse of the Eastern block, that Francis Fukuyama's essay "The End of History" (1989) appeared in the *National Interest*. We in fact know that it was none other than Allan Bloom himself who in the same year that *The Closing of the American Mind* appeared extended an invitation to Fukuyama to come to his John M. Onlin Center for Inquiry into the Theory and Practice of Democracy at the University of Chicago to deliver the essay that would later be known as "The End of History."¹² Now, the agenda of Bloom's book is ostensibly domestic, whereas the target of Fukuyama's book is blatantly foreign. If there were to be one corroborating evidence that these two collapse in the overriding agenda of the American right to prevent the massive demographic change to take its natural course it is this very invitation. Otherwise what would the author of the most critical diatribe against American higher education have to do with the coroner of the End of History and the appearance of the Last Man?

Fukuyama did nothing more than taking Bloom's domestic battle to foreign territories. As the great custodians of the Western Civilization (a bit odd for Fukuyama, but there it is), both Bloom and Fukuyama were frightened witless of the massive demographic changes that had driven Peter Brimelow to drop all pretensions to civility and expose his racism. Fukuyama's categorical claim that The West had won the game and that the game was over, the end of history in sight and the very last man upon us, were all universal claims to a fictitious foreign audience to settle the account right here domestically and declare the culture war over and moot. If the West had won globally, then how imbecilic would be to compromise its very validity domestically. The massive demographic changes caused by decades of labor migration were palpable on American campuses. The presumed superiority, indeed the very supposition, of "The Western Civilization," was being radically debated right here in the middle of what Bloom likes to think of as the flowering achievement of its Hegelian promise. To claim victory for Bloom's *civil war*, Fukuyama called the *global game over*.

Beyond Bloom, Fukuyama, and Co., the American University campuses remained the focus of critical attention throughout the 1990's. The higher education became the barometer of a much larger reality: The massive material changes at the very heart of the greatest achievement of the Western Civilization. What was at stake was much more than the presumed illiteracy of the new generation. That was only a decoy. By far the most distinguished intervention in the early 1990's was by the prominent historian of Christian

dogma Jaroslav Pelikan who in his *The Idea of the University: A Reexamination* (1992) updated Cardinal Newman's mid-Nineteenth century defense of the autonomy of the institution. Pelikan's elegant argument, like its distinguished predecessor and model, remained Platonically above and beyond the mundane materiality of the evidence and argued passionately, as Newman had done a century and a half earlier, for production of knowledge for knowledge sake. It was quite accidental that in the very same year that Pelikan produced this passionate defense of the autonomy of the academic life, Sigmund Diamond's *Compromised Campus: The Collaboration of Universities with the Intelligence Community, 1946-1955* (1992) appeared and put the distinguished Yale Professor's argument in the context of the most mundane realities. In Diamond's brilliant documentation of Harvard and Yale collaboration with FBI during the darkest days of McCarthyism, the material basis of a modern university are fully exposed.

The Center Cannot Hold

If there were any illusion as to what exactly was at issue in these campus battles they were eradicated with the publication of Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (1992). In this book Schlesinger clearly outlined what the real battle was. He went against multiculturalism with a vengeance. He warned that the new wave of immigrants were threatening the very fabric of the Union, and that their identity politics was disruptive of the very ideals of the United States. Bilin-

gualism and Afrocentrism were targeted for his particular attention. As a former assistant to President Kennedy and an advocate of FDR's New Deal, Schlesinger saw no parity between what the new immigrants were doing to the nation and his liberal ideals. The "Schlesinger's Syllabus," 13 books that he considered "indispensable to an understanding of America," was his program of action to incorporate and assimilate the new wave of immigrants back into the bosom of the founding fathers. *The Federalist Papers*, Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*: These were among the books that the new immigrants had to read.¹³

But the crisis on Schlesinger, Fukuyama, and Bloom's hands was much more critical than they could handle. Not only the wave of history was against them, but the changing shape of the globe and its implications for the very idea of "American" were now translated into extraordinarily eloquent voices *inside* the United States. Voices at once subtle and critical, coming at times from unexpected corners. One such eloquent voice was that of Lawrence W. Levine who took Bloom and Co. to such a magnificent task in his *The Opening of the American Mind: Canons, Culture, and History*. With perspicacity, wisdom, and a brilliant historical imagination, Levine celebrated in joy where Bloom and Co. were mourning in horror:

The historical pattern of American higher education (...) has been toward increasing openness, greater inclusiveness, expanded choice, the study of the modern as well as the ancient, a concentration on American, African and Asians well as European culture. These have not been inventions of our own time; they have not resulted

from the plots of the New Left activists, the chauvinism of Afrocentrists, the philistinism of unsophisticated, gullible students, or the Machiavellianism of crafty faculty. This pattern has been the result of fundamental changes in the nature and composition of our society and has emanated from continuous encounters with those who have held a more fixed, Eurocentric, past-oriented, hierarchical conception of education.¹⁴

But even Levine is limited here in his conception of the “American” as he tries to rescue it from the Radical Right. Far more serious challenges were in the offing. Consider Catherine A. Lutz and Jane L. Collins’ *Reading National Geographic* (1993). This was a brilliant study by an anthropologist and a sociologist who documented in impressive detail the insidious function of an innocent-looking institution like the National Geographic in constituting the very idea of the “American” as *normal* by abnormalizing the rest of the world into the exotic window of a museum at best and a zoo at worst. The implication of Lutz and Collins’ study was much more radical than even they were willing to articulate. But even in their guarded and conservative estimation the whole Pandora Box of negational constitution of the “American” identity as an extension of the European and the flowering achievement of the Western Civilization were challenged. That challenge had obvious implications for the new wave of immigrants. It added theoretical force to their material evidence that they had an organic right to reconstitute their living space and recast the Schlesinger’s list, talk back to Bloom, and reach for their pillow every time they heard of Fukuyama.

Of the same force and magnificence was Ronald A. T. Judy's *DisForming the American canon: African-Arabic Slave Narratives and the Vernacular* (1993). This single volume very innocently introduced a blatantly evident but categorically excluded element in the making of the "American" narrative as an extension of the "European" and its Enlightenment Reason. Through a careful examination of African-American slave narratives written in Arabic, Judy quietly disrupted the canonicity of the Enlightenment as the singular achievement of Western Civilization. Judy argued that through the intermediary of the Arabic text the African slaves had access to a mode of self-representation categorically independent of the European Enlightenment and its exclusive claim to Reason. Judy's daring imagination eloquently argued for a reconstitution of the very idea of the American literary nationalism which is far more global and inclusive in its defining moments.

Judy's exposition of Kant's negrophobia was a critical move in disarming the very author of "What is the Enlightenment." Judy celebrated the indivisibility of *Ben Ali's Diary*, its having been written in Arabic, by an African, in the condition of servitude, negritude, dismissal. In the eloquent words of Wahneema Lubiano's introduction, Judy's text is

a surgical critique of Kant's inability to "reason" away the Negro's being; a mapping of the means by which Douglass's narrative strips Kant's veil of rationality away from the xenophobia that undermines his project; a sustained analysis of one of Black studies's founding moments and its relation to the incredibly "interested" nature of academic knowledge production, circulation, and legitimation; an evisceration of Allan Bloom, his genealogy, and his

progeny; an engagement with the reconstructionists intervention in African American literary studies; a serious—and often productive—reading of the Douglass and Equiano narratives; and finally, the recovery of an African-Arabic American slave narrative and the deconstruction of its literary history.¹⁵

But Judy has an agenda far more radical than just adding yet another, albeit in a “foreign” language, slave narrative to the model established by Douglass and theorized by Henry Louis Gates Jr. He means, and he delivers, to destroy the whole sub-categorical canonicity of the “slave-narrative” as a knowable referent. He means, and he delivers, to prevent the mutation of the defiant fact of a slave’s reality from the constitutionally compromising categorization of it into a literary narrative.

These were not ordinary moments in American history, and these were not negligible waves in academic fascination with one theory or another. There was a perfect correspondence between these revolutionary ideas and the material shifts in the very basis of the nation. Priscilla Wald’s *Constituting Americans: Cultural Anxiety and Narrative Form* (1995) shook the very assumption of who these “We the People” are who have constituted the Americans at their very constitutional inauguration.¹⁶ Wald read carefully through Frederick Douglass’s autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Herman Melville’s *Pierre*, Harriet Wilson’s *Our Nig*, W. E. B. Dubois’ *The Souls of Black Folk*, and Gertrude Stein’s *The Making of Americans* in order to shatter the metaphysical presence invested in the very constitution of the term “American.” “Douglass’s analogue calls attention to both the literariness of United States na-

tionalism and the importance of literature to the project of nation-building. That was also the explicit and resounding message of self-proclaimed literary nationalists who called upon authors to articulate a cultural identity for the imagined community.”¹⁷ In such splendid detail documenting the function of an amorphous narrative constitution of the very idea of a nation were not exactly reassuring for the custodians of the most advanced achievement of the Western Civilization.

What Donald E. Pease achieved in his edited volume, *National Identities and Post-Americanism Narratives* (1994), was even more radical in its explicit findings. Pease brought together a collection of groundbreaking essays that successively destructed the very conception of an “American” narrative in which the conception of the American *identity* is predicated on a constellation of non-American *alterities*. By divesting from an array of constructed categories—the Women, the Blacks, the Foreigners, the Homeless—any claim to membership, the nationalizing narratives have in effect constituted the “American” by a radical demarcation of the non-American. The post-nationalist, post-Americanism argument that emerges from Pease’s volume destroys the very assumption of any categorical claim to a national culture and a universal civilization to which the Americans can belong. Pease’s volume is one of the most accurate description of how a national narrative is artificially and politically assembled and how its dismantling conceptually corresponds to the material shifts long suppressed by the dominant ideologies of Americanism. In his brilliant contribution to this volume, “Nationalism,

Hypercanonization, and *Huckleberry Finn*,” Jonathan Arac demonstrated the extraordinary fixation of American literary nationalism on a handful of characterizing texts at the expense of a vast array of possibilities made impossible by an over-nervous literary identity politics.

(. . .) *Huckleberry Finn* is famous for bringing crucial moral issues to bear on and in the psyche of its protagonist, yet this, too, is a further centering; the form and fable of *Huckleberry Finn* rejects the very possibility of public debate. After the political failures that had led to the Civil War, after the political failures that had brought Reconstruction to an end, Twain’s literary narrative takes the obliquity of radical ellipsis (...) Huck Finn lives so as to feel right with no sanction beyond his own psyche, the imaginative construction of an autonomous self is the cultural work of literary narrative.”¹⁸

The construction of that autonomous self has been central to the entire project of not just nation-building and its historical agency but to the very national culture which is to authorize that agency.

The destruction of the millennium-old assumption of national cultures as placed within a universal (Western) civilization was not limited to any single country, nor was its implications confined to dismantling only the hegemonic power of the Western Civilization. Derek Gregory’s *Geographical Imagination* (1994) went for a far more vital juggernaut and with a single stroke of scholarly imagination revealed the very constitution of geography not just as a power-basing discipline but as a colonial discourse. Gregory demonstrated how the fabrication of imaginative space is in fact constitutional to categorical thinking. What we learn from Gregory’s study is the organic link of historical

narratives, intellectual genealogies, philosophical teleologies, as the most evident example, to the centrality of an imaginative landscape in the creative memory. What emerges from Gregory's groundbreaking work is the organic link between geographical imagination, the colonial constitution of power, and the production of vested knowledge.

Now Enter Huntington and Co.

None of these radically destructive interventions, representing a much larger philosophical dislocation identified with poststructuralism and postmodernism, could have gone unnoticed by the self-appointed custodians of the Western Civilization who saw their privileged position as the sole defining voice of a cultural polity which was being radically challenged. It is precisely in this context and against this movement that Samuel P. Huntington's "The Clash of Civilizations?" (1993) ought to be read and understood. Its apparent global audience is an entirely bogus decoy to conceal the deep anxiety of its domestic concerns. The massive movement of labor and capital has radically challenged the Nineteenth century invention of the nation-state as the optimum unit of economic operation and as Saskia Sassen, among others, has extensively demonstrated the notion of national sovereignty in the age of globalization is now the most critical task facing the outdated nation-states.¹⁹

People like Huntington, with their impeccable racist records dating back all the way to Vietnam War, are now

threatened by the evident change in the demographic composition of a nation they thought was God's gift to Western Civilization. When the spellbinding movement of labor and capital has totally confused the national boundaries and the fabrication of national cultures, Huntington goes up-stream, as it were, to catch the movement at a higher level of abstraction. In this endeavor he is capably aided by other reactionary intellectuals, organic to the hegemonic supposition of the Western Civilization, far more learned and erudite in their command of their craft.

Harold Bloom's *The Western Canon* (1994) was a Miltonian reassertion of power as to who and what counts in the Western Canon.²⁰ Bloom was dauntless against the onslaught of an army of nemesis he identified as Multiculturalism, Feminism, Marxism, or Afrocentricism. He championed himself as the defender of taste and of aesthetics autonomous of ideology. The rhetoric of Bloom's account of the Western Canon is inundated with exclusionary jabs like "our culture" and "our Western literary tradition." He lamented with Yates that "the center has not held" and that "mere anarchy" is upon the world. The confusion about Bloom is to collapse some of the greatest literary achievements in the world into the abstraction of "The Western Canon." We as a result learn that indeed Shakespeare is a great dramatist and that he belongs to the "The Western Canon." The false dichotomy between which Bloom inserts his diatribe is that good literature is either part of the Western, or even Eastern, Canon, foregrounding a civilization, or else we are illiterate philistines who do not, cannot, and will not read these masterpiece and opt for cultural studies. It

never occurs to the great Bloom that one can read Shakespeare and Dante and love them as much as he does and still kick the very notion of canonicity and the foregrounding of civilizational thinking royally, that one can revolt against the tyranny of any power precisely on the premise of the creative imagination that Homer and Ferdowsi, Virgil and Abu Nuwas, Goethe and Hafez map out. That he does not know the second half of every pair I listed is not the issue. At issue is the self-centralizing powers of civilizational thinking that with all his readings in the Western canon Bloom is yet to learn from a good piece of creative imagination.

The sorts of issues that Harold Bloom was raising were not limited to academic circles. David Denby's *Great Books: My Adventures with Homer, Rousseau, Woolf, and other Indestructible Writers of the Western World* (1996) clearly indicated that there is a massive contingency in the market that even a journalist could exploit.²¹ The need to protect the Western Civilization now assumed a sizeable social basis. Canonicity was no longer a matter of literary or philosophical debate. What the epithet "Indestructible Writers of the Western World" militantly put forward was the iconic status of these texts, their standing for something else, their safeguarding the best in the Western Civilization.

People like Denby were of course right in their commercial estimation that vapid reminiscences about Western Canons sell. The conservative crusade to save the Western Civilization had now assumed a widespread proportion that embraced very odd couples. It was not just people like Brimelow whose racism is underlined by a remarkable historical illiteracy and ignorance of the circumstances that in-

stigate global migration of capital and labor, but public intellectuals of a far superior and fairer nature equally failed to understand the constitutional forces at work in massive demographic changes from the periphery of capitalist Cosmopolis to its centers, challenging the very metaphor of a center and a periphery to the gyration of capital and labor. Richard Rorty's *Achieving Our Country* is one such regrettable evidence of a lifetime record of admirable academic and political career to come to such tribalist *cul-de-sac*. With admirable tenacity and liberal-minded fairness, Rorty asks for a return to the tradition of democratic intellectual labor of Walt Whitman and John Dewey generation. Rorty, who has been one of the most successful American pragmatists in assimilating Continental Philosophy into his revised reading of that American tradition, now cannot resist siding with Harold Bloom in taking a swipe at the "school of resentment" as they call the critical reading of the so-called "Classics." He says that he has "no doubt that cultural studies will be as old hat thirty years from now as was logical positivism thirty years after its triumph."²² He also joins Bloom in prophesying that the "odd blend of Foucault and Marx [is] (...) a very minor episode in the endless history of Platonism."²³ This may indeed be the case. But what Rorty and Bloom have both missed, in Rorty's case much more regrettably, is the constitutional difference between the changing location of the United States in late global capitalism from the time of Whitman and Dewey's. The spiraling chase of labor and capital has resulted in massive migratory patterns in the world. It is not for vacationing in good climate that the flood of legal and illegal immigrants pour from

Africa, Asia and Latin America into Europe and North America. The ever-versatile capital duck them as it may and go and build up factories where they used to live for even cheaper labor, the motion is set in gear. Electronic capitalism now has constitutionally transgressed the very assumption of national boundaries in such radical terms that we can no longer really “achieve our country.”

By the end of the millennium, a spirit of doom and termination pervaded the soul of the American Right and there is no better text to see that sense of nostalgia and decay than in Jacques Barzun’s *From Dawn to Decadence: 1500 to the Present: 500 Years of Western Cultural Life* (2000). As one of the most distinguished cultural historians of this century, Barzun has written *From Dawn to Decadence* with a sense of prophetic doom. With a magisterial language at once celebratory and mournful Barzun sets upon himself the obituary task of grieving the demise of the Western Civilization. “It takes only a look at the numbers,” Barzun declares early in his massive volume, “to see that the 20th century is coming to an end. A wider and deeper scrutiny is needed to see that in the West the culture of the last 500 years is ending at the same time. Believing this to be true, I have thought it the right moment to review in sequence the great achievements and the sorry failures of our half millennium.”²⁴ To Barzun the present is decadent, corrupt, misguided, and a failure. The great achievements of the Western Civilization have been made and now is the autumn of its decline, its universal promises undelivered. Barzun notes with curiosity the fact that his possessive “our past” is a problem as to whom exactly it refers to, but whitewashes over it as “that is for each

person to decide.”²⁵ That is the first in a succession of narrative strategies to claim the West for the mighty and the victorious over the last five hundred years with nothing as much as a hint at the catastrophic consequences of “Our Western Civilization” at its home and its abroad. The text as a result is a nostalgic celebration of High European Culture, its art and music, philosophy and literature, sciences and technology. The result a visit to the museum, guided by a world class museum tour guide, knowledgeable of all the dead certainties.

Whence Civilization?

The re-emergence of civilizational thinking at the last two decades of the 20th century and at the heart of capitalist modernity was a defense mechanism, a futile attempt to save the outdated mutation of capital and culture at the commencement of the project. The very categorical constitution of “civilization” is an Enlightenment invention for very specific reasons and objectives. Neither the aristocratic nor the ecclesiastical orders of feudalism and scholasticism thought or practiced in civilizational terms. From Hegel’s *Philosophy of History* to Göthe’s conception of *Weltliteratur* to Herder’s idea of World History, to Kant’s groundbreaking metaphysics of morals, the very conceptual categories of civilizational thinking were coined and set in motion at the commencement of capitalist modernity.

From the dawn of civilizational thinking in Hegel and Herder to the wake of instrumental rationalism in Max Weber, the collapse of the polyvocality of what had not yet

given birth to the very idea of “Europe” as a cultural contingency announced the supra-tribal formation of the “Western Civilization.” “Islam,” as indeed “Africa,” “China” or “India” were simultaneous abstractions invented and animated by project of Orientalism in the speculum of “The West” as the Self of all its Others.

The pre-modern configuration of power in medieval Europe had placed the aristocratic houses and the ecclesiastical orders as the bipolar centers of social order, corresponding with a dynastic historiography (aristocratic) claiming Christendom (ecclesiastical) as its universal frame of reference. At the dawn of the capitalist revolution, the aristocratic and ecclesiastical nuclei of power gradually give way to the rising bourgeoisie and as a result the dynastic history yielded to conceptions of national cultures, while Christendom simultaneously yielded to the idea of Western Civilization, with the rising Enlightenment philosophers replacing the clerical order as intellectuals organic to the new social order.

The idea of the Western *Civilization* at the commencement of capitalist modernity was to the European national *cultures* what Christendom was to dynastic histories during the medieval period. As the rising bourgeoisie replaced in power and prestige both the aristocratic and the ecclesiastical orders, the conceptual legitimacy of dynastic histories and Christendom lost their epistemic credibility to those of national *cultures* and their enframing and emplotment in the Western *Civilization*. Because of its anxiety of class legitimacy, and because it could not genealogically compete either with the aristocratic or with the ecclesiastical orders,

the rising European new class was intuitively drawn to such universal and universalizing abstractions as national *cultures* and universal *civilizations*.

There has been a division of labor to the nature and function of national cultures and their civilizational context. While the national cultures corresponded to national economies as the analytical unit of the economic working of capital, their constructed civilizational context targeted the colonial consequences of the capital. European national cultures were the domestic expressions of the national economic units of the working capital, while the simultaneous construction of the Western Civilization identified and distinguished the constellation of these national capitals and cultures from their colonial consequences.

The European national cultures were the ideological insignia separating the European national economies as the currencies of cultural exchange-value, while the very idea of The Western Civilization was to distinguish the accrued totality of those cultures and economies from their colonial consequences. It is thus not accidental that practically the entire scholarly apparatus at the service of civilizational studies of non-Western civilizations were the handiwork of Orientalism as the intelligence arm of colonialism. Islamic, Indian, or Chinese civilizations were concocted, crafted, documented and textualized from scattered bodies of alternating evidence by successive armies of European Orientalists negationally authenticating the simultaneous construction of the Western civilization. As from Hegel to Herder the idea of The Western Civilization is being crafted, far less illustrious but far more numerous an army of Orien-

talists are mirroring its civilizational others as eastern Civilizations in general and Islamic, Indian, etc. in particular. As the colonial territories are mined to extract the raw material of a massive productive machinery switchboard in European capitals, the same exploitations are at work on the historical memories and evidence of colonized societies to serve the ideological foregrounding of The Western Civilization. Practically all these civilizational mirrors are on the site of the colonial territories of the European capital. They were all constructed to raise the Western Civilization as the normative achievement of world history and lower all others as its abnormal antecedents.

By the sheer force of the European capital, conceptions of national cultures and civilizational constructs is hegemonically adapted in colonial territories with the same force as their economies are being incorporated in to the global force. Very soon in the colonies too dynastic, regional, or tribal histories are carved into national cultures and placed within the civilizational constructs—Islamic, Indian, or Chinese. Iranian, Egyptian, or Turkish cultures are carved out of scattered memories and evidence and placed within the general rubric of the Islamic Civilization. Thus on the colonial territories, fabricated national cultures and civilizational contexts become the sites of hegemonic incorporation into the project of capitalist modernity, though from its colonial end. The more political nationalism functions as a site of resistance to colonialism, the more cultural nationalism incorporates vast bodies of extraterritorial resistances to the project of capitalist modernity. We launch nationalist movements against colonialism just to entrap ourselves ever so

thoroughly in the project, modernized from the colonial end of the capital.

The Islamic civilization did not roll over and play dead to authenticate the Western Civilization. Islam also became the site of sustained ideological resistance to colonialism and called itself the Islamic Ideology. The result was the production of a knowledge industry, a journalistic off-shoot of Orientalism, that began to brand moral and material resistance to imperialism “Islamic Fundamentalism” and use it as a ploy to authenticate the civilizational superiority of The West and the barbaric inferiority of the Rest.

Barnard Lewis continues to authenticate the Islamic Civilization as the supreme civilizational other of the Western Civilization.

Meanwhile native informers as varied as Fouad Ajami, Bisam Tibi, Fatimah Mernisi, and Daryoush Shayegan doubly authenticate the Islamic Civilization having taken a vacation from history. Whereas Al-e Ahmad’s notion of Westoxication was a conceptual fallacy concocted to resist the moral and material hegemony of colonialism, these native informers are there to blame the victim and diagnose a disease.

In this context and in the emerging globality, the metaphoric division of the world into civilizational boundaries and center and periphery no longer are valid. Whether in dialogue or headed for clash, the very practice of civilizational thinking has once again received a new lease on life by Huntington’s generation of nervous reactions to yet to be fully charted consequences of globalization. The move is to pull back the terms of engagement with our present predicament

back to the early nineteenth century when civilizational thinking was first launched in correspondence to the specifics of capital and colonial bifurcation of the world. The move is to place the colonial cultures back where they belong and restore authenticity to the utterly discredited notion of the Western Civilization.

Civilizational dialogue, as indeed civilizational debates, clashes as indeed conversations, is a latter-day collapse into the bare necessity of will to power disguising itself as will to truth, pragmatics of power selling itself as political theory. After the onslaught of the project of modernity and its intelligence arm the Enlightenment, the very idea of “Islam” emerges as the defeated counterpart of the victorious “West.” The two construct became the civilizational Other of each other, as one particular case in the larger teleology between the Western and the eastern civilizations.

Prior to the colonial extension of capitalist modernity, with Orientalism as its intelligence arm, what we know of Islam as an historical practice is the simultaneous polyvocality of its discourse, polylocality of its geographical manifestations, and the polyfocality of its visions. In response to the monolithic instrumentalization of colonialism, Orientalism successfully suppressed this cacophonous configuration and collectively theorized it as one particularly poignant civilizational other of “The West.”

Reversing back to civilizational dialogue or debate, clash or conversation, is to resist ideologically the corroding power of the spiral capital that sells you a pair of Nike whether you take them off before you do your ablutions and

pray in a mosque or put them on to go for a jog in your bikini, so far as you wear them out quickly and go back for another pair.

Reality

At what particular moment in our history does Huntington launch this belated idea of civilizational conflict at us? He is entirely oblivious to the fact that the critical intelligence behind the events such as the Iranian revolution of 1979 is not reducible to its categorical reduction to an Islamic event. His conception of the world, that of an Islamic Revolution included, still operates at the colonial level at which such categorical designations took place. He is completely innocent of the fact that from Edward Said (“The Orient”), to V. Y. Mudimbe (“Africa”), to José Martí (“Latin America”) to Ranajit Guha (“India”), we have long since learnt the specifics of the relation of power under which such categorical terms were invented to dominate. We have resisted all such designations site by site in theoretical articulations, as we have had to resist them on the battlefield of their colonial counterparts.

Huntington’s clahs, as indeed Khatami’s dialogue, of civilizations also come as the reversal ploys of precisely a moment when the rapid globalization of capital flies in the face of such grandiloquent museum relics. They rise and belatedly announce themselves at a time when the torpedo of hurricane Floyd in the Caribbean Sea and its effect on Texas oil refiners can and does fluctuate the volume of “Death to America” chants on the Tehran University soccer field.

Globalization of capital equals the atomization of individuals, their de-cultivation, de-nationalization, de-territorialization, their being expurgated from the political parameters of their historical agency. Under these circumstances, capital and its cultural categories, through such instrumental mechanisms as CNN and its successful mutation of capital as culture, becomes the naked nerve of Oedipalization independent of all cultural constitutions of father or creative sites of resistance to them.

Formation of national cultures and civilizational contexts of those cultures was the ideological by-product of a specific period in the operation of capital. In that nascent configuration of forces and relations of production, the aggressive formation of national economies was the optimal unitary basis for the working of the capital and its colonial consequences. National economies and national cultures were first concocted at the metropolitan centers of the capital and then gradually extended into the colonial consequences of the project.

Civilizational thinking was a European Enlightenment project to give its rising bourgeoisie a universal frame of collective identity. "The Western Civilization" gave universal identity to European national cultures. German, French, or British cultures were particular manifestations of , so the story unfolded, "The Western Civilization." While national cultures were concocted to distinguish one economic unit of capital from another, civilizational thinking was invented to unify these cultures against their colonial consequences. Islamic, Indian, or African civilizations were invented contrapuntally by Orientalism, as the intelligence arm of co-

lonialism, in order to match, balance, and thus authenticate “The Western Civilization.”

All-non-Western civilizations were invented exactly as such, as negational formulations of the Western, thus authenticating the Western. But there was much more to these non-Western civilization than simply to authenticate the Western negationally. Hegel subjected all his preceding human history into civilizations stages leading to the Western civilization, thus in effect infantilizing, Orientalizing, exoticizing, and abnormalizing the entire human history as preparatory stages towards their implicated spiritual goal. As colonial nationalism aped and replicated nationalism of the capital at the European centers of the project, so did Islamic or Indian civilizations mirrored, though in a contorted image, the principiality of “The Western Civilization.”

Both the formation of national cultures and the civilizational framing of them corresponded to a age of capital in which the economic constitution of national economies were the optimal unitary operation of economic production. At the threshold of the 21st century, the selfsame capital has evolved in the global logic of its operation and the unitary basis of national economies no longer can serve as the currency of its operation. The circular spiral of capital and labor has now so ferociously destroyed the artificial national boundaries of its own making not more than 200 years ago that it is no longer possible for any claim to national economy to have a legitimate claim on operation. The result is the aggressive acculturation of individuals from their national economies and national cultures, as they are being

thrown into an entirely new configuration of capital and its culture.

A quick look at the United States, which is by far the most aggressively mutated national economy and national culture reveals that we can no longer think of this country as having a claim over either a national economy or a national culture. The influx of the migratory labor into the United States has initially created a so-called multicultural society to which conservative thinkers like Huntington, Fukuyama, Bloom, Barzun, etc. have violently reacted. Huntington's thesis of the clash of civilization is a disturbed reaction to this phase of cultural confusion at the heart of the globalizing capital. What he does not understand is that he is quite late in responding, and that he is responding to something already on its way to change. His real heart break is yet to come. This so-called multicultural phase to which Huntington and Co, have responded so violently is only a transitory period in the modular reconfiguration of capital and labor. The real fire-work is yet to come. This transitory multiculturalism we witness today in the United States or the Western Europe will soon give way to the logic of the globalizing capital that has already entered its electronic phase. Asian and Latinos in the United States, South Asians in England, the Turks in Germany, the Indians and Koreans in the Persian Gulf, etc., are now the prime examples a global migratory movement that will utterly shatter not only the unit of national economy but also its constituent conception of national cultures. From the new configuration of the global capital and labor the material basis of a new culture will soon emerge that is neither nationally cultural nor recogniz-

ably multicultural. That material reconfiguration of capital and labor will generate its own culture which will be at once post-national and as a result post-civilizational.

National cultures like Iran or their civilizational categories like Islam have an equally antiquarian claim to outdated conceptions of culture and civilization. With a lag-time constitutional to their secondary nature, they to are drawn, willy-nilly, into the bosom of the globalizing capital and its emerging culture. In the inherent logic of the new configuration of capital and its corresponding culture it no longer matters if one lives in Tehran or New York, speaks Persian or English, practices Islam, Judaism, or Christianity. What matters is the particular location in the universal operation of capital at work in articulating its own corresponding culture.

Notes

1. Published in the *International Sociology*, September 2001, v. 16, n. 3, p. 361-8.
2. See Huntington's "The Clash of Civilizations?", in *Foreign Affairs*, 72,3 (Summer 1993).
3. See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York, Simon and Schuster, 1996.
4. See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York, The Free Press, 1992.
5. Huntington, 1996: 102.
6. See Roy P. Mottahedeh, "The Clash of Civilizations: An Islamicist Critique," *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review* 2 (1995), 2: 1-26.
7. From "Immigrants Admitted by Country or Region of Birth," Fiscal Years 1950-1993, *Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Na-*

- turalization Services*, 1992, Immigration and naturalization Service, US Department of Justice.
8. See Todd S. Purdum's report, "Shift in the Mix Alters the Face of California," in *The New York Times*, 4 July 2000.
 9. See Northrop Frye, "*The Decline of the West* by Oswald Spengler," *Daedalus*, "Twentieth-Century Classics Revisited," Winter 1974, p. 1- 13.
 10. See Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education has failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students*. New York, Simon and Schuster, 1987: 380.
 11. See Robert L. Stone (ed), *Essays on the Closing of the American Mind*. Chicago, Chicago Review Press, 1989.
 12. See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Lat Man*. New York, The Free Press, 1992: ix.
 13. Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *The Disuniting of America : Reflections on a Multicultural Society*. New York, W. W. Norton, 1998.
 14. Lawrence W. Levine, *The Opening of the American Mind: Canon, Culture, and History*. Boston, Beacon Press, 1996: 170.
 15. Ronald A. T. Judy, *DisForming the American canon: African-Arabic Slave Narratives and the Vernacular*. Foreword by Wahneema Lubiano. Minneapolis, University of Minneapolis Press, 1993: xv-xvi.
 16. Priscilla Wald, *Constituting Americans: Cultural Anxiety and Narrative Form*. Durham, Duke University Press, 1995.
 17. Wald 1995: 105.
 18. See Jonathan Arac, "Nationalism, Hypercanonization, and Huckleberry Finn," in Donald E. Pease *National Identities and Post-Americanism Narratives*. Durham, Duke University Press, 1994: 33.
 19. See for example Saskia Sassen's *Losing Control: Socerignty in an Age of Globalization*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.
 20. See Harold Bloom's *The Western Canon*. New York, Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994.
 21. See David Denby, *Great Books: My Adventures with Homer. Rousseau, Woolf, and other Indestructible Writers of the Western World*. New York, Simon and Schuster, 1996.

22. Richard Rorty, *Achieving Our Country*. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1998: 132.
23. Rorty 1998: 138.
24. Jacques Barzun, *From Dawn to Decadence: 1500 to the Present: 500 Years of Western Cultural Life*. New York, Harper Collins, 2000: ix.
25. Barzun 2000: xiii.