



Samuel P. Huntington, 1927–2008

The eminent political scientist Samuel P. Huntington, who died on December 24, had been a member of AEI's Council of Academic Advisers for many years. His wide-ranging contributions stretched from political order in developing countries to civil-military relations and from democratization in postauthoritarian and post-Communist states to migration and American identity. One of Huntington's most important contributions of recent years—the thesis that a “clash of civilizations” would become the animating force in post-Cold War world affairs—was first presented as a Bradley Lecture at AEI on October 19, 1992. It was, as he said in 1998, his “first opportunity to hold forth on the clash of civilizations before an informed and critical audience. The article and the book that developed out of that lecture stimulated widespread and intense discussion and controversy.”

Below are excerpts from the 1992 lecture and from two tributes to this highly original thinker who was friend and teacher to many at AEI.

The Clash of Civilizations

The fundamental source of conflict in the post-Cold War world will not be primarily ideological or economic but cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations.

By a civilization, I mean the broadest level of cultural identity short of that which distinguishes humans from other species. People of different civilizations have different views on the relations between God and man, citizen and state, parent and child, husband and wife, as well as differing views of rights and responsibilities, liberty and authority, equality and hierarchy. These differences are the products of centuries; they will not soon disappear.

Cultural characteristics are less mutable and less easily resolved than political and economic ones. In the former Soviet Union, Communists can become democrats; the rich can become poor,

and the poor, rich. But Russians cannot become Estonians, and Azeris cannot become Armenians. In ideological conflicts, the key question was, *Which side were you on?* And people could and did choose sides and change sides. In conflicts between civilizations, the question is, *What are you?* That cannot be changed.

For a century and a half after the emergence of the modern international system, Western conflicts were largely among princes, emperors, and monarchs attempting to expand their territories. This pattern lasted until the end of World War I, when, as a result of the Russian Revolution, it yielded to the conflict of ideologies within Western civilization. Now, with the end of the Cold War, international politics moves out of its Western phase, and its centerpiece becomes the interaction between the West and non-Western civilizations.

The most significant dividing line in Europe may well be the eastern boundary of Western Christianity in the year 1500. This line separates Finland and the Baltic states from Russia, cuts through Belarus and Ukraine, swings westward separating Transylvania from the rest of Romania, and then goes through Yugoslavia almost exactly along the line now separating Croatia and Slovenia

Samuel P. Huntington was a longtime professor at Harvard University and a member of AEI's Council of Academic Advisers. A version of this article appeared in the AEI Newsletter and was delivered as a Bradley Lecture.

from the rest of Yugoslavia. In the Balkans, this line coincides with the historic boundary between the Hapsburg and Ottoman empires.

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The peoples to the north and west of this line are Protestant or Catholic; they share the common experiences of European history; they are generally better off than the peoples to the east. The peoples to the east and south are Orthodox or Muslim; they historically belonged to the Ottoman or tsarist empires; they were only lightly touched by events shaping the rest of Europe. Conflict along the fault line between Western and Islamic civilizations has been a seesaw for 1,300 years, and it is unlikely to cease.

Historically, the other great antagonist of Arab Islamic civilizations has been the pagan, animist, and

now increasingly Christian black peoples to the south. And the conflict of civilizations is deeply rooted elsewhere in Asia, and even in the increasingly difficult relations between Japan and the United States. Reason thus exists to think that the major conflicts of the future will be between peoples from different civilizations.

Consider Russia. The question of whether Russia is part of the West or of a distinct Slavic-Orthodox civilization has been a recurring one in Russian history. The dominance of Communism shut off this historic debate, but with Communism discredited, that issue must now be faced. If, after abandoning Marxism, Russia also rejects liberal democracy, relations between Russia and the West could become far more distant and conflictual.

In the short term, it is clearly in the interests of the West to promote greater cooperation and unity within its own civilization, to incorporate into the West societies in Eastern Europe and Latin America, to promote cooperative relations with Russia and Japan, and to limit the expansion of the military strength of Confucian and Islamic states. In the longer term, as the military and economic strength of non-Western civilizations increases, the West must develop a more profound understanding of these civilizations and expend major efforts to coexist with them in an increasingly interpenetrated global society.



The following is an excerpt from an article by Fouad Ajami in the December 30, 2008, issue of the Wall Street Journal entitled "Samuel Huntington's Warning." Ajami, who had written the lead critique of Huntington's thesis in Foreign Affairs in 1993, admitted later that he had erred and that "Huntington had been correct all along." Describing Huntington's last book, Who Are We?, Ajami had this to say:

Huntington lived the life of his choice, neither seeking controversies, nor ducking them. *Who are We?* had the signature of this great scholar—the bold, sweeping assertions sustained by exacting details, and the engagement with the issues of the time.

Fouad Ajami is a professor of Middle East studies at Johns Hopkins University. A version of this article appeared in the *Wall Street Journal* on December 30, 2008.

He wrote in that book of the "American Creed" and of its erosion among the elites. Its key elements—the English language, Christianity, religious commitment, English concepts of the rule of law, the responsibility of rulers, and the rights of individuals—he said are derived from the "distinct Anglo-Protestant culture of the founding settlers of America." Critics who branded the book as a work of undisguised nativism missed an essential point. Huntington observed that his was an "argument for the importance of Anglo-Protestant culture, not for the importance of Anglo-Protestant people." The success of this great republic, he said, had hitherto depended on the willingness of generations of Americans to honor the creed.

We do not have his likes in the academy today. The patriotism that marked Samuel Huntington's life and work is derided, and the American Creed he upheld is thought to be the ideology of rubes and simpletons, the affliction of people clinging to old ways.

The following is an excerpt from an article by Eliot A. Cohen in the January 19, 2009, issue of The Weekly Standard entitled "A Scholar and a Gentleman." Cohen, a student of Huntington, remembers his mentor and friend:

Sam's numerous books and no less important articles (I still assign a 1962 essay, "Patterns of Violence in World Politics," in one of my courses) are a staggering corpus of work. But they represent only a portion of his legacy. For Sam has left behind him a vast array of students, in government, journalism, and business, who are what they are in part because of him.

Eliot A. Cohen is counselor of the Department of State and will return to his position as a professor at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies on January 21, 2009. A version of this article appeared in the January 19, 2009, issue of *The Weekly Standard*.

Sam did not shrink from a fight. In the bad days of Vietnam, he was heckled and hounded for having done consulting work for the Department of Defense, and in later years, he faced the outrage of superficial readers or, more often, those who thought they knew what he meant when they had failed to read what he had written. Sam did not care, not because he was a callous man, but because he cared, first, foremost, and always, about Harvard's motto: *Veritas*. The truth mattered, all else was secondary.

A great professor lives after his death in his writings, to be sure, but as much, and sometimes even more, in the lives he has touched, the values he has imparted, the example he has set. So it was with Sam, the revered teacher, mentor, colleague, and friend of so many students who will miss him sorely and strive, in his absence, to emulate him.