

The End of Multiculturalism

Lawrence E. Harrison

FUTURE GENERATIONS may look back on Iraq and immigration as the two great disasters of the Bush presidency. Ironically, for a conservative administration, both of these policy initiatives were rooted in a multicultural view of the world.

Since the 1960s, multiculturalism, the idea that all cultures are essentially equal, has become a dominant feature of the political and intellectual landscape of the West. It has profoundly influenced Iraq War policy, the policy of democracy promotion, international development agendas and immigration policy, with consequences for the cultural composition of societies.

But multiculturalism rests on a frail foundation: Cultural relativism, the notion that no culture is better or worse than any other—it is merely different. That's doubtlessly good advice for cultural anthropologists doing ethnographic studies in the field. If one's goal is full understanding of a value system quite different from one's own, ethnocentrism can seriously distort the quest and the conclu-

sions. But what if the objective is to assess the extent to which a culture nurtures values, attitudes and beliefs that facilitate progress toward democratic governance, social justice and an end to poverty, the goals of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights? The idea that some cultures are more nurturing than others of progress thus defined—and that this assumption can be measured and assessed—challenges the very essence of cultural relativism.

The idea also has major implications for a variety of domestic and foreign policies, from the ability of a country to absorb large numbers of new immigrants to the ease with which one expects to export democracy and free-market systems. Why, for example, have free-market economic reforms worked well in India yet poorly in Latin America (Chile excepted), where socialism, even authoritarian socialism in the case of Hugo Chávez's Venezuela, appears to be alive and well?

Cultural factors do not wholly explain political, economic, and social success or failure, but surely they are relevant—as more than two decades of research, some of it published in the pages of this magazine, has demonstrated.¹ Yet many policymakers are uncomfortable addressing

Lawrence E. Harrison directs the Cultural Change Institute at the Fletcher School at Tufts University, where he also teaches. He is the author of *The Central Liberal Truth: How Politics Can Change a Culture and Save It from Itself* (Oxford University Press, 2006) and author or co-editor of six other books on the role of cultural values in human progress.

¹The research undertaken by the Culture Matters Research Project (CMRP) and its conclusions are presented in my overview of the entire project, *The Central Liberal Truth*. The papers

cultural differences, even when there is clear evidence that culture matters.

Multiculturalism and Foreign Policy

IF CULTURE matters, then, by influencing the degree of receptivity of a society to democracy and free-market institutions and the degree to which the society is just and produces and encourages entrepreneurs, what are the implications for a foreign policy, a fundament of which is the doctrine that “These values of freedom are right and true for every person, in every society?”—this implies that any culture in the world is capable of sustaining a functioning democracy. The Bush Administration has staked huge human, financial, diplomatic and prestige resources on the doctrine’s applicability in Iraq. It is now apparent that the doctrine is fallacious.

What were the chances of consolidating democracy—not just elections, but also the full array of political rights and civil liberties—in Iraq, an Arab country with no real experience with democracy and with two conflict-prone Islamic sects, Sunni and Shi’a, and an ethnolinguistic group, the Kurds, seeking autonomy? And why did people think that this would ignite a “democracy wave” that would sweep through the region, when many of the preconditions associated with a successful transition to democracy—including societal openness and literacy, particularly female literacy—were lacking? The accompanying table (next page), based on information gathered by Freedom House and the 2004 UN Human Development Report, makes this particularly apparent.

The Arab world is not fertile soil for the rapid cultivation of democracy.

A key component of a successful democratic transition is trust. Trust is a particularly important cultural factor for social justice and prosperity. Trust in others reduces the cost of economic transactions, and democratic stability depends

on it.

Trust is periodically measured in some eighty countries by the World Values Survey. Four Nordic countries—Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland—enjoy very high levels of trust: 58–67 percent of respondents in these countries believe that most people can be trusted. By contrast, 12 percent of respondents in Zimbabwe and South Africa, 11 percent in Algeria, 8 percent in Tanzania and Uganda, and 3 percent of Brazilians believe that most people can be trusted. There are no survey data for Iraq, but the data from the other Middle Eastern states are not particularly encouraging.

The high levels of identification and trust in Nordic societies reflect their homogeneity; common Lutheran antecedents, including a rigorous ethical code and heavy emphasis on education; and a consequent sense of the nation as one big family imbued with the Golden Rule. In sharp contrast, Cameroon’s Daniel Etounga-Manguelle points to some of the cultural factors that help explain the low levels of trust in Africa and the propensity of the region for corruption and strife: fatalism, authoritarianism and a communitarianism that suffocates both individual initiative and economic rationality. One can point to many of the same factors in Iraq—to which the current ethno-sectarian conflicts vividly attest.

prepared for the CMRP appear in two edited collections: *Developing Cultures: Essays on Cultural Change* (New York: Routledge, 2006), co-edited by Harvard psychologist Jerome Kagan and me; and *Developing Cultures: Case Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2006), co-edited by Boston University sociologist Peter Berger and me. See also my two contributions to *The National Interest*—“Culture Matters” (Summer 2000) and “The Culture Club” (Spring 2006)—and the ongoing research of the Cultural Change Institute at the Fletcher School at Tufts University (<http://fletcher.tufts.edu/ccci/index.html>).

RATING THE ARAB WORLD

*1 is most free, 7 least free

	Political Rights	Civil Liberties	Overall Rating	Adult Literacy (%)	
				Male	Female
Algeria	6	5	Not free	80	60
Egypt	6	5	Not free	67	44
Iraq	6	5	Not free	60	30
Jordan	5	4	Partly free	95	85
Lebanon	5	4	Partly free	92	81
Libya	7	7	Not free	92	71
Mauritania	6	4	Partly free	60	43
Morocco	5	4	Partly free	63	33
Oman	6	5	Not free	82	65
Qatar	6	5	Not free	n.a.	n.a.
Saudi Arabia	7	6	Not free	87	69
Sudan	7	7	Not free	69	50
Tunisia	6	5	Not free	83	65
U.A.E.	6	6	Not free	80	76
Yemen	5	5	Partly free	70	29
AVERAGE	6	5		77%	57%

Sources: Freedom House; 2004 UN Human Development Report

If nothing else, the Iraq adventure demonstrates the enormous risks that attend a foreign policy predicated on President Bush's view, expressed when he met Indonesian President Yudhoyono in November 2006, that "freedom is universal and democracy is universal." But it also underscores the need to appreciate the role culture plays in all aspects of foreign affairs—and the cultural competence necessary in all foreign-affairs agencies, including the Department of Defense.

Multiculturalism and International Development

ANOTHER AREA where the sway of multiculturalism is apparent is international development. Development of poor countries in all its dimensions—political, social and economic—has been a priority goal of the

advanced democracies, motivated by both pragmatic (e.g., reduced international strife, increased trade, reduced illegal immigration) and humanitarian motives.

But most development-assistance institutions have thus far failed to address cultural obstacles to progress and the need for cultural change. Their avoidance of culture is in part attributable to culture-blind economists—and anthropologists and other social scientists committed to cultural relativism—who have dominated policy. The four UN Development Program Arab Human Development Reports are courageous exceptions.

Cultural relativism fits very nicely with, and reinforces, the predilection of many economists to assume "that people are the same everywhere and will respond to the right economic opportunities and incentives"—a point made by former World Bank economist William Easterly

when he reviewed my book *Who Prospers?*² How, then, would Easterly explain why, in multicultural countries where the economic opportunities and incentives are available to all, some ethnic or religious minorities do much better than majority populations. This has been true, for example, of any place the Chinese have migrated, from Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand—all the way to the United States and Canada.

Or what about differences that emerge between countries in the same region of the world, with similar geographical attributes and populations of the same general ethnic stock? Haiti is the poorest, least literate, most misgoverned, most corrupt country in the Western Hemisphere, substantial aid from the United States, Canada, the World Bank, and other bilateral and multilateral donors notwithstanding. The dominant belief system, Voodoo, is based on sorcery: Hundreds of spirits, very human and capricious, control human destinies. The only way to gain leverage over what happens in one's life is to propitiate them through the ceremonial intervention of the Voodoo priests and priestesses. What you do, whether you live your life ethically, is irrelevant to the spirits; what matters only is that they be, in essence, "bribed." Voodoo is thus a major contributor to the high levels of mistrust, paranoia, sense of helplessness and despair noted in the anthropological literature about Haiti.

Voodoo's roots are in the Dahomey region of West Africa, whence came most of the slaves the French imported into "Saint Domingue", Haiti's colonial predecessor. Dahomey is today the country of Benin, where the indicators of income, child malnutrition, child mortality, life expectancy and literacy are strikingly similar to those for Haiti. But we see a far different picture when we examine Barbados, another Caribbean island that, like Haiti, was populated largely by slaves

from Dahomey. Barbados was shaped by British values and institutions—it was a British colony until 1966; Haiti won its independence from France in 1804. Barbadians are sometimes referred to as "Afro-Saxons" or "Black Englishmen." Barbados is a prosperous democracy, number thirty on the 2005 UN Human Development Index, ahead of the Czech Republic, Argentina, Poland and Chile. It is approaching First World status.

These divergent outcomes are not accidents. Culture does matter. Race doesn't.

To be sure, the World Bank, USAID and other development institutions have been employing anthropologists at least since the 1970s. But, consistent with cultural relativism, their role has been to assure that projects adequately address culture as it exists, not to facilitate change. Symptomatic of the multiculturalist environment at the World Bank was an encounter I had after having made a presentation on culture at a World Bank Poverty Reduction Conference a few years ago. (I assume that I had been invited to speak because of the popularity of *Culture Matters*³ at the World Bank bookstore. I had had several prior contacts with the bank that had sensitized me to the institutional hostility to anything that challenged cultural relativism.) During the question-and-comment period, an African employee of the World Bank said, with some fire in her eyes, "I thought we had put 'blaming the victim' explanations behind us long ago."

The considerable intelligence, creativity and dedication of development professionals over the past half-century have not succeeded in transforming the large majority of poor, unjust, authoritarian societies. Where transformations have occurred,

²William Easterly, *Finance and Development* (The World Bank and the IMF), March 1994, pp. 51.

³Co-edited with Samuel Huntington (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

they usually either have been nurtured by cultures that contain progress-prone elements (e.g., the Confucian societies of east Asia) or have been cases where cultural change has been central to the transformation (e.g., Spain, Ireland or Quebec).

I want to stress that the *Culture Matters* paradigm does not present democracy and progress as being the exclusive preserve of particular nations. Even the West had to undergo a period of cultural transformation to discard the progress-resistant elements in its own culture. That transformation is still far from complete in some parts of "the West."⁴

The Iraq adventure has powerfully reinforced the lesson that cultural change must be led from within a society. A critical mass of native political, intellectual and religious leaders who recognize that some aspects of the traditional culture present obstacles to popular aspirations for a better life is indispensable. Efforts to encourage change from the outside are likely to be resented, resisted and labeled "cultural imperialism."

Cultural change is not easy, and the culture paradigm is not a magic wand. But adding cultural change to the array of other development-assistance tools should, in the long run, significantly accelerate the rate of progress in those countries that choose to take the paradigm seriously.

A Matter of Migration

WE OFTEN see these issues as only affecting other countries and only U.S. interests overseas. But what happens when we ponder the domestic implications? One issue largely overlooked in recent debates over immigration is the impact when an unprecedented number of people from "low-trust" cultures immigrate to the United States.

In 1990, 52 percent of Americans and a like percentage of Canadians believed that most people could be trusted. In

2000, the proportion of trusting Americans had dropped to 36 percent; of trusting Canadians, to 39 percent.

While there are doubtlessly many factors contributing to this troubling slide, multiculturalism may well be one of them. This is apparent in two senses: First, immigrants from areas like Africa and Latin America bring their native cultures' mistrust with them, and, second, the presence of significant numbers of "strangers"—people who may speak a foreign language, dress differently, behave differently—may leave people in the mainstream doubtful of their trustworthiness. Both undermine "social capital"—"a high level of trust and tolerance, an egalitarian spirit, volunteerism, an interest in keeping informed, and participation in public affairs."⁵ This point was recently made by Robert Putnam, one of the architects of the concept of social capital. It provoked a strongly negative reaction from multiculturalists.⁶

Canada's commitment to multiculturalism was initially driven by the birth of the country as a bicultural society. Biculturalism has been costly, and not just in the burdens that bilingualism imposes on any society. Until recent decades, for example, Quebec was far behind Anglophone Canada with respect to per capita income, education and in-

⁴Take Latin America. In his new book, *Las Costumbres de los Ecuatorianos* (The Customs of the Ecuadorians), former President of Ecuador Osvaldo Hurtado spotlights traditional Ibero-Catholic culture as the source of Ecuador's problems in constructing a democratic, just, prosperous society. Those cultural obstacles to progress are now much less prominent in Spain and Portugal, both of which find themselves substantially in the Western European cultural mainstream.

⁵Roger Doyle, "Civic Culture", *Scientific American*, June 2004, pp. 34.

⁶See, for example, comments posted at <http://abc-news.go.com/US/Story?id=3479078&page=4>.

dustrialization. This gap bred resentment and led to claims of exploitation. The gap closed substantially after Quebec's "Silent Revolution" of the 1960s, which sharply reduced the influence of the Catholic Church. Yet, ironically, as the Anglophone and "post-Catholic" Francophone cultures converged, a large Québécois separatist movement emerged.

Quebec's history demonstrates a huge potential risk of multiculturalism—a divided society. Had British Governor Guy Carleton in 1774 chosen to push English and acculturation to British values and institutions on Quebec rather than enable perpetuation of the French language and culture, relationships between the two Canadas would surely have been difficult for a generation or two. But today, Canada would probably be a more unified nation.

So, should Canada's experience be emulated as a model for how the United States should cope with a growing Hispanic population? Hispanics now form the largest U.S. minority, approaching 15 percent—about 45 million—of a total population of about 300 million and are projected by the Census Bureau to constitute about 25 percent—more than one hundred million—of a total population of 420 million in 2050. Their experience in the United States recapitulates Latin America's culturally shaped underdevelopment. For example, the Hispanic high school dropout rate in the United States is alarmingly high and persistent—about 20 percent in second and subsequent generations. It is, of course, a good deal higher in Latin America, where popular education has had much lower priority than in the United States and Canada.⁷

Samuel Huntington was on the mark when he wrote in his latest book *Who Are We?: "Would America be the America it is today if it had been settled not by British Protestants but by French, Spanish, or Portuguese Catholics? The answer is no. It would not be America; it would be Quebec, Mexico, or Brazil."*⁸ The Mexi-

can Nobelist Octavo Paz had a similar view of the two Americas:

One, English speaking, is the daughter of the tradition that has founded the modern world: the Reformation, with its social and political consequences, democracy and capitalism. The other, Spanish and Portuguese speaking, is the daughter of the universal Catholic monarchy and the Counter-Reformation.⁹

In *The Americano Dream*, Mexican-American Lionel Sosa argues that the value system that has retarded progress in Latin America is an impediment to the upward mobility of Latin American immigrants in the United States. So does former U.S. Congressman Herman Badillo, a Puerto Rican whose book *One Nation, One Standard* is both an indictment of Latino undervaluing of education and a call for cultural change.

The progress of Hispanic immigrants, not to mention harmony in the broader society, depends, then, on their acculturation to the values of that broader society. Efforts—for example, long-term bilingual education—to perpetuate "old country" values in a multicultural salad bowl undermine acculturation to the mainstream—and upward mobility—and are likely to result in continuing underachievement, poverty, resentment and divisiveness. So too does the willy-nilly emergence of bilingualism in the United States—no language in our history has ever before competed with English to the

⁷Space does not permit a detailed discussion of the findings that have led to this conclusion in this essay; interested readers are encouraged to peruse the sources listed in the first footnote.

⁸Samuel Huntington, *Who Are We?: The Challenges to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), pp. 59.

⁹Octavio Paz, *El Ogro Filantrópico* ("The Philanthropic Ogre"), (Mexico City: Joaquín Mortiz, 1979), pp. 55. My translation.

point where one daily hears commercial enterprises responding to telephone calls with, "If you want to speak in English, press one; *Si quiere hablar en español, oprima el botón número dos.*"

Because language is the conduit of culture, the perpetuation of Spanish as a second national language of the United States implies the perpetuation of Latino culture. There is no word for "compromise" in Spanish, nor is there a Spanish word that captures the full meaning of the English word "dissent." A prominent Nicaraguan educator with a Harvard Ph.D. once told me that for Latin Americans, "dissent" (*disenso, disensión*) is close to "heresy"—something that has been noted with respect to other languages, such as Russian. Moreover, as the Costa Rican psychiatrist Luis Diego Herrera points out in his essay in *Developing Cultures: Essays on Cultural Change*, many Spanish verb forms are passive reflexive (e.g., "It fell" rather than "I dropped it." "It got broken" rather than "I broke it."), a verbal structure that may nurture a lack of a sense of accountability.

But while there is much to be concerned about with respect to immigrants from Mexico, and Latin America more generally, this is not true of all immigrants. The experience of immigrants from China, Korea and Japan contrasts

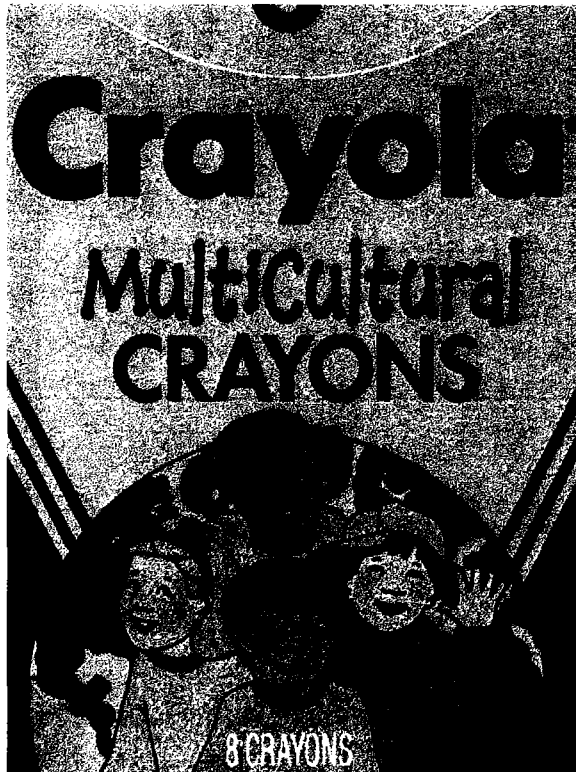
strikingly with that of Latino immigrants. The Asians' rapid upward mobility is evidenced by their vastly disproportionate numbers at our most prestigious universities. Making up about 5 percent of the U.S. population, Asians constitute 41 percent of undergraduates at the University of California at Berkeley, 27 percent at MIT, 24 percent at Stanford and 18 percent at Harvard. The success of

Asian-Americans reminds us of the east Asian "miracles"—initially economic, but now also, in several cases, political. East Asian immigrants have found it easier to adapt in part because they are influenced by traditional Confucian culture, which, like Jewish culture (Jews may be even more disproportionately represented in elite universities), shares some central values with America's dominant Anglo-Protestant culture. Both cultures

emphasize "progress-prone" values, such as education, the belief that a person can influence his destiny, wealth is the product of individual creativity and advancement should be based on merit.¹⁰

Among other elements of U.S. Anglo-Protestant culture relevant to success are the rule of law; fair play; individual rights; limits on governmental authority; a blend

¹⁰See Lawrence E. Harrison, "The Culture Club", *The National Interest*, No. 83 (Spring 2006).



Cultural relativism in a box. AP Images

of individualism and sense of community; freedom, including freedom of religion; and an ethical code that breeds trust. These values are substantially shared by other countries of the Euro-Atlantic and east Asian communities; but this is emphatically not so in the case of the Islamic world, Africa and Latin America.

So far, the immigration debate in the United States has been framed largely in economic terms (although border security and environmental concerns are also clearly in play)—producing some odd pro-immigration bedfellows, such as the editorial pages of *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. Most policymakers have sparred over the questions of whether the U.S. economy needs more unskilled immigrants, whether immigrants take jobs away from U.S. citizens, to what extent immigrants are responsible for draining resources (e.g., with respect to education and health expenses), and whether or not population growth, importantly driven by immigration, is necessary for a healthy economy.

But immigration looks very different when viewed in cultural terms, particularly with respect to the vast legal and illegal Latino immigration, as many as a million or more people a year, most of them with few skills and little education. To be sure, the United States has absorbed large numbers of unskilled and uneducated immigrants in the past, and today the large majority of their descendants are in the cultural mainstream. But the numbers of Latino immigrants and their geographic concentration today leave real doubts about the prospects for acculturation: 70 percent of children in the Los Angeles public schools and 60 percent in the Denver schools are Latino.¹¹

The power of culture, for good and for bad, was captured a few years ago by Mexican journalist Mauricio González de la Garza after a visit to California:

Seeing San Diego, one becomes aware of

what Mexico could be if it hadn't experienced a demographic explosion and an explosion of corruption, graft, and nepotism, and political, moral, social, and economic degradation.¹²

In a letter to me in 1991, the late Mexican-American columnist Richard Estrada captured the essence of the problem:

The problem in which the current immigration is suffused is, at heart, one of numbers; for when the numbers begin to favor not only the maintenance and replenishment of the immigrants' source culture, but also its overall growth, and in particular growth so large that the numbers not only impede assimilation but go beyond to pose a challenge to the traditional culture of the American nation, then there is a great deal about which to be concerned.

Some Recommendations

SO CULTURE needs to be added to the debate on a variety of foreign and domestic policies. It may be too late for Iraq, but migration and development are ongoing

¹¹Those who profess not to be concerned about the acculturation of Latinos because of the successful acculturation of immigrants from similar cultures—Italians are often cited—should ponder the numbers: Americans of Italian antecedence account for about 6 percent of the total population. The Census Bureau projects a Latino population proportionally four times more numerous in the year 2050. In a front-page story on November 17, 2007, *The New York Times* noted that two Hispanic surnames—García and Rodríguez—were among the ten most common American surnames, the first time in history that a surname not of Anglo origin appeared in the top ten.

¹²Cited in Lawrence E. Harrison, *The Pan-American Dream* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), pp. 173.

issues. And if multiculturalism is a myth, how do we avoid the woes that will inevitably attend the creation of an enduring and vast underclass alienated from the upwardly mobile cultural mainstream? Some policy implications, one for Latin America, the others for the United States and Canada, are apparent.

First, Latin American political, intellectual, religious and other leaders should heed the advice of prominent writers like Osvaldo Hurtado and journalists Máriano Grondona and Carlos Alberto Montaner. They must reject the “foreign devils” explanations for Latin America’s development shortcomings, for example, “dependency” and anti-capitalist *neo-liberalismo*. They must instead focus inward on those features of traditional Latin American culture that are obstacles to the consolidation of democracy, social justice and prosperity, among them authoritarianism, elitism, fatalism, absence of long-term focus, a low priority for education, and an emphasis on connections and *amiguismo* rather than merit. And here, the transformations undergone by Spain and Portugal that have vaulted both into the Western European democratic-capitalist mainstream provide a culturally relevant model for the rest of Latin America—as opposed to regressing toward failed socialist/authoritarian “solutions” of the Hugo Chávez variety.

Second, the flow of immigrants into the United States must be calibrated not only to the needs of the economy—and it bears remembering that new arrivals have particularly affected in negative ways low-income American citizens, dis-

proportionately African-American and Hispanic, as Barbara Jordan stressed as chair of the 1990s Immigration Reform Commission—but also to the capacity of the United States to assure acculturation of the immigrants. We must be a melting pot, not a salad bowl. The melting pot, the essence of which is our Anglo-Protestant cultural tradition, is our way of creating the homogeneity that has contributed so much to the trust and mutual identification—and progress—of the Nordic societies.

Finally, as with the immigration flows of the late 19th and early twentieth centuries, an extensive program of activities designed to facilitate acculturation, including mastery of English, should be mounted. A law declaring English to be the national language is one measure that would be helpful in this respect. And tasking respected social scientists with periodic assessments of acculturation of the burgeoning Hispanic minority would also provide useful benchmarks.

The costs of multiculturalism—in terms of disunity, the clash of classes and declining trust—are likely to be huge in the long run. All cultures are *not* equal when it comes to promoting progress, and very few can match Anglo-Protestantism in this respect. The United States and Canada should be promoting acculturation to the national mainstream, not a mythical, utopian multiculturalism. And they should take care that the Anglo-Protestant virtues that have brought them so far do not fall into disrepair, let alone disrepute. □