



Samuel Huntington's Moral Geography



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1. Samuel Huntington is an articulate exemplar of those who think that the U.S. - as part of an entity called "the West" - is threatened by the increasing presence cultural Others. He warns against welcoming cultural diversity:

Some Americans have promoted multiculturalism at home, some have promoted universalism abroad, and some have done both. Multiculturalism at home threatens the West; universalism abroad threatens the West and the World. Both deny the uniqueness of Western Culture. ¹

It turns out that "security" is now cultural security for Huntington. It is people flows rather than weapons that threaten the territory with which he identifies. His perspective on "the clash of civilizations" is one among many approaches, particularly those aimed at a security-oriented mapping of the globe, which, in Fredric

Jameson's terms, collapse ontology with geography. ² Two approaches to the self-recognition of the modern state help situate this practice. First, it is necessary to heed what Michael Taussig has called "the cultural practice of statecraft" ³ in which the state is understood to be continually crafting itself as the avatar of a national culture. Second, it is necessary to locate the ways in which that cultural practice of the state constructs the worlds of danger to its coherence.

2. This latter aspect of the state's structures of self-recognition and reproduction is most evident in security discourses. "Security," is not a thing to be defined, indeed as a concept among scholars of international politics it is more or less "essentially contested;" ⁴ it is to be understood in terms of how and when it is articulated. While its articulation is often associated with strategic arguments in struggles among states, it is also expressed as part of the general ontological defense of the primacy of the state and its claim to be supported by and expressive of a primordial sovereign/citizen identity.
3. Construed in this way, "security" emerges as involvement in the ontological grounding of the political. ⁵ But Huntington eschews an ontological or desiring impetus for his moral geography. His ontological and cosmological commitments to a geopolitical and civilizational order are, for him, detached, realistic assessments of threats to the "security" of the "West." Failing to see the arbitrariness with which civilizational codes have emerged, he sees other "civilizations" as a threat to the West, and the immigration of non-western Others as a threat to what he constructs as a unitary American national culture.
4. Ironically, as one for whom power is a dominant category for interpreting global process, Huntington views knowledge as primarily technical; appropriately pursued, it has no intimacy with the operation of power or authority. He suggests that maps simply serve a rational, heuristic function:

Simplified paradigms or maps are indispensable for human thought and action...We need explicit or implicit models to: 1. Order and generalize about reality; 2. understand causal relationships among phenomena; 3. anticipate and, if we are lucky, predict future developments; 4. distinguish what is important from what is unimportant; and 5. show us what paths we should take to achieve our goals. ⁶

5. In contrast, over a century ago Joseph Conrad understood well the "violence of representation" that inheres in some geographic imaginaries. ⁷ Under the general

rubric of "imperial geography," he proposed a chronology of geographic perspectives that accompanied and legitimated various stages in the process of the European colonization. His stages ran from "geography fabulous," based on myths of the new world, through "geography militant," coinciding with the invasions, to "geography triumphant," expressed in the subsequent cartographic representations of the European settlements.⁸

268766. As Conrad's discussion makes clear, maps reflect practiced imaginaries; they are irredeemably entangled with moral and political projects.⁹ The "power-knowledge" circuit that Conrad's "geography triumphant" reflected was associated with the establishment of the Euro-American dominated geopolitical world of states. Huntington's replacement of that map with one based on a "civilizational" ordering reflects another project. Rather than extending the early project of settlement and domination, it is a project of enclavization, of retreating to the citadel of "Western civilization" around which he draws a line that separates the West from "the rest."
268767. To proceed in Joseph Conrad's spirit and challenge Huntington's disinterested model of geography, it is necessary to locate geopolitical cartographies in a temporal structure, displacing Huntington's current map, with a mobilizing cartographic time image. A genealogy of political space, which treat impulses ranging from Roman ecumenicalism to early and later periods of nation building can help us resist the naturalizing of geopolitical space that has been characteristic of analysts who treat only the recent history of international antagonism.
268768. Such a genealogy of political space should begin with the first attempt at global mastery during the Roman empire because "the first maps in Western history," according to Claude Nicolet, appeared during the Persian War and were shaped by the attempts at "visualizations of the distances that were destined to mark, or to mask, the balance of power."¹⁰ Accordingly, Strabo's maps articulated the Roman view of the world and the place within it that the ecumenically inclined Romans had assigned themselves.¹¹ Inasmuch as Strabo's maps were also expressions, more specifically, of Caesar Augustus's ecumenical conception of the Roman Empire, there was a significant entanglement between Caesar's in-process autobiography and the geography of empire. The world represented was the one that Augustus meant to master.
268769. It was not until the Renaissance that the geopolitics represented by official cartographers in "the West" began to indicate a separation from the imprimatur of emperors and monarchs. In England, for example, cartographic representations had begun to diminish the space formerly assigned to "insignia of royal power," which had reflected identities based on "dynastic loyalty," and increasingly emphasized markers of land configuration and national territory.¹²
268770. By the seventeenth century, the succession of images on maps reflected a historical sequence "from universal Christendom, to dynastic state, to land-centered nation."¹³ Contrary to the view that radically separates history or narrative and geography (e.g. Immanuel Kant's), subsequent western cartography has been significantly shaped by stories of encounter. If, for example, we jump ahead to the period of nation building in the eighteenth century it becomes clear that "the text of geography is not an innocent one."¹⁴ Eighteenth century travel writers were lending a story of cultural encounter to the emerging geopolitical map. The writings of Thomson and Chateaubriand, among others, reflected a commitment to secure the "home," the national space of their respective "western" nations in the face of encounters with exotic Others.¹⁵
268771. This tradition of securing the home, whether the space of the nation or "western civilization" more generally has been part of the security mentality in the west ever since. But the civilizational dimension of this mentality has its own historical trajectory. To resist this dimension of the Huntington cartography, it is necessary to create a temporal rather than static image of "civilization," for while the old, realist Huntington focused primarily on states, the new civilizational Huntington focuses on cultural rather than geopolitical clashes within a "world order" he sees as civilizational rather than nation-state based:

The world is in some sense two, but the central distinction is between the West as the hitherto dominant civilization and all the others, which, however, have little if anything in common among them. The world, in short, is divided between a Western one and a non-Western many.¹⁶

The most dangerous civilizational challenge that Huntington constructs is "Islam."

While it has been clearly shown that despite a resurgence of orthodox Islamic religious commitments, contemporary Islam harbors a complex and pluralistic set of relationships between religious and political institutions,¹⁷ Huntington's Islam is constituted as a "global religious revival."¹⁸ The civilizational coherence that Huntington is seeking to protect is a historical construction that has taken shape in different ways at different times, but at present, it is connected to a "governmentality" that emerged in the past two centuries. Whereas the absolute monarchies were concerned with ruling their "subjects," the modern state constructed itself in terms of the alleged cultural unity of its population.

341845. Since the late eighteenth century, the "governmentality"¹⁹ of the European state has increasingly oriented state practices toward managing various social and cultural dynamics. Indeed part of the state's control over the meaning of the political has involved it in what Peter Taylor has termed, "the capture of cultural identity."²⁰ Forces such as demographic expansion, monetary abundance, and agricultural growth, encouraged governments to turn to the problem of managing an economy and to "security," the policing of the boundaries within which this management of people in relation to things was to take place. They became preoccupied, at least in the European case, with the "population... as the ultimate end of government."²¹
341846. Ultimately, this preoccupation resulted, from at least the mid nineteenth century, in high levels of surveillance of sexual and other practices which moralists associate with the maintenance of "decency," so that the nation's "public sphere " is the place where "decent" or civilized" behavior is to take place. Indeed, throughout its modern history, nationalism and codes of decency have been significantly interrelated.²² Its more recent inter-articulations have been evident in campaigns of those associated with saving "American civilization" against sexually explicit media.
341847. In a recent op-ed piece in the New York Times, for example, William Bennett and C. DeLoris Tucker praised the Wal-Mart store chain for refusing to stock "compact disks with lyrics and cover art that it finds objectionable"²³ and appealed for "simple decency," which they claim has the support of "concerned parents and politicians of both parties."²⁴ To connect this concern with maintaining decency by policing media with a security problematic, it is necessary to recognize the interrelationships between "decency" as a dimension of cultural evaluation and the historical emergence of the idea of "civilization." Although both decency and civilizational codes were initially employed within European societies, they became associated eventually with the impetus to nationalism and thus to national distinctiveness in the world of states. The entanglement between domestic and international concerns certainly remains. To protect the bourgeois culture of decency, which Bennett and others associate with "American" culture, for example, they and others evoke the idea of the American civilization.
341848. Clearly, those who summon civilizational and cultural codes and attach them to the practices of "western" nations see them as both self-evident and as signs of distinction. But a historical perspective on the emergence of these codes of judgment reveals that what are now regarded as unproblematic styles of behavior and affect - especially patterns of inhibition versus release of emotion and physical violence - are a product of a slow historical shaping process since the middle ages. And, even within this century, significant changes in affective patterns are in evidence - for example the change from drinking in the work place to a situation of workplace sobriety and leisure sphere inebriation.²⁵
341849. In Europe, *civillite'* as a guide to behavior developed concurrently with state formation. In the "age of absolutism," it was associated with the processes through which western societies imposed domestic pacification. While the behaviors were being shaped, there developed a concurrent concept of civilization which was to become part of European self-appreciation, although in different states, that civilizational discourse took on different qualities and was differently connected to antagonisms between classes.²⁶
341850. Most significantly, the norms prescribing constraints and codes of decency, which initially related primarily to within-society class dynamics as well as to state-sponsored aspect of pacification, acquired a collective, ontological significance; they became part of a cluster of ideas about national distinctiveness. George Mosse argues that the norms comprising *civillite'* needed a broader warrant; they "had to be informed by an ideal if they were to be effective...In most timely fashion, nationalism came to the rescue."²⁷ And since the epoch of state-formation, in which these codes and nationalism have been interconnected, the civilizational map has served various expressions of domestic anxiety about dangers to the nation and/or to Western civilization as a whole.
341851. Modernity in western nations is therefore a period in which we witness the

coalescence of the codes of civilization and decency. Historically, the triumph of bourgeois classes has been associated with their specific codes of decency. Added to that since then, however, has been the post hoc moralizing of those codes which has allowed them to be a basis for judgment of both deviance within the state and dangers from without. As a result, the modern state has in various ways performed its commitment to possessing a distinctive national culture. Huntington's attempt to consolidate a cultural singularity for the U.S. and "the West" constitutes another such performance with a different cartographic spin. It is an attempt to impose a unity on a diversity that keeps the nation and its preferred global "ethnic" neighborhood whole. Nevertheless, as Etienne Balibar has noted, "No nation, that is no national state, has an ethnic basis...but they do have to institute in real (and therefore in historical) time their imaginary unity against other possible unities." ²⁸ .

352373. In order to produce such an imaginary unity, Huntington must freeze-frame culture. His fear of an assault on western culture requires a static version of "culture," which he construes as a more or less fixed civilizational characteristic, based primarily on mentalities - for example "shared beliefs."²⁹ If one focuses instead on dynamics of acculturation, it becomes difficult to fix either "American" or "western" culture. Over time, "culture" in the sense of practices of space, memory, subjectivity, and collective responsibility (among other things), alters as various different peoples share proximity as well as engaging in both direct and mediated encounters. What has produced "western civilization" has been a dynamic of adjustment as various cultural practices, often attributed to the non West, infect "western" cultural practices.
352374. In short, Huntington conjures away the foreignness within "the West." This is not the place to treat his various oversimplifications and depluralizations of the so-called non-West. A critical literature has increasingly addressed these shortcomings.³⁰ It is his geographic imaginary, his practice of line-drawing that one must address to recognize how Huntington, and indeed the security analyst in general, manages to conceptually isolate what is ambiguous with respect to civilizational groupings.
352375. In constructing a "fortress community"³¹ by drawing lines between the West and the rest, Huntington denies the interdependencies involved in producing and reproducing the West and the rest as well as the ambiguities of the cultural orientations within the various groupings. The consequences of this kind of boundary fixation can be demonstrated with reference to the retrospective treatment of one source of the barbarian anxiety that those who worry about "cultural security" manifest, the story of the fall of ancient Rome.
352376. Contrary to the familiar story of the fall of ancient Rome - that it succumbed to the barbarians at the gates, Rome could not be understood as circumscribed by sharp boundaries. As C. R. Whittaker has shown, Roman frontiers were not precise lines of defense or enforcement, which radically separated what was Rome from non-Rome. Roman frontiers were more zonal than wall-like.³² The ancient world had been, in varying degrees, Romanized, and the place between Rome and non-Rome was a zone, not a wall of defense. Nevertheless, one contemporary security analyst, relying on the mythic, barbarians at the gates story and preoccupied with modern geopolitical lines, succumbed to the temptation to see Rome in terms of strict geopolitical boundaries rather than ambiguous zonal frontiers.³³
352377. In like manner, Huntington has drawn a sharp boundary around "western culture." In order to do so, he too must rely on an ethnographically dubious story, one about the development of "the West." His emphasis is on the establishment of a harmonious and consensual order rather than on, for example, the struggles that remain within the order. While he ethnicizes the conflicts abroad, based on mythic histories of such global arenas as the Balkans, which never had the sharp ethnic divisions that he and other security analysts ascribe to them,³⁴ he de-ethnicizes the western peopled spaces and constructs the civilization of the West on the basis of abstract principles such as "equality before the law."
352378. Ironically, this abstract principle, perhaps more than any other, is violated by much of the history of "the West." From the initial assaults on indigenous peoples in the Americas - who have no places on Huntington's map - through the unequal treatment of peoples of African origin, to the current treatment of both legal and non-legal immigrants, the story of "the West" is a story of practices of radical exclusion, followed by slow and grudging acceptance or domestication of foreignness within at the level of juridical identification and protection while at the level of the mythologizing of western freedom, it is a denial of those practices of exclusion. There remains a remarkable disjuncture between a geographical and a discursive "West," between that ambiguous and shifting spatial domain and the exclusive "West" that has emerged for those who practice various modes of security.
352379. The identity/difference practice for Huntington, then, is haunted by time. Only by

momentarily fixing what constantly changes can one find, in one's imagination, a culture or a civilization. The particular configuration that Huntington thinks he discerns outside the West owes more to his freeze-framing than to the world on which his vision is imposed. And most significantly, Huntington's fetishized temporality is accompanied by a mode of thinking space that is dogmatic. Mistaking his moral geography - the abjection of various forms of otherness outside of West and the denial of otherness within it - for perspicuous knowledge, he thinks that his way of thinking has stable and unproblematic referents, that it allows him to "order and generalize about reality."³⁵ Nevertheless, the "reality" that Huntington assembles in his West versus the rest mapping of the globe constitutes a moral geography, a security-oriented ethico-political initiative aimed at protecting an enclave whose civilizational integrity is a more a function of the way he tells the story of modernity than it is of stable cultural or civilizational difference.

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letter to the editors

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Notes

353255. ¹ Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), p. 318.
353256. ² See Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 4.
353257. ³ Michael Taussig, *The Nervous System* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 115.
353258. ⁴ Bradley Klein, *Strategic Studies and World Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 20.
353259. ⁵ On this point, see Michael Dillon, *Politics of Security* (New York: Routledge, 1996).
353260. ⁶ Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, p. 30.
353261. ⁷ The issue of the "violence of representation" is treated in Jacques Derrida's reading of the thought of Emmanuel Levinas: "Violence and Metaphysics," in *Writing and Difference* trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 79-153.
353262. ⁸ Joseph Conrad, "Geography and Some Explorers," in *Last Essays* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co, 1926), pp. 1-21.
353263. ⁹ On this point, see the discussion in J. B. Harley, "Cartographic Ethics and Social Theory," *Cartographica* 27 (1990), pp. 1-23.
353264. ¹⁰ Claude Nicolet, *Space, Geography, and Politics in the Early Roman Empire* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), p. 5.
353265. ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.
353266. ¹² The perspective and quotations here are from Richard Helgerson, "The Land Speaks: Cartography, Chorography, and Subversion in Renaissance England," *Representations* 16: 4 (Fall, 1986), p. 56. It was also the case, more generally in

- England that, by the end of the sixteenth century, the process of consolidating the state form was accompanied by "an unprecedented explosion in the making of maps." See Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, The Great Arch (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), p. 70.
353267. [13. Ibid.](#), p. 62.
353268. [14.](#) Shawn Irlam, "Gerrymandered Geographies: Exoticism in Thomson and Chateaubriand," MLN 108: 5 (December, 1993), p. 892.
353269. [15. Ibid.](#)
353270. [16.](#) Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations, p. 36.
353271. [17.](#) See Ira M. Lapidus, "State and Religion in Islamic societies," Past and Present 151 (1996), pp. 3-27.
353272. [18.](#) Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations, p. 116.
353273. [19.](#) This expression is Michel Foucault's in "Governmentality," In Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller eds. The Foucault Effect (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 87-88.
353274. [20.](#) Peter J. Taylor, "Beyond Containers: internationality, interstateness, interterritoriality," Progress in Human Geography 19:1 (March, 1995), p. 6.
353275. [21.](#) Foucault, "Governmentality," p. 100.
353276. [22.](#) For this history see George Mosse, Nationalism and Sexuality (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985).
353277. [23.](#) William Bennett, and C. Deloris Tucker, "Smut-Free Stores." New York Times December 9, 1996, p.: A15.
353278. [24. Ibid.](#)
353279. [25.](#) Joseph Gusfield, The Culture of Public Problems (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).
353280. [26.](#) Norbert Elias, The Civilizing Process (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1994), p. 22ff.
353281. [27.](#) George Mosse, Nationalism and Sexuality.
353282. [28.](#) Etienne Balibar, "Racism and Nationalism." trans. Chris Turner. in Etienne Balibar and Emmanuel Wallerstein, Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities (New York: Verso, 1991), p. 49.
353283. [29. Ibid.](#), p. 57.
353284. [30.](#) See for example, the symposium in Asian Studies 18:1 (July 1994).
353285. [31.](#) The expression is in Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Toward a New Common Sense (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 485.
353286. [32.](#) C. R. Whittaker, Frontiers of the Roman Empire (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), p. 11.
353287. [33.](#) See Whittaker's treatment of Edward Luttwak's misreading of ancient geography [Ibid.](#), p. 6.
353288. [34.](#) On this point, see David Campbell, "Political Prosaics, Transversal Politics, and the Anarchical World." in Michael J. Shapiro and Hayward Alker eds. Challenging Boundaries (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 7-31.
353289. [35.](#) Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations, p. 30.