The Debate over the Historical-Political Background of a Civic Multicultural Society

Abstract: Ongoing political, military and social violence gives the impression that liberal ideas of freedom, democracy and multicultural society do not serve as a barrier to the shedding of blood. This paper shows that recognizing the way powerful interests color our conceptions of truth and value and need not automatically result in a purge of all existing social-political categories. Consequently, the paper addresses many of the ambiguities that a critique of ideology and values tends to evoke, paying special attention to the prevailing explanations of world power, violence and world peace in our contemporary reality, especially in the fields of sociology and ideology. The significance of several factors in the American Weltanschauung that have a major impact on life today have been examined.

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We will start with one of the major solutions to recent political, military and social violence and that is to sort out what is called *Pax Americana*, which includes civic multicultural vision, amalgamated with religious faith.

Between 1730 and 1740, the English colonies in the eastern part of the North American continent were swept up by a wave of religious revivals known as *The Great Awakening*. Under the influence of charismatic preachers, tens of thousands of people experienced an ecstatic transcendence and were "born again" and returned to the fold of Evangelical Protestantism. According to Samuel P. Huntington, the *Great Awakening* was the beginning of the birth of the American nation (Huntington, 2004). The religious movement preceded

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the war against the British colonial regime and was a necessary condition for the American Revolution. For the first time, a social and political force disguised as a religious movement swept through the different colonies and created a new, shared, national-religious consciousness, one that had nothing to do with the settlers' original British identity.

Huntington claims that alongside its immigrant nature, the American nation was, and remains, a white, religious, Puritan-Protestant one that absorbed human elements, especially from (white) Europe together with ideas from the European Enlightenment and the Age of Reason. It became an immense melting pot in which people and ideas were subjected to a blunt process of Americanization (Huntington, 2004). As long as the mechanisms of Americanization functioned properly (while also carefully selecting who would be allowed to join the nation), the United States became the fulfillment of prosperous humanity's most advanced dreams as it marched vigorously onwards towards a world hegemony.

Advancing towards a world hegemony, shedding blood and tears along the way, the ideals of *Pax Americana,* including a civic multicultural democratic vision, were implemented everywhere, either theoretically or practically. Ongoing political, military and social violence gives the impression that the liberal ideas of freedom and democratic- multicultural society do not serve as a barrier to the spilling of blood. Considering whether the dominance of the western world in previous decade signifies the possibility that we are moving towards the establishment of a universal civilization, we will not necessarily get to a point where all of humanity nestles under the wing of one single liberal civilization. It seems that the end of history and global peace will probably remain an elusive goal and so we can look forward to worldwide conflicts followed by various attempts at a variety of solutions.

Presently, one of the major solutions to recent political, military and social violence is to set straight what is called *Pax Americana* which includes civic democratic multicultural vision, amalgamated with religious faith. There are many nations and societies anxious to be dominated by *Pax Americana* and many others who are fighting it. In many instances, those societies outside the American social-political-economic consensus are banned and neglected by the rest of the world. Eventually, these cultures will reach the conclusion that they need to learn more about American Weltanschauung and American values as well as American history in order to integrate themselves in the world society, economy and politics.

One of the first and highly popular assumptions about American society and culture is that it is replete with violence, even though Americans themselves are still ensconced in the self-content pleasing image of a moral and just nation. The debate over a multi cultural civic society and a better understanding of its original

roots leads many historians, sociologists and political scientists to characterize and clarify the differences between American and European political violence. Traditionally, the aim of the latter, based on ideas of the Enlightenment, is to bring about revolution and regime change, whereas political violence in America does not aim at changing an existing regime but rather at strengthening it. In other words, Americans are violent in support of the status quo. To a certain extent, Americans implemented ideas of the Enlightenment Movement, reaching specific goals in a way that the Europeans did not even dare to imagine. Two of the principles of the French Revolution, liberty and equality, crystallized into concepts of a decidedly economic nature in America: liberty includes the right to lead a democratic life, defend the individual and acquire, own and safeguard property. Equality is the possibility of economic opportunities for all residents of the United States.

Certain ideas appear to be crucial for better understanding the role and sources of violence in American Weltanschauung. An illustrative example of these sources is the concept of *venture* and the manifestations thereof. It was Immanuel Kant (1997), who applied the concept of venture to courage and freedom of thought and to the dynamic development of the process of self-improvement, which ultimately affords every individual his true uniqueness. Nevertheless, the idea of *risk* was given a completely different interpretation upon reaching American shores years later. In American society, a risk or gamble is connected to an individual adventure that has to do with business. The motto engraved in 1787 on the seal of the first Senate reads: "*Mind your own business*". This motto has been consistently associated with the perception of the western frontier as a promise of economic success. For that reason, the settlers very quickly made land a resource yielding speculative profits.

In the West, every American is a master of his or her own activities. Americans realized relatively early on that access to land did not necessarily guarantee access to wealth unless it was accompanied by access to market forces. The re-embodiment of Enlightenment ideas in America, tantamount to transforming spirit into commodities, caused a violent system in which Americans achieved the good life, a life of paradise, albeit besides hell. At the same time, the existing order of democratic liberalism is an essential implication for realizing the true American experience.

September 11th was an event that jolted American fundamental ideas and challenged the authority of its basic values. The horrifying events of that day forced people to examine their myths in order to get a handle on the crisis. One is the myth of 'savage war', based on the legends of the early frontier. The myth represents American history as an Indian war, in which a 'savage' ethnic enemy opposes white Christian civilization: an enemy whose hostility to civilization is part of its nature or fundamental character; an enemy not just opposed to interests but to 'civilization itself'. The myth also pro-

vides a recipe for countering that threat, a model of heroic action that will bring victory and resolve crisis. "The hero of this myth is the wielder of extraordinary violence: he can win only by fighting fire with fire, evil with evil, and just fights until the enemy are exterminated or utterly subjugated. In war with such an enemy, nothing less than total victory is acceptable". (Slotkin, 2001, p. 11)

This American imposition of evil versus good, hostile versus friendly, civilized versus savage, categorizes the American war on terrorism. It is an either/or mentality that makes the link between the absence of an interest in international diplomacy on one hand, and the Christian values and ideals on the other, very clear. Such an international standpoint is more than often comprehended by Europe as an attempt of dragging the international community into a medieval international regime, based on the rule of barely concealed force. It seems that *Pax Americana* is shaped by symbols of right and wrong values and beliefs in the realm of international relationship, similarly to values and beliefs that guide American society in its domestic programs and are often reflected in that country's contemporary foreign policy.

An additional central idea that has had great impact on the implementations of *Pax Americana* is the phenomenon of American uniqueness which is based on several intertwined factors, one of which, that of "plenty", makes clear the difference between Europe and America from the very first glance (Gutfeld, 2002). Ever since the first European settlers arrived in America, they have been concerned with comparing the two continents. Some argue that this endless scrutinizing of Europe derives from feelings of inferiority in a new society vis-à-vis a rich and ancient culture; others say that Americans perceive America as superior to a Europe that is seen as old and corrupt.

Over and over again, the Americans defined their uniqueness vis-à-vis Europe, and later on towards the entire world. As compared to the plenitude of virgin land in America, land in feudal Europe or other countries in Asia or Africa had been divided up and cultivated for generations. Neither revolution nor release of land to farmers allowed for even a bit of available property. The settlers who arrived from populated and often hungry Europe saw the huge, primeval tracts of land in America as a guarantee of economic success. Even before they arrived, they had dreamed of America as the land of unlimited opportunity. The wealth of land, its resources and potential along with the economic flourishing of Americans is not just a physical-geographical characteristic of a huge country perceived as uninhabited, but also an economic success as a result of an ideological system derived from the Protestant ethos. The "plenty" serves as a source of inspiration for a religious outlook and an economic condition that produces the uniqueness of America (Gutfeld, 2002).

Paradoxically, it is the endless expanse of land that has caused the change in the concept of boundary. Land is not the only basis for connections to material wealth. The borders of America, as opposed to the concept of border prevalent in Europe, are promises of a wonderful start of prosperity and wealth. The border (or the frontier) indicates not just a physical place or area that marks the boundaries of the state and the limit of its sovereignty; it indicates a metaphysical idea that is both a process and a place, i.e. a new place and new process of adjustment to a new reality.

The notion of frontier as held by the 19th century historian Frederick Jackson Turner (1999), a founder of the Progressive Movement, saw the continued existence of democracy as contingent upon America's expanses. Like President Thomas Jefferson before him, Turner thought that an independent life in which the individual is the master of his land and his fate ensured the development of political liberty. He saw the struggle for survival by the pioneering settlers in the Wild West as the factor that had shaped their individualistic character of combining resourcefulness and inventiveness, the products of free-living conditions in a wild region, and shaping a combination of roughness, aggression and strength. The outcome of this process shapes the individualistic character either of the lone equestrian, who single-handedly grapples with a hostile nature and sometimes goes to his own town or to others overseas to help the community in their struggle against nature or to fight the bad guys, i.e. evil.

Historian and sociologist Seymour Martin Lipsett (1922) argues that the five values upon which the American experiences are based - liberty, equality, individualism, populism and laissez-faire - could not exist without the one basic condition that is unique to the United States: "plenty" (Gutfeld, 2002). The Americans concentrated on the exploitation of plenty above all; mythical individualism helped them achieve this. Consequently, America's plentitude, together with its uniqueness, caused other nations and societies to envy them, but it is also necessary in order to recognize what is involved in the sacrifice of moral values and justice for the sake of the acquisition of wealth.

Why are the American Weltanschauung and its implementations meeting resistance and are so underrated in many places across the world today? Alternatively, vice-versa, what makes it difficult for the American liberal mind to deal with the outside world beyond its shores? These questions have been frequently asked in different forms during these last years and specifically in relation to the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts. The answer to both questions is found in American history and in the American ideals of plentitude, uniqueness, laissez-faire, individualism, populism and the Protestant ethos. American idealistic nationalism justifies the assertion of superiority of the American people over other peoples as well as ascertaining the assertion of the superiority of American ideals over other ones. Implementing a reality of liberal-democratic values all over the

world leads toward a tendency to absolutize and dichotomize war and peace according to basic Western values. So it happened that the enthusiastic liberals most ready to support war providing they can turn it into a crusade for advancing humanistic ideals have been condemned by many societies and cultures.

The United States has trouble understanding revolutionary ferment in the rest of the world because it has never experienced a true revolution, fighting instead a War of Independence and not even one of natives against alien conquerors (like that of the Algerians against the French, Indians against the British, etc.). Their "revolution" was the settlers against the Mother Country. Furthermore, reflecting on past revolutions, the Americans presuppose that real revolutions are remarkable but rare. Even nowadays, as the proletariat in Third World slums continues to radicalize, the American social-political policy is to encourage and support the middle classes all over the world, middle classes that are becoming increasingly conservative and less willing to fight for the existing order.

In American eyes, the world in which we live has become a dangerous place where large numbers of people resent the freedom, democracy, wealth, power, and culture of the United States. They vigorously oppose their efforts to persuade or coerce other societies to accept American values of human rights, democracy and capitalism (Huntington, 1997). Besides, it is becoming harder and harder for Americans to be able to distinguish between true world-wide partners, (who would like to share the same Weltanschauung and values), opportunistic allies with whom they have no common interests, strategic partner-competitors with whom they have a mixed relationship, antagonists with whom negotiation is possible, and between unrelenting enemies who would try to destroy their civilization, culture and the democratic system (Huntington, 1981).

Culturally and as a secular political entity, the U.S. is a Protestant-Christian and not a Judeo-Christian nation. According to Huntington, (2004) secularism (unlike atheism) does not clash with religion; rather, the two complete each other, with civil religion serving as an adhesive between political secularism and religious secularism. There is quite a bit of confusion in the book regarding the essence of American religion. In some places, the term denotes a universal faith in God (Christians of all stripes, Jews, Muslims and even Hindus believe in the transcendental entity that created the world and continues to direct it); elsewhere it means Christianity in general. In many other places, it stands for Protestantism, usually American-style Protestantism, which is as unique as the rest of the country's culture. This uniqueness is what made the U.S. into the land of promise - the goal and destination, Huntington believes, of every person on earth. Nevertheless, that is also its biggest problem. The unique American creed finds its foremost expression in the English language (as the only language uniting all Americans), in Christianity, in commitment to the religious community, in the English

legal conception and heritage, in the personal accountability of the governing figures, in individual rights and individualism in general, in the work ethic, and in the unshakable belief that individuals have a right and a duty to create heaven on earth. Huntington is himself a great believer in the American myth of the shoeshine boy who can go far in life through hard work, profound intention (both expressed in actual work and God's work) and perseverance. Certain central concepts are not part of this paradigm: democracy, capitalism and multicultural society.

The U.S., Huntington argues (2004), has not yet completely lost its Protestant core culture, but this no longer commands a hegemonic position. From a country of immigrants, the U.S. has turned into a country of Diasporas, with each ethnic group serving as a lobby for a foreign country or people. The loyalty of these groups is uncertain and even double; in some cases, their members' primary loyalty is not to the U.S. at all, even though they are its citizens and in some cases were even born and raised as Americans. As a result, the civic multicultural society turns to be a nightmare, according to Huntington.untington blames the economic, political, and above all academic, elites of embracing anti-patriotic and trans-national values, and of displacing their loyalty from the American nation to abstract universal values that often clash with American values and interests. Globalization, he argues, has created for these elites loci of interests and loyalty outside their own country (for example, most large American corporations have become multinational, and neither their top executives nor many of their shareholders are American). Many people outside the U.S. view globalization as "Americanization." But Huntington, like a number of conservative thinkers, sees it as the de-Americanization of American economy and values, and as the blurring of boundaries between the national and the meta-national - which to Huntington is also a-national, if not anti-national.

Huntington's approach is full of logical and conceptual contradictions. He rejects collective rights (mostly those of non-whites and non-Protestants) in support of the protection of individual rights within the U.S. in the name of liberalism. At the same time, however, he argues for the absolute privilege of national (collective) rights over the trans-national individual rights of "the world's citizens". This double standard is underscored by, on the one hand, Huntington's objection to having international bodies (the United Nations, the International Court at the Hague, and so on) investigate and sit in judgment of U.S. violations of human rights (which are distinct, individual rights) and, on the other hand, Huntington's defense of the American right to intervene anywhere in the world to protect these same values which usually include religious extremism and fanaticism. In other words, the rules of the game - in the U.S. and elsewhere - are determined according to the interests of the very stratum to which Huntington himself belongs and whose privileges must be protected.

On the domestic front, Huntington attacks the laws of affirmative action, which he sees as one of the reasons for the decline, and deterioration of Americanism. He is, as stated above, a meritocrat who believes that acceptance to educational institutions to public office and to jobs in general, as well as professional advancement, should be based solely on one's qualifications. Huntington venerates wars, which he sees as the primary cause of humanity's advancement. Huntington expresses his conclusion clear and loud: "... the worst thing that ever happened to the U.S.," he writes plainly and without flinching, "is the collapse of the evil Soviet empire; the best thing was the September 11 attacks which restored the sense of an external threat, revived American patriotism and led to the declaration of America's war on global terror." (Huntington, 2004)

It is therefore not surprising that Americans may find themselves isolated within their own world hegemony, an international consequence that seems to be similar to their past national history when the individualistic character of the lone equestrian was shaped. There is also the danger that a country of liberty can become a garrison state (Brzezinski, 1998), and all other countries in the world, which are under American influence and control, will be treated as wide enormous ranches of the Wild West. These dangers stem from the paradox that the world's first absolute hegemonic superpower is also a democratic state. Thus, flawed policies could jeopardize not only the effectiveness of America's hegemony, but also the democratic nature and the values of its own regime.

The capacity to maintain world hegemony depends on the ability of Americans not to ignore the need for those allies who are sharing the same democratic values and on their own volition to treat other countries not as vassal states subservient to the U.S. in order to accept America's leadership. Consequently, as a counterpoint to Huntington's ambiguous and distrustful approach toward other cultures and civilizations, America's principal challenge in contemporary times is to find the golden mean between a wise reliance on allies and the superiority of American might. An important precondition for this balance is that the use of American force must not become a factor that creates resistance to, and animosity towards, the U.S, as it has been happening during the conflict in Iraq.

This change in the attitude towards other cultures should lead to the idea that American cultural hegemony will continue to be dominant and so the American Weltanschauung, especially because of American superiority in mass media and technology. American society must be aware of the political implications of its political, economical and technological hegemony that creates resistance against it and inflames the fear of a deluge of local cultures with American products - from Hollywood to a MacDonald's hamburger. The consequence of this analysis means the lone horseman's course of action which leads America's absolutely hege-

monic policy, a policy that should be moderated and even shifted toward multilateralism among equals which means not only changes in style and approach but in substance as well.

The social-political analysis in this paper addresses many of the ambiguities that a critique of ideology and values, especially in the fields of sociology and ideology, tends to evoke. It shows that recognizing the way powerful interests color our conceptions of truth and value yet need not result in a purge of all existing categories. Moreover, this recognition need not end in a call for reflection that is more critical and a mapping of relationships of power, thereby increasing a sense of anomie. This kind of critical reflection suggests that an important start to uncovering the ways that we act and think is to ignore our dependence on genuine communication. Yet, it is only a start. We must bring this assessment to life in our social actions and in our personal commitments. By being aware of what came before and what may come after, we must all strive to do so.

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