
Book Reviews

The Renaissance Created Civilization, and That Culture Alone Will Save It

by Nancy Spannaus

Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress

edited by Lawrence E. Harrison and Samuel P.
Huntington
New York: Basic Books, 2000
348 pages, hardbound, \$35

The Twilight of American Culture

by Morris Berman
New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2000
205 pages, hardbound, \$23.95

Whether human civilization survives the coming period ahead, will depend chiefly upon whether leading statesmen once again revive the ideas of the Golden Renaissance, and its image of mankind, in the grand project of rebuilding nations and peoples. Above all, this enterprise depends upon clarity on questions of culture, that nexus of social relations which determines the individual's relationship to his fellow man and woman, to nature, and to ideas. That clarity has been provided, in the 20th Century, by only one great economist and philosopher, Lyndon H. LaRouche, who has fought for a revival of Renaissance ideas in the fields of economics, music, science, art, and statecraft, around the central concept of man as a creature of cognition, made in the image of God.

There could hardly be any greater enemies of LaRouche's war for Classical culture than Samuel P. Huntington and Lawrence E. Harrison, the editors of *Culture Matters*. In fact, these Harvard professors are not interested in the broad question of culture at all. What they want to do, is to assert the allegedly superior economic and related values of British Imperialism, as the pathway to economic progress and democracy. The nation state, the key vessel of Christian humanists for promoting progress and the dignity of the individual, is to be de-

stroyed, in deference to "the markets" and international institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank.

Yet, the assertion of those "values" — loosely defined as the Protestant Ethic of Max Weber fame — did *not* create the heights of modern European civilization. To the contrary, the assertion of those values, the values of the Enlightenment which fought to supplant the achievements and ideas of the Renaissance, has put world civilization on the road to decline, and very rapidly so. Those who listen to Huntington and Harrison will enter that path of devolution.

That decline is truthfully described in the book by social critic Morris Berman, who effectively shows that American culture is disintegrating into a New Dark Age, as a result of hedonism, corporate greed, the income gap, increasing illiteracy, and other forms of degeneracy. But Berman himself, doesn't understand that the Enlightenment was a counterdeployment to the Golden Renaissance, and therefore cannot present the conceptual solution to the crisis which he sees.

The Harrison-Huntington Thesis

One cannot approach the Harrison-Huntington book without looking at the history of these two individuals, who took co-responsibility for pulling together the Harvard Symposium, which produced *Culture Matters*.

Samuel Huntington, well known for his *Clash of Civilizations* thesis, and his role as a member of President Jimmy Carter's National Security Council, is no stranger to the limelight of public policy. Huntington was a Coordinating Group member of the New York Council on Foreign Relations' "1980s Project" during 1975-76, working particularly on issues of "democracy" for the then-fledgling Trilateral Commission. The report which he produced then, along with Michael Crozier and Joji Watanuki, actually asserted: "We have come to recognize that there are potentially desirable limits to economic growth. There are also potentially desirable limits to the indefinite extension of political democracy. . . . A government which lacks authority . . . will have little ability, short of cataclysmic crisis, to impose on its people the sacri-

ices which may be necessary” (*The Crisis of Democracy*, 1975). In the Carter Administration, Huntington’s role, planning for security disasters, was coherent with such a perspective of repressive emergency rule.

There is, however, no hint of such a view in Huntington’s introduction to *Culture Matters*. Here he purports to be naively fascinated by the fact that countries like Ghana have declined over the last 30 years, while countries like Korea have prospered. He wants to look into the role of culture in creating these contrasting results. He defines culture “as certain values and attitudes toward man and society. . . .”

By Huntington’s own testimony, and the weight of material in the book, the chief editor was Lawrence E. Harrison, a 20-year veteran of the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID), primarily in Ibero-American nations, during 1962-82. Like Huntington a professor at Harvard, Harrison has been a very public proponent of changing Ibero-American cultures, allegedly in order to permit them to develop. As *EIR* uncovered decades ago, however, AID’s role in Ibero-America, like that of the Trilateral Commission internationally, was aimed at the opposite of economic progress—primarily at population control.

Harrison’s introduction is an affront to one’s intelligence from the outset. He starts off by saying how the development efforts of the 1960s failed, and then those efforts of the 1990s, after the fall of the Berlin Wall. But he rules out economic exploitation as a cause of those failures! “Neither colonialism nor dependency has much credibility today,” as an explanation for poverty in Third World countries, he writes. He also finds racial discrimination an equally unconvincing explanation for “underachievement” of African-Americans. Apparently, in Harrison’s view, all the development assistance required has been provided nationally and internationally over the last decades.

Can it really be that Harrison is unaware of the way in which the international bankers’ cartel has blackballed African and other nations, and absolutely denied them credit for real economic development? Is he unaware of the growth of cartels, and the international financiers that set the terms of trade? That cannot be. Yet, Harrison brushes aside the economic relations of the real world, in order to assert that he subscribes to the increasingly popular school founded by Alexis de Tocqueville, Max Weber, and Edward Banfield, who all asserted that cultural values play a critical role as either facilitators or obstacles to progress.

Max Weber, of course, is the notorious author of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, written in the early 20th Century, who sought to prove that the alleged values of capitalism—primarily the desire to accumulate wealth and compete, without immediate rewards—was the critical motor force in the development of industrial society. In effect, what Weber was arguing for, was the superiority of the British System, and the Hobbesian, not Protestant, philosophy which

drove it.

As I shall report later, in a summary of the proceedings of a Book Forum in Washington, D.C., at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) on *Culture Matters*, Harrison didn’t totally get away with his crass promotion of British imperialism.

The Harvard Seminar

Twenty-two individuals participated in the Harvard symposium, and have their contributions printed in this book. They are divided into seven sections under the following titles: Culture and Economic Development; Culture and Political Development; The Anthropological Debate; Culture and Gender; Culture and American Minorities; The Asian Crisis; and, Promoting Change.

True, not every contributor followed the Huntington-Harrison thesis. Directly challenging them are Jeffrey Sachs, who argues that geography accounts for differences in development; cultural anthropologist Richard A. Shweder, who opposes all international standards of culture; and Nathan Glazer, another Harvard professor of Education and Sociology, who is reluctant to deal with culture, because of its divisive role in society. But the rest of the speakers, most of them professors in sociology or anthropology, were gung-ho, so to speak, on the main thesis.

The most striking epigones of Harrison and Huntington’s outlooks were two Ibero-Americans and one African: Mariano Grondona, a journalist from Argentina; Carlos Alberto Montaner, a journalist now operating from Spain; and Daniel Etounga-Manguelle, a Cameroonian whose profession is never identified, but who was on the World Bank’s advisory committee for Africa. Their contributions to the seminar show an infuriating, and pernicious influence.

Grondona insists that the decision for development, or non-development, lies within the society alone, and then lists 20 contrasting cultural values which he claims determine a society’s decision on this matter. I cite the most outrageous.

Under the “Value of Work,” Grondona condemns as “progress-resistant” those societies which value the intellectual, the artist, and the politician, among others, as leading citizens. Under “Importance of Utility,” he claims that grand visions deter progress. He adds that the “lesser virtues” of punctuality and tidiness, for example, are more conducive to progress than the great traditional virtues of “love, justice, courage, and magnanimity.” He then claims that “rationality” consists in a lot of small achievements, not great projects in economy or social organization.

All this amounts to, is Grondona’s saying that, in his view, economic progress is inconsistent with, and actually antagonistic to, morality. Truly, that’s a modern theory, but historically, and in the long term, amounts to a total lie.

Montaner develops the same theme, with more specific reference to attacking Ibero-American cultural values. He attacks tariffs, for example, apparently without a clue to the

role they played in building up the greatest industrial nations. He is even more explicit on the morality question, claiming, "It is a quest for social justice that condemns the poor to permanent poverty—a true case of the road to hell being paved with good intentions." (p. 61)

As for Etounga-Manguelle, he is equally rabid in arguing that "we can no longer reasonably blame the colonial powers for our condition," and in arguing that the African's concern to care for his community, is one of the major blocs to African development. In the case of Africa, where domination by raw materials cartels couldn't be more obvious, the evil of this "cultural" approach is particularly hideous. But Etounga-Manguelle, who runs the Société Africaine d'Étude, d'Exploitation et de Gestion (SADEG) (African Society for Study, Exploitation, and Management), which runs more than 50 "development" projects in West, Central, and Southern Africa, is clearly very active in spreading his outlook in high places.

Harrison Spills the Beans

Better insight into the nature of intervention being conducted by the Harvard symposium participants, and their hangers-on, was available at an Oct. 12 Book Forum held at the AEI, which this author attended. Gathered to congratulate themselves and each other on their work, were Huntington, Harrison, and a number of other "big names" in academia, including AEI economics fellow Michael Novak; Harvard Prof. Dr. Francis Fukuyama; Transparency International Vice Chairman Frank Vogel; and senior sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset. About 30 or 40 other citizens attended as well.

The individual who exposed the game was Lawrence Harrison, the second to speak on the panel assembled by AEI, under its president Christopher DeMuth. Harrison began by telling the audience about a seminar he had addressed in Ottawa, Canada the previous week, where "economic development" issues were being addressed. In the course of the discussion, a student brought up 1960s economist Sir Arthur Lewis, said Harrison, which brought to his mind a famous statement by Lewis. Sir Lewis, from the West Indies, was noted for his statement that the best empires have helped civilization, by giving their colonies better health care, education, and so forth. He cited the West Indies as a clear example. Harrison proceeded to endorse Lewis's remark, and British imperialism in general, citing the great records of the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand in terms of economic development, as another form of "proof."

The fact that the United States had broken from the British Empire was not significant in his mind.

Harrison's shameless endorsement of the British Empire, in fact, provides the clearest key to the entire concept by *Culture Matters*. The whole project insists that the Anglo-American model today, which is in fact the British free-trade and imperial system, is the model of success, and therefore

must be adopted by poor nations around the world. The fact that this model is currently collapsing, in the midst of the most dramatic financial and social crises in centuries, is blithely ignored.

Oh, at the conclusion of his remarks, Harrison did note that there have been some negative changes in culture in the United States, but this was not permitted to interfere with his overall model.

This author, in a question, congratulated Harrison for his shameless honesty, and then pointed out the fact that the current financial system is collapsing. But, there is a strong likelihood of a paradigm shift back to American System economics, similar to the shift in the United States in the 1920s, to FDR's policies of the 1930s. The professor declined to respond.

But he did have to deal with some other critics, among them Fukuyama, Novak, and Lipset. Novak, who was on the panel, complained that the Harrison-Huntington study actually left out moral questions, and that the Weberian thesis, attributing capitalist progress to Protestantism, had actually been contradicted by many examples. Lipset implicitly, although not directly, criticized the methodology being used, by noting that there had been a statistical study in Ibero-America, purporting to show that Jews were responsible for capitalist development, because everywhere Jews had settled, there was such development. Unfortunately, he noted, this correlation was absolutely *false* in terms of causality.

Also interesting was the criticism by Fukuyama, who noted that there were virtually no economists involved in the seminar. He said he thought cultural factors like those being discussed, only amounted to about 20% of the reason for economic progress, or non-progress, but was harsher when it came to the Weberian thesis. Weber is wrong, he said. He then cited a quote from Weber, who apparently said that he thought the only country less likely than China to develop economically, was Japan. Clearly, Weber did not understand Confucian culture, or the Japanese either!

If one didn't know that billions of dollars was going into trying to force the cultural shifts which Huntington and Harrison were "studying," the whole affair would not have been so disconcerting.

What Is Happening to American Culture?

Let us now turn to *the Twilight of American Culture*, by Morris Berman.

Berman's thesis is direct, and to the point: American society is in decline, headed into a New Dark Age. The markers for this process range from the domination of the culture by corporations, the hideous decline in literacy, the culture of violence, and the growing gap between the rich and the poor. Berman compares the American decline to that of other empires, specifically that of Rome.

Keep in mind that Berman is writing social criticism, not

history. His observations are often anecdotal, and his analysis of the decline of empires is not historically precise. But, as a social scientist, he is certainly a lot more truthful than those inflated “analysts” who came together in Harvard in the Spring of 1999.

What Berman doesn’t understand is the etiology of the decline. He treats it as if there had not been a life-or-death struggle between the republican and oligarchical tendency in the United States since its birth, but that the decline was more or less an organic, or natural, outgrowth of U.S. history. The roles of the assassinations in the 1960s, the rock-drug-sex counterculture, and the takeover of financial institutions by post-industrial society lunatics do not make it onto his radar screen.

This becomes particularly evident in the proposal that Berman makes for dealing with the problem. He comes up with the concept of the “New Monastic Individual,” in which an individual makes the choice of withdrawing from the dominant, dumbed-down, degraded popular culture, in order to preserve intellectual standards. The parallel, of course, is to the work which Christian monks did during the decline of the Roman Empire, where they saved manuscripts or other artifacts of learning, which were later revived during the Renaissance. Berman says that he does not recommend that people literally withdraw into private communities, as did the monks, but that they nonetheless work to preserve cultural standards within their own little worlds of activity, be they teaching, or playing music, or other such things.

One fundamental problem is that Berman does not make a distinction philosophically between the revival of culture in the Renaissance, and the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment of the 18th Century was built directly as an attempt by the world oligarchy to crush the ideas of the Renaissance, which had inspired a universal culture of progress. Exemplary is John Locke, for example, a spokesman for slavery and the British oligarchy, who promoted the social contract, rather than the universal natural law of Gottfried Leibniz, Nicholas of Cusa, and Leonardo da Vinci.

But Berman does realize that a breaking point is coming. In his concluding chapter, he says that he expects today’s culture to be replaced because of “the enormity of the Great Collapse, which will act as a wake-up call on an unprecedented scale. In addition, transnational corporations and their control and saturation of the environment will not be possible because they will be so financially devastated.” This is true at the moment of collapse, but, clearly, new *institutions* will have to be built in order to prevent what will simply be a new feudal arrangement. This, Berman does not attempt to define. He does not propose political intervention, but personal fulfillment.

The Question of Culture

The truth of the matter, is that there are two warring cultures today—that based on oligarchism, which denigrates

man’s nature, and that based on republicanism, which values every individual for his or her mind. And the political battle ongoing to determine which of these cultures succeeds, will determine the pathway of mankind’s future, for generations to come.

But this does not have to be taken as a matter of faith. An honest study of how technological progress has actually proceeded, over the history of mankind, reveals what kinds of cultures, and values, led to advancement, versus those which led to decline. The crucial case in point, is the American Revolution.

The American Revolution, and the industrial strength which it produced, is *not* a product of the so-called Protestant Ethic, although many Protestants were actually involved. No. The American Revolution is a direct descendant of the cultural revolution made by the Golden Renaissance, which promoted the values of Classical education, beauty, and statecraft, which reached their political height in the creation of United States. Not that there hasn’t always been a political battle within this country, where oligarchism has maintained its toehold, and more. But it was the Renaissance tradition, which valued and promoted man in the image of the Creator, which is provably responsible for the advances made. In this tradition, morality and economics are combined into a common search for the general welfare of the population.

Contrast the historical United States, then, with those nations which never revolted against the British Empire, or who are subject to the IMF today. Many of those nations may have had dramatic increases in Gross National Product, or strong militaries, or a calm political scene where political liberties appear to be respected, but none has ever enjoyed the level of progress for the individual, which this republic has achieved. They are all marred by such cultural problems as the caste system, or ruling oligarchies, or mass illiteracy, which reflect the fact that their people are *not* viewed as citizens made in the image of the Creator, and there are not even any institutions devoted to the concept of the general welfare.

Of course, today, the United States itself is acting to a large extent, as if it had never broken from the British imperial tradition. But, as the inevitable breakdown crisis, created by the rottenness of that system, strikes, there will come the opportunity, no, the necessity, for drastic changes. As that time comes, sane political leaders will throw away books like *Culture Matters*, and read LaRouche.

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