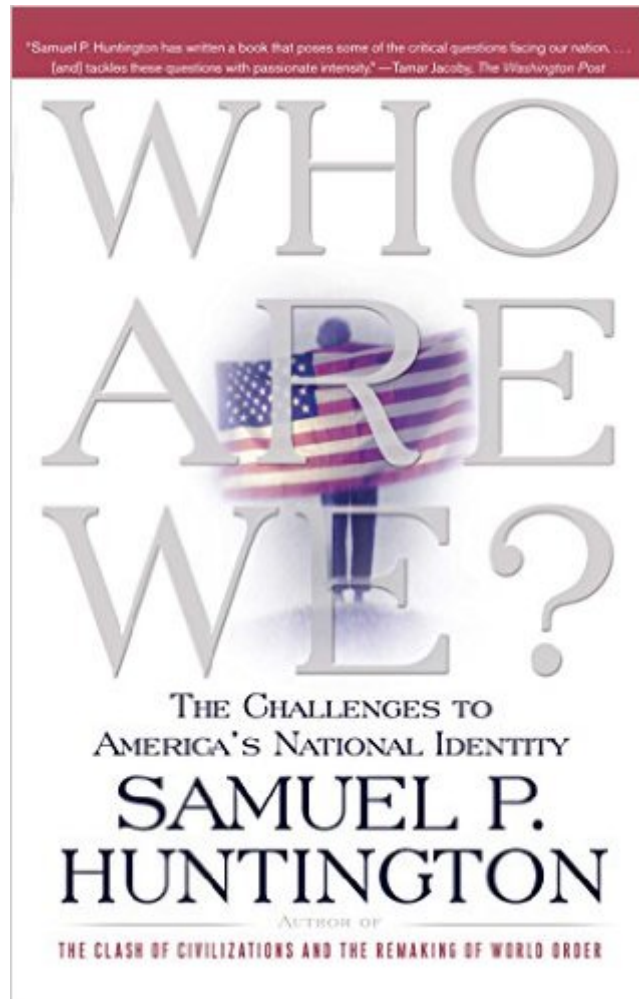


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Who Are We?: The Challenges To America's National Identity



Synopsis

In his seminal work *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Samuel Huntington argued provocatively and presciently that with the end of the cold war, "civilizations" were replacing ideologies as the new fault lines in international politics. Now in his controversial new work, *Who Are We?*, Huntington focuses on an identity crisis closer to home as he examines the impact other civilizations and their values are having on our own country. America was founded by British settlers who brought with them a distinct culture, says Huntington, including the English language, Protestant values, individualism, religious commitment, and respect for law. The waves of immigrants that later came to the United States gradually accepted these values and assimilated into America's Anglo-Protestant culture. More recently, however, our national identity has been eroded by the problems of assimilating massive numbers of primarily Hispanic immigrants and challenged by issues such as bilingualism, multiculturalism, the devaluation of citizenship, and the "denationalization" of American elites. September 11 brought a revival of American patriotism and a renewal of American identity, but already there are signs that this revival is fading. Huntington argues the need for us to reassert the core values that make us Americans. Timely and thought-provoking, *Who Are We?* is an important book that is certain to shape our national conversation about who we are.

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Customer Reviews

As a Hispanic American, I was a bit conflicted with Samuel P. Huntington's "Who Are We?," but I

ultimately enjoyed it. His premise is that we are now seeing a wave of immigration like none before. First in its sheer numbers, but more importantly in the fact that America has never before had so many immigrants from one non-English language and culture come at the same time. By 2050, Hispanics are projected to be the majority of the population. Huntington never says that this is a bad thing per se, but he makes a great case that immigrants today are not assimilating into American culture like they have in the past. Today they keep their language, their culture, and often their foreign citizenship as well. This is only a problem if you believe that white Anglo-Saxon protestant culture, which immigration is ostensibly eroding, is superior and at the core of American greatness. Huntington certainly seems to believe this; only time will tell if he is right. While I agree with him on so many points (bilingual education in public schools, for example, which is really education in Spanish), I'm not sure I share his general concern. We are experiencing a major demographic shift, and affirmative action does distort the American dream, but I'm not sure that future generations of Hispanic Americans will not assimilate into a (modified) American culture. I am an American first and foremost. This is the case probably because I was born and raised here. But Spanish was nevertheless my first language, and my folks didn't become citizens until this year. If I ever have children, they will certainly be even more American than me. Despite Huntington's copious statistics, I don't see how a future generation of immigrants' children, born and raised in the U.S.

As someone who came to the United States fresh after college in the mid-eighties, I pondered the question of my new identity and American identity in general quite often. I picked Mr. Huntington's book in the summer of 2005 and found it to be very enlightening. I find it undeniable the fact that at the origin of the success of America as a nation and a state lies her British, protestant origins. That origin set the tone of the work ethic, legal system, democratic representation. One can find further confirmation of this thesis in the splendid "The History of the American People" by British historian Paul Johnson. Samuel Huntington points out that until early sixties immigrants arriving in the USA were assisted by the government in their assimilation process. The English language instructions were easily available and no one found offensive the premise that the command of the English language was essential to fully function as an American. Since then, the "assimilation" became a bad word and government's assistance started to look like discrimination. These days, in the name of diversity and political correctness, any government program has a counter-assimilation effects. The bilingual education of Hispanics, for example, only postpones their entry into the English speaking world. Compare the fate of Hispanic youth receiving their education in Spanish with that of young children arriving from Eastern Europe, Russia or Asia. With no bilingual education available

to those kids, their successful transition into English speaking world is almost instantaneous. While discussing three major social theories, Mr. Huntington clearly makes a case for a "tomato soup with garnishings" model (with tomatoes representing anglo-protestant core values with garnishings provided by non-anglo immigrant groups).

Back in 1993, Huntington's seminal article in Foreign Affairs "The Clash of Civilizations" was prescient about the violent clash between Islam and the West. It better explained the causes of 9/11 than most books written after 9/11! Now, Huntington's focus has turned inward to the changing identity of American society. He considers that the demographic explosion of Mexicans within the U.S. is causing a Clash of Civilizations within our borders. This is not going to be a destructive clash as the one with Islam. Nevertheless, Huntington suggests it may alter the identity of the U.S. Huntington states that the U.S. identity is the result of an Anglo-Protestant culture characterized by the English language, the rule of law, work ethic, education, and upward mobility. This entails that each generation has aspired to achieve a higher standard of living. Immigrants from all over the World have adopted this Anglo-Saxon creed as their own road to success. Generations of Europeans, and Asians adopted the English language as a mean to thrive within American society. However, according to Huntington, Mexicans are different. Mexican immigration differs from past immigration due to a combination of factors, including: proximity, scale, regional concentration, and historical presence. Mexico is a large country contiguous to the U.S. with a huge population of 100 million. Mexicans infiltrate the porous U.S. border in unprecedented numbers. Thus, Mexicans dominate the influx of emigrants to the U.S. They also tend to settle in Border States. By 2050 Hispanics are projected to represent 25% of the U.S. population. Today they already account for over 32% of the population in California and Texas. Many Mexicans view their infiltration within the U.S.

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