

NATION IN SEARCH OF IDENTITY.

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Search for identity is the idea and the activity that sums up American intellectual life at present and the main streams of thought of its literature. The reports delivered at the EAAS 2006 Conference of which I was a participant and a chair of workshop 7 were a vivid proof to this thesis. My presentation comes as an endeavour to sum up and analyze the most important ideas expressed in the reports & parallel lectures of the conference.

The papers presented in my workshop "Conformism and Non-conformism in US Women's Literature of the 19th and 20th Centuries" formed a unity, from the point of view that basically, all of them were devoted to search for identity, the problem brilliantly posed in Robert Mikkelsen's report "Gaining the High Ground; Us and Them."

In the summer of 2004 Harvard Professor Samuel P. Huntington – author of the text and the term "Clash of Civilizations" – published a book in the United States entitled, *Who Are We? America's Great Debate*. In it he raises the issue of American identity in a manner that has caused a stir. Huntington put forward a single uniform cultural definition of American identity (to which we will return). In doing so, he rejected the mixture of cultural pluralism and ideological civic culture that has served as the dominant definition of American nationhood for the last five decades. In putting forward his case, he not only implicitly claims the right to set such a uniform cultural norm; he also implicitly divided the nation into those who fulfill the requirements of this standard – us - and those who do not - them. This he has done in the name of a re-ignited patriotism and national unity in the post-9/11 world. His stated object is to "find meaning and virtue in America's past and in its possible future." He seeks a revitalized and unified America.

Yet it may be asked if such a definition of America is the best way to unify the nation it seeks to define and defend, either at home or abroad. As leading demographer Charles Keely once remarked, "Without the *pluribus* and an environment that allows plurality to flourish, there is no *unum* in America...Nothing will destroy the unity of America as completely as uniformity imposed by some of us on all of us." And so the lines are drawn.

For my part, as a liberal, transnational, cosmopolitan, academic Democrat living abroad, I find his views both abhorrent and inaccurate, as I am certain do many of my academic colleagues here today. Draping oneself in the flag is not an argument, it is a populist tactic. The contention that it is unpatriotic to view the United States as a culturally pluralistic nation made up of a variety of ethnic groups held together by a common civic

culture and ideology is frankly flabbergasting. Nor do I subscribe to the “Clash of Civilizations” viewpoint of America’s position in international relations. Like Rector I believe that the interaction of cultures may be to their mutual advantage and profit – and that this is true both *within* multicultural societies as well as *between* societies and nations with different cultures.

However, I believe it would be a mistake to simply dismiss Huntington as a crank. The viewpoint he represents is a real and historically rooted one. Though I do not expect it to become a popular one – 16 % of the population do not make up a quorum – I believe we may well see a further withdrawal of American support for international engagement of the heels of failure to secure peace and stable government in Iran. Fear of the world may lend his views more support. This could leave the door open to those who might (to mix metaphors) wish to shut it on the world. We shall see.

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