

American culture and politics

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This research looks at American Culture and Politics since there is so much in American history and culture. The proposal paper contains some of the findings about the American politics and culture. This paper can help scholars who want to have a wide knowledge about American politics and culture and how they influence each other. The primary research sources that will be used include: Questionnaire and Interview. Secondary sources include: published textbooks, and published statistics. INTRODUCTION

To begin with, American conservatives claim that the Left, from its parapets of power in Hollywood, the universities, the national media, the federal courts, and the National Endowment for the Arts, has waged, for decades, a "culture war" upon the American people — a war that the people have been losing. The conservatives' complaint is commonly put this way: the Left has set out to "politicize" American culture, to force it to conform to a new orthodoxy of political correctness in everything from homosexual marriage to pronoun usage (Kesler, 1998).

The conservatives' point is that culture should be above, or at least separated from, the political order; that civil society — the realm of art, religion, family, and private property — should be protected, for the sake of liberty as well as culture, against political encroachments. Instead of politics trying tyrannically or arbitrarily to create culture, politics should devote itself to conserving culture (Combs, 1991). According to Goodnow politics had to do with the policies or expressions of the state will (Parashar, 1997).

Thus in the conservative view, politics should grow out of culture and serve culture, not the other way around. Scholars and activist on the left should take warning: What once political movements have become translated into

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personal quests for fulfillment (Cloud, 1998). But at this point one sees that there are actually two conservative views of culture. They differ on the question of what it means to "conserve" culture: Does it mean to keep government's hands off it, to be neutral towards culture and allow it to develop however artists and citizens choose?

Or does it mean a hands-on approach, an active promotion of "traditional American values" against their would-be subverters in and out of government? Hands-off is the preference both of libertarians, who tend to take a democratic and laissez faire attitude towards culture, and of those neo-conservatives who defend high culture against the public's attempts to influence it (Josephson, 2007). The hands-on approach is preferred by the so-called Religious Right, by most who refer to themselves as "cultural conservatives" or traditionalists, and by many neo-conservatives who are repelled by the prospect of American society's utter de-moralization.

Even conservatives who are prepared to use government to shore up American culture, however, typically reject the notion that they are "politicizing" the culture (Whitfield, 1996). They argue that they are only using politics to get beyond politics — that is, to overcome the culture's artificial or forced politicization. White Southerners, used to a friendly custodial environment, were confronting a more diverse and secular American culture (Marsden, 2006).

Seizing upon this contradiction or ambiguity, the Left today charges that conservatives are prepared, when they are prepared, to take a laissez faire attitude towards culture only because theirs — the white male bourgeois culture — is the dominant one. When its hegemony is challenged, liberal

critics note, as it is being challenged currently, then conservatives cease to be defenders of a hands-off cultural policy and quickly become advocates of cultural protectionism (Wald, & Calhoun-brown, 2006).

Yet in challenging the supposed hegemony of patriarchal or conservative culture, most liberal intellectuals do not imagine themselves to be calling for the hegemony of their own culture. Today's liberals stand for "multiculturalism," for the replacement of ruling-class culture by the multiplicity of cultures belonging to oppressed, or formerly oppressed, classes and groups. In the past, white males had used their culture to justify and reinforce their rule over the rest of society; it was white males who "politicized" culture, according to the multiculturalists (Sturm, 2002).

Now, the rest of society — indeed, the world — can bring previously excluded cultures to bear in order to delegitimize the old "racist, sexist, homophobic" order and ordain a new, more inclusive one (Roper, 2002). From the standpoint of traditionalist conservatism, every society or people are defined by its culture, and therefore every culture is more or less an exclusive one (Neve, 1992). In John O'Sullivan's words, "A multicultural society is a contradiction in terms and cannot survive indefinitely.

It either becomes monocultural or runs into trouble. " 1 At this juncture, we urgently need some clarity on the meaning of " culture. " Becoming American was initially a political and constitutional choice, but finally it necessitated a series of profound transformations in business, speech, dress, religion, literature, education, heroes, holidays, civic ceremonies — in character (Bergmann & Seminar onFeminismand Culture in Latin America, 1990).

The public schools movement was one of the most important, as well as one of the most obvious, of these subsequent efforts to conform the American people to their new republican institutions. It is an old political observation, echoed in Montesquieu and countless other writers, that in the beginning men make the institutions, and after that the institutions make the men. The American founders had this maxim very much in mind as they built the institutions that would guide the nation's destiny, and today it is worth pondering anew.

Perhaps it is time to build some new institutions, if we are to have a real chance to rehabilitate American culture. During a relatively brief period of time the first food industry has helped to transform not only the American diet, but also our landscape, economy, workforce, and popular culture (Schlosser, 2001) as a kind of growth: a culture is a living social organism that has particular ethnic "roots" and develops from those roots, often flowering into unique, that is, characteristic achievements of high art.

To understand a culture means therefore to appreciate it in its particularity, to see it as a unique historical growth — not as a mere exemplum of a common and unchanging human nature, much less as an imperfect embodiment of the best political or social order. Reason has little to do with culture in this sense, therefore, because the modern concept of culture emphasizes the ethnic, the particular, the authentic at the expense of the universal; whereas reason strives, even in practical affairs, to see particulars in the light of universals.

An authentic culture is natural in the sense of being an uncoerced growth, not in the sense of containing universal principles that can be grasped and

perhaps manipulated by reason (Tomsich, 1971). Accordingly, an authentic culture cannot be designed or planned because it cannot be thought through; it is always in the process of slow change or adaptation.

Ever since Edmund Burke, whose defense of the British Constitution became the model for the Right's thinking on the cultural roots of politics in general, conservatives have argued that culture is neither a goal that politicians can seek to achieve nor a product that they can make — let alone export.

SUMMARY Oddly enough, the multiculturalists agree with the traditionalists on the primacy of culture over politics, and to some extent even on the definition of culture.

What the multiculturalists insist on, however, is that culture does not have to be exclusive, or more precisely, that Americans can participate in many cultures without succumbing to any one of them and without ceasing to be American. But this is to pile absurdity upon absurdity. References Bergmann, E. L. & Seminar on Feminism and Culture in Latin America. (1990). Women, culture, and politics in Latin America. California: University of California Press. Cloud, D. L. (1998). Control and consolation in American culture and politics: rhetoric of therapy.

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