

## Culture Wars: Myth or Reality?

David Eaton  
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Does the “Culture War” actually exist or is it purely a myth?

In the aftermath of the 2004 presidential election, Morris P. Fiorina of the Hoover Institution published *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*, in which he contends the idea of America being a “deeply divided” nation is specious.

Offering copious data, he claims a high percentage of Americans possess moderate viewpoints regarding social issues and politics, and we are not as “deeply divided” as those on the fringes of the political spectrum (or the news media) would have us believe.

Yet, the divisiveness that has become so pervasive in our culture indicates that our country is, in fact, highly polarized.

According to Fiorina, these fringe elements tend to confer with coteries who reinforce their particular perspectives and do not represent the large, moderate and politically ambivalent demographic that seeks pragmatic solutions to problems.



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This is a countervailing argument to that of Pat Buchanan who has long held America is under siege due to the encroachment of non-traditional religious (or *contra*-religious) influences and not-so-well intentioned multiculturalists who see little or no value in the Western tradition. For Buchanan, nothing less than the soul of America is at stake.

Fiorina admits, perhaps unwittingly, that there is something to Buchanan’s claim when he states:

“The culture war metaphor refers to a displacement of the classic economic conflicts that animated twentieth-century politics in the advanced democracies by newly emergent moral and cultural ones. Even mainstream media commentators saw a “national fissure” that “remains deep and wide,” and “Two

Nations under God.”... [M]any contemporary observers of American politics believe that old disagreements about economics now pale in comparison to new divisions based on sexuality, morality and religion, divisions so deep as to justify fears of violence and talk of war in describing them.”

By admitting cultural concerns have displaced what heretofore had been conflicts born of economic concerns, Fiorina seems to be conceding that the “culture war” is more than just a metaphor.

My contention is that cultural Marxism, the ideology behind the evisceration of Western values, is not merely an invention of paranoid religionists, but a real threat to the best of the West.

Buchanan’s apocalyptic prognosis may be seen as expressions of paranoia and hyperbole (even racism), but few would argue that in the second half of the last century, we witnessed the kind of social and cultural upheavals that give credence to the idea that the polarization we now witness is quite severe.

Fiorina based much of his data on the American political environment during the 2002 midterm and 2004 presidential elections. Though the Red State/Blue State paradigm has become a common way to portray the political divide that now exists in the United States, it remains a generalization that does little to explain how and why political and cultural fault lines have developed to the degree they have. He concedes as a nation we are “more purple” than red or blue and making across-the-board generalizations may not be helpful in accurately assessing our current cultural dichotomy. He correctly asserts that party operatives and insiders are more entrenched and strident in their opinions than Joe the plumber.

Culture warriors of any stripe are generally more zealous and intensely opinionated than the citizenry at large. Fiorina doesn’t argue that political operatives are not heavily engaged in influencing the public, nor does he put forth any solutions with regard to the pervasive influence pedaling rampant in contemporary culture — whether perpetrated by politicians, clergy, activists, entertainers, or the media. Citing “novelty and negativity” as features that enhance news value, he views the media as being an accelerant of inflammatory rhetoric because vociferous exhortations and denunciations from partisans produce a sense

of conflict, which makes for juicy sound bites and revenue-generating copy — and justification for the term “fake news.”

In spite of the data, Fiorina’s assertions do not take into account how “friendly fire” in various cultural skirmishes affects the general welfare of the nation. It’s one thing to contend that by and large Americans are not caught up in culture wars on a daily basis to the same degree as political elites, but it’s quite another to suggest that the battles don’t exist, or, if they are being fought on the periphery by partisans, that the effects of those battles don’t impact our social condition in significant ways.

The passing of the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare), for instance, was championed and/or denounced by partisans on both sides of the debate, but the law affects almost every citizen one way or another. The bifurcation has become especially fractious between religionists and secularists. Fiorina’s statistics may indicate that the chasm is primarily politically driven, but evidence has mounted since 2004 that those “newly emergent moral and cultural” concerns play heavily into the psyche of a larger demographic.

Alan Abramowitz’s 2010 book, *The Disappearing Center: Engaged Citizens, Polarization, and American Democracy*, and Marc Hetherington and Jonathan Weiler’s *Authoritarianism and Polarization in American Politics* (2009), offer more countervailing evidence to Fiorina’s contentions.

Abramowitz’s well-researched findings indicate the partisan political divide that simmers in the political arena reflects a more significant division, one that goes beyond the common contention that only political elites and their acolytes are caught up the fray. Hetherington and Weiler offer an insightful view that a significant underlying factor in the battle for the hearts and minds of the populace is the degree of structured “authoritarianism” we want in our lives. Questions about “who controls who and what,” and under what ideological rubric are never far from the surface when social, political and cultural debates occur.

For Hetherington and Weiler, this cultural and ideological dichotomy “is not between two groups with the same psychological disposition who merely disagree” but are “animated by fundamentally different dispositions” and “dramatically different worldviews.” Abramowitz, Hetherington and Weiler all contend those worldviews are increasingly connected to the issue of morality, and as a result, the issue of religion becomes ever more vexatious. The palpable alignment of political parties in the United States with either religionists or secularists makes it difficult to refute this particular contention, and Fiorina acknowledges there is nothing new about “cultural conflict” vis-à-vis the role of religion in the United States.

In what has become a rather heavy assault on religion and “conservative” dogma, merely labeling someone or a particular idea that is antipodal to a liberal, egalitarian worldview as being “fascist” now passes as a viable critique. This has become a common defense mechanism for the purveyors of cultural Marxism and PC-based multiculturalists, and one that is decidedly illiberal. As British journalist Melanie Phillips observes, the current iteration of culture wars and the subsequent “unraveling of the Enlightenment” is the result of the spurious rationale “that reason can exist detached from the civilization that gave it birth...the fundamental error of thinking that to be ‘enlightened’ necessarily entails a repudiation of religion.”

Hetherington and Weiler also cite the metaphorical social theories of University of California at Berkeley linguistics professor, George Lakoff, who posits that conservatism is the progeny of what he terms “the strict father” model, while the liberal view is the progeny of a “nurturant parent model.” For Lakoff, a proponent of the Rockridge Institute, a progressive think tank that assists liberal politicians, the “strict father” is preoccupied with tradition, hierarchical order and structure, whereas the “nurturant parent” is concerned with well-being compassion, justice and equality. Lakoff contends that both views have value but acknowledges that the proponents of these seemingly antipodal outlooks see each other as being threats to their respective agendas.

The opprobrium of the combatants on both sides extends beyond news bites and strident op-ed pieces, and according to Hetherington and Weiler, these opposing views “go far beyond disagreements over policy choices and even ideology, to conflict about core self-understandings of what it means to be a good person and to the basis of a good society.”

What we deem to be worthy of our concerns has both a subjective/emotional aspect as well as an objective/intellectual aspect. Yet judgment of any kind has come to be seen as a manifestation of the “strict father” authoritarian model and out of step with progressivism — and decidedly anti-egalitarian — when it can easily be argued that having both authoritarian and nurturing attributes are not mutually exclusive in the development of a more humane society. As *Divine Principle* posits, this is not an either/or proposition, for both are in accord with concepts of the Three Blessings, polarity and the Four Position Foundation.

Traditionally, religion has acted as the proverbial “moral compass” in the process of achieving a moral

and ethical society/culture in which love and trust were intrinsic to everything — family, community, business, education, arts, media, economics, etc. Judeo-Christian theology instructs that at some point in history there was a deviation away from God and godly behavior, thus restoring the lost ideal by making our way back to “the Garden” became the essential trial for humankind to free itself from the bondage of sin and spiritual darkness. Compromising or violating those foundational elements would be seen as a violation against the common good of the community at large. Hence, judgment enters the equation..



*The CAUSA International Lecture Manual, published in 1985.*

As philosopher Roger Scruton observes, judgment is implicit in any faith-based community because once ideals and tenets are firmly in place, there is expectation that good citizens of the community will abide by them in order to realize the “ethical vision.” For the religious person there is an understanding that judgment is our destiny — something we will all face when we ascend to the next realm. This concept is deeply rooted in the Judeo-Christian psyche, and though we may live our lives with the intention of doing what is morally and ethically correct, how we behave in relation to others is the ultimate measure of our contributing to an ethical society (not to mention where we may find ourselves in the next world).

T. S. Eliot believed that the interface between religion and community “cannot be finally divorced from one another” and that religion, poetry and education could foster collaborative efforts towards establishing a more humane society. As the apostle James put it, “faith without works is dead.” The Unitarian Universalists echo that sentiment when they say, “More

important than the creed is the deed.”

There are those in the Unification movement who argue that any discussion regarding the “culture war” is tired, old, Cold War rhetoric — a shopworn myth that needs to be dismissed as inconsequential in the pursuit of our vision of a culture of peace. Obviously, I’m not convinced of that particular assessment.

Given the presence of cultural Marxism in our society, I advocate for a CAUSA-type initiative to educate and elucidate both our members and the public to the pernicious effects of this fallacious ideology in much the same way our movement did in North and South America in the 1980s.

Education is paramount because it is perilous to ignore the reality of the “culture war” raging before us. Merely “coexisting” will not bring us to the point of reconciliation. Being engaged in the process of creating a culture of peace requires being proactive in promoting the God-centered virtue and values as defined in Divine Principle.

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*David Eaton has been Music Director of the New York City Symphony since 1985. In addition to his conducting career, he has been an active composer, arranger and producer with 55 original compositions and over 700 arrangements and transcriptions to his credit. One of his recent compositions, “70 and Counting!”, was performed at the United Nations as part of its 70th Anniversary concert in 2015. In 2016, he was awarded an honorary doctorate by UTS.*