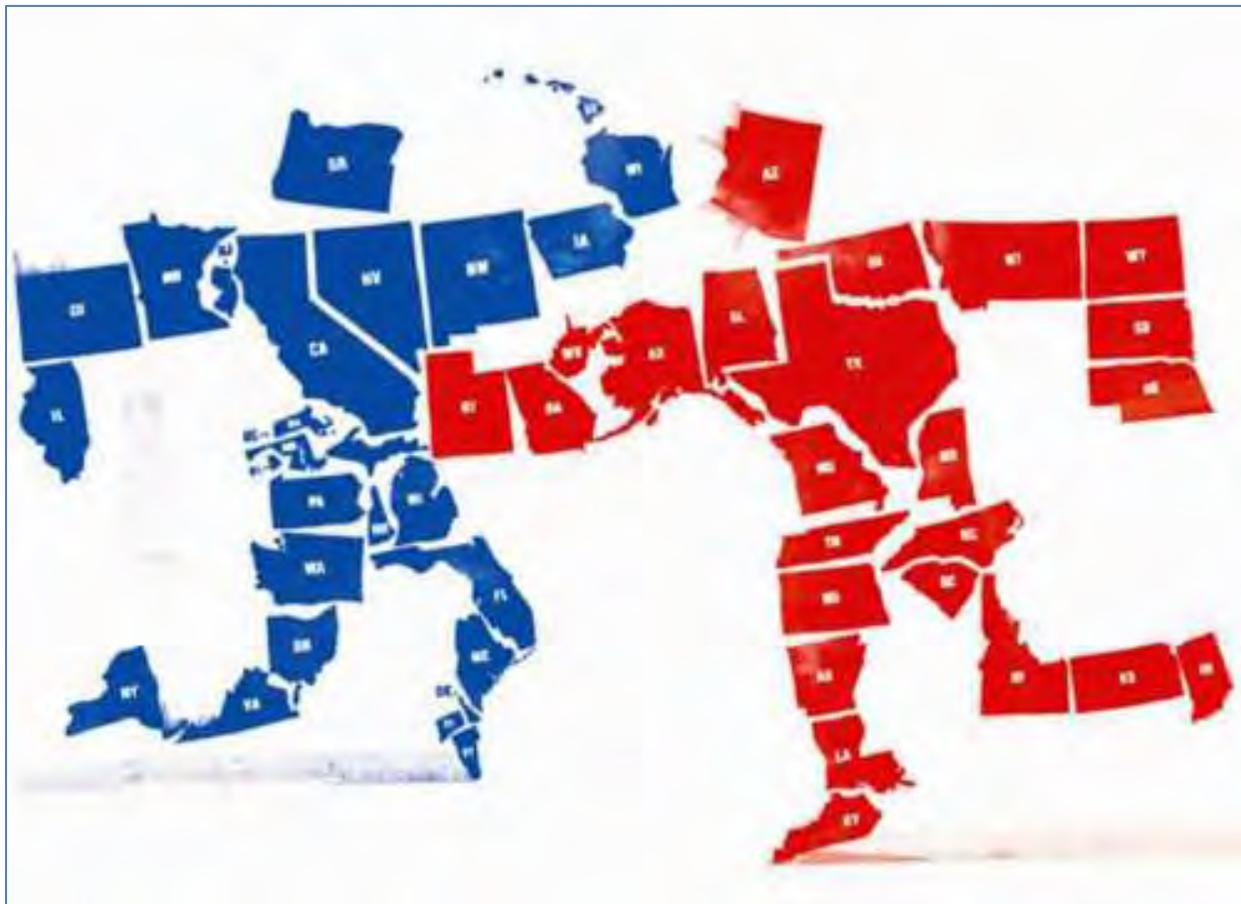


Cultural Wars and Heading Alternatives

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 Stanford University and the Hoover Institution, published his book, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*, in which he contends that the idea of America being a “deeply divided” nation is a specious claim. Offering copious data, Fiorina makes the case that a high percentage of Americans possess moderate viewpoints regarding social issues and politics, and as such, we are not as “deeply divided” as those on the fringes of the political/cultural spectrum (or news media) would have us believe. According to Fiorina, these fringe elements tend to confer with coterie who reinforce their particular perspectives and as such, do not represent the large, moderate and politically ambivalent demographic that seeks pragmatic solutions to problems.



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This is a counter to the views of Pat Buchanan and others who have long held that America is under siege due to the encroachment of non-traditional religious (or anti-religious) influences and not-so-well intentioned multiculturalists. For Buchanan, nothing less than the soul of America is at stake. That said, Fiorina admits that there is something to the “newly emergent” idea of “Two Nations Under God.” He writes:

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... [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 characterizing the idea of a culture war as a “myth,” while admitting that cultural concerns have displaced what heretofore had been conflicts born of economic concerns, is Professor Fiorina conceding that the “culture war” is more than just a metaphor?

In spite of the data, his assertions do not take into account how “friendly fire” in the culture war affects the general welfare of the nation. It’s one thing to contend that most Americans are not caught up in culture wars to the same degree as political elites, but it’s quite another to suggest that culture wars 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, for instance, has been championed and/or denounced by the partisans on both sides of the debate, but the law will affect just about every citizen in one way or another –positively and/or negatively.

Alan Abramowitz’s book, *The Disappearing Center*, and Marc Hetherington and Jonathan Weiler’s book, *Authoritarianism and Polarization in American Politics*, offer countervailing evidence to Fiorina’s contentions. Abramowitz’s findings indicate the partisan political divide that simmers in the political arena reflects a more significant dichotomy, one that goes beyond the common contention that only political elites and their acolytes are caught up the fray. Hetherington and Weiler offer a perspicacious view that a significant underlying factor in the battle for the hearts and minds of the populace is the degree of structured “authoritarianism” that 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.

The framers of the American Constitution sought to put limits on the power of government, but over time those limits have been eroded and herein lies the basis for the contentious debates about control and authority. 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 contend that 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. It is not merely a myth, and even Fiorina acknowledges that 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 some idea that is antipodal to a liberal, egalitarian worldview as being “fascist,” now passes as a viable critique. Moreover, on one hand the progressives denounce authoritarian control as being fascist, all the while extolling the virtues of bigger and more intrusive government. In fact, progressives seek government control so long as it is in accord with their vision as opposed to a conservative vision.

Hetherington and Weiler cite the metaphorical social theories of University of California, Berkeley professor of linguistics, 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 concedes 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 of the debate 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.” (emphasis added).

Debates about values and appropriateness have long been rooted in moral and ethical perspectives — axiology. What we deem to be worthy of our concerns has both a subjective (emotional) aspect and well as an objective (intellectual) aspect, yet judgment in any form 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. It’s not an either/or proposition, for both can be beneficial in various contexts.

The Unificationist tenet of the two-parent family as the cornerstone of a culture of peace promotes the importance of both fatherly and motherly expressions of love and guidance being in the family modality. Ontologically, this is in accord with the polarity paradigm as articulated in the Principle of Creation. Finding value in both the conservative and liberal perspectives should be our aim. The beauty, truth and goodness ideal as explained in *The Exposition of the Divine Principle* requires that these three attributes need to be working concomitantly in order for the highest expression of love to be realized. Without a firm understanding of what constitutes godly values, even something as virtuous as compassion can be misconstrued.

Compassion, a hallmark of liberal orthodoxy, is often in short supply when dealing with those whose needs are real and severe. Being empathetic to the plight of “the other” requires sensitive speaking and painful listening. Talking past one another is not the way to strengthen relationships, familial or otherwise. Yet compassion, without the requisite understanding of values, tradition and our cultural patrimony (inheritance) often leads to the erosion, or misreading, of the very principles needed to foster godliness and altruism.

“Headwing” thought is a decidedly Unificationist concept. Though it may yet be a neologism, finding value in “the other,” be it in the family, or in the Oriental-Occidental equation, or in the generational gap, or in the political, religious and cultural spheres, requires a sincere and informed examination of values and motivations if our pursuit of peace is going to get beyond the existing “culture wars” and to a place where these conflicts and antagonisms can be finally ameliorated.

Relegating the culture war to a fictive invention, as Fiorina suggests, makes it easy to dismiss as a spurious, inconsequential issue. However, a deeper review of the 20th century reveals that the “emergent moral and cultural” divide is neither mythic nor metaphoric. 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 20th century, we witnessed cultural convolutions that would have been unthinkable a few decades earlier. Finding solutions to our malaise requires finding common ground and working in a symbiotic fashion in order to ascertain the values that can provide remedies to our problems. This is the essence of “Headwing” thought. Seeking the best of all worlds holds the best hope for creating a culture of peace.

David Eaton is Lecturer in Music and Culture at Barrytown College of UTS. He 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 47 original compositions and over 600 arrangements and transcriptions to his credit.