

# Edward Said: The Myth of the Clash of Civilizations

This is the first part of [Edward Said](#)'s lecture on Samuel Huntington's essay and book on the "Clash of Civilizations," at the University of Massachusetts in 1996.

Edward Said was a Palestinian-American academic, writer and advocate for Palestinian rights, while Samuel Huntington's 'Clash of Civilizations' theory which suggest people's cultural and religious identities will be the primary source of conflict in future.

The transcript is from [the Media Education Forum website](#).

Edward Said:

Thank you very much. I'm going to start, in fact, talk throughout about an essay and a book written by Samuel Huntington entitled The Clash of Civilizations. When it first appeared in 1993 in the journal Foreign Affairs, it had a question mark after it and it announced in it's first sentence that world politics is entering a new phase. Three years later Huntington expanded the essay, some would say bloated it, to the size of a book without a question mark. The new book which was published last year, entitled The Clash of Civilizations and the Emerging World Order. My premise is that the essay is better than the book. I mean it got worse the more he added to it. So I'll concentrate most of my attention on the essay but make some comments about the book as we go along.

Now, what Huntington meant when he said that world politics was entering a new phase was that whereas in the recent past world conflicts had been between ideological camps, grouping the first, second and third worlds into warring entities, the new style of politics which he discerned would entail

conflicts between different and presumably clashing civilizations. I quote him, "The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics." Later he explains how it is that the principal clash will be between Western and non Western civilization, but he spends most of his time in the two works, discussing the disagreements, potential or actual, between what he calls the West on the one hand, and on the other, Islamic and Confucian civilizations. In terms of detail, a great deal more attention, hostile attention, is paid to Islam than to any other civilization including the West. In much of the tremendous interest subsequently taken in Huntington's essay, I think derives from its timing rather than exclusively from what it says.

As he himself notes, there have been several intellectual and political attempts since the end of the Cold War to map the emerging world situation, and this includes Francis Fukuyama's thesis on the end of history, which nobody talks about, so the end of Fukuyama really. (laughter) And the thesis put about during the latter days of the Bush Administration, the theory of the so-called New World Order. But, there have been more serious attempts to deal with the coming millennium in works by Paul Kennedy for example, Eric Hobsbawm, less interesting and more rabid Conor Cruise O'Brien, Robert Kaplan and a book that's apparently making the rounds in campuses on Jihad vs. McWorld by Benjamin Barber. All these books have looked at the coming millennium with considerable attention to the causes of future conflict, which has given them all, I think justly, cause for alarm.

The core of Huntington's vision, which is not really original with him, is the idea of an unceasing clash, a concept of conflict, which slides somewhat effortlessly into the political space vacated by the unremitting war of ideas and values embodied in the unregretted Cold War of which of

course, Huntington, was a great theorist. I don't think therefore it's inaccurate to suggest that what Huntington's providing in his work, especially since it's primarily addressed to influential opinion and policy makers, is in fact a recycled version of the Cold War thesis that conflicts in today's and tomorrow's world will remain not economic or social in essence but ideological. And if that is so, one ideology, the West, is the still point or the locus, around which for Huntington all other civilizations turn. In effect then, the Cold War continues, but this time on many fronts, with many more serious and basic systems of values and ideas like Islam and Confucianism struggling for ascendancy and even dominance over the West. Not surprisingly, therefore, Huntington concludes his essay with a brief survey, not only his essay but his book as well, with a survey of what it is that the West must do to remain strong and keep it's opponents weak and divided.

He says, "The West must exploit differences and conflicts among Confucian and Islamic states to support in other civilizations groups sympathetic to Western values and interests. To strengthen international institutions that reflect and legitimate western interests and values, and to promote the involvement of nonwestern states in those institutions." And that's a very interventionist and quite aggressive attitude towards other civilizations to get them to be more western. So strong and insistent is Huntington's notion that other civilizations necessarily clash with the West and so relentlessly aggressive and chauvinistic is his prescription for what the West must do to continue winning, so that the reader is forced to conclude that he's really most interested in continuing and expanding the Cold War by other means, rather than advancing ideas that might help us to understand the current world scene or ideas that would try to reconcile between cultures.

Not only will conflict continue, but he says, the conflict

between civilizations will be the latest phase in the evolution of conflict in the modern world. It's as a very brief and rather crudely articulated manual in the art of maintaining a wartime status in the minds of Americans and others, that Huntington's work has to be now understood. I go so far as saying that it argues from the standpoint of Pentagon planners and Defense industry executives, who may have temporarily lost their occupations after the end of the Cold War but have now discovered a new vocation for themselves. But perhaps because Huntington is more interested in policy prescriptions than he is either in history or careful analysis of cultures, Huntington in my opinion is quite misleading in what he says and how he puts things. A great deal of his argument, first of all, depends on second and third hand opinion that scants the enormous advances in our concrete understanding and theoretical understanding of how cultures work. How they change, and how they can best be grasped or apprehended.

A brief look at the people and opinions he quotes suggests that journalism and popular demagoguery are his main sources rather than serious scholarship or theory. When you draw on tendentious publicists and scholars, you already prejudice the argument in favor of conflict and polemic rather than in favor of true understanding and the kind of cooperation between peoples that our planet needs.

Huntington's authorities are not the cultures themselves but a small handful authorities picked by him, because, in fact, they emphasize the latent bellicosity in one or another statement by one or another so-called spokesperson for or about that culture. The giveaway for me is the title of his book and his essay, *The Clash of Civilizations*. Which is not his phrase but Bernard Lewis's. On the last page of Lewis's essay titled, *The Roots of Muslim Rage*, which appeared in the September 1990 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*, Lewis speaks about the current problem with the Islamic world, I quote:

(this is incredible stuff.) "It should by now be clear," Lewis says, "that we are facing a mood and movement in Islam far transcending the level of issues and policies and the governments that pursue them. This is no less than a clash of civilizations. The perhaps irrational, but surely historic receptions of an ancient rival against our" (whenever you hear the word our, you want to head for the exit) "Judeo Christian heritage, our secular present and the world-wide expansion of both. It is crucially important that we on our side should not be provoked into an equally historic but also equally irrational reaction against that rival." In other words we shouldn't be as crazy as they are. And, of course Lewis is very much listened too at the Council of Foreign Relations, the New Yorker Review of Books and so and so forth. But few people today with any sense would want to volunteer such sweeping characterizations as the one's advanced by Lewis about a billion Muslims scattered through five continents, dozens of differing languages and traditions and histories. Of them all, Lewis says that they all are enraged at western modernity. As if a billion people were really only one person and western civilization was no more complicated a matter than a simple declarative sentence.

But what I do want to stress is first of all how Huntington has picked up from Lewis, in the classic kind of Orientalist gesture, the notion that civilizations are monolithic and homogeneous and second how, again from Lewis, he assumes the unchanging character of the duality between us and them. In other words, I think it's absolutely imperative to stress that like Lewis, Huntington doesn't write neutral, descriptive and objective prose, but is himself a polemicist whose rhetoric not only depends heavily on prior arguments about a war (inaudible) but in effect perpetuates them. Far from being an arbiter between civilizations, which is what he suggests he might be doing, Huntington is a partisan, advocate of one civilization over all the others. Like Lewis, Huntington defines Islamic civilization reductively, as if what most

matters about it is it supposed anti-Westernism. I mean it doesn't matter to him that Muslims have other things to do than to think about the West with hatred. But you get the impression that that's all they are thinking about is how to destroy the West, bomb it and destroy the whole world really

For his part, Lewis tries to give a set of reasons for his definition that Islam has never modernized, that it never separated between Church and State, that it's incapable of understanding other civilization, all of them complete untruths. I mean, of course the Arabs, Muslims have traveled well before the Europeans in the East, in Africa, and in Europe and were great discoverers of other civilizations well before Marco Polo and Columbus. But Huntington doesn't bother with any of this. For him Islam, Confucianism, and the other five or si

civilizations, Hindu, Japanese, Slavic, Orthodox, Latin American and African that still exist, are separate from each other and consequently potentially in a conflict, which he wants to manage, not resolve. He writes therefore as a crisis manager, not as a student of culture and civilizations, nor as a reconciler between them. At the core, and this is what has made his work strike so responsive a chord among post-Cold War policy makers, is this sense that you saw in crisis managing prose during the Vietnam War, this sense of cutting through a lot of unnecessary details. You go through masses of scholarship and huge amounts of experience and you boil all of it down to a couple of catchy easy to quote and remember ideas, which are then passed off as pragmatic, hard-headed, practical, sensible, clear.

Now I come to the more serious part of what I have to say, is this the best way to understand the world we live in? Is it wise to produce a simplified map of the world and then hand it go generals and civilian lawmakers as a prescription for first comprehending and then acting in the world? Doesn't this in effect prolong and deepen conflict? What does it do to

minimize civilizational conflict? Do we want the clash of civilizations? Doesn't it mobilize nationalist passions and therefore nationalist murderousness? Shouldn't we be asking the question, why is one doing this sort of thing? To understand or to act? To mitigate or to aggravate the likelihood of conflict?

XI'd want to begin to survey the world situation by commenting on how prevalent it has become for people to speak now in the name of large, and in my opinion, undesirably vague and manipulable abstractions like 'the West' or 'Japanese culture' or 'Slavic culture' or 'Islam' or 'Confucianism'. Labels that collapse particular religions, races and ethnicities into ideologies that are considerably more unpleasant and provocative than Gabino and Renan did 150 years ago.

Let me give a couple of examples to illustrate what I mean. The language of group identity makes a particularly strident appearance from the middle to the end of the nineteenth century as the culmination of decades of international competition between the great European and American powers for territories in Africa and Asia. In the battle for the empty spaces of Africa, the so called Dark Continent, France and Britain, Germany, Belgium, Portugal resort not only to force but to a whole slew of theories and rhetorics for justifying their plunder. Perhaps the most famous of such devices is a French notion of the civilizing mission – la mission civilisatrice – a notion underlying which is the idea that some races and cultures have a higher aim in life than others. This gives the more powerful, the more developed, the more civilized, the higher, the right to colonize others, not in the name of brute force, or plunder, both of which are standard components of the exercise, but in the name of a noble ideal.

Conrad's most famous story, *The Heart of Darkness*, is an ironic, even terrifying enactment of this thesis that as the narrator puts it, "the conquest of the Earth which mostly

means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion, a slightly flatter noses than ourselves is not a pretty thing, when you look into it too much. What redeems it, is the idea. An idea at the back of it, not a sentimental pretense but an idea, and an unselfish belief in the idea, something you can bow down before and sacrifice to.”

In response to this sort of logic two things occur. One is that competing imperial powers invent their own theory of cultural destiny in order to justify their actions abroad. Britain had such a theory, Germany had one, Belgium had one and of course in the concept of Manifest Destiny, the United States had one too. These redeeming ideas dignify the practice of competition and clash, whose real purpose as Conrad quite accurately saw, was self aggrandizement, power, conquest, treasure, and unrestrained self-pride. I'd go so far as to say that what we today call the politics or the rhetoric of identity, by which a member of one ethnic or religious or national or cultural group, puts that group at the center of the world, derives from that period of imperial competition at the end of the last century, and this in turn, provokes the concept of worlds at war that quite obviously is at the heart of Huntington's article. In the related of political economy, geography, anthropology, and historiography, the theory that each world is self enclosed, has it's own boundaries and special territory is applied to the world map, to the structure of civilizations, to the notion that each race has a special destiny, a psychology and an ethos. Renan said for example, that the Chinese race, its destiny is to serve, they are a docile people and they must serve. The Black race must be the bearers, the laborers of mankind cause they are strong in physique and can work hard, that kind of – all these ideas almost without exception are based not on the harmony but on the clash or conflict between worlds.

The second thing that happens is that the lesser people, the objects of the imperial gaze so to speak; respond by resisting



their forcible manipulation and settlement. We now know that active resistance to the white man began the moment he set foot in places like Algeria, East Africa, India and elsewhere. Later, primary resistance was succeeded by secondary resistance. The organization of political cultural movements determined to achieve independence and liberation from imperial control. At precisely the moment in the nineteenth century that among the European and American powers a rhetoric of cultural self-justification begins to be widespread, a responding rhetoric among the colonized people develops, one that speaks in terms of African or Asian or Arab or Muslim unity, independence, self-determination

In India for example, the Congress party was organized in 1880 and by the turn of the century, had convinced the Indian elite that only by supporting Indian languages, industry and commerce could political freedom come. These are ours and ours alone, runs the argument, and only by supporting our world against theirs, note the "us versus them", construction, can we finally stand on our own. One finds a similar logic at work during the Meiji period in modern Japan. Something like this rhetoric of belonging is also lodged at the heart of each independence movement, nationalism. And it achieved the result shortly after the World War II, not only of dismantling over a period of about twenty years the classical empires but of winning independence for dozens of countries thereafter. India, Indonesia, most of the Arab countries, Indochina, Algeria, Kenya, etc. all these emerged onto the world scene sometimes peacefully, sometimes as the effect of internal development as in the Japanese instance, or of ugly colonial wars and wars of national liberation.

In both a Colonial and post-Colonial contacts therefore, rhetorics of general, cultural or civilizational specificity went in two potential directions, one, a utopian line that insisted on an overall pattern of integration and harmony between all peoples, the other a line that suggested as to how

all cultures were so specific and jealous as to reject and war against all the others. Among instance of the utopian, are the language and institutions of the United Nations founded in the aftermath of World War II, and the subsequent development out of that of various attempts of world government predicated on coexistence, voluntary limitations of sovereignty, the integration of peoples and cultures harmoniously. Among the second are the theory and practice of the Cold War and more recently the idea of a clash of civilizations, which appears to be a necessity for a world of so many parts and indeed even a certainty. According to this, cultures and civilizations are basically separated from each other, that is to say the core of Islam is to be separated from everything else. The core of the West is to be separated from all the others.

I don't want to be invidious here. In the Islamic world there has been a resurgence of rhetoric and movements stressing the innate opposition between Islam and the West, just as in Africa, Europe, Asia and elsewhere movements have appeared that stress the need for excluding or exterminating, as in Bosnia, others as undesirable. White Apartheid in South Africa was such a movement as is the Zionist idea that Palestine should be for the Jews only and the Palestinians as non-Jews should have a lesser place. Afro-centricity, Islam-centricity are movements that also stress the independence and separateness of cultures.

Within each civilizational camp we will notice that there are official representatives of that culture who make themselves into its mouthpiece. Who assign themselves the role of articulating 'our' or for that matter 'their' essence. This always requires compression, reduction, exaggeration. So in the first and most immediate level then, statements about what 'our' culture is, civilization is, or ought to be, necessarily involves a contest over the definition. That's why I think it's more accurate to say that the period that we're living in is not the clash of civilizations but the clash of

definitions. Anyone who has the slightest understanding of how cultures really work, knows that defining the culture, saying what is for members of that culture, is always a major and even in undemocratic societies, an ongoing contest. There are conical authorities to be selected, regularly revised, debated, selected, dismissed. There are ideas of good and evil, belonging or not belonging, hierarchies of values to be specified, discussed, and re-discussed. Each culture moreover defines its enemies, what stands beyond it and threatens it, an other to be despised and fought against.

But, cultures are not the same. There is an official culture, a culture of priests, academics, and the state. It provides definitions of patriotism, loyalty, boundaries and what I've called belonging. It is this official culture that speaks in the name of the whole. But it's also true, and this is completely missing from the Clash of Civilization argument as we hear it in Huntington, in addition to the mainstream or official culture, there are dissenting or alternative, unorthodox, heterodox, strands that contain many antiauthoritarian themes in them that are in competition with the official culture. These can be called the counter-culture, an ensemble of practices associated with various kinds of outsiders, the poor, immigrants, artistic Bohemians, workers, rebels, artists. From the counter-culture comes the critique of authority and attacks on what is official and orthodox. No culture is understandable without some sense of this ever-present source of creative provocation from the unofficial to the official. To disregard the sense of restlessness in the West, in Islam, in Confucianism within each culture and to assume that there's complete homogeneity between culture and identity, is to miss what is vital and fertile in culture.

A couple of years ago Arthur Schlesinger wrote a book called the Disuniting of America, which is a kind of *cris de coeur* about the way in which American history, which for him is the history of Bancroft and Adams and so on, is dissolving into

something quite different. And he says that new groups in American society want the writing of history to reflect not only an America that was conceived of and ruled by Patricians and landowners, but an America in which slaves, servants, laborers and poor immigrants played an important, but as yet unacknowledged role. The narratives of such people, silenced by the great discourses whose source was Washington, the investment banks of New York, the universities of New England, and the great industrial fortunes of the middle and far west, have come to disrupt the slow progress and unruffled serenity of the official story. They ask questions, interject the experience of social unfortunates, and make the claims of lesser peoples, of women, Asian and African Americans, and various other minorities, sexual as well as ethnic.

There's a similar debate inside the Islamic world today which in the often hysterical outcry about the threat of Islam, Islamic Fundamentalism and terrorism that one encounters so often in the media, is often lost sight of completely. Like any other major world culture Islam contains within itself an astonishing variety of currents and countercurrents. I would say that it is this extremely widespread attitude of questioning and skepticism towards age-old authority that characterizes the post war world in both east and west. And it's that that Huntington cannot handle and therefore resorts to the business of this clash of cultures or class of civilizations.

To theorists of that sort, civilization identity is a stable and undisturbed thing, like a room full of furniture at the back of your house. This is extremely far from the truth, not just in the Islamic world but throughout the entire surface of the globe. To emphasize the differences between cultures is completely to ignore the literally unending debate about defining the culture or civilization within those civilizations including western ones. These debates completely undermine any idea of a fixed identity and hence the

relationships between identities. What Huntington considers to be a sort of ontological fact of political existence, to wit, the clash of civilizations. Too much attention paid to managing and clarifying the clash of cultures obliterates something else, the fact of a great and often silent exchange and dialogue between them. What culture today, whether Japanese, Arab, European, Korean, Chinese, Indian, has not had long intimate and extraordinarily rich contacts with other cultures? There is no exception to this exchange at all. Much the same is true of literature where readers for example of Garcia Marquez, Naguib Mahfuz, Kenzaburo Oe exist far beyond the national or cultural boundaries imposed by language and nation. In my own field of comparative literature, there's a commitment to the relationships between literatures as to their reconciliation and harmony despite the existence of powerful ideological and national barriers between them. And this sort of cooperative collective enterprise is what one misses in the proclamations of an undying clash between cultures. The lifelong dedication that has existed in all modern and ancient societies among scholars, artists, musicians, visionaries and prophets, to try to come to terms with the other, with that other society or culture that seems so foreign and so distant.

It seems to me that unless we emphasize and maximize a spirit of cooperation and humanistic exchange, and here I don't speak simply of uninformed delight or amateurish enthusiasm for the exotic but rather a profound existential commitment and labor on behalf of the other. Unless we do that, we are going to end up superficially and stridently banging the drum for our culture in opposition to all the others.

And we know also in another very important study of the way cultures work, the book, co-authored or co-edited by Terrence Ranger and Eric Hobsbawm, that even tradition can be invented. I mean the idea of a culture and a civilization being something that's stable and fixed is completely disproved by

this notion of how traditions can be invented, manufactured for the occasion so the traditions are really not the wonderfully stable things that we are but rather abstractions that can quite easily be created, destroyed, manipulated and so on.

As I've argued in several of my own works, in today's Europe and the United States what is described as Islam, for instance, because this is where the burden, I think of Clash of Civilizations thesis goes, what is described as Islam belongs to the discourse of Orientalism, a construction fabricated to whip up feelings of hostility and antipathy against a part of the world that happens to be of strategic importance for it's oil, it's threatening adjacency to Christianity, it's formidable history of competition with the West. Yet this is a very different thing, that what to Muslims who live within it's domain, Islam really is. There's a world of difference between Islam in Indonesia and Islam in Egypt. By the same token, the volatility of today's struggle over the meaning and definition of Islam is evident, in Egypt, where the secular powers of society are in conflict with various Islamic protest movements and reformers over the nature of Islam and in such circumstances the easiest and least accurate thing is to say, "That is the world of Islam, and see how it is all terrorists and fundamentalists and see also how different, how irrational they are, compared to us."

But the truly weakest part, and I conclude here, the weakest part of the clash of cultures and civilizations thesis is the rigid separation assumed between them despite the overwhelming evidence that today's world is, in fact, a world of mixtures, of migrations and of crossings over, of boundaries traversed. One of the major crises affecting countries like France, Britain and the U.S. has been brought about by the realization, now dawning everywhere, that no culture or society is purely one thing. Sizeable minorities, North Africans in France, the African Caribbean, and Indian

populations in Britain, Asian and African elements in this country, dispute the idea that civilization, that prided themselves on being homogeneous can continue to do so. There are no insulated cultures or civilizations. Any attempt made to separate them into the watertight compartments alleged by Huntington and his ilk does damage to their variety, their diversity, their sheer complexity of elements, their radical hybridity. The more insistent we are on the separation of the cultures, the more inaccurate we are about ourselves and about others. The notion of an exclusionary civilization is to my way of thinking an impossible one. The real question then is whether in the end we want to work for civilizations that are separate or whether we should be taking the more integrative but perhaps more difficult path which is to try to see them as making one vast hole, whose exact contours are impossible for any person to grasp, but whose certain existence we can intuit and feel and study.

XIn view of the depressing actualities around us, the presence of intercultural, interethnic conflicts, it does seem to me ostrich-like to suggest that we in Europe and the U.S. should maintain our civilization, which Huntington calls the West, by holding everyone and all the others at bay, increasing the rifts between peoples in order to prolong our dominance. That is in effect what he argues and one can quite easily understand why it is that his essay was published in Foreign Affairs and why so many policy makers have drifted toward it as allowing the U.S. to extend the mindset of the Cold War into a different time and for a new audience. Much more productive and useful is a new global mentality or consciousness that sees the dangers we face from the standpoint of the whole human race. These dangers include the pauperization of most of the globe's population, the emergence of virulent local, national, ethnic and religious sentiment as in Bosnia, Rwanda, Lebanon, Chechnya and elsewhere, the decline of literacy and onset of a new illiteracy based on electronic modes of communication, television and the new

information global superhighway, the fragmentation and threatened disappearance of the grand narratives of emancipation and enlightenment. Our most precious asset in the face of such a dire transformation of history is the emergence not of a sense of clash but a sense of community, understanding, sympathy, and hope, which is the direct opposite of what Huntington provokes.

If I may quote some lines by the great Martiniquean poet, Aime Cesaire that I used in my book *On Culture and Imperialism*, and I never tire of quoting these lines, and he speaks here for man, *l'homme* in French, but "the work of man is only just beginning and it remains to conquer all the violence entrenched in the recesses of our passion and no race possess the monopoly of beauty, of intelligence, of force, and there's a place for all at the rendezvous of victory" and what they imply, these sentiments prepare the way for dissolution of cultural barriers as a kind of blockage between cultures as well as of the pride that prevents the kind of benign globalism already to be found for instance in the environmental movement, in scientific cooperation, in the women's movement, and the universal concern for human rights, in concepts of global thought that stress community and sharing over racial, gender or class dominance. It would seem to me therefore, that efforts to return the community of civilizations to a primitive stage of narcissistic struggle, needs to be understood, not as descriptions about how in fact civilizations behave, but rather as incitements to wasteful conflict and un-edifying chauvinism and that seems to be exactly what we don't need.

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# Barack Obama: Cairo, June 2009

US President Barack Obama seeks a 'New Beginning' in his speech in Cairo, 4 June, 2009. The video and transcripts in different languages can be downloaded from [the official White House website](#).

Thank you so much. Good afternoon. I am honored to be in the timeless city of Cairo, and to be hosted by two remarkable institutions. For over a thousand years, Al-Azhar has stood as a beacon of Islamic learning; and for over a century, Cairo University has been a source of Egypt's advancement. And together, you represent the harmony between tradition and progress. I'm grateful for your hospitality, and the hospitality of the people of Egypt. And I'm also proud to carry with me the goodwill of the American people, and a greeting of peace from Muslim communities in my country: Assalaamu alaykum.

We meet at a time of great tension between the United States and Muslims around the world – tension rooted in historical forces that go beyond any current policy debate. The relationship between Islam and the West includes centuries of coexistence and cooperation, but also conflict and religious wars. More recently, tension has been fed by colonialism that denied rights and opportunities to many Muslims, and a Cold War in which Muslim-majority countries were too often treated as proxies without regard to their own aspirations. Moreover, the sweeping change brought by modernity and globalization led many Muslims to view the West as hostile to the traditions of Islam.

Violent extremists have exploited these tensions in a small

but potent minority of Muslims. The attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, and the continued efforts of these extremists to engage in violence against civilians has led some in my country to view Islam as inevitably hostile not only to America and Western countries, but also to human rights. All this has bred more fear and more mistrust.

So long as our relationship is defined by our differences, we will empower those who sow hatred rather than peace, those who promote conflict rather than the cooperation that can help all of our people achieve justice and prosperity. And this cycle of suspicion and discord must end.

I've come here to Cairo to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world, one based on mutual interest and mutual respect, and one based upon the truth that America and Islam are not exclusive and need not be in competition. Instead, they overlap, and share common principles – principles of justice and progress; tolerance and the dignity of all human beings.

I do so recognizing that change cannot happen overnight. I know there's been a lot of publicity about this speech, but no single speech can eradicate years of mistrust, nor can I answer in the time that I have this afternoon all the complex questions that brought us to this point. But I am convinced that in order to move forward, we must say openly to each other the things we hold in our hearts and that too often are said only behind closed doors. There must be a sustained effort to listen to each other; to learn from each other; to respect one another; and to seek common ground. As the Holy Quran tells us, "Be conscious of God and speak always the truth." That is what I will try to do today – to speak the truth as best I can, humbled by the task before us, and firm in my belief that the interests we share as human beings are far more powerful than the forces that drive us apart.

Now part of this conviction is rooted in my own experience.

I'm a Christian, but my father came from a Kenyan family that includes generations of Muslims. As a boy, I spent several years in Indonesia and heard the call of the azaan at the break of dawn and at the fall of dusk. As a young man, I worked in Chicago communities where many found dignity and peace in their Muslim faith.

As a student of history, I also know civilization's debt to Islam. It was Islam – at places like Al-Azhar – that carried the light of learning through so many centuries, paving the way for Europe's Renaissance and Enlightenment. It was innovation in Muslim communities – – it was innovation in Muslim communities that developed the order of algebra; our magnetic compass and tools of navigation; our mastery of pens and printing; our understanding of how disease spreads and how it can be healed. Islamic culture has given us majestic arches and soaring spires; timeless poetry and cherished music; elegant calligraphy and places of peaceful contemplation. And throughout history, Islam has demonstrated through words and deeds the possibilities of religious tolerance and racial equality.

I also know that Islam has always been a part of America's story. The first nation to recognize my country was Morocco. In signing the Treaty of Tripoli in 1796, our second President, John Adams, wrote, "The United States has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion or tranquility of Muslims." And since our founding, American Muslims have enriched the United States. They have fought in our wars, they have served in our government, they have stood for civil rights, they have started businesses, they have taught at our universities, they've excelled in our sports arenas, they've won Nobel Prizes, built our tallest building and lit the Olympic Torch. And when the first Muslim American was recently elected to Congress, he took the oath to defend our Constitution using the same Holy Quran that one of our Founding Fathers – Thomas Jefferson – kept in his personal

library.

So I have known Islam on three continents before coming to the region where it was first revealed. That experience guides my conviction that partnership between America and Islam must be based on what Islam is, not what it isn't. And I consider it part of my responsibility as President of the United States to fight against negative stereotypes of Islam wherever they appear.

But that same principle must apply to Muslim perceptions of America. Just as Muslims do not fit a crude stereotype, America is not the crude stereotype of a self-interested empire. The United States has been one of the greatest sources of progress that the world has ever known. We were born out of revolution against an empire. We were founded upon the ideal that all are created equal, and we have shed blood and struggled for centuries to give meaning to those words – within our borders, and around the world. We are shaped by every culture, drawn from every end of the Earth, and dedicated to a simple concept: E pluribus unum – “Out of many, one.”

Now, much has been made of the fact that an African American with the name Barack Hussein Obama could be elected president. But my personal story is not so unique. The dream of opportunity for all people has not come true for everyone in America, but its promise exists for all who come to our shores – and that includes nearly 7 million American Muslims in our country today who, by the way, enjoy incomes and educational levels that are higher than the American average.

Moreover, freedom in America is indivisible from the freedom to practice one's religion. That is why there is a mosque in every state in our union, and over 1,200 mosques within our borders. That's why the United States government has gone to court to protect the right of women and girls to wear the hijab and to punish those who would deny it.

So let there be no doubt: Islam is a part of America. And I believe that America holds within her the truth that regardless of race, religion or station in life, all of us share common aspirations – to live in peace and security; to get an education and to work with dignity; to love our families, our communities and our God. These things we share. This is the hope of all humanity.

Of course, recognizing our common humanity is only the beginning of our task. Words alone cannot meet the needs of our people. These needs will be met only if we act boldly in the years ahead; and if we understand that the challenges we face are shared, and our failure to meet them will hurt us all.

For we have learned from recent experience that when a financial system weakens in one country, prosperity is hurt everywhere. When a new flu infects one human being, all are at risk. When one nation pursues a nuclear weapon, the risk of nuclear attack rises for all nations. When violent extremists operate in one stretch of mountains, people are endangered across an ocean. When innocents in Bosnia and Darfur are slaughtered, that is a stain on our collective conscience. That is what it means to share this world in the 21st century. That is the responsibility we have to one another as human beings.

And this is a difficult responsibility to embrace. For human history has often been a record of nations and tribes – and, yes, religions – subjugating one another in pursuit of their own interests. Yet in this new age, such attitudes are self-defeating. Given our interdependence, any world order that elevates one nation or group of people over another will inevitably fail. So whatever we think of the past, we must not be prisoners to it. Our problems must be dealt with through partnership; our progress must be shared.

Now, that does not mean we should ignore sources of tension.

Indeed, it suggests the opposite: We must face these tensions squarely. And so in that spirit, let me speak as clearly and as plainly as I can about some specific issues that I believe we must finally confront together.

The first issue that we have to confront is violent extremism in all of its forms.

In Ankara, I made clear that America is not – and never will be – at war with Islam. We will, however, relentlessly confront violent extremists who pose a grave threat to our security – because we reject the same thing that people of all faiths reject: the killing of innocent men, women and children. And it is my first duty as president to protect the American people.

The situation in Afghanistan demonstrates America's goals, and our need to work together. Over seven years ago, the United States pursued al-Qaida and the Taliban with broad international support. We did not go by choice; we went because of necessity. I'm aware that there's still some who would question or even justify the events of 9/11. But let us be clear: Al-Qaida killed nearly 3,000 people on that day. The victims were innocent men, women and children from America and many other nations who had done nothing to harm anybody. And yet al-Qaida chose to ruthlessly murder these people, claimed credit for the attack and even now states their determination to kill on a massive scale. They have affiliates in many countries and are trying to expand their reach. These are not opinions to be debated; these are facts to be dealt with.

Now, make no mistake: We do not want to keep our troops in Afghanistan. We see no military – we seek no military bases there. It is agonizing for America to lose our young men and women. It is costly and politically difficult to continue this conflict. We would gladly bring every single one of our troops home if we could be confident that there were not violent extremists in Afghanistan, and now Pakistan, determined to

kill as many Americans as they possibly can. But that is not yet the case.

And that's why we're partnering with a coalition of 46 countries. And despite the costs involved, America's commitment will not weaken. Indeed, none of us should tolerate these extremists. They have killed in many countries. They have killed people of different faiths – but more than any other, they have killed Muslims. Their actions are irreconcilable with the rights of human beings, the progress of nations and with Islam. The Holy Quran teaches that whoever kills an innocent is as – it is as if he has killed all mankind. And the Holy Quran also says whoever saves a person, it is as if he has saved all mankind. The enduring faith of over a billion people is so much bigger than the narrow hatred of a few. Islam is not part of the problem in combating violent extremism – it is an important part of promoting peace.

Now, we also know that military power alone is not going to solve the problems in Afghanistan and Pakistan. That's why we plan to invest \$1.5 billion each year over the next five years to partner with Pakistanis to build schools and hospitals, roads and businesses, and hundreds of millions to help those who've been displaced. That's why we are providing more than \$2.8 billion to help Afghans develop their economy and deliver services that people depend on.

Let me also address the issue of Iraq. Unlike Afghanistan, Iraq was a war of choice that provoked strong differences in my country and around the world. Although I believe that the Iraqi people are ultimately better off without the tyranny of Saddam Hussein, I also believe that events in Iraq have reminded America of the need to use diplomacy and build international consensus to resolve our problems whenever possible. Indeed, we can recall the words of Thomas Jefferson, who said: "I hope that our wisdom will grow with our power, and teach us that the less we use our power, the greater it

will be.”

Today, America has a dual responsibility: to help Iraq forge a better future – and to leave Iraq to Iraqis. And I have made it clear to the Iraqi people – – I have made it clear to the Iraqi people that we pursue no bases, and no claim on their territory or resources. Iraq’s sovereignty is its own. And that’s why I ordered the removal of our combat brigades by next August. That is why we will honor our agreement with Iraq’s democratically elected government to remove combat troops from Iraqi cities by July, and to remove all of our troops from Iraq by 2012. We will help Iraq train its security forces and develop its economy. But we will support a secure and united Iraq as a partner, and never as a patron.

And finally, just as America can never tolerate violence by extremists, we must never alter or forget our principles. Nine-eleven was an enormous trauma to our country. The fear and anger that it provoked was understandable, but in some cases, it led us to act contrary to our traditions and our ideals. We are taking concrete actions to change course. I have unequivocally prohibited the use of torture by the United States, and I have ordered the prison at Guantanamo Bay closed by early next year.

So America will defend itself, respectful of the sovereignty of nations and the rule of law. And we will do so in partnership with Muslim communities which are also threatened. The sooner the extremists are isolated and unwelcome in Muslim communities, the sooner we will all be safer.

The second major source of tension that we need to discuss is the situation between Israelis, Palestinians and the Arab world.

America’s strong bonds with Israel are well known. This bond is unbreakable. It is based upon cultural and historical ties, and the recognition that the aspiration for a Jewish homeland



is rooted in a tragic history that cannot be denied.

Around the world, the Jewish people were persecuted for centuries, and anti-Semitism in Europe culminated in an unprecedented Holocaust. Tomorrow, I will visit Buchenwald, which was part of a network of camps where Jews were enslaved, tortured, shot and gassed to death by the Third Reich. Six million Jews were killed – more than the entire Jewish population of Israel today. Denying that fact is baseless, it is ignorant, and it is hateful. Threatening Israel with destruction – or repeating vile stereotypes about Jews – is deeply wrong, and only serves to evoke in the minds of Israelis this most painful of memories while preventing the peace that the people of this region deserve.

On the other hand, it is also undeniable that the Palestinian people – Muslims and Christians – have suffered in pursuit of a homeland. For more than 60 years they've endured the pain of dislocation. Many wait in refugee camps in the West Bank, Gaza and neighboring lands for a life of peace and security that they have never been able to lead. They endure the daily humiliations – large and small – that come with occupation. So let there be no doubt: The situation for the Palestinian people is intolerable. And America will not turn our backs on the legitimate Palestinian aspiration for dignity, opportunity and a state of their own.

For decades then, there has been a stalemate: two peoples with legitimate aspirations, each with a painful history that makes compromise elusive. It's easy to point fingers – for Palestinians to point to the displacement brought about by Israel's founding, and for Israelis to point to the constant hostility and attacks throughout its history from within its borders as well as beyond. But if we see this conflict only from one side or the other, then we will be blind to the truth: The only resolution is for the aspirations of both sides to be met through two states, where Israelis and Palestinians each live in peace and security.

That is in Israel's interest, Palestine's interest, America's interest and the world's interest. And that is why I intend to personally pursue this outcome with all the patience and dedication that the task requires. The obligations – the obligations that the parties have agreed to under the road map are clear. For peace to come, it is time for them – and all of us – to live up to our responsibilities.

Palestinians must abandon violence. Resistance through violence and killing is wrong, and it does not succeed. For centuries, black people in America suffered the lash of the whip as slaves and the humiliation of segregation. But it was not violence that won full and equal rights. It was a peaceful and determined insistence upon the ideals at the center of America's founding. This same story can be told by people from South Africa to South Asia; from Eastern Europe to Indonesia. It's a story with a simple truth: that violence is a dead end. It is a sign neither of courage nor power to shoot rockets at sleeping children, or to blow up old women on a bus. That's not how moral authority is claimed; that's how it is surrendered.

Now is the time for Palestinians to focus on what they can build. The Palestinian Authority must develop its capacity to govern, with institutions that serve the needs of its people. Hamas does have support among some Palestinians, but they also have to recognize they have responsibilities. To play a role in fulfilling Palestinian aspirations, to unify the Palestinian people, Hamas must put an end to violence, recognize past agreements, recognize Israel's right to exist.

At the same time, Israelis must acknowledge that just as Israel's right to exist cannot be denied, neither can Palestine's. The United States does not accept the legitimacy of continued Israeli settlements. This construction violates previous agreements and undermines efforts to achieve peace. It is time for these settlements to stop.

And Israel must also live up to its obligation to ensure that Palestinians can live and work and develop their society. Just as it devastates Palestinian families, the continuing humanitarian crisis in Gaza does not serve Israel's security; neither does the continuing lack of opportunity in the West Bank. Progress in the daily lives of the Palestinian people must be a critical part of a road to peace, and Israel must take concrete steps to enable such progress.

And finally, the Arab states must recognize that the Arab Peace Initiative was an important beginning, but not the end of their responsibilities. The Arab-Israeli conflict should no longer be used to distract the people of Arab nations from other problems. Instead, it must be a cause for action to help the Palestinian people develop the institutions that will sustain their state, to recognize Israel's legitimacy, and to choose progress over a self-defeating focus on the past.

America will align our policies with those who pursue peace, and we will say in public what we say in private to Israelis and Palestinians and Arabs. We cannot impose peace. But privately, many Muslims recognize that Israel will not go away. Likewise, many Israelis recognize the need for a Palestinian state. It is time for us to act on what everyone knows to be true.

Too many tears have been shed. Too much blood has been shed. All of us have a responsibility to work for the day when the mothers of Israelis and Palestinians can see their children grow up without fear; when the Holy Land of the three great faiths is the place of peace that God intended it to be; when Jerusalem is a secure and lasting home for Jews and Christians and Muslims, and a place for all of the children of Abraham to mingle peacefully together as in the story of Isra – – as in the story of Isra, when Moses, Jesus and Mohammed, peace be upon them, joined in prayer.

The third source of tension is our shared interest in the

rights and responsibilities of nations on nuclear weapons.

This issue has been a source of tension between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran. For many years, Iran has defined itself in part by its opposition to my country, and there is in fact a tumultuous history between us. In the middle of the Cold War, the United States played a role in the overthrow of a democratically elected Iranian government. Since the Islamic Revolution, Iran has played a role in acts of hostage-taking and violence against U.S. troops and civilians. This history is well known. Rather than remain trapped in the past, I've made it clear to Iran's leaders and people that my country is prepared to move forward. The question now is not what Iran is against, but rather what future it wants to build.

I recognize it will be hard to overcome decades of mistrust, but we will proceed with courage, rectitude and resolve. There will be many issues to discuss between our two countries, and we are willing to move forward without preconditions on the basis of mutual respect. But it is clear to all concerned that when it comes to nuclear weapons, we have reached a decisive point. This is not simply about America's interests. It's about preventing a nuclear arms race in the Middle East that could lead this region and the world down a hugely dangerous path.

I understand those who protest that some countries have weapons that others do not. No single nation should pick and choose which nation holds nuclear weapons. And that's why I strongly reaffirmed America's commitment to seek a world in which no nations hold nuclear weapons. And any nation – including Iran – should have the right to access peaceful nuclear power if it complies with its responsibilities under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. That commitment is at the core of the treaty, and it must be kept for all who fully abide by it. And I'm hopeful that all countries in the region can share in this goal.

The fourth issue that I will address is democracy.

I know – I know there has been controversy about the promotion of democracy in recent years, and much of this controversy is connected to the war in Iraq. So let me be clear: No system of government can or should be imposed by one nation on any other.

That does not lessen my commitment, however, to governments that reflect the will of the people. Each nation gives life to this principle in its own way, grounded in the traditions of its own people. America does not presume to know what is best for everyone, just as we would not presume to pick the outcome of a peaceful election. But I do have an unyielding belief that all people yearn for certain things: the ability to speak your mind and have a say in how you are governed; confidence in the rule of law and the equal administration of justice; government that is transparent and doesn't steal from the people; the freedom to live as you choose. These are not just American ideas; they are human rights. And that is why we will support them everywhere.

Now, there is no straight line to realize this promise. But this much is clear: Governments that protect these rights are ultimately more stable, successful and secure. Suppressing ideas never succeeds in making them go away. America respects the right of all peaceful and law-abiding voices to be heard around the world, even if we disagree with them. And we will welcome all elected, peaceful governments – provided they govern with respect for all their people.

This last point is important because there are some who advocate for democracy only when they're out of power; once in power, they are ruthless in suppressing the rights of others. So no matter where it takes hold, government of the people and by the people sets a single standard for all who would hold power: You must maintain your power through consent, not coercion; you must respect the rights of minorities, and

participate with a spirit of tolerance and compromise; you must place the interests of your people and the legitimate workings of the political process above your party. Without these ingredients, elections alone do not make true democracy.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Barack Obama, we love you!

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Thank you.

The fifth issue that we must address together is religious freedom.

Islam has a proud tradition of tolerance. We see it in the history of Andalusia and Cordoba during the Inquisition. I saw it firsthand as a child in Indonesia, where devout Christians worshiped freely in an overwhelmingly Muslim country. That is the spirit we need today. People in every country should be free to choose and live their faith based upon the persuasion of the mind and the heart and the soul. This tolerance is essential for religion to thrive, but it's being challenged in many different ways.

Among some Muslims, there's a disturbing tendency to measure one's own faith by the rejection of somebody else's faith. The richness of religious diversity must be upheld – whether it is for Maronites in Lebanon or the Copts in Egypt. And if we are being honest, fault lines must be closed among Muslims, as well, as the divisions between Sunni and Shia have led to tragic violence, particularly in Iraq.

Freedom of religion is central to the ability of peoples to live together. We must always examine the ways in which we protect it. For instance, in the United States, rules on charitable giving have made it harder for Muslims to fulfill their religious obligation. That's why I'm committed to working with American Muslims to ensure that they can fulfill zakat.

Likewise, it is important for Western countries to avoid

impeding Muslim citizens from practicing religion as they see fit – for instance, by dictating what clothes a Muslim woman should wear. We can't disguise hostility toward any religion behind the pretence of liberalism.

In fact, faith should bring us together. And that's why we're forging service projects in America to bring together Christians, Muslims and Jews. That's why we welcome efforts like Saudi Arabian King Abdullah's interfaith dialogue and Turkey's leadership in the Alliance of Civilizations. Around the world, we can turn dialogue into interfaith service, so bridges between peoples lead to action – whether it is combating malaria in Africa, or providing relief after a natural disaster.

The sixth issue – the sixth issue that I want to address is women's rights. I know – I know – and you can tell from this audience, that there is a healthy debate about this issue. I reject the view of some in the West that a woman who chooses to cover her hair is somehow less equal, but I do believe that a woman who is denied an education is denied equality. And it is no coincidence that countries where women are well educated are far more likely to be prosperous.

Now, let me be clear: Issues of women's equality are by no means simply an issue for Islam. In Turkey, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, we've seen Muslim-majority countries elect a woman to lead. Meanwhile, the struggle for women's equality continues in many aspects of American life, and in countries around the world.

I am convinced that our daughters can contribute just as much to society as our sons. Our common prosperity will be advanced by allowing all humanity – men and women – to reach their full potential. I do not believe that women must make the same choices as men in order to be equal, and I respect those women who choose to live their lives in traditional roles. But it should be their choice. And that is why the United States will

partner with any Muslim-majority country to support expanded literacy for girls, and to help young women pursue employment through micro-financing that helps people live their dreams.

Finally, I want to discuss economic development and opportunity.

I know that for many, the face of globalization is contradictory. The Internet and television can bring knowledge and information, but also offensive sexuality and mindless violence into the home. Trade can bring new wealth and opportunities, but also huge disruptions and change in communities. In all nations – including America – this change can bring fear. Fear that because of modernity we lose control over our economic choices, our politics, and most importantly our identities – those things we most cherish about our communities, our families, our traditions, and our faith.

But I also know that human progress cannot be denied. There need not be contradictions between development and tradition. Countries like Japan and South Korea grew their economies enormously while maintaining distinct cultures. The same is true for the astonishing progress within Muslim-majority countries from Kuala Lumpur to Dubai. In ancient times and in our times, Muslim communities have been at the forefront of innovation and education.

And this is important because no development strategy can be based only upon what comes out of the ground, nor can it be sustained while young people are out of work. Many Gulf states have enjoyed great wealth as a consequence of oil, and some are beginning to focus it on broader development. But all of us must recognize that education and innovation will be the currency of the 21st century – – and in too many Muslim communities, there remains underinvestment in these areas. I'm emphasizing such investment within my own country. And while America in the past has focused on oil and gas when it comes to this part of the world, we now seek a broader engagement.



On education, we will expand exchange programs, and increase scholarships, like the one that brought my father to America. At the same time, we will encourage more Americans to study in Muslim communities. And we will match promising Muslim students with internships in America; invest in online learning for teachers and children around the world; and create a new online network, so a young person in Kansas can communicate instantly with a young person in Cairo.

On economic development, we will create a new corps of business volunteers to partner with counterparts in Muslim-majority countries. And I will host a Summit on Entrepreneurship this year to identify how we can deepen ties between business leaders, foundations and social entrepreneurs in the United States and Muslim communities around the world.

On science and technology, we will launch a new fund to support technological development in Muslim-majority countries, and to help transfer ideas to the marketplace so they can create more jobs. We'll open centers of scientific excellence in Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia, and appoint new science envoys to collaborate on programs that develop new sources of energy, create green jobs, digitize records, clean water, grow new crops. Today I'm announcing a new global effort with the Organization of the Islamic Conference to eradicate polio. And we will also expand partnerships with Muslim communities to promote child and maternal health.

All these things must be done in partnership. Americans are ready to join with citizens and governments; community organizations, religious leaders and businesses in Muslim communities around the world to help our people pursue a better life.

The issues that I have described will not be easy to address. But we have a responsibility to join together on behalf of the world that we seek – a world where extremists no longer

threaten our people, and American troops have come home; a world where Israelis and Palestinians are each secure in a state of their own, and nuclear energy is used for peaceful purposes; a world where governments serve their citizens, and the rights of all God's children are respected. Those are mutual interests. That is the world we seek. But we can only achieve it together.

I know there are many – Muslim and non-Muslim – who question whether we can forge this new beginning. Some are eager to stoke the flames of division, and to stand in the way of progress. Some suggest that it isn't worth the effort – that we are fated to disagree, and civilizations are doomed to clash. Many more are simply skeptical that real change can occur. There's so much fear, so much mistrust that has built up over the years. But if we choose to be bound by the past, we will never move forward. And I want to particularly say this to young people of every faith, in every country – you, more than anyone, have the ability to re-imagine the world, to remake this world.

All of us share this world for but a brief moment in time. The question is whether we spend that time focused on what pushes us apart, or whether we commit ourselves to an effort – a sustained effort – to find common ground, to focus on the future we seek for our children, and to respect the dignity of all human beings.

It's easier to start wars than to end them. It's easier to blame others than to look inward. It's easier to see what is different about someone than to find the things we share. But we should choose the right path, not just the easy path. There's one rule that lies at the heart of every religion – that we do unto others as we would have them do unto us. This truth transcends nations and peoples – a belief that isn't new; that isn't black or white or brown; that isn't Christian or Muslim or Jew. It's a belief that pulsed in the cradle of civilization, and that still beats in the hearts of billions

around the world. It's a faith in other people, and it's what brought me here today.

We have the power to make the world we seek, but only if we have the courage to make a new beginning, keeping in mind what has been written.

The Holy Quran tells us: "O mankind! We have created you male and a female; and we have made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another."

The Talmud tells us: "The whole of the Torah is for the purpose of promoting peace."

The Holy Bible tells us: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."

The people of the world can live together in peace. We know that is God's vision. Now that must be our work here on Earth.

Thank you. And may God's peace be upon you. Thank you very much. Thank you.