

In August, I wrote several columns on how culture matters, both domestically and internationally. I have long doubted that the issue is as much racial differences as it is the practices and values of various cultures. Our recent election was a perfect demonstration of a cultural clash that shocked the world.

The US is going through the same conflict that we are seeing around the world: democratic institutions are losing the support that they have had for a long time. We know from history that when people stop believing in the laws, agencies, and protections that make self-government work, governments either fall or go dictatorial. Those of us who have always believed, as I have, that government is not the problem, but that the character of our representatives is, I did not realize how widespread the anger against all of our government institutions was.

We see in our country and all over the world "culture shock," a fear among ordinary people that their culture is changing in ways that leave them feeling alienated. Since the end of World War II, we have gone through a culture change that is unprecedented in its speed. Laws and attitudes that have been with us for centuries are suddenly being challenged and transformed.

The values that characterize the modern world include some incendiary issues: equality of women, demands for racial and religious equality, total freedom of speech that has brought vulgarity into our arts and daily discourse, science that challenges old truths including religions (brain science, robotics, ecology, medicine, technologies), and constant lecturing from the elites and educated that make the less educated angry.

Those of us on the educated and liberal side politically have trampled and insulted the values of many people we neither meet nor know. But we have heard from them in this election. They did not support Donald Trump because he was loved by all Republicans, but because he made many of them feel that they were being heard. He used language, epithets, and manners that boosted their own self-regard, language that they were never allowed to use in polite society.

Many serious Republicans did not vote for him, considering him an unqualified loose cannon, but many did vote for him only because they want to guarantee that the Supreme Court can be turned very conservative for a whole generation. Republicans believe in incremental social change, and not the sort of almost uncontrollable changes that roil ordinary lives. They may have a point.

Remember, however, that Hillary Clinton won the popular vote, although losing the Electoral College, an institution that gives more voting power to small states and rural towns. Our founders feared direct democracy, setting up institutions to prevent mob rule (or popular voting majorities). There is some wisdom in this.

Abroad, Europe is going through the same kind of crisis. The EU has tried to act as a super-government, enforcing their ideas of a modern society on the unwilling and conservative classes that still make up national populations. The elites believe that it is Europe's duty to take in as many refugees fleeing wars and persecution as can arrive. I admire their generosity of spirit, but the burden of supporting this horde and trying to absorb them is on ordinary Europeans. The immigrants from the Muslim world are not only difficult to integrate into a modern western society, but many come with views and intentions that threaten their host countries. Europe's EU is starting to fall apart, certainly with the exit of the British, angry at the dictation of the EU and their own elites.

The danger of this alienation is that the global rule of law that the United States promoted and protected since the end of World War II is now in meltdown. Dictatorships are being favored once more, in Russia, Turkey, Poland, the Philippines, apparently with popular enthusiasm. But since all of their free press is being suppressed, how do we know?

President Trump is in for a steep learning curve. With luck, a meltdown of both political parties may give birth to a new centrist party that unites us once more.

686 words

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