

Topic Page: [Huntington, Samuel P.](#)

Definition: **Huntington** from *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate(R) Dictionary*

Samuel Huntington 1731–1796 Am. Revolutionary polit.

Summary Article: **Huntington, Samuel**

From *Encyclopedia of Global Justice*

Samuel P. Huntington (April 18, 1927, to December 24, 2008) was an American political scientist, who was an associate professor of government and Deputy Director of The Institute for War and Peace Studies at Columbia University until 1963, when he returned to his alma mater Harvard University, assuming the Albert J. Weatherhead III Chair until his death in 2008. He is the author of numerous books and articles, including *Political Order in Changing Societies* (1968), *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (1957), *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996a), and *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (2004).

Huntington was highly influential in US politics, challenging the conventional view that recently decolonized nations would evolve with economic and social development into stable democracies. Huntington is best known for his “Clash of Civilizations” theory, first launched as an article in *Foreign Affairs* magazine (1993) and then later expanded into his 1996 book. The theory describes the geopolitical organization of the post–Cold War era in terms of geological metaphors (“fault lines”) separating the world's “civilizations” which he names Western, Latin American, Islamic, Chinese, Hindu, Orthodox, Japanese, and “possibly” African. “It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation-states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future” (*Foreign Affairs* Vol. 72, No. 3, Summer 1993).

The geological metaphors of Huntington's “Clash of Civilizations” theory implies the inevitability of conflict between world civilizations whose grounding beliefs are fundamentally opposed. The theory remains highly controversial, but gained greater cachet after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Today the “Clash of Civilizations” theory is regarded by many as the theoretical legitimization of American aggression against China and Islamic cultures and the playbook of American civil-military relations. Critics of the theory note that it legitimizes and promotes the use of violence in foreign affairs and ignores inconvenient historical realities: “The West won the world not by the superiority of its ideas or values or religion, but rather by its superiority in applying organized violence. Westerners often forget this fact, non-Westerners never do” (Huntington 1996: 51). During 1977 and 1978, Huntington served the White House Coordinator of Security Planning for the National Security Council, under President Jimmy Carter. Huntington's last book (2004) applied the culture clash theory to his homeland, warning that large-scale Latino immigration was splitting the nation.

Huntington is important to the theme of global justice because his starkly “realpolitik” predictions regarding cultural clashes was generally accepted by United States conservatives as accurately foretelling the challenges that would characterize world affairs in coming decades. His dark predictions

regarding the threat of Islamic culture and his recommendations of the necessity for the United States to arm itself against such eventualities helped frame the worldview of the industrial-military complex of the United States and to justify such extreme reactionary responses as George W. Bush's "preemptive" war on Iraq.

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