

The Ethnocentricity of Democracy, Capitalism, and Christianity.

By Kendal Smith¹

“To be governed is to be watched over, inspected, spied on, directed, legislated at, regulated, docketed, indoctrinated, preached at, controlled, assessed, weighed, censored, and ordered about by men who have neither the right, nor the knowledge, nor the virtue” (Platt 45). Capitalists always have and will most likely continue to control democracy, much more so than the legislatures or the people who elected the legislatures and whom they represent. Lobbyists, with their seemingly endless support in the form of campaign donations, barter for the addition or removal of laws and for tax breaks that ultimately result in lucrative returns for the capitalists. The United States government has always claimed God-ordained authority, and, of course, has actually acted in the name of money. ‘In God We Trust’ is written on the currency of the United States of America. God is mentioned on state flags, written on government documents, and engraved on seals that are posted on the walls of government facilities. Before testifying in a courtroom, one must swear an oath of the truth on a Bible. Legislators must also swear an oath of allegiance on the Bible when elected and before beginning approval or rejection of new laws, repealing or amending old laws, and deciding the direction the United States will take in any given situation or crisis. The connection is evident in the operation of the democratic, capitalistic, and Christian enigma that is the United States of America. It is also becoming more evident that the United States’ intentions are to assimilate the entire world into a democratic, capitalistic, and Christian society that not only poses no threat to it, but is also identical to it in every way. The beauty and individuality of the diverse cultures of the world are changing or vanishing due to the ethnocentric philosophy of the governmental, religious, and economic leaders of the United States of America and her cohorts of similar thinking nations. First, the United States has continually policed the world and forced democracy upon other countries for more than a century. Second, the

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westernization of the world through consumerism is destroying the individuality of indigenous cultures. Finally, religious missions have drastically altered a unique and important facet of other cultures by discrediting native religions. After examining these issues, one can clearly see the United States of America and the culture-bound thinking of her leaders and citizens are assimilating the uniquely diverse cultures of the world.

1) Policing the World

Immediately after colonizing, the North American continent colonists began expelling or annihilating indigenous people and the culture they had developed and subsisted in for thousands of years. The colonists then revolted and after winning their independence founded the United States of America, and created what they called a democracy. Two hundred and thirty years later, the United States government is so certain of success in the founding of a form of government with seemingly indefinite longevity that the attempt is repeatedly made to rescue other countries or territories from their own ignorance, to enlighten them, and to force them into attempting to establish a psuedo-democratic form of government for themselves.

At one time, the United States was indeed fighting the good fight. During World War I and then World War II, the enemy was clear. The Nazis, Fascists, and Imperialist dictators had every intention of taking over the entire world. After experiencing undeniable victories in the two World Wars, the United States and her shiny, newly proven democracy, reveled in the fact that they had saved the world from, what the U.S. thought to be, certain demise. “The United States, delighting in her resources, feeling that she no longer had within her sufficient scope for her energies, wishing to help those who were in misery or bondage the world over, yielded in her turn to that taste for intervention in which the instinct for domination cloaked itself” (Platt 381).

Korea and Vietnam were two more chances to show the world what a shiny new superpower with God on its side could do and what a supremely successful form of government democracy actually was. The enemy had changed its name for these wars; it was now called Communism. However, the United States’ reasons for going to war had changed as well. Instead of fighting against the imminent and immediate conquest of the entire world by the axis powers, they were now playing a virtual game of chess with communism as the face of the new enemy. The world was the chessboard, democracy

and communism the players, and Korea was the first desired square on the board. Democracy was white and communism black, good and evil. The problem was that the American people were not as interested in what was happening on the other side of the world as they were when a tangible threat existed during the World Wars. The communist takeover of Korea, and a lost chance for another democratic stronghold, was simply not a just enough cause to merit sending soldiers to fight and die. The next square on the chessboard was Vietnam; the notoriously unpopular conflict that should have taught the United States of America a lesson for the ages. The American people knew they did not want the Vietnam War long before it became a war, even though it was never actually called a war, and it was sugar coated and called a conflict instead. Vietnam was nothing more than a bloody, expensive reproduction of the Korean War. This time it was the same game, same opponents, and different, although equally insignificant, squares on the chessboard. After a black eye and hasty retreat the United States was content to lick her wounds for a while though she never would admit defeat and obviously did not learn a lasting lesson from the embarrassment.

The United States' latest quest for the assimilation of a country is President George W. Bush's war in Iraq. The Bush administration adamantly professed that Iraq was invaded due to Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's continued refusal to allow United Nations inspectors into sites where Iraq was allegedly manufacturing and stockpiling biological and chemical weapons of mass destruction. To date no weapons of mass destructions have been found, and the Bush administration has made a transition from the apparently non-existent weapons of mass destruction to Iraqi support of the terrorists who flew planes into the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. However, since there were no Iraqis involved in the attacks on the World Trade Center, reasoning for the invasion and occupation shifted yet again to aiding the spread of democracy and removal of a tyrannical dictator from power and installing a democratic form of government. The Iraqi people were living in fear and poverty, and the United States had a God given right to save the Iraqis from the situation they found themselves in and the totalitarian leader currently in power. However, reports show that since the United States' invasion of Iraq in 2003, conditions continue to deteriorate. Lack of water, electricity, and chronic malnutrition has actually increased with United States intervention (Mrove).

The problem, which is becoming more evident all the time, is that the invasion and occupation of Iraq is and always has been about oil. Democracy is secondary and only because it is the standard American justification used to pursue its own form of world domination. Iraq had a large portion of the planets' oil reserves and the United States wanted it. The Bush administration then, after exhausting the reserve of standard excuses, decided that the reason for the invasion and occupation of Iraq all along was to spread this self proclaimed, superior form of government called democracy. Not only has the United States continually policed the world and forced democracy upon the people and governments of other countries for decades, but religion is another aspect of cultural individuality falling victim to the ethnocentricity of western idealism.

2) Westernization through Consumerism

The westernization of the world through consumerism is destroying the individuality of indigenous cultures. All aspects of non-western cultures around the world are subject to the corruption and oppression of the United States capitalistic machine. "It is probably true that business corrupts everything it touches. It corrupts politics, sports, literature, art, labor unions and so on. But business also corrupts and undermines monolithic totalitarianism. Capitalism is at its liberating best in a non-capitalist environment" (Platt 34). Capitalistic imperialism is saturating countries around the world and is quite possibly at its most voracious in the countries of Asia. "In the past two years, U.S. venture capitalists (VCs) have been streaming into China like Manchu invaders breaching the Great Wall" (Maney).

Western clothing is so glamorized that the people of many countries have discontinued wearing the indigenous clothing of their country, and many of the youth may go their entire life without ever seeing the native dress of their culture actually worn. All one must do is view television or open a magazine and the lack of native dress is readily apparent. Women of the Pacific Islands have traded their bark cloth wraps and grass and palm leave skirts, and men their sarongs, for western style swimsuits and trunks and shirts depicting western ideas and slogans. Women in Japan have set aside their beautiful kimonos and sandals for business suits and flats. In Korea, Tibet, and India the chupas and kaftons have been traded for designer jeans, half-shirts, and sneakers. Around the world turbans, tankas, and milfas have all been traded for ball caps and

bandannas. In some instances, perhaps western clothes are more practical, but seldom more interesting and beautiful. In many more instances, the spiked heel, halter-top, and mini-skirt type outfits of popular western dress, for example, are much less practical than the indigenous clothing. When switching to more desirable western dress, many people sacrifice much more than practicality, they sacrifice the money needed to sustain life to look more American. In Vietnam, where the average per-capita income is four-hundred and fifty dollars per year, residents line up to pay anywhere from seventy dollars to one-hundred twenty nine dollars for a pair of jeans (Kirk). Occasionally some types of indigenous clothing can still be seen on the pages of *National Geographic Magazine*, or while viewing the *Discovery Channel* or *History Channel*, but not in magazines depicting cultures and the dress of cultures as they are on a day-to-day basis.

Many non-European people throughout the world will go to great lengths to look more American. Some will go as far as seeking plastic surgery to accomplish this goal. Altering one's normal, native-born features simply because what is seen in magazines, movies, and on television is an unsettling trend. The hooded eyes of the Orientals, for example, are an exotic, unique, beautiful feature to be treasured instead of altered to mirror popular culture. Another very common example of altering one's appearance to fit popular cultures, which can be seen in Hispanic and Asian cultures alike, is the attempt at bleaching the beautiful jet-black hair they were blessed with. The result is usually a burnt orange that seldom comes close to the perfect blond pictured on models and actors or actresses in the magazines, movies, and television programs of which they dream of being a part.

Around the world, people are following the United States' example in diet as well. Every day there are more instances of McDonalds, Burger Kings, Pizza Huts, and other fast food chains opening up satellite stores in every corner of the world. A continual deviation from traditionally plain, but less processed, diets is occurring among the native people of countries who have lived on certain staple foods for centuries and who have now been introduced to rich, high fat, high calorie junk foods. The digestive system and metabolism rate of the indigenous people of a given area have evolved in direct correlation with the food sources most readily available. A population may be adapted to consuming rice and fish, rice and beans, corn and beans, or whatever

combination of staple foods their locality allows, and provided there is enough of the staple food, the people will thrive and enjoy a relatively healthy lifestyle. After the western diet has been consumed for a while, the native foods are no longer fulfilling, lacking the heavy fats that leave one feeling full, lethargic, and ultimately satisfied. The diet trends and overall health of countries around the world are now following the United States' tendency towards obesity, heart disease, and a plethora of other health problems linked to poor diet and a sedentary lifestyle. Not only has consumerism drastically changed indigenous cultures through the ethnocentricity of western ideology, but religious missions have also radically altered a unique and important facet of other cultures by discrediting native religions.

3) Missionaries

The final problem of United States dominated ethnocentricity is that religious missions have drastically altered a unique and important facet of other cultures by discrediting indigenous religions. Religion is one of the more distinct characteristics of a culture historically defining the dress, diet, and disposition of the members of a civilization. Religion has been the cause of disagreements, alliances, and wars throughout history because each member of particular religion feels passionately about his/her chosen faith. Many feel passionately enough about spreading their religious convictions and continually attempt to recruit others into their religion in the form of missionary work. Many more feel passionately enough about their faith that an encroachment upon their beliefs warrants one to either kill or be killed in the name of their religion. Missionaries can unintentionally become that encroachment upon an indigenous religion with their tireless and relentless recruitment practices. Christian missionaries believe the teachings of Christianity to be the only way to salvation and everlasting peace. Missionaries also believe that the indigenous religions from which they are trying to recruit members are completely false. Therein lie the problems missionaries can cause when offering unsolicited advice on spiritual matters.

Missionaries are not acting with malice when discrediting the native religion in an area; they are working because they believe they are fulfilling the will of God. However, missionaries do not seem to understand that many times the people they are evangelizing to passionately believe in their existing faith as well or they would not be participating in

it. The natives of this persuasion, much like the missionaries, believe their form of religion to be the only correct and proper form of worship. Offence is taken when one from far away visits a society and tells the members of the society being visited that their method of worshipping God is not only incorrect, but if it is continued, they will be punished by the unimaginable punishment of eternal damnation. This practice is not only an example of culture-bound thinking that undermines the structure of a culture through its religion, but it is spreading a belief as truth, that when viewed from a neutral point of view, has no more credibility than the religion of the culture being encroached upon.

Christian missionaries' most profitable argument in evangelism is, and always has been, a simple scare tactic. Missionaries simply ask the heathens who recoil from the idea of renouncing their inherent religion, "What if you are wrong?" They explain that if the heathens convert to Christianity and the decision turns out to be a mistake the heathens are no worse off than they are now. However, if they do not accept Christianity as their faith and they turn out to be wrong, they will burn in hell. Many of the less structured religions such as Buddhism, Taoism, or Shinto might have members who are more likely to be swayed by these tactics, but when used to confront a strong, well-entrenched, and very skeptical religion such as Islam, these tactics are useless. Muslims continue to not only resist the American military and Christian missionary agenda, but also to view their differences with Americans and their advances as a sign of the coming Jihad or Holy War. Muslims protested recently in Afghanistan: "Shouting 'Death to America,' more than 1,000 demonstrators rioted and threw stones at a U.S. military convoy" (Sadeq). "Death to America" has become the war cry of Islam.

The story is as old as time itself. Battles have been fought, won, and lost over which religious faith will dominate a territory or country. Whichever religion wins out will bring with it a rich and textured culture. The culture will have its own dress, festivals, and overall personality. These unique differences will be what distinguish the culture from the rest of the world. The members of a culture are not evil, bad, or heathen because they choose not to accept an offer of a purportedly better religion.

The United States has continually policed the world and forced democracy upon other countries for more than a century, the westernization of the world through consumerism is destroying the individuality of global cultures, and religious missions

have drastically altered a unique and important facet of other cultures by discrediting indigenous religions. Though democracy, capitalism, and Christianity may seem, to an American, like the only way for the people of a country to prosper, the truth is that our pristine example has simply not withstood the test of time. Many civilizations founded with systems very different than that of the United States of America have lasted many times longer. The Romans and the Mayans both lasted many times longer than the United States has endured thus far. At the peak of any civilization, which could claim a substantial piece of history, the sentiments of the people were probably much like those of American society. Unfortunately all things must end, and democracy, capitalism, and even Christianity fall into that category. When all is said and done, one can only hope to be a part of a civilization that carves a considerable and honorable piece of history for itself. As one can clearly see, the beauty and individuality of the diverse cultures of the world are changing or vanishing due to the ethnocentric philosophy of the governmental, economic, and religious leaders of the United States of America and her cohort of similar thinking nations.

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