



ARE SOME CULTURES BETTER THAN OTHERS?

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Do you think the United States and Western Europe are made up of imperialist, colonialist, resource-exploiting, greedy, grasping, brown-skin-hating people whose values are not worth defending?

If you think this question is absurd and that no one thinks this way, you would be very much mistaken. Many people do. And what's even more disturbing, many of these people were born and live in the West. In other words, they have come to despise their own culture.

This thinking is the product of a doctrine widely taught in our schools. It's known as multiculturalism, the belief that all cultures are equal. Or to put it another way, no culture's values, art, music, political system, or literature are better or worse than any other.

But is this really true?

Some years ago, Nobel-prize winning novelist Saul Bellow created a major controversy when he said, "Find me the Tolstoy of the Zulus, or the Proust of the Papuans, and I would be happy to read him." For this, Bellow was accused of racism.

The charge was nonsense. Bellow wasn't saying that the Zulus and Papuans are incapable of producing great novelists. He was saying that, as far as he knew, they hadn't. But just by raising the possibility that some cultures have contributed more than others, he violated the chief tenet of multiculturalism.

More recently, President Donald Trump expressed a similar sentiment in Warsaw, Poland.

"We write symphonies. We pursue innovation...We treasure the rule of law and protect the right to free speech and free expression...We empower women as pillars of our society and of our success...That is who we are...Those are the priceless ties that bind us together...as a civilization."

For this, Trump was roundly condemned by the multiculturalists. How could he say these things, one writer wrote, "as if these were unique qualities to white-dominated nations, instead of universal truths of the human race across all cultures."

Here's the problem: Are values such as innovation, rule of law, free expression and women's empowerment equally held across all cultures?

If all cultures are equal, how does one account for the fact that, for the last 500 years, it has

been one culture—the culture of the West, and now of America—that has shaped the world?

Multiculturalists explain it in terms of oppression. Western civilization, they say, became so powerful because it is so evil. The study of Western civilization, they insist, should focus on colonialism and slavery—the unique mechanisms of Western oppression.

But colonialism and slavery are not uniquely Western at all. They are universal.

The British conquered India and ruled it for 300 years. But before the British, the Persians, the Mongols, the Muslims, and Alexander the Great had done exactly same thing - conquered large parts of India.

Indeed, the British were the sixth or seventh colonial invader to occupy India.

As for slavery, it has existed in every culture. It was prevalent in ancient China, in ancient India, in Greece and Rome, and in Africa. American Indians practiced slavery long before Columbus set foot here.

What is uniquely Western, in fact, is not slavery, but the abolition of slavery. And what distinguishes the West from all other cultures are the institutions of democracy, capitalism, and science. These institutions developed because of a peculiar dynamism of Athens and Jerusalem—a synthesis of classical reason and Judeo-Christian morality.

And it is these institutions, I believe, that comprise the source of Western strength and explain the West's long-standing dominance in the world.

The West's greatest strength is not merely its military power, but also the unparalleled power of its ideas and institutions.

But what about America? If America is a nation of immigrants—mostly non-white immigrants—doesn't that, by definition, make it a multicultural society?

No. America is a multi-ethnic society. We don't want it to be a multicultural society. I'm an immigrant from India. My wife is an immigrant from Venezuela. Despite our differences of ethnic background, we have both assimilated to the unique values of America—the values embodied in our Constitution and our laws. The pursuit of happiness. The American Dream.

So, no—the United States and Western Europe are not made up of imperialist, colonialist, resource-exploiting, greedy, grasping, brown-skin-hating people. Our values are worth defending—not just because they are ours, but because they are good.

I'm Dinesh D'Souza for Prager University.