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The politics of oxymoron

by [Roger Sandall](#)

On the singularity of “civilization.”

One of the stranger things about Samuel Huntington’s book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* was the debt it owed to anthropology. Throughout much of the past hundred years, anthropologists had been talking about clashes or conflicts among cultures, and at first glance Huntington’s formulations seemed like an attempt to raise this mundane phenomenon to the more grandiose level of international affairs.

Numerous critics have identified the political issues at stake. They point out how foolish it is to imagine that men are mere prisoners of their cultures; how blind it is not to see that states with widely varying peoples and traditions, but also with the benefit of democracy, free markets, and the rule of law, peacefully cooperate all over the globe; and how perverse it is to pretend that well established procedures for conflict management have not given the modern world an unprece ...

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