

## A Small World?

"The West: Unique, Not Universal" by Samuel P. Huntington, in *Foreign Affairs* (Nov.-Dec. 1996), 58 E. 68th St., New York, N.Y. 10021.

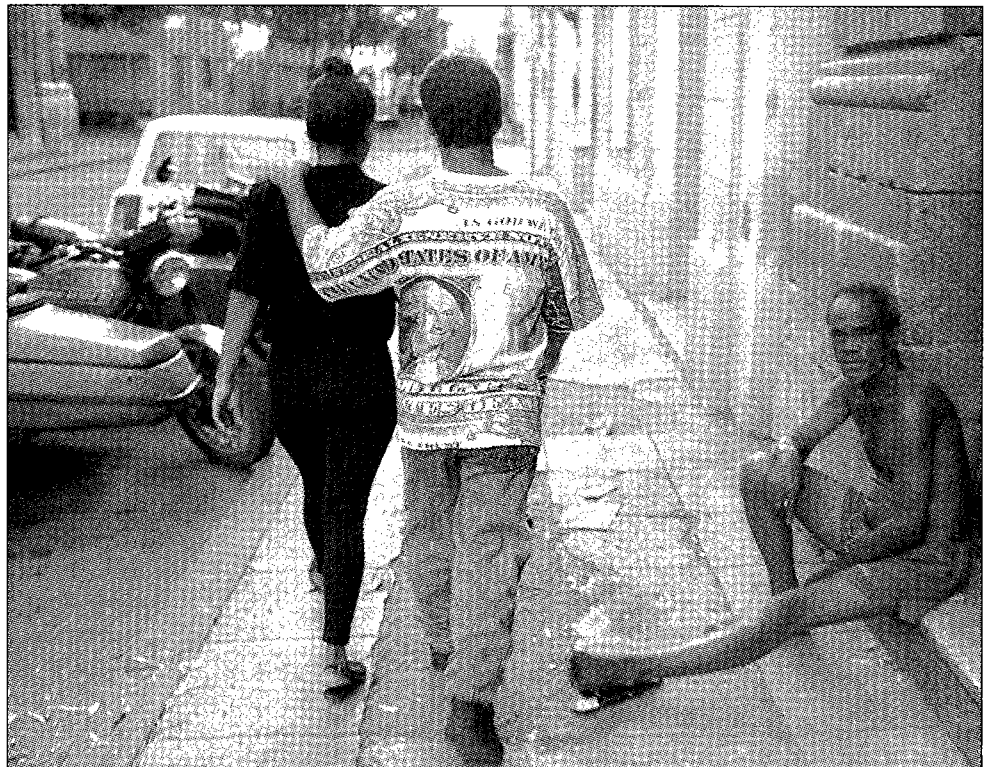
As Coca-Cola, Big Macs, Hollywood action-adventure movies, and Western-style elections have spread to the most remote corners of the earth, some observers have concluded that the world is moving toward a single, universal, basically Western culture. This is a dangerous illusion, argues Huntington, a political scientist at Harvard University and the author of *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996).

Though the West was the first civilization to "modernize," the process (which involves industrialization, urbanization, and the spread of literacy, education, and wealth) need not imply Westernization, he points out. Indeed, many of the West's most distinctive characteristics are premodern. "Japan, Singapore, Taiwan, Saudi Arabia, and, to a lesser degree, Iran have become modern societies without becoming Western societies. China is clearly modernizing, but certainly not westernizing." Civilizations have always borrowed from one another, in ways that enhance their own culture, he observes. China's absorption of Buddhism from India,

for example, resulted not in the "Indianization" of China but in the Sinification of Buddhism. Something similar, he maintains, is happening in Japan and other non-Western societies today, with regard to selected aspects of Western culture.

In the past, Huntington points out, many leaders of non-Western societies invoked Western values such as self-determination, freedom, and democracy in their efforts to ward off domination by the West. Today, their successors denounce attempts to promote those same values as Western "human rights imperialism."

Much of the world is now becoming, in fundamental ways, "more modern and less Western," Huntington says. With respect to the central cultural features of religion and language, "the West is in retreat." As a proportion of the world's population, Western Christians, who now make up about 30 percent, are steadily losing ground, and before long will be surpassed by Muslims. Similarly, although English has become the lingua franca of international commerce, the English-speaking part of the world's popula-



*The trappings of Western life are easily worn—and can be easily discarded.*

## *The Armed Forces' New Clout*

The American military's influence over U.S. foreign policy is growing, writes Robert D. Kaplan, a contributing editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* (Sept. 1996).

*The acceleration of technology is driving a wedge between military and civilian societies and bringing about, for the first time, a professional-caste elite. Thus today's volunteer Army is different from all others in our history. Soldiers are becoming like doctors and lawyers—another professional group we'd like to need less of but upon which we rely more. And just as health reform requires the consent of the medical community, because doctors own a complex body of knowledge, foreign policy will over the decades be increasingly influenced by the military, because war, peacekeeping, famine relief, and the like are becoming too complex for civilian managers. . . .*

*The technological revolution that has increased the military's clout in Washington has decreased the State Department's: advances in global communications deprive diplomats of privileged firsthand knowledge, and businesspeople, with their own growing array of resources, require less help from embassies. In fact, embassies may not survive beyond a few more decades.*

tion has shrunk (to less than eight percent in 1992).

"The time has come," Huntington declares, "for the West to abandon the illusion of universality and to promote the strength, coherence, and vitality of its civilization in a world of civilizations." The West should pursue its own interests, rather than advance those of other peoples, and the Western nations should avoid intervening in conflicts in which they have no direct stake.

Western leaders, Huntington writes, should attempt not "to reshape other civilizations in the image of the West—which is increasingly beyond their ability—but to preserve and renew the unique qualities of Western civilization." Greater Western unity is essential. The United States must abandon dreams of a Pacific Century and adopt "an Atlanticist policy of close cooperation with its European partners, one that will protect and promote . . . the precious and unique civilization they share."

## ECONOMICS, LABOR & BUSINESS

### *Why Doesn't America Save?*

"Understanding the Postwar Decline in U.S. Saving: A Cohort Analysis" by Jagadeesh Gokhale, Laurence J. Kotlikoff, and John Sabelhaus, in *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity* (1996: No. 1), The Brookings Institution, 1775 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036; "The Saving Mystery, or Where Did the Money Go?" by Lynn Elaine Browne with Joshua Gleason, in *The New England Economic Review* (Sept.-Oct. 1996), Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, P.O. Box 2076, Boston, Mass. 02106-2076.

Are the baby boomers a generation of self-absorbed spendthrifts who must bear the blame for the alarming decline in national saving? No, argue these two studies. The authors look elsewhere for an explanation.

The U.S. net national saving rate averaged more than nine percent of net national product in the 1950s and '60s, but less than three percent in the first five years of the 1990s. Net domestic investment also dropped—from an average of about eight percent in the 1950s, '60s, and '70s to less than four percent per year in the 1990s.

This, economists say, has limited growth in productivity and thus, real wages.

Gokhale, Kotlikoff, and Sabelhaus, of the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland, Boston University, and the Congressional Budget Office, respectively, find two forces chiefly responsible for the postwar decline in saving. One is government redistribution of resources from young and future generations to older ones through transfer programs such as Social Security and Medicare. The second is "a sharp increase in the propensity of older Americans" to spend money.