

A Reply to Samuel Huntington's "Hispanic Challenge"¹

A Conversation Between

José Luis Valdés-Ugalde* and Leonardo Curzio**



Nelly Salas/Cuartoscuro

"Huntington's ideas demonstrate above all a kind of illustrated xenophobia that we had not seen in his work and that has surprised analysts quite a bit."

LEONARDO CURZIO: An article by Samuel Huntington, "The Hispanic Challenge," appeared in the March-April 2004 issue of the influential magazine *Foreign Policy* edited by Moises Nahim. What do you think of it, José Luis?

JOSÉ LUIS VALDÉS-UGALDE: It's a preview by Huntington of his book *Who We Are. The Challenges of America's National Identity*, soon to be published by Simon and Schuster. Huntington, a Harvard political scientist, is the renowned author of classics like *The Clash of Civilizations* and *Political Order in Changing Societies*. He's known by all experts in

political science and specific regimes and political systems, like the authoritarian regimes in Latin America, and he has been widely read by both Latin Americans and people from the United States. In this article, he delves into a polemical issue, I would say in a rather provocative way: the supposed Hispanic threat, specifically the Mexican

* Political analyst and director of CISAN.

** Journalist and researcher at CISAN.

threat, to cultural integration in the United States. Huntington basically defends three ideas: one, that the avalanche of Mexican immigrants is a potential threat for U.S. cultural and political integration; second, that the most serious and immediate threat for their identity comes from Latin American migration, particularly from Mexico; and three, that if Spanish continues to spread in the United States, there will be significant consequences in political and government matters, fundamentally in a process of integration that he thinks is continual and constantly increasing and that also includes other aspects like illegality, regional concentration, persistence and historic presence. Broadly speaking,

these are Huntington's ideas. I think that they demonstrate above all a kind of illustrated xenophobia that we had not seen in his work and that has surprised analysts quite a bit. This article is just beginning to be debated in Mexico. I think it's wrong, that it is a new expression of intolerance that reflects, in any case, a historic fact: the dominant religion since colonial times in the United States is the source of three series of ideas that make up part of most Americans' "common sense" and that Professor Huntington seems to share. The first involves identity, who Americans are, but from an isolationist vision, from a vision that many have of their own exceptional status and destiny, that also stands out in the

article in what I think is a dangerous way because it offers nativists anti-Mexican arguments during an electoral year, arguments that could even be used as pretexts for an even greater anti-Mexican offensive than we have already seen. In that sense I think the article could have very serious implications. At the same time, it should be said that the second series of ideas in colonial religion involves the way people deal with dissent and how to behave toward people with ideas that are different from one's own. This is a recurring theme in U.S. history. For many Americans, the only way to deal with people whose views are different from their own—in this case Mexicans or Latinos—is to isolate them. I



UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL
AUTÓNOMA DE MÉXICO

Colección Lecturas Jurídicas



Serie: Manuales Jurídicos
Incluye 21 títulos.



Serie: Estudios Jurídicos
Incluye 16 títulos.





FACULTAD DE DERECHO

Serie: El Derecho y sus Maestros
Incluye 10 títulos.

De venta en la Facultad de Derecho y librerías de la UNAM

think that, as can be seen in Professor Huntington's orthodox Protestant view, Americans, particularly those who identify themselves as the most religious, demonstrate with this discourse that they are not particularly tolerant of behavior that deviates from relatively strict norms, even when these same people tend to hold to an abstract principle of "freedom for all" as does Huntington himself. I think that many Americans accept a relatively authoritarian concept of community, which includes practices of indoctrination, among other anti-democratic practices that I think are contained in the article.

Let me tell you that I also find substantial theoretical mistakes in it, above all with regard to the process of assimilation. It has been demonstrated, paradoxically in contradiction to what Huntington says, that the integration of Hispanics is greater today than it was in the past. Some studies show a decrease in non-assimilated Hispanics from 40 percent to 26 percent in the last 12 years. This means that today Hispanics are more easily assimilated, that they incorporate themselves more easily into U.S. society. Most Hispanics (around 63 percent) are bilingual or bicultural. Mexican Americans and Hispanics in general feel comfortable speaking both languages. That is why it seems to me to be an unpardonable error when Huntington makes language the central issue in his argument. I think it is very anti-Mexican and it clearly directs the article not against immigrants in general, but against a particular population that he considers a danger, but that is actually only a threat for traditional nativism, which in this case is racist. It is unfortunate—and, as academics, we have to emphatically say so—that Professor Huntington

has assumed positions that are so profoundly reactionary at such a delicate time in U.S. political life.

LEONARDO CURZIO: I am also enormously concerned, since it is a matter of the secular integration of two communities, the Hispanic and the Anglo communities, that have coexisted for over 100 years in the United States, in which assimilation has been achieved almost naturally. I don't think the balance in California, in Texas, in New Mexico, changes the relationship between these two communities at all. For example, when you have a chance to hear Bill Richardson, the governor of

to Mexicans' daily life, that is perfectly integrated into the American model. If you go to Los Angeles, for example, you don't feel a break with Mexico. If you go to Houston or many other U.S. cities, you don't feel you have broken with your way of life. I think that the famed Huntington is exaggerating the argument that Giovanni Sartori made in Europe according to which the countries of the European Union are trying to incorporate communities—he is referring mainly to Muslim communities—that do not share the values of democratic pluralism or the same set of freedoms, and that are the ones pushing for women to use the veil and

It has been demonstrated, in contradiction to what Huntington says, that Hispanics are more integrated today than they were in the past.

New Mexico, speak Spanish—which he does as well as you or I—or when we hear Rosario Marín speak Spanish (the woman whose signature is on dollar bills, the former treasurer of the United States), I don't see how it affects the United States. I am also enormously concerned about Huntington's theoretical contradiction. Just a few years ago, in *The Clash of Civilizations*, he said that there were two countries, Turkey and Mexico, that were divided between two civilizations. Turkey, he said, is Islamic, but at the same time it is part of Europe. He said that Mexico is a country that shares an enormous number of values with what he calls the Hispanic-American civilization, but at the same time is a profoundly American nation. In many ways, ours is a country with many values, like consumption patterns, the organization of our cities and much of what is related

who want to preserve at all costs a series of religious elements that distinguish them totally from the cultures that have received them. Quite to the contrary, I maintain that Mexicans basically share the values that give cohesion to the phenomenon that Huntington himself calls American civilization.

JOSÉ LUIS VALDÉS-UGALDE: I agree. I also think that this recognized political scientist is wrongly zeroing in on Hispanics when he talks of regional concentration, for example, or the inability to speak the host country's language. We should not forget that the Irish and Italians concentrated in the northeastern United States. Nor should we forget that populations like the Cubans, concentrated in Miami, or Mexicans in California show the degree of immigrant communities' openness and are the ones that have

made the United States what it is as a nation, including, of course, the last Hispanic or Mexican immigrant who entered the country yesterday. These are populations that have not only shown great openness, but also a notable capacity to adapt to the U.S. life style and norms.

I think that Huntington's argument is an exaggeration that negates another fundamental aspect: the issue of mixing in multi-ethnic societies, today's societies. Neither Europe nor the United States are exempt from this. England, France and Germany show that, even though each of these nations has recalcitrant sectors that resist immigrants, the veil and people of color, defending racial purity and a whole

series of positions that I think are in a minority, today's world does not necessarily have a single dominant color, a dominant language or a dominant culture. It is really an infinity of mixtures that already exist and that explain, from their wealth of diversity and tolerance, the importance and need to recognize that this is not only a sign of our time but is also a value added for our societies. We must be emphatic and direct: in the United States, not only have Mexican immigrants been mistreated, but the country has been enriched by the entry of Latin American immigrants, particularly Mexicans. This is true in terms, for example, of the extraction of surplus value in hiring; in culinary terms;

in cultural terms; in terms of a world view; and of diversity in many senses. This is a fact that cannot be denied. Nor can the "loss" of sovereignty or a supposed loss of a specific integrity or cultural identity of the nation be ascribed to Mexicans or other Latinos. I think this is a wrong analysis and, in effect, theoretically contradictory and politically dangerous. **MM**

NOTES

¹ This is the transcription of an interview broadcast on the popular radio program "Enfoque," Monday, March 9, 2004.



**QUINTA BIENAL
INTERNACIONAL DE RADIO**
Del 17 al 21 de mayo de 2004, México

Cursos talleres de capacitación radiofónica

Producción Radiofónica

- **DIRECCIÓN DE ESCENA PARA RADIODRAMAS**
Impartido por Goetz Naleppa, productor y dramaturgo de Deutschland Radio, Alemania.
Duración: 20 horas.
Cupo máximo: 12 personas.
- **PRODUCCIÓN Y MONTAJE EN SISTEMA NO LINEAL (PROTOOLS)**
Impartido por Ángel Marín, Radio Educación, México.
Duración: 25 horas.
Cupo máximo: 12 personas.
- **DISEÑO DE PROYECTOS RADIOFÓNICOS. LA CREATIVIDAD COMO ESTRATEGIA ENUNCIATIVA**
Impartido por Gastón Montells, director de FM La Tribu, Argentina.
Duración: 20 horas.
Cupo máximo: 15 personas.
- **MIRAR CON EL OÍDO. DISEÑO Y PRODUCCIÓN DE RADIO FEATURE**
Impartido por Anja Gundelach, productora de feature, Alemania.
Duración: 25 horas.
Cupo máximo: 10 personas.
- **Periodismo Radiofónico**
- **REPORTAJE CULTURAL RADIOFÓNICO**
Impartido por Enrique Atonal, periodista de Radio Francia Internacional.

Radioarte

- **FORMATOS CORTOS- PROGRAMAS DE ACTUALIDAD**
Impartido por dos especialistas de la Deutsche Welle: Bettina Ambach, periodista y capacitadora de Madrid, España, y Ramón García Ziemsen, periodista y capacitador de Colonia, Alemania.
Duración: 48 horas.
Cupo máximo: 12 personas.
- **NUEVO PERIODISMO DE RADIO POR INTERNET**
Impartido por Julia Zapata, responsable de la BBC de Londres para América Latina.
Duración: 20 horas.
Cupo máximo: 15 personas.
- **Nuevas Tendencias Radiofónicas**
- **LA INTERACTIVIDAD EN LA RADIO**
Impartido por Guy Riboreau, Director del Centro de Capacitación de Radio Francia Internacional.
Duración: 20 horas.
Cupo máximo: 15 personas.
- **NUEVOS GÉNEROS Y FORMATOS RADIOFÓNICOS**
Impartido por Mariano Cebrían Herreros, docente e investigador de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid, España.
Duración: 20 horas.
Cupo máximo: 20 personas.

Tutoriales

- **CREACIÓN DE POESÍA SONORA**
Impartido por: Enzo Minarelli, poeta, artista audiovisual y editor, Italia.
Duración: 4 horas.
Cupo máximo: 20 personas.
- **EAR-CLEANING – EXERCISES IN LISTENING**
Impartido por: Murray Schafer, creador del concepto de paisaje sonoro, Canadá.
Duración: 4 horas.
Cupo máximo: 45 personas.
- **CULTURA DE PAZ, UN CAMINO PARA LA RADIODIFUSIÓN**
Impartido por José Zepeda Varas, Director del Departamento Latinoamericano de Radio Nederland.
Duración: 8 horas.
Cupo máximo: 15 personas.



**INFORMES EN
RADIO EDUCACIÓN**
Ángel Urraza 622, Col. Del Valle
Tels. 1500 1054 y 1500 1061

www.radioeducacion.edu.mx

www.bienalderadio.com