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# John Fonte: Why There Is a Culture War Study Guide

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# JOHN FONTE: WHY THERE IS A CULTURE WAR

## STUDY GUIDE, 2006

### Steven Alan Samson

<http://www.orthodoxytoday.org/articles/FonteCultureWar.shtml>

#### Study Questions

1. Identify the two competing worldviews (Thomas Sowell calls them "visions" in *A Conflict of Visions*) that Fonte finds lurking below the surface calm. [At root this is a dialectic that goes back centuries as Richard Weaver notes in *Ideas Have Consequences*. It is the old problem of the One and the Many: unity vs. multiplicity or plurality. In the Middle Ages it gave rise to the Battle of the Universals: realism vs. nominalism. Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy discusses the role of revolution and revolutionary thinking in the history of western civilization in *Out of Revolution*; James Billington focuses on the period from 1789 to 1917 in *Fire in the Mind of Men*; Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn has written an equally detailed analysis in *Leftism*; Dwight Murphey's works are also recommended]. (15-16)
2. How did **Antonio Gramsci** extend Karl Marx's analysis of society? Who are "the people" (in Gramsci's parlance) and how are they disadvantaged? How is power is exercised by privileged groups? What does he mean by **hegemony**? What step is necessary in order to empower the **marginalized**? On what battlefields is the resulting "war of position" fought out? [NOTE: Kenneth Minogue also discusses the idea that the "the personal is the political"] (16-17)
3. What did Gramsci believe necessary to promote revolutionary consciousness? What role did he assign to intellectuals? What is meant by "**absolute historicism**"? [Postmodern schools of thought tend to regard all ways of knowing and doing as "socially constructed": conventional rather than natural]. What was distinctive about the "Hegelian Marxism" [and "critical theory"] associated with the **Frankfurt School**? (17)
4. What is "**group-based morality**"? How this idea differ from both the Judeo-Christian and the Kantian-Enlightenment [classical liberal] ethical frameworks? Relate Gramsci's concept of dominance and hegemony to Catharine MacKinnon's view of "male power" [also referred to as **patriarchy** and **androcentrism** on p. 26]. Her emphasis is on "group subjection." How has MacKinnon's view influenced American law? (18-19)
5. Besides academics and politics, identify some of the major sectors of American society that have been influenced by Gramscian ideas. **Diversity** has become a code word for groups, group identity [Kuehnelt-Leddihn called it "identitarianism" in *Leftism*], and group rights. [See Budziszewski on "The Problem with Communitarianism"]. What is meant by "**internalized oppression**" in diversity education? [Gramsci used the term "hegemony"; Marx would have used the term "false consciousness"]. Who were some of the leading opponents of Ward Connerly's initiative I-200 in the state of Washington? (19-21)
6. In *Democracy in America* (1835, 1840), **Alexis de Tocqueville** described an American political culture that has been called "**American exceptionalism**" for its conscious effort to keep its distance from Old World ways and problems. Identify its three chief components? Who are some of today's Tocquevilleans? What is the danger posed by a "therapeutic state" (the term originated with Philip Rieff's analysis of a therapeutic culture in *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*). What are some of the other groupings outside the

Gramscian and Tocquevillian orbits? (21-24)

7. What are "**mores**"? Who are some of the Tocquevillians and from where do they draw their inspiration? What is the source of **civic truths**, according to "A Call to Civil Society"? What is the underlying perception behind calls for cultural renewal and cultural transmission? What has historically been the primary force for cultural transmission? Where do Tocquevillians differ with regard to the proper role of government in this transmission? [See Budziszewski on the strategies of "filtration" and "inculcation" in regime design]. Identify some faith-based projects. (24-26)
8. Whose work inspired or influenced the Gender Equity in Education Act of 1993 and the Violence Against Women Act of 1994? How is the idea of group subjection, group consciousness, and group rights promoted by these laws? [Minogue makes an oblique reference to such ideological thinking, calling it "political moralism;" Lieber discusses an antecedent of such thinking, calling it Rousseauism; Schumaker and his colleagues discuss the different form of feminism in *Great Ideas/Grand Schemes*]. What is meant by **disparate impact**? (26-28)
9. What is the Supreme Court's record in adjudicating cases arising under these laws? According to Christina Hoff Sommers, what are the implications of the Court's ruling in *Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education*? What was the basis of Justice Stevens dissent in *Boy Scouts of America v. Dale*? Why did Justice Scalia dissent in *Romer v. Evans*? What was the rationale for the HUD investigation of a Berkeley neighborhood?
10. What would be the implications for the American experiment if Gramscian [as well as Marxist and Rousseauist] principles were to triumph? (31)

## Review

Antonio Gramsci	hegemony
false consciousness	traditional vs. organic intellectuals
absolute historicism	Frankfurt School
Catharine MacKinnon	group rights
areas of Gramscian activity	Alexis de Tocqueville
components of American exceptionalism	mores
civic truths	Carol Gilligan