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Benjamin Barber: Jihad vs. McWorld Study Guide

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BENJAMIN BARBER: JIHAD VS. MCWORLD

STUDY GUIDE, 1996-2003

Steven Alan Samson

Study Questions

1. Identify the forces that are plotting out two possible political futures. [The philosopher Henri Bergson made a similar observation in his discussion of the "law of dichotomy" and the "law of twofold frenzy" in The Two Sources of Morality and Religion]. What do they have in common?
2. Identify the four imperatives of McWorld or political globalization. What are some of the signs of an erosion of national sovereignty? What sort of peace and stability is favored within these international markets? What are some of the unifying factors? What factors come to be marginalized?
3. How did the dream of autarky and the reality of dependence play out in Periclean Athens? In modern America? What commonalities are required by Enlightenment science and technology? What languages and new attitudes are coming to prevail in the world of "ideology on four wheels?" [By contrast, Russell Kirk also recognized the automobile's disintegrating effects, calling it a "mechanical Jacobin."]
4. What does the author mean by equating "Americanization" and "homogenization?" [Hint: the behavioralist school of political science was promoting such "universalism."] What does he mean by software supremacy? [Does the software designer prescribe the range of its uses? If the planned society is inevitable, who will guard the guardians?] Discuss the power of life-style images. What are some of McWorld's undemocratic tendencies?
5. How does the ecological imperative cut two ways? Why may it intensify inequality? To what extent has the "Enlightenment dream of a universal rational society" been realized? Parodied? [Think about the two tribes in H. G. Wells's story, "The Time Machine."]
6. Why do global institutions so often seem to be "ineffective reactors to the world's real actors?" When did the character of nationalism change? What is the aim of the resulting small-scale wars? What are some of the causes of this fragmentation? [The term in political science is "balkanization."]
7. What virtues are displayed by each form (McWorld and Jihad)? What are some of the corresponding vices? What does the author mean by "antipolitics" and what sort of antipolitics is associated with each extreme? [Read Kenneth Minogue's Politics for a systematic treatment of politics and antipolitics. Paul Rahe's "Don Corleone, Multiculturalist" is also apropos].

8. Which of these two options does Barber expect to triumph over the long haul? What are the democratic forms of each that may yet be realized? Why does Barber recommend a reconsideration of the Articles of Confederation? What are some of the obstacles? May institutions be bodily transferred from one culture or context to another?
9. How should "indigenous democratic impulses" be treated? What is the danger of "democracy in a hurry?" What would Barber's preferred future look like?