

What Is 'Culture War'?

Day by day, year by year, what once was unthinkable has now become celebrated, and even protected by law. Meanwhile, what was once virtuous or admired is seen as hateful and backwards. The older you are, the more you see it.

In the recent past, America and Europe were grounded in a Christian ethos, one that influenced everything in society. Today, a kind of egalitarian, nihilistic ethos—in which individuals create their own beliefs and shape their lives and actions around them—is taking over. If you don't accept or tolerate those behaviors, no matter how deranged or degenerate, you are labeled intolerant and may find yourself sideways with your employer, friends, school, the media, or even the law.

Social commentators have long called the fight over these changes a "culture war." But what really is a culture war? And how serious is it? For answers, we turn first to Carl Von Clausewitz, the famed Prussian military tactician from the 19th century who is still widely read by military leaders around the world.

In his masterpiece, [*On War*](#), published posthumously by his wife Marie, Clausewitz aims to make a seemingly variable concept easily understood.

War is nothing but a duel on a larger scale. Countless duels go to make up war, but a picture of it as a whole can be formed by imagining a pair of wrestlers. Each tries through physical force to compel the other to do his will; his immediate aim is to throw his opponent in order to make him incapable of further resistance.

War is thus an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will.

A simple, yet effective definition of war. But we also need to define the “culture” part of “culture war.”

Often when individuals think of culture they think of fine art, fancy meals, and a night at the opera. But these are generally considered high culture and are only components of the overall culture.

“Taken in its broad, ethnographic sense,” Sir Edward B. Tylor, a 19th century intellectual in the anthropology field, wrote in [*Primitive Culture*](#), culture is “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”

The foundation of any culture is belief or *ethos*, most often the religious beliefs of a people. *Merriam-Webster* defines *ethos* as “the distinguishing character, sentiment, moral nature, or guiding beliefs of a person, group, or institution.”

A culture war, therefore, may be considered a non-traditional war waged over the *ethos* or guiding beliefs which inform and shape the collective actions of a people, nation, or even civilization. It’s a war over the very foundations of society, law, morals, and customs, and in some ways, reaches much deeper than many traditional wars.

The objective of a culture war is the destruction and replacement of one *ethos* and its culture for another, but not through the means of a conquering army or a traditional civil war fought with opposing armies. It is far more subtle and takes place internally, with the proponents of change spending decades hollowing out and taking over cultural institutions such as media, entertainment, and education. If they meet with success, they begin seizing the levers of power in government, giving them the full use of force against their enemies.

In the end, the object of a culture war is the same as a traditional war: *“to compel our enemy to do our will.”*

And that is why we must take seriously the culture war that has engulfed our nation and grown hotter in recent months. For far too long, opponents of the new *ethos* have assumed that all will be well if they just win a few elections. Yet they long ago abandoned the realms of media, education, and entertainment to the point that they no longer can enter those realms, and thus must create entirely new and independent culturally influencing platforms.

Worse, there can be no neutral in a culture war. If a hostile group or fifth column seeks to destroy your beliefs and culture, and by extension sees anyone upholding those beliefs as an enemy, you are at war whether you like it or not. Much like being threatened and harassed by a crazed stalker, “live and let live” is impossible in a culture war. The proponents of change will not stop their assault until you not only surrender to their *ethos*, but celebrate it.

As Clausewitz writes of kindness in war:

*Kind-hearted people might of course think there was some ingenious way to disarm or defeat an enemy without too much bloodshed, and might imagine this is the true goal of the art of war. **Pleasant as it sounds, it is a fallacy that must be exposed: war is such a dangerous business that the mistakes which come from kindness are the very worst.** The maximum use of force is in no way incompatible with the simultaneous use of the intellect. If one side uses force without compunction, undeterred by the bloodshed it involves, while the other side refrains, the first will gain the upper hand.*

What Clausewitz describes above is exactly what has taken place in recent decades. The proponents of change took the fight seriously, and when they seize power, they use that power “without compunction.” Whereas the opponents of the

egalitarian nihilism eating away at the fiber of our people have been far too kind and “tolerant.” They are still operating in a “live and let live” mentality that has long since passed.

A culture war is just as serious as a traditional war, even more so in many cases. There is no neutral in this fight, it’s a total war for the very soul of our nation.

—

Image Credit: Unsplash