

# THE INSTITUTE OF WORLD POLITICS

## Leaving a Legacy for the Defense of Western and American Civilization

By John Lenczowski  
Founder and President, The Institute of World Politics

Occasionally, friends of mine who are concerned about the decline of our civilization ask me how they might make strategic investments to reverse that decline and to defend the civilization that we in America and the West have inherited and wish to pass on to our children and future generations. Here, then, are some reflections on how one can leave a legacy to those causes that give maximum support to the strengthening, defense, and advancement of our precious civilization.

Let me begin by quoting a friend of mine, Jim Kimsey, a pioneer in the development of the internet and the co-founder of AOL, who once said: “There are only four things you can do with your money: 1) spend it lavishly on yourself; 2) give it to your ungrateful children and ruin their lives; 3) give it to the government; or 4) give it to causes that will do some good for your community, your country, and the world.” How to accomplish the last of these four options is a challenge that, in the absence of a coherent set of objectives and a strategic plan to accomplish those objectives, is a true problem for anyone faced with it. Since I have thought about this issue at length, let me share with you a conceptual framework for the most responsible and strategic allocation of resources that would have the greatest impact.

### **The Problem: The Fragility of Civilization**

One disturbing but incontrovertible fact about the human condition is that civilization is fragile. It is much easier to destroy it than to create it. As they say, it takes centuries to create a gentleman. Thus, to preserve civilization and to advance it, it cannot be taken for granted. Private citizens, including business and community leaders, educators, cultural leaders, the media, as well as government leaders, cannot be passive about this; they must take active steps to accomplish this task, especially when there are ideas, movements, and anti-cultural impulses that would tear down what has been built and replace it with mediocrity or, worse, degradation.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century revealed just how fragile civilization is. This was the century that witnessed:

- two world wars;
- the rise of Nazism in the lands of Beethoven and Mozart;
- the rise of Communism and its Maoist variety that together were responsible for the murder

- of well over 100 million people (not including those killed in war);
- the rise in the welfare states of the West of the phenomenon of the underclass – a group distinct from the traditional poor – with its unique and seemingly intractable pathologies;
- the growth of Islamic communities in Europe that threaten to erase the distinctiveness of individual European cultures; and
- the concomitant rise of Islamist fanaticism around the world – a phenomenon that has resulted not only in countless acts of terrorism but such spectacles as the destruction of centuries-old monumental Buddhist sculptures in Afghanistan.

Each of these developments to one degree or another, and their cumulative total, have done, or, in the case of growing Islamist radicalism, have the capability to do, incalculable damage to Western civilization as it has been built up over the centuries. Most of these cases have involved the creation or development of radical ideologies at odds with the ideas, principles, and aesthetic sensibilities that have been the building blocks of western civilization. Earlier, the French Revolution, a revolution driven by radical ideology, was another example of fanaticism that violently overturned a traditional order hospitable to high civilization. As Burke lamented about the Revolution: “But the age of chivalry is gone. That of sophisters, economists, and calculators, has succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished for ever.” This was in sharp contrast to the American Revolution, which changed the political order without undermining civilization.

Meanwhile, in the modern West (Europe and America), our intelligentsia has been suffering from a severe lack of clarity of thought about what are the boundaries that separate civilization from barbarism. This is not just a passive failure on the part of the intellectuals; it is a condition aggravated by active subversion by many of those intellectuals. Civilization, after all, has certain ingredients, and too many among today’s intelligentsia not only fail to identify these ingredients, but, in both direct and indirect ways, make these ingredients targets for destruction.

One of the ways this destruction is undertaken is by subjecting healthy institutions and customs to the kind of criticism that would destroy them or make them irrelevant to the lives of people who need them. Instead of judging such institutions, customs, and ideas by real-world standards – i.e., by comparing them to institutions, customs and ideas to others elsewhere in the world, critics judge them by utopian standards of perfection.

Other influences that undermine civilization are moral relativism, the rejection of the existence of truth, the rejection of beauty, the failure to acknowledge the relationship between beauty and truth, and the abjuring of excellence. When standards of morality, truth, and beauty are distorted, blurred, or outright rejected, students of the next generation as well as large elements of the public at large become confused about those standards. Some will fail to realize that the institutions, customs, principles, and ideas that sustain civilization and stave off

barbarism do not inhere in nature, are not free goods, and require active defense. Such confusion or ignorance, in turn, translates into an inability to recognize threats to that civilization that remains. In other words, the abandonment of standards results in a weakening of a nation's "immune system" and a continued vulnerability to the erosion of civilization.

The visible results of such confusion, ignorance, and subversion include:

- the coarsening of language and manners;
- "art" that requires no talent or the hard work needed to develop talent;
- public "art" of such breathtaking ugliness and mediocrity that it prompts public protests;
- decades of atonal "classical" music that drove crowds away from the symphony halls;
- the abandonment of classical music programming from public radio;
- hubristic and ugly architecture that glorifies the architect rather than ennobling and pleasing the users of the edifices;
- the removal of old books from public and university libraries;
- the rise of gratuitous and graphic sex in both cinema and literature and the general pornographization of entertainment;
- the decay of scholarship through ideologization and focus on methodology rather than substantive analysis;
- the distortion of history in ways that deprive us of our national memory and cultural identity;
- attacks on America's heritage that minimize American cultural and civic achievements and elevate American sins in such a way as to undermine morally-ordered patriotism;
- the abandonment of a "core curriculum" at almost all the major colleges and universities in America – that curriculum which exposed students to the ideas, history, and literary and cultural achievements of Western civilization; and
- the consequent loss of cultural, historical, and philosophical literacy and common intellectual and cultural bonds (of the high culture variety) among Americans who purport to be educated, and their substitution by bonds based solely on materialistic utilitarianism and low, "popular" culture.

One result of such developments is the ongoing "culture war" whose protagonists are represented by various institutions. On the artistic side of this conflict are a few institutions like the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which represent the apogee of high civilization of the West. Such institutions stand and prosper precisely because there are private citizens who understand the importance for the larger common good of the preservation and advancement of this level of culture.

On the other side of the divide, there is a myriad of other cultural, or perhaps one could say anti-cultural, institutions – many of which represent the trends of nihilism, glorification of mediocrity, anomie and alienation, deconstructionism, "post-modernism," and other ideologies

and impulses that are often and usually in direct revolt against the civilization represented by the treasures at the Met. Most of these trends reflect the rejection of beauty and the promotion of gimmickry and visual expressions that “push the boundaries” of what is deemed to be the conventional, humdrum, philistine sensibilities of the unenlightened. As one of the most famous modern artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century admitted, he sold his soul and abandoned the pursuit of true art in order to “*epater les bourgeois*” – to amaze, or excite the passions of, the uncultured but wealthy bourgeois mentality.

In Europe, this process is even further advanced than in America. There, we are witnessing not only the degradation of venerable cultures but also their gradual disappearance – through “civilizational fatigue,” demographic suicide, massive Moslem immigration, and the loss of national identity and culture. History reveals that the loss of civilization is assuredly not impossible – witness great civilizations of the past that now lie in ruins as a result of war, economic catastrophe, mass migration, and moral-cultural decay. Imagine what would happen to the Met, the Louvre, the Prado, or the Uffizi if radical Islamists were to succeed in their mission to establish a global Caliphate a hundred years from now. Such nightmares need not keep us awake if a concerned and vigilant citizenry does its part to preserve our precious inheritance.

### **The Solution**

As disparate as this disturbing congeries of problems would seem, there are actually coherent ways to address them. The most strategically effective solutions must involve recognition that there are certain decisive causes of the problems involved. These causes are principally in the realm of ideas – ideas that have consequences, consequences that we now lament.

The beginning of wisdom is to identify the problem ideas and how they are promulgated in such a way as to have such large-scale cultural effects. If there is anything in common about the various ideological causes of the problem, it is the rejection of standards: standards of truth, standards of beauty, and ultimately, moral standards. The source of this rejection is moral relativism and its derivative, cultural relativism. Moral relativism is the assertion that there are no objective, universal moral standards and that any and all such “standards” are a matter of personal preference – preference that is established by the individual’s personal, financial, political, social, or sensual benefit or convenience. Cultural relativism is the assertion that no culture is better than any other, that no set of ideas is superior to any other, and that, therefore, no civilization is to be preferred above any other.

For such ideas to triumph, it is necessary to ignore or suppress centuries of philosophical wisdom (a task successfully accomplished at most colleges and universities today) as well as knowledge of comparative civilizations. The study of such subjects reveals, for example, that the Decalogue is not only of Judaic and Christian relevance, but, also represents the *de facto* moral

code of most great civilizations. It also raises simple but compelling questions that lie at the heart of an examined life: for example: if moral relativism were true, then how could one have any basis to criticize the Holocaust or the Gulag? Aren't these just other lifestyle choices? And who are we to criticize someone else's lifestyle?

To understand the importance of standards and to uphold those standards, it is necessary to have institutions whose business it is explicate them, maintain them, and defend them. These are the institutions that are the pillars of a civilization. They include:

1. at the most elemental level, those institutions that examine and teach fundamental philosophical truths. These institutions explore such philosophical questions as: the existence or non-existence of a transcendent, objective, universal moral order; the origin of any such order, and therefore whether or not a transcendent being exists; human nature and whether it is malleable and perfectible on a mass scale; the existence of truth; and the relationship between beauty and truth. Ultimately, for some of these questions to be answered in all their dimensions, they must be addressed from metaphysical and even theological perspectives.
2. institutions whose work is to present or sponsor works of art and culture – fine art, music, literature, theater, architecture – that represent beauty, a beauty that happens also to reveal truth. These institutions display, maintain, and celebrate the masterpieces of human creation that hold up the true standards of beauty and excellence.
3. educational institutions that integrate the study of philosophy with the arts, sciences, literature, and history: in other words colleges and schools that offer a classical liberal arts education with a core curriculum.
4. educational institutions that are involved in the defense of our civilization – defense in all its forms: moral, political, aesthetic, cultural, ideological, philosophical, economic, diplomatic, and military.

### **The Specific Role of Classical Liberal Arts Colleges and The Institute of World Politics**

The role of higher education in the teaching and upholding of standards cannot be underestimated. American colleges and universities as a whole used to accomplish this task with excellence but, with a few exceptions, no longer do. Most name-brand “elite” academic institutions today have long since rejected the classical “core curriculum” of liberal arts in favor of offering a 2,000-course smorgasbord where the students, with no guidance, choose to consume only the “desserts” and almost never the nutritious fare. Students graduate from college with major gaps in the knowledge of philosophy, literature, sciences, foreign languages, fine arts, history, geography, and politics. However bright they may be and however prestigious

their college, too many American students emerge as fundamentally uneducated people who have neither mastered an understanding of the principles and foundations of their civilization nor grappled with the central philosophical questions that would enable them to pass rather than flunk life.

There are a select few remaining classical liberal arts colleges which accomplish the pedagogical and civilizing mission that the elite schools used to do. These institutions, which constitute the new elite in undergraduate pedagogy, are the ones that retain and consciously defend a “core curriculum” in the liberal arts and most of them are not the brand names. These schools recognize that there is a wisdom of the ages. In contrast to other colleges’ practice of leaving decisions on what to study to uneducated students, these schools assign mature adult professors with life experience to the task of giving the young people guidance as to what are the truly important subjects to study.

At the graduate level, there is our own institution, The Institute of World Politics. We are the only graduate school in the nation consciously dedicated to the moral, political, cultural, economic, diplomatic, and military defense of our country and civilization.

President John Adams once wrote a letter to his wife in 1780 where he explained:

*I must study politics and war, that my sons may have liberty to study mathematics and philosophy....in order to give their children a right to study painting, poetry and porcelain.*

This sentence, which I consider to be a classic American aphorism, summarizes the logic of why I founded the Institute. We teach exactly those subjects which must lie at the basis of the defense of our country and civilization – as Adams identifies them: philosophy, politics, and war – the subjects which concern the establishment of peace and security, which are our nation’s highest public policy priority. Nothing in our public life is possible without peace and security – neither domestic governance, commerce, the exercise of civil liberties, the pursuit of art and culture, nor even organized charitable work. Strategic errors in achieving these goals are the costliest and most grievous errors that our government can make. Sometimes, such errors have historically resulted in the fall of governments, the loss of national independence, and even the collapse of civilizations.

We send our sons and daughters in harm’s way to fight for our freedom and security. They depend on sound political, diplomatic, and military strategy, intelligence, counter-intelligence, and economic strategy. Failure in each of these departments is almost always an intellectual failure – a failure to understand a foreign culture, a failure to know how to handle a given political or diplomatic situation, an intelligence failure, a counterintelligence failure, a failure to communicate effective messages, a failure even to realize that one must have strategic

communications, a failure to understand which is the most strategic of the various battlefields where a conflict is underway. This is but a handful of examples where lack of knowledge can have deadly consequences, consequences that can last for years, threatening our lives and the lives of those who take tremendous risks to protect us.

At the heart of the Institute's curriculum is the teaching of fundamental philosophical principles, applied ethics, American Founding Principles, comparative ideologies and civilizations, history, geography, international relations, and economics. These subjects are part of our foundational curriculum that must supply what most of our students (and, when I was at Georgetown University for fifteen years, my graduate students there as well) never were taught in college.

Then, of course, we teach the various arts of statecraft: military strategy, the art of diplomacy, peacemaking and conflict resolution, public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, intelligence, counterintelligence, economic strategy, and the methods of leadership. The purpose of imparting knowledge of all these arts is to restore a capability to use also the non-military instruments of power effectively – including several extremely neglected ones – so as to minimize the necessity of using force to protect our interests while enabling us to defend our civilization at every level.

Our teaching of the political and philosophical principles that are the secrets of our country's success as a civilization is based on the premise that one cannot effectively defend a country and civilization that one neither understands nor appreciates. Perhaps one can say that it is impossible to defend a country that one doesn't love. Hence, we teach those elements of our civilization that can only inspire one to appreciate its rarity and preciousness in comparison to most human experience throughout the centuries.

In this regard, there is a relationship between what one can call the moral health of a civilization, its vulnerability to external threat, and therefore its ability to survive in an anarchic and often dangerous world. The ancient Roman historian, Livy, once explained that the surest way to defeat an enemy is to promote among his population the ideas of selfishness and hedonism that encourage a moral decline. Such moral decline is perceived by external enemies as an internal weakness which can be exploited for strategic advantage. Indeed, the moral decline of a civilization, as was the case in ancient Rome, has a price: a price frequently paid in war. One can argue that many of the Islamist extremists see exactly this kind of "provocative weakness" in America today, and this perception has emboldened their aggression against our people and the symbols of our culture.

If more Americans received the type of education offered at The Institute of World Politics and at undergraduate colleges with sound core curricula, our civilization would be much more secure and the state of high culture in our nation's various artistic endeavors and

institutions would be in much better health. Arguably, support of such institutions is one of the most strategic investments that can be made for the preservation, defense, and perpetuation of our extraordinary civilization.