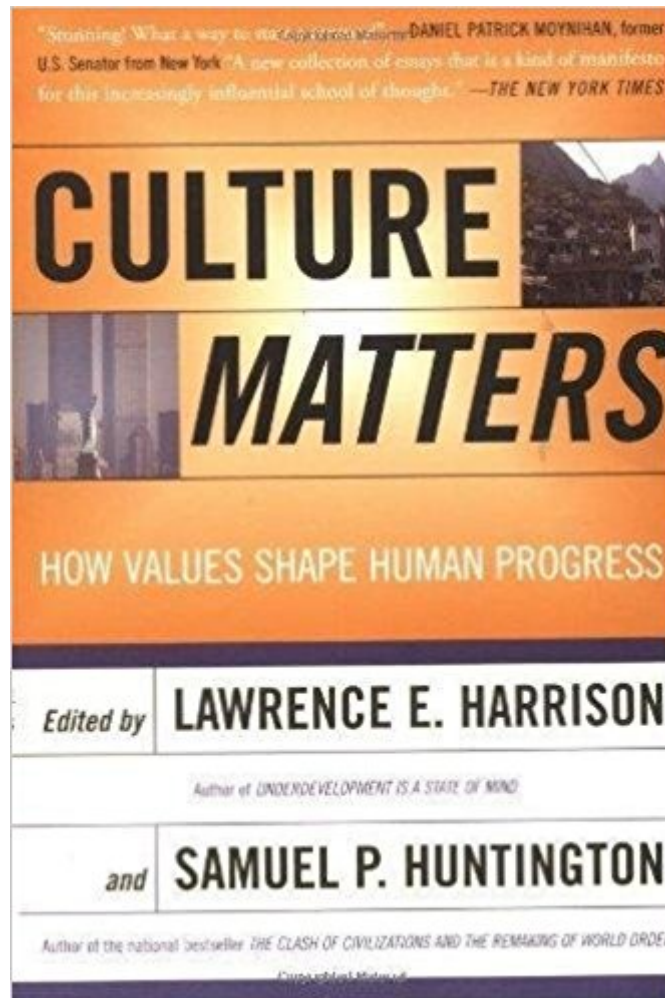




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# Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress



## Synopsis

Prominent scholars and journalists ponder the question of why, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the world is more divided than ever between the rich and the poor, between those living in freedom and those under oppression.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This collection of essays addresses a difficult question: Are some cultures better than others at creating freedom, prosperity, and justice? Although *Culture Matters* offers varying responses to this politically incorrect question, its editors, Lawrence E. Harrison and Samuel P. Huntington, as well as the bulk of its contributors, answer in some form of the affirmative. In an introduction, Harrison (author of *Underdevelopment Is a State of Mind*) writes in the third person of the movement he helps lead: "They are the intellectual heirs of Alexis de Tocqueville, who concluded that what made the American political system work was a culture congenial to democracy; Max Weber, who explained the rise of capitalism as essentially a cultural phenomenon rooted in religion; and Edward Banfield, who illuminated the cultural roots of poverty and authoritarianism in southern Italy, a case with universal applications." (The book, moreover, is dedicated to Banfield, "who has illuminated the path for so many of us.") For readers loath to make value judgments about cultures, *Culture Matters* may be tough going. But admirers of *Trust* by Francis Fukuyama, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations* by David Landes, and any number of books by Thomas Sowell will find much to admire on these pages. Fukuyama and Landes, in fact, have written chapters--along with Barbara Crossette,

Robert Edgerton, Nathan Glazer, Seymour Martin Lipset, Orlando Patterson, Lucian Pye, Jeffrey Sachs, and many others. In an especially compelling essay on Africa's continuing plight, Daniel Etounga-Manguelle asks, "What cultural reorientation is necessary so that in the concert of nations we [Africans] are no longer playing out of tune?" And this is the point of the book: not to denigrate any particular culture, but to figure out how all people can improve their quality of life. In the words of Harrison, who pens the book's concluding essay, "It offers an important insight into why some countries and ethnic/religious groups have done better than others, not just in economic terms but also with respect to consolidation of democratic institutions and social justice. And those lessons of experience, which are increasingly finding practical application, particularly in Latin America, may help to illuminate the path to progress for that substantial majority of the world's people for whom prosperity, democracy, and social justice have remained out of reach." --John J. Miller --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Why do some cultures achieve economic success while others languish? Why do some countries develop successful democracies while others continue to undergo political upheavals? Are these discrepancies because of the cultural values of a people and their country? How important are these values, and can they be modified? These questions and others are discussed within the wide-ranging, thought-provoking, and sometimes quite controversial essays presented here. Drawn from a symposium sponsored by the Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies, essays by David Landes, Lucien Pye, Barbara Crossette, and others cover a wide variety of topics, from the effect of culture on various countries throughout the world to a discussion of culture and its role in gender issues. Also of interest are essays on how cultural issues may be the root cause of African American underachievement in the United States. Those interested in economics, cultural studies, international studies, and political science will find much to think about in this challenging collection. For academic libraries.-Danna Bell-Russel, Library of Congress Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Great book ! Great service !! :)

Used this book recently for a Global Studies class in college. Although some of the statistics and information are a little outdated now that this book is about 15 years old, it still provides many insightful essays dealing with global economic and sociological issues. Most of the chapters are very well written, although there are a few that are hard to read. Get it here for cheap, it's a good

resource.

I was pleasantly surprised by the opinions of the different participants. It has helped me in a book that I'm preparing about the real causes of underdevelopment in Latin America where I live. I always suspected that our attitudes toward work, savings, life, were the possible culprits. This work has put clearly those factors in evidence.

This is really the detailed paper(s) of a conference of political scientists and sociologists explaining the correlation between progress and certain cultural attributes. These political scientists papers often debate and contradict each other. This is certainly interesting. But, it is difficult to extract a main theme out of this book. You also feel that this field is associated with a great deal of political correctness regarding a sensitive issue. So, the language is not always very direct. You often wonder what these political scientists are really saying in between the lines. One great benefit from this book is that it got me acquainted with the 'World Value Survey.' This is an amazing ongoing analysis of different nations culture regarding different axis such as secular vs religious, level of freedom, level of trust in national institution. The World Value Survey has a website with a bunch of free published paper on many aspects of sociological analysis in the book. In the sense, the World Value Survey website is just as good if not better than the book.

This book is a very good compilation of article on the role of culture in development. The compilation includes articles by a large number of premier authors on the subject, including the editors, Michael Porter, David Landes, Jeffrey Sachs, Francis Fukuyama, among others. The articles deal with many different topics, though the common theme is how culture affect the success of a certain aspect of society, such as health, education, institutions, justice, etc. It does focus on blaming certain cultures for lack of success, but rather it tries to understand the themes that allow certain cultures to outperform others. The lessons do not blame a culture, but rather suggests somewhat modest (and often drastic) change that is necessary to permit a well functioning capitalist economy to exist. As an economist, I found this book extremely useful in demonstrating the "transaction costs" that a culture may impose on a country, hence reducing its opporutnities for growth. In economics, this is usually studied in theory, but this book provides lively examples of how this is truly the case. However, I do believe that this book would be useful for practitioners in other disciplines.

Culture Matters consists on a series of essays written by well-known scientists and journalists from

all over the world. Each of them describes the causes of underdevelopment based on many theories, but mainly through sociological explanations, like culture, values and attitudes. As a Latin American I can say I finally found a book that brings light into such a controversial issue as the failure of our countries. I was particularly impressed by Carlos Montaner's account of the role of the elites in our societies, and how their corrupt practices have destroyed our economies. The book fortunately goes beyond the common and naïf conclusions of the so called anti-imperialists and intellectuals from the left by succeeding in showing the real factors that bring prosperity and progress into communities. It also enriches Weber's work by adding new and interesting aspects that positively contribute to create wealth and welfare for people. I highly recommend this book for everyone who is interested in finding explanations for the underachievement of countries instead of blaming "the forces of evil" and economics.

This is a wonderful book depicting the impact of various cultures on human progress and development.

I just started reading the book and I finished the Culture and Economics section. This book is a collection of essays by prominent sociologists and economists written in an easy to understand language (except for some sections in one essay where the authors want to foist technical terms on you to impress or cajole you into seeing things their way but you will know and identify such people and make your own judgements about what they have to say) and it presents both points of views (the extremes as well as the middle ground). Although there is one bad thing about the book (you cannot tell clearly which author will argue which side until you are in the middle of the essay : this is particularly the case with people who wish to state that Culture Does NOT Matter. They almost sneak up their arguments on you and beat around the bush for pages before getting there; which probably reflects on their essays). If anything, reading this book has told me A LOT about every manner of culture including African and Latin American cultures. These are deep insights that only an observant student of that culture can deduce. It is enlightening to read them at times while at other times you go "Ok, so these people have problems, maybe I can do something about it, maybe I may not, but I would like to know more about the culture good and bad, and particularly the parts that every culture tries to hide or gloss over". This book is a good read for all future politicians, economists, businessmen and anyone who is curious about how to interact with various cultures and what are the motivations behind the actions of various cultures. Fabulous, simply fabulous. What is amazing is the media attention a book like *Guns, Germs and Steel* received as opposed to

this book which is simply sublime. I read passages of it to everyone I know.

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