

**Reinventing Humanity for Survival
in the Twenty-first Century:
Salvaging Our Best through Prehistory
and Multiculturalism**

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**Associate Professor of Anthropology
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**First Annual Final Word Lecture
Faculty Recognition Day
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Introduction

Science is the invention of reality,¹ and many of us as social and physical scientists are reality's inventors. Strange as that notion may sound, the major scientific revolutions including the Copernican, Darwinian and Freudian, all vastly redefined and reinvented our perception of the world, even the universe and humankind's place within it. Perched on the brink of not only a new century but a new millennium, we have reached a watershed of history and the need and opportunity to redefine, if not rediscover, our identities as humans, our relationship to one another and our role as creatures sharing the planet.

As we face the twenty-first century, we pause in anticipation of what lies ahead while reflecting ambivalently on the triumphs and tragedies of the twentieth century, the achievements of which, particularly in science and technology, are undeniable. But those advancements have come with a cost and the dubious distinction of labeling our century the most destructive in human history in terms of magnitude of human bloodshed and devastation inflicted on the environment. In spite of our other achievements, we have yet to forge a viable model for our planet's survival relevant to the exigencies of the century to come.

In our search for paradigms appropriate for modeling the future, historians remind us that those who forget the lessons of the past are bound to repeat them (an image, no doubt, of hell as an eternal World Civ class). But is history an appropriate mirror for reflecting the human condition? Recorded history emerged along with the state and other artifacts of "civilization" a mere 5,000 years ago. The state evolved as an inevitable outcome of the agricultural revolution 10,000 years ago, as an institution necessary for the protection of private property (essentially non-existent before agriculture) and some responsibility for its citizens' physical and economic well-being in return for their loyalty and support. This lecture is not an intentional harangue of the state but argues that the state is but one of many humanly created and highly transient institutions² that, regardless of ideological persuasion, has directed the human condition toward greater degrees of social stratification, economic inequality, crime, conflict and war. After 5,000 years, the state and the downside of its outcomes seem the inevitable and insurmountable end product

of history. A prophet 2,000 years ago proclaimed that "the poor will always be among you." I contend that in engineering the twenty-first century, war and the acceptance of chronic social and economic inequality must become in the minds of men and women as socially unacceptable, humanly unconscionable and morally abhorrent as were the horrors of slavery or the political and social subordination of women — both ubiquitous features of the human landscape for the last five millennia.

State systems, that have in the past endorsed or tolerated such depredations of the human spirit, are not historically *a priori* in existence or inevitable and immutable in their structure. Witness the recent and rapid demise of the Soviet Union and the irony of Marx's prediction of "the withering away of the state" in the case of history's largest empire and first Marxist state. Elsewhere, the power of the modern state to impose itself has yet to make an indelible imprint on much of the continent of Africa. At a time in history when a global marketplace allows for the free and unencumbered transfer of capital and jobs across national boundaries (see Reich 1991) and when military armaments meant for defense of national sovereignty are increasingly used internally as instruments of mass destruction of its own people, the function and longevity of the state as we know it must be questioned.

If the influence of the state in its formative role of determining the human condition is eroding, then we must seize the moment to design more humanly positive and affirming social, political and economic structures that redefine our human identities. As social creatures, our ability to adapt to changing environments has been the hallmark of our species' success. In searching for our "true" human identity I propose that in our present lives as in our human past, we are what we do. Accepting that, we must view the past 10,000 years as an inconclusive phase of human history comprising no more than .5 percent of the human experience. In preparing for a viable future as *Homo sapiens*, we need to take inspiration from our politically and sexually egalitarian past that dominated the two million years prior to the agricultural revolution, as well as preserve and protect the remaining vitality of our multicultural present. Cultural diversity as well as biological diversity are ultimately our most vital resources for maintaining an evolutionary advantage in adapting to the selective pressures of an uncertain future.

Science Invents Reality

I began with the self-consciously audacious remark, "science creates reality." The premise presents "reality" as a highly subjective phenomenon. Reality is a question of perspective — whether one is a person or a paramecium, an aardvark or an ant. Copernicus's proclamation on the earth-sun relationship was greeted with shock and indignation by the temporal and religious establishments of his day. His disclosure could have cost him his life in an age more inimical to rearrangements of the accepted natural order of Man as the focus of God's creation in an earth-centered universe. Copernicus's discovery, though second nature to us now, was quite recent in time — the bulk of humanity before him (and arguably since) having existed quite comfortably on a flat, stable earth around which the sun moves in a constant east-west pattern. At a basic empirical level our senses tell us this is, in fact, true. And when challenged, as I have been from time to time by individuals inhabiting remote parts of Africa, to prove that the earth is a spherical body hurtling through space (as if to say, "If you're so smart with your western education, then prove it."), I am left grasping a worldview no more persuasive than the notion that some illnesses are caused by germs, invisible things that fly through the air and make us sick, to which the same African might respond, "Yes, we know — evil spirits." Regarding Copernicus's hypothesis, I could only stand there and vainly scratch out in the sand crude depictions of the solar system. My case would have benefited more from astrology than astronomy. Ultimately, my worldview like that of the African in my illustration — is culturally created. The shamans of my world, whom I call scientists, have in fact conjured visions and proposed versions of reality which I accept as fact and carry in my head.

If we are capable of reinventing our view of the universe, surely we can take some initiative in reinventing our human identities and our relationships with other living things on this planet. In fact, there is strong precedent for such reinvention. Well over a century ago Darwin taught that we are an evolving part of the natural order of plants and animals. Although Darwin's scheme of humanity and nature would go unquestioned throughout history in much of the non-Western world where attempts to control and subdue nature are minimal, his view of the natural world is still adamantly opposed and rejected by substantial sectors of the Western world.

To survive in the twenty-first century, it is time we reinvented ourselves and our attitudes toward one another. As unlikely as that change might seem, there is evidence from this century that we are capable of the transition and are, in fact, in the midst of launching it. Granted, we have much more to do to fully realize equality between the sexes. However, some very fundamental strides have been made. For example, women's suffrage, the right to vote and participate in America's political process at the most basic level, occurred 73 years ago — less than a lifetime. Who were these people, these Americans who lived then, who tolerated and upheld laws barring half our citizens from this most fundamental right? From our perspective in time, it is hard to reconcile this historical fact. My only physical link to that era is my grandparents — wonderful people, all of them. And yet, my grandmothers were denied this very basic American right until each was in her mid-thirties. Obviously, the nineteenth amendment was a big step in the reinvention of the relationship of the sexes — a process of redefinition with which we are still coming to terms. Whoever it was who denied our grandmothers the right to vote, we are definitely not among them. We are profoundly different in our attitudes, and we will never again tolerate the old male franchise. Although amendments alone can't legislate human dignity, two or three generations after the nineteenth amendment, it is reasonable to say some progress has been made.³

In a review of U.S. history, slavery comprises a particularly dark chapter. It seems inconceivable that the founding fathers, the cream of the Enlightenment, tolerated and condoned slavery. What sleight of hand logic flowed from the pen of Jefferson when he wrote, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal." Today, slavery is internationally outlawed. There are rumors of its existence in Mauritania and examples of indentured servitude in parts of the world, but with a few notable exceptions, this vile institution is dead.

Who were these people who laid claim to other human life, and how was slavery tolerated for so long and on such a massive scale in our society? Most of us feel out of touch with that era and at a loss for an answer. My most direct link to that period was my Great Aunt Ann who was born in 1860 and died 107 years later in 1967, the year I graduated from college. She and my great-grandparents were early homesteaders in Nebraska and didn't

own slaves. However, she is my closest connection with that time in history and the realization that it was not that long ago and, yes, those people were not totally unlike ourselves.

Eventually, the abolition movement became an international cause. Great Britain took steps to unilaterally outlaw the slave trade beginning with the end of the eighteenth century and used its formidable fleet to arrest the trade in human cargo.⁴ As repugnant as the notion of slavery is today (an institution that spanned the last five millennia), our children or grandchildren must adopt a similar attitude toward warfare and violence as primitive, barbaric, outmoded, intolerable and ultimately maladaptive forms of conflict resolution.

We have arrived, in my estimation, at the first point in history where war, like slavery, can and must be abolished. If anything was gained from the Cold War era, it was the recognition that in the nuclear age there can be no victors in a grand scale war — only losers — and that the arms race has been a massive exercise in waste and futility. This is not a moral or idealistic conclusion but a totally pragmatic one.

Having ended the bipolar standoff of the former superpowers, the time has arrived for the United Nations to internationally abolish warfare just as slavery was abolished over a century ago. This process has already begun in the case of international intervention in the conflict in Somalia. A lasting peace in that troubled land may prove elusive due to some faltering first steps by the U.S.⁵ and its international supporters in plotting this new and unconventional course of action. However, precedent has been set. The rest of the world must know from this point onward that armed conflict, like slavery, is no longer tolerable, and the world community of civilized nations no longer will allow it. The warring parties in the former Yugoslavia should be the first to hear of the world's intolerance for war.

The Limitations of History

For our species to survive the twenty-first century and beyond, we need to follow the course that is most adaptive — one that enhances rather than decreases human potential for survival. We need some current assessment, to paraphrase former New York Mayor Ed Koch, of "How're we doin'" as a species. However, comparative reference points from the past pose a problem because recorded history from the last 5,000 years offers few

relevant examples of who we "ought" to be because the bulk of that period is an unrelenting chronicle of chronic conflict and warfare.

Even history's relevant lessons seem wasted on most Americans who have almost an aversion to history because we are still a young nation, almost a nation without history. America has always meant directing hope toward the future. History manifested in war, poverty, class-consciousness and limited opportunity for social mobility is what, for many Americans, our ancestors fled from Europe and elsewhere in the world. And they happily forgot history. I am speaking with only a slight sense of parody when I say that for half of America, history is knowing Paul McCartney sang with another group before Wings. For the other half, history is bunk (as Henry Ford said) perhaps because recorded history provides our species with few positive role models for us to aspire to.

In discussing topics of war and poverty in my classes, I am troubled by my students' steady response that human conflict and economic inequality are inevitable and unavoidable — almost a litany of "As it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be..." My response is that we are in fact psychological prisoners of history — a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy in which we socially rise (or descend) to the level of our own expectations. Perhaps it was best put by James Joyce's Stephen Dedalus's cry: "History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake (Joyce 1961: 34)."⁶ We must, in fact, free ourselves from history and in the process regain a sense of ourselves as quintessential existential beings. As humans, unlike trees or dogs, our being precedes our essence, and with that knowledge we are free, with some limitations, of becoming anything we want.

Reinventing Ourselves from Prehistory

In reinventing ourselves for survival in the future we may gain inspiration from prehistoric and non-western models of cultural behavior, if for no better reason than to see how very adaptable we really are as a species. In the course of evolution our primate predecessors spent the bulk of their time as arboreal-dwelling vegetarians in the tropics of Africa. Since these origins, our hominid family has dispersed and conquered every conceivable eco-niche including, more recently, the Arctic as terrestrial, near complete carnivores a mere 50,000 to 100,000 years ago. Surely we have wandered far from home.

In reflecting on how these remarkable adaptations occurred, let's review some of the highlights of our reinventions. For the major part of evolutionary history, our adaptations were almost strictly biological. The last major physical reinvention of our forebears was upright, bipedal, terrestrial locomotion which occurred over four million years ago with the Australopithecines who were not yet human but represent the first definite hominids or members of our taxonomic family (Hominidae). Our reinvention as two-legged creatures was largely an involuntary response to a diminished forest environment during a period of climatic desiccation following the end of an ice age. It must have been a great shock to abandon the protective arms of an arboreal habitat for life on the land ruled by large carnivores such as lions. These first hominids were quite ill-equipped for this sudden transition because, like ourselves, they were physically generalized beings with no specialized skills (we can't run fast in comparison with a cheetah; we are lacking in sharp fangs and claws for defense or predation.) and, therefore, very vulnerable. Those individuals who survived the transition to a grounded existence found upright locomotion an effective adaptation allowing them to look over the tall savanna grasses and see food and danger. Upright stance also freed the hands to pick up rocks and sticks for defense and later for tool manufacture and manipulation. It also afforded a more secure way to carry young over longer distances.

The second major reinvention involved pair bonding between the sexes and the organization of families. These developments are significant because they illustrate the beautiful complementarity between physical and cultural evolution. Prior to this point in time, the mother-infant bond comprised the basic hominid social unit; males were, as is the case with many mammalian species, nearly superfluous except as inseminators (genitors). However, in the new terrestrial environment, the mother-infant unit was highly vulnerable. Females were particularly constrained in their activities due to the excessively long dependency period of hominid infants compared with other mammals.

How Sex Saved the Species: The Miracle of the Hidden Estrus.

Among almost all non-human mammalian species, sex between males and females occurs at the time of estrus when

ovulation and female sexual receptivity are most likely to result in conception. That is, among other mammals, sex and reproduction are directly functionally related. However, the human female is unique among mammals; estrus is accompanied by no overt signals. And secondly, the human female is potentially sexually receptive at all times. Consequently, from a reproductive standpoint alone, human sex is a highly inefficient activity resulting in much wasted time and energy.

But from a sociological perspective human sexuality is highly efficient because it promotes pair bonding. If human sex occurred only in conjunction with estrus, then males would likely wander off (hunting or whatever) until the next mating period leaving individual females and their young at risk from predators or starvation. However, constant sexual attraction promotes pair bonding and the ongoing assistance of a male in furnishing food and protection. As a result, males developed a vested interest, an equity, in staying close by to ensure that the offspring they feed and protect were indeed their own. The inclusion of males in the social unit marks the origin or invention of the family, the most enduring and universally recognized social institution in the world today.

Subsequent to the development of the hidden estrus and the emergence of the family, our reinventions have focused solely on culture as the primary means of adapting to the environment. Cultural adaptation is infinitely faster than biological adaptation, and culture is direction oriented; it involves an important element of choice on our parts. At least to some degree we choose what we are to become; we plot our own destinies.

The next significant reinvention occurred approximately two million years ago as our genus *Homo* emerged during the Lower Paleolithic and with it our very significant reinvention as carnivores — or at least as creatures having a much greater dependence on meat in the diet. Increased meat eating was a response to terrestrial life on the open African savanna where a non-arboreal diet made it increasingly difficult to achieve adequate protein intake from vegetable sources alone. However, the shift to greater meat consumption was fraught with problems. Evolutionary design equipped our forebears (like ourselves) with a basically vegetarian dentition and digestive tract and a noted absence of carnivore characteristics such as claws and pronounced canines. Furthermore, control of fire for cooking,

rendering meat more digestible, was another 1.3 million years away (a long time to wait for a home cooked meal).

A diet with meat as the main source of high quality protein provided a fully balanced complement of amino-acids for nurturing physical growth including increased brain development. To make this transition, our ancestors created the first stone tools (choppers and slicers), butchering implements, as physical extensions to compensate for their lack of carnivore physiology. With these simple stone tools, cultural adaptation was launched as the main response to coping with the environment. In the process of reinventing ourselves as semi-carnivores and cultural beings, the first stone tools for butchering meat were, arguably, the prototype for all technology to come. These developments helped insure the survival of our species.

Prior to the first stone tools, human subsistence could be best described as grazing and browsing — each individual foraging independently, randomly and opportunistically with no particular emphasis on goal oriented group activities, exchange of food, or collection and storage of food beyond satisfying immediate needs. The first stone technology, though rudimentary, had a revolutionary impact on the economic and social organization of our forebears — some of which we still feel today.

Efficient butchering tools enabled men to become full-time hunting specialists. Group hunts selected for greater social organization, planning and cooperation among male participants. Women, encumbered by pregnancy and nursing children, avoided or were excluded from the hunt because of its physical demands and increased risks. They became gatherers of edible vegetable matter of which they collected more than they could consume and brought the surplus back to exchange for meat. Two million years ago the first technology resulted in the invention of the first division of labor by sex⁷ (a characteristic of all societies ever since), and with it the need to create permanent campsites for the exchange and consumption of food, socializing and sleeping. In effect, the first tools resulted in the invention of home.

Our Basic Human Nature: The Way We Were

In seeking our basic human nature, we can dispense with the nature-nurture, circular social science, chicken-or-egg games. We can, in fact, examine human behavior from a dispassionate, quantitative angle by asking how has the bulk of humanity

behaved for the bulk of human history (much longer than recorded history). The answer is, ninety percent of all humans who have lived on planet earth have been hunters and gatherers. This was the solitary form of subsistence from its point of origin two million years ago up to ten thousand years ago with the advent of organized agriculture. This period comprises 99.5 percent of our genus *Homo*'s existence. If one were to argue that early members of our genus *Homo* were not members of our species, and therefore not fully human, until the emergence of *Homo sapiens* 200,000 to 300,000 years ago,⁸ then hunting and gathering by complete members of our species comprises 95 or 96 percent of human history.

What kind of creatures were we as hunters and gatherers? In brief, we were politically, economically and sexually egalitarian. The need for frequent migration of base camps kept material possessions to a minimum. Individual land ownership was irrelevant because of lack of control over elusive and seasonally variable wild game and vegetation land tracts. Once collected, food resources were perishable, particularly meat; thus, food storage was impractical and personal hoarding was unacceptable and antisocial behavior. Sharing and equal redistribution of food, especially meat, was adaptive behavior. The success of the hunt was sporadic and serendipitous; the unpredictable quality of hunting predicated that meat be shared evenly and reciprocally between all members of a camp regardless of their age or ability. Hunting and gathering afforded a well-balanced high level of nutrition; even today in desertic environments hunters and gatherers manage to draw on dozens of edible plants and animals as food sources and rarely go hungry even in times of seasonal scarcity. The diet of hunters and gatherers is typically superior to contemporary agricultural populations throughout the world, sixty percent of whom subsist on rice and the majority of the rest depend on some other staple carbohydrate such as maize, wheat, or cassava.

Although meat has high value because of its greater scarcity relative to vegetable resources, female gatherers in the tropics supplied 60 to 80 percent of a population's intake from gathered sources. In addition to good nutrition, hunters and gatherers had exceptionally good health due in part to frequent mobility (leaving biodegradable wastes behind); small bands of 25 to 50 individuals having little contact with other human groups also meant that contagion was restricted.

Nominal group leadership emerged based on characteristics of wisdom and merit; they led (not ruled) informally and by virtue of group consensus and only for as long as they led well. Effective leadership warranted respect but no privileged entitlement of access to strategic resources or exemption from work. Leaders led by example; they had no power of coercion. There were no codified laws, police, courts, prisons or armies. Instead of chaos and anarchy, peace and tranquility reigned among hunters and gatherers. Theft, homicide, rape and child abuse were all but unknown. Economic interdependency and commonly shared values promoted group solidarity; antisocial behavior was controlled through peer pressure and group norms. The greatest punishment exacted on deviants was exile — social ostracism and banishment from the group.

Women in hunting and gathering societies were accorded high social and political status equal to or nearly equal to that of men. Although meat is more highly valued than vegetables due to its relative scarcity, women's equality is directly related to their major contribution to subsistence.

Contrary to Hobbes's dismissive view of Man in nature living a life that was "nasty, brutish and short," our hunting and gathering forebears enjoyed the original affluent society in which food was in general abundance and life was basically devoid of social and economic inequalities and their correlates of conflict and war. Our early human ancestors fostered an adaptively advantageous ethic of sharing and caring affording them lives high in quality including a twenty hour work week and lots of free time for social interaction and esthetic expression. Attending all night dances and sleeping late were common adult activities.

Hunting and gathering, though relatively simple in its technology, provided our ancestors with an enduringly successful and resilient existence, one that was meaningful, secure and relatively free of rancor. It is a challenge for alternate modes of subsistence to sustain themselves in any way comparable to hunting and gathering. The first simple tools enabled our forebears sufficient control of their environment that they were able to expand into other habitats outside the tropics. Control of fire some 700,000 years ago provided not only the origins of cooked food, but also enabled our ancestors to inhabit temperate zones and finally conquer the Arctic.

If this reconstruction of our prehistoric past seems hopelessly Rousseauian and valorized, the social, economic and political structures of our past are well-preserved and documented among the remaining quarter million hunters and gatherers living today. Unlike our prehistoric ancestors, these remnant hunters and gatherers live not in the world's lushest environments but in the most marginal recesses of the Arctic, deserts and tropical forests. Today these remaining hunters and gatherers include the !Kung San of the Kalahari in Botswana (see Lee 1984, Thomas 1989), the Mbuti (pygmies) of the Ituri Forest of Zaire (Turnbull 1962, 1983) and many more food collecting groups that were well-documented earlier in this century like the Netsilik Eskimo.

While I wax rhapsodic about the life-style of hunters and gatherers, you may wonder why the majority gave it up in favor of agriculture some 10,000 years ago. My students invariably reply with typical agro-industrial viewpoints: "They wanted to become civilized; they wanted more food and better nutrition; they wanted more free time..." All of these answers are false. Hunting and gathering was so successful that it contributed to its own demise as world population increase and corresponding decrease in carrying capacity rendered it unsustainable. The agricultural revolution was not sudden but a gradual phenomenon that hunters and gatherers gave in to reluctantly.

Agriculture: The Revolution Fought for Social and Economic Inequality

As carrying capacity was met and exceeded under hunting and gathering, more food per unit area needed to be produced. At first this entailed greater attention given to nurturing wild vegetation species — pulling a few weeds, adding a little water in the dry seasons, but most importantly, building rudimentary fences around the first gardens to protect them from grazing wildlife and from the hands of other gatherers. With that first fence 10,000 years ago, the earliest agriculturalist protected his time and energy investment in a plot of land he called his own. In the process, he created the origins of private property and the emergence of social and economic inequality; some farmers grew and stored more than others enabling them to acquire more wives and offspring as laborers. A larger family and kin group afforded protection of this investment as well as a group to mobilize in acquiring additional lands, including the taking by

force of neighbors' fields. The origin of warfare, therefore, was organized theft. It has recurred endlessly since then (Japan's invasion of China in World War II, Iraq's conquest of Kuwait). At the risk of oversimplifying matters, the rest of history is an account of increased economic and social differentiation through class formation and war on ever larger scales of destruction. The technical efficiency of killing other human beings has increased to the point that there is nothing left to do but stop the madness.

The Western Heritage: Hero or Villain

The Western heritage has a long and impressive list of achievements to its credit. From the majesty of Michelangelo to the understated serenity of Emily Dickinson, excellence in the arts is matched only by the dynamism of science and technology. At the core of the Western paradigm is the overriding blessing of the Judeo-Christian tradition that invokes humankind in Genesis to have dominion over the earth including its creatures and material resources. This is clearly a philosophy of humankind living apart from nature in contrast to being a part of nature. For its fulfillment, the philosophy, as interpreted and manifested, seems to justify the aggressive and exploitative conquest of nature and other human beings.

The paradigm has produced wealth and power for a few as well as an inordinate sense of its own superiority. Those who are not followers of the paradigm have historically been declared inherently inferior and deserving of enslavement, domination or physical and cultural destruction. Not only is the paradigm exploitative, it is narcissistic. It assumes everyone else wants to be like us, and if they don't, they should. The paradigm includes an implicit assumption that we are leading the inevitable course of history, and that compels everyone (to borrow the words of Lee Iacocca) to either lead, follow or get out of the way. However, for those outside the West who buy into the paradigm, the majority invariably enter the system on its lowest rung as permanent members of a growing culture of discontent.

The destructive element of the Western paradigm becomes more evident to us if we view it manifested in the non-Western world. The classic example is Brazil's wholesale destruction of its rainforests — the lungs of the planet. Each year a forest area equivalent, by some estimates, to the state of Oklahoma is eliminated and with it the physical and cultural destruction of

the Indians who have lived there for millennia as the forest's guardians. Something between fifty and ninety percent of the earth's biodiversity exists in tropical rainforests, and those who inhabit the forests have maintained its best inventory and knowledge of its uses. Quite simply, when we lose biodiversity, we sacrifice our children's adaptive options for the future. In the destruction of other species, we sound the death knell of our own.

As Americans we comprise only five percent of the world's population. Our share of the world economy is an impressive 25 percent⁹ (Reich 1991); however, to sustain our economy and lifestyle, we also consume 35 to 50 percent of the world's resources (Haviland 1992). That figure has declined some recently not because of any diminution in our pattern of consumption but because other nations, following our lead, are catching up.

The world's population took two million years to reach one billion by 1850 and added an additional four billion from 1850 to the present. Given this vastly increased population, a conflict has emerged between diminishing resources and rising expectations of material consumption. At the risk of labeling myself an alarmist, neo-Malthusian, I must say that the Western paradigm has run its course. Not only is it an inappropriate export to the developing world, but from a two-million year perspective, it appears very limited in its ability to sustain ourselves. (The paradigm is sort of a profligate French amalgam of Marie Antoinette's "Let them eat cake," and Louis the Fourteenth's "*Après moi le deluge*.") In replacement of the present paradigm, I am not proposing a life experienced in sackcloth and monastic self-denial but one in which our identities are geared more toward higher values than the full-throttle acquisition, consumption and disposal of material and human resources. The message is not anti-technology but a clarion call for increased efforts to create technology and energy sources (greater development of renewable non-polluting sources such as solar power) less destructive of nature and other humans.

The Gift of Multiculturalism: Lessons from Somalia

Multiculturalism is not an arrogantly patronizing allowance for other peoples to have equal time to express themselves but a gift in which we become the beneficiaries of all that other cultures have to offer in enhancing quality of life while pooling solutions for our long-term survival.

Most Americans know Somalia as a land of desolation and death, most of it man-made. The suffering of the many is inflicted by a few in an aberrant orgy of destruction wrought with weapons bestowed by the superpowers...a Grim Reaper legacy of the Cold War. However, what I know of Somalis is also the indomitable triumph of the human spirit. In better times, the well-being of many in the midst of a sparse environment is the striking feature of their society. The majority survive and occasionally thrive, by living according to a time-honored ethic of reciprocal obligations and responsibilities to extended kin and community. The needy do not subordinate themselves to their benefactors. Those with more are obliged to respond, without solicitation, to the needs of those with less. Social expectations place greater demands on the generosity of the giver than gestures of gratitude from the receiver. This vital social ethic was explained to me best by a former research assistant, Ahmed Mohamed Ali (currently a refugee in Toronto) who said, "Does a child thank his mother for giving him food?"

The point may be lost on a society in which the value of the individual is elevated to almost religious dimensions. Our lofty ideal of the individual's worth is overstated and overemphasized. It has led to the Me Generation, rampant narcissism and the unrelenting but vain pursuit of fulfillment. Centering on the self dissociates us from commitments bigger than ourselves and leads to indifference to the decay and disintegration in our cities, communities, families and personal relationships. In return, the individual is granted an increased sense of isolation, alienation and a lack of identity with or inclusion in a larger group. In this regard, we have much to learn from tribal societies whose loyalty to family and community goes undiminished. Our species' success is a direct result of our ability to function corporately as members of social groups. Individualism, as an end in itself, is an evolutionary dead end.

In a historically pastoral nomadic society such as the Somali, where possessions are few and literacy is rare, history, values and identity are preserved in a rich oral tradition expressed in poetry. In addition to providing a cultural repository, Somali poets have traditionally functioned as equivalents to lawyers and judges in conflict resolution. In the midst of Somalia's current distress, Dr. Said Samatar, Professor of History at Rutgers and a native-born Somali, has called for his country's

poets to come forth to broadcast on national radio as a means of promoting dialogue between factions and healing wounds by drawing on a common identity. In a world in which most disputes are resolved by threat or use of armed might, it is a happy circumstance to acknowledge the gentle, redemptive power of peace promulgated by poets.

Over a decade ago my wife Nancy and I were completing our dissertation fieldwork among Somalis in northern Kenya. One day our work at home was interrupted by a nearly blind, eighty-year old Somali woman named Mama Hamida. Uneducated and having spent a lifetime in a rugged pastoral nomadic existence, she was about to embark on the *Haj* — the pilgrimage to Mecca. Although all Muslims aspire to go to Mecca once in their lives, few achieve that goal, especially women. Mama Hamida came by to ask for a contribution toward her daunting trip — one that she might not survive. We felt awkward in our meager gift drawn from the penury of dwindled grants. How could it make a difference in providing her fare?

A few weeks later Mama Hamida made a triumphal return to our village. When she arrived to thank us for our blessing on her journey, Nancy and I were poring over a tableful of survey data with our Somali research assistants. From her travel pack she drew a crumpled wad wrapped in Arabic newsprint. The contents revealed a few precious dates from a special palm in Mecca. Few words were spoken as we each partook of the gift carried carefully from the distant and sacred place. The blind woman's gesture was one of life's rare moments that transcend race, religion, age, ethnicity, gender...and all the other barriers that separate us in our more ordinary moments.

These Somali experiences are enduring gifts to me as are the gifts of every culture to us all. The gifts are too precious to be lost, too valuable to go unshared. Let us celebrate diversity, the gift that can give survival to our species and salvation to the planet. PEACE.

Notes

¹ Although I have taken liberty in developing this concept to my own ends, the phrase is borrowed from Professor Ronald Cohen (currently at the University of Florida) my graduate advisor in anthropology, academic and professional mentor, and dear friend from my graduate days at Northwestern University whose particular definition of science made a lasting impression on me.

² In spite of the imposing facade of the state's seeming permanence, there are currently more than 180 states in the world — 130 more than at the time of World War II. Additionally, there are noteworthy examples of states that pre-date WWII that have disappeared from our contemporary map [e.g., U.S.S.R.]. Both the increasing number of states since 1945 and the loss of the world's largest state reveal a reversal in a 5,000-year trend toward fewer and larger political entities.

³ I wish to thank Dr. James Rodechko, Wilkes University History Department, for information regarding women's suffrage.

⁴ Historical events relating to Great Britain and the international abolition of slavery include:

1772 — The legal decision effectively ending slavery in England.

1807 — The Parliamentary Statute that abolished the British slave trade. Britain spent time and diplomatic effort over the following years to enlist support of similar action from other countries.

1883 — Slavery was abolished throughout the British Empire.

Gratitude is expressed to Dr. Joel Berlatsky, Wilkes University History Department, for this information and further commentary on how the abolition of slavery in Britain was inspired by Enlightenment ideals relating to the Rights of Man and the evangelical religious revival of the early nineteenth century.

⁵ Although I endorse American intervention in Somalia for its efforts to curb the tragic famine, I disagree with the lack of decisive and appropriate action taken to ensure an environment of political stability within Somalia. The War Lords do not represent the Somali people, and the Somali people's respect for America has diminished in response to the U.S. military's willingness to tolerate and negotiate with the War Lords. The War Lords are thieves and should be arrested and tried in an international court for war crimes against the Somali people. The terror and pillaging of the Somali people committed by the War Lords is responsible for the majority of the 300,000 to 400,000 deaths in Somalia in the past two years. Additionally, the War Lords have either killed, driven underground or exiled the traditional respected moral authority within Somalia which must reemerge in order to create a lasting peace and enduring government.

⁶ My thanks to Dr. J. Michael Lennon, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Wilkes University, for suggesting the Joyce quote plus additional gratitude expressed for his invaluable editorial assistance and encouragement with this manuscript. Grateful acknowledgement is also due Drs. Patricia and Robert Heaman, Wilkes University English Department, for the exact wording and reference for the quote. Special commendation is accorded Dr. Harold E. Cox, Chair of the Wilkes University History Department, who as director of the Wilkes University Press is responsible for the final editing and printing of this essay. His meticulous attention to detail and willingness to work within extreme time limits, in response to my procrastination with the draft, are deeply appreciated.

⁷ Whereas the first technology created a sexual division of labor, we are now in an era when technology is erasing that division of labor. Relatively few jobs today legitimately exclude women on the basis of need for brute strength or high risk factors — criteria long used to delineate male tasks. Likewise, domestic technology (dishwashers, microwave ovens, frozen and pre-processed foods) render anyone of either sex capable of maintaining basic sustenance. The current elimination of sex roles has far-reaching repercussions for our society and relations between the sexes. If economic interdependence between the sexes is eliminated, then several million years later we have begun to revert back increasingly toward a society based on the mother-infant dyad. Males may once again regress to the mammalian model of social irrelevancy, except as inseminators.

⁸ The physical features of *Homo habilis* and *Homo erectus* were more rugged than modern *Homo sapiens*; however, the major difference between earlier and present members of our genus relate to cranial capacity, approximately 1000 cc for the former vs. 1400 cc for modern humans.

⁹ America's share of the world economy was fifty percent at the end of World War II (Reich 1991). However, as the United States' portion of the international economy has shrunk over forty years, it would appear American consumption of world resources has increased.

¹⁰ Professors Samatar's views on the political functions of Somali poets were presented in two guest lectures at Wilkes University in February 1993. These views were also communicated to the U.S. State Department and military officials in Washington, D.C. in his discussions on Somali policy.

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Concerning the Speaker

James L. Merryman, a fourth generation Nebraskan and descendant of homesteaders, received his B.A. in History and Philosophy from Nebraska Wesleyan University. He has a Master's degree in Anthropology from the State University of New York at Binghamton. He and his wife Nancy (Wilkes, 1969) each hold the Ph.D. in anthropology and were awarded Certificates of African Studies from Northwestern University. The Merrymans have conducted joint research on the social and economic roles of African men and women.

Merryman first encountered Africa with the Peace Corps in 1967. As an agricultural volunteer in Kenya he assisted that newly independent country's dairy and beef industries. His initial contact with Africa made a lasting impression. In 1971 he returned to Kenya to manage a pilot irrigation project in Kenya's arid north for Somali pastoral nomads who had lost their livestock to drought and international conflict. A follow-up study of the area in the late 1970s provided the focus of his dissertation research. During his twelve years in Africa, he has also been involved in applied studies of rural credit, river basin development, arid lands agricultural development, reforestation and programs for refugees. Recently, he served as a consultant to the U. S. State Department on matters relating to the political and economic reconstruction of Somalia.

Merryman joined the Wilkes faculty in 1989 as Associate Professor of Anthropology and International Studies Advisor.

Concerning the Lecture

The premise of the Final Word Lecture is that the lecturer has only six months to live and would like to sum up a career of teaching and scholarship for colleagues, students and friends. While the selected professor is, in fact, healthy, the hypothesized death adds urgency and focus to the lecture. The idea is borrowed from the University of Michigan's "Last Lecture."

The Final Word Lecture is given on the evening of Wilkes University's Faculty Recognition Day, at which faculty are lauded for their achievements as teachers and scholars. A number of awards, including the Carpenter Award for teaching, are announced at this annual event.

The Final Word lecturer is chosen by a committee of Wilkes professors and receives a \$1,000 award through the generosity of an anonymous donor. At a subsequent time, and at the donor's discretion, the title of the award and lecture series will be changed to include the donor's name.

