

The Oil Drum: Campfire

Discussions about Energy and Our Future

Osama Bin Lowrider: Its All the Same Culture

Posted by [Nate Hagens](#) on April 26, 2009 - 10:55am in [The Oil Drum: Campfire](#)

Topic: [Sociology/Psychology](#)

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Tonight's guest essay from [Chuck Burr](#), brought back memories of a similar message, (after reading Daniel Quinn's "Ishmael" many years ago), that jettisoned me from my more=better individual trajectory. Quinn's books were among the first I read suggesting our current cultural norms were not the preordained destination for our species, and caused me to read far and wide about what was happening to our planet and the general intersection of more demand/ less supply. In a related vein, Chuck Burr's essay takes a very wide boundary view of our options as a culture encountering multiple resource limits but weighed down by huge existing fixed infrastructure. I don't agree with all of it, as we may have been 'Takers' all along just with lower tribal populations, but his essay raises some interesting and important issues. We're not going 'back', but it is possible to go forward on a parallel but different path. Tonight's Campfire questions are: How WOULD we just walk away from the existing social and built infrastructure? Is it desirable? Is it possible?

([Campfire Guidelines](#))



Osama BinLowRider - It's All the Same Culture

Our political discussions and media coverage are far too shallow to be useful. We must go deeper and much further back to understand the world today and learn how to get where we want to go.

Almost everyone misunderstands what culture is. Most think it is soda pop, pop stars, blue jeans, language, and TV. Some think it is capitalism, communism, or progressivism. Some see culture as Western culture or Eastern culture.

Look at the motorcycle picture. The motorcycles will fool you. All of the people above belong to the same culture as does a soccer mom in a Chicago suburb. Keep guessing. This makes a huge difference in how we understand what is happening today and where we are going.



The answer is, that we are all Takers. We all belong to the same culture, tea-to-tiler or Taliban, one culture. The Dali Lama or Duncan Donuts cop, one culture. Our Taker culture began 10,000 years ago with the agricultural revolution when they locked up the food, began the population –food race, invented war, started privatizing land, and ended the formerly one universal religion of animism. It was forgotten in just a few generation that there used to be probably 10,000 unique Leaver cultures before our now universal Taker culture—The Great Forgetting.

Some suggest that modern progressive exuberance has replaced Christianity as the modern culture or religion. The “here and now” and a better life for each generation from technology replacing faith in an “unseen unknown afterlife” culminating in a technological singularity that will save humanity.

They are right to identify exuberance, but today’s exuberance is the same that caused a tribe of agriculturalists between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers to start overtaking their Leaver neighbors in an unending conquest that is now largely complete. The age of Enlightenment, the Renaissance, and Manifest Destiny are past examples of the same exuberance. The ultimate hubris was inventing one god in a human form. Today, all but one or two million Leavers, versus of 6.8 billion Takers, are left alive or are not yet assimilated.

It’s Pointless To Discuss Anything Else

Peak oil and financial collapse seem important because they immediately affect us and are within our lifetime scale. But, they are just noise along the way of our 10,000 year Taker cultural odyssey. Nothing will change for our children until our culture ends. It will be one rise and fall, migration and conquest, resource war after resource war on and on until our culture is completely replaced with a resilient diversity of many new cultures. Until then we are just building and operating the Taker prison for ourselves and our children. Only when our culture ends, will the earth be allowed to start healing itself. A change of leadership of the same culture is also a waste

of time.

Here comes the important part of the essay: discussing anything else today except walking away from our culture is pointless. This has to do with the difference between programs and vision or story. When Columbus invaded Haiti, he brought with him the greatest virus of all, a new cultural story.

The story of Leaver cultures before the agricultural revolution was, “Humanity belongs to the earth.” The Taker cultural story is, “The earth belongs to man.” This has been the crux of the creation and perpetuation of our culture for the last 10,000 years. We have had technology since the digging stick, technology has nothing to do with culture. It is how you value humanity in relation to “our relations” or the earth and what you do with the technology that matters.

A program is doing more of the same. If the effort in Afghanistan is failing, send more troops. If test score are falling, spend more on a failed educational system. If the banks are failing, send them more money.

A program is like a stick in the river of our culture. Programs run contrary to the cultural story. Recycling is a program to combat our consumer economy. Smart grids are a program to combat our excessive use of cheap fossil fuel energy. Green building is a program to combat urban sprawl. Food aid is a program to combat the population–food race. Organic farming is a program to combat industrial totalitarian agriculture.

Programs are fruitless efforts to combat the symptoms of our cultural story that the world belongs to man. Until the story is reversed, all programs are a complete waste of time. If you truly want peace, social justice, and Ecotopia, you have to starting living under the remembered story that humanity belongs to the earth.

The Problem is Not Humanity

Humanity has lived on the earth for three or four million years. For millions of years we lived in harmony or symbiosis with the ecosystem. We had a stable population. A “give it to them as good as you get” it erratic retaliator strategy existed instead of war. Tribalism and animism were the universal human organizational structures and religion. Tribalism is the one and only evolutionarily proven human social organizational system. Tribalism is to humans what herds are for deer, pods are for whales, schools are for fish, and hives are for bees. The problem began 10,000 years ago when our culture was created.

You Cannot Invent a New Social Organizational System

Here is the rub. You just can’t invent a new social organizational system like a tribe. We have been trying to perfect a new social organizational system called civilization for 10,000 years. But, civilization continues to fail more each year for more people and species. If civilization was going to create world peace and plenty for all it would have done so already. It never can because a story based on one species taking everything it can gets its hands on will never work. We even treat members of our own species as poorly as we do all other species we exploit.

The Great Remembering

The only solution worth discussion is developing new cultures that live by the original story that

humanity belongs to the earth. Going green is not enough. Driving a hybrid and having a backyard vegetable garden is not going to get you there. It's deeper than that. I am beginning to think we are going to have to start depaving, give up our iPods, and start making music for ourselves. I am not sure how far this is going to have to go. But I do know that it has to go back to a level in which our population and method of consumption allows the earth to start rebuilding biodiversity and topsoil.

We will have to remember our relationship with the cultivars, how to give support to get support, how to live on local sunlight, and we might even have to remember animism. We have a long way to go. I am starting the journey for myself and my children.

Hierarchies have strong defenses for attacks from below. However, they have no defense from abandonment. The point is we have to create new cultures that borrow from what we can from the present that fits within the structure of the past. This is the only way we will make a difference. We have to become the change we want to see, find like minded friends, and start our own local tribes. We must develop a high enough level of group self reliance that will allow us to walk away. We need doers, not talkers, not surfers, and not bloggers. We need to be walking toward something better, not away from something we don't like. Its time to start living your truth.

Original essay by Chuck Burr [here](#)

Notes:

Daniel Quinn

[Ishmael](#)

Ernest Callenbach

[Ecotopia](#)

Marija Gimbutas

[The Civilization of the Goddess: The World of Old Europe](#)

Dan Piraro

[Bizarro](#)

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