**CULTURE WARS**

Culture wars refer to disagreements about cultural and social beliefs between groups, especially between people with more conservative opinions (= generally against social change) and people with more progressive opinions (= generally supporting social change). It refers to a struggle for the domination of certain values, beliefs and practices.

Symbolic issues and questions of identity occupy a larger and more antagonistic position in the general culture than they did 10 or 20 years ago.

This term has been commonly used in the US in modern politics with hot topics likes abortion, homosexuality, multiculturalism and other cultural conflicts founded on the opposition of values, ways of life, which give rise to a major political divide.

**In the US**

Contemporary politics in the United States is often described as involving a "culture war." The central claim of those describing a culture war is that the major political cleavage in contemporary American politics is no longer economic class, race, gender, geographical region, or any of the many "social structural" differences that divide our population. Rather, the idea is that a major realignment of sensibilities and controversial issues has occurred since the 1960s, and now the body politic is rent by a cultural conflict in which values, moral codes, and lifestyles are the primary objects of contention. Issues such as abortion, homosexuality, pornography, and drug use are the typical points of culture wars contention; others have used the phrase to discuss issues of multiculturalism, diversity, and school curricula. Religious commitments, symbols, and groups have been strongly connected to culture wars politics. (cf. Encyclopedia)

Culture wars have intensified in the past few years and found a fertile ground in this multicultural society which is favors societal debates at the heart of the political debate.

This was the case with Covid 19 which polarized on one side the conservative party around the defense of Americans’ constitutional rights when they were faced with the obligation to wear a mask or to lockdown, and on the other side the liberal party which considered that individual liberties should be sacrificed in the name of public health. The Governnor of North Dakota even said at the time that opposing the wearing of the mask was a “senseless culture war” which put American lives in dangers.

More generally speaking, since the early 2000s, the culture war has transformed into an heightened opposition between Republicans and Democrats. The stakes related to the culture war broadened in the 2010s with the BLM movement, the protests against the national anthem, the debate around climate change, Obamacare’s health policy, the rights of the LGBTQIA+ community, the role of religion, etc.

Numerous examples can be mentioned like in 2019 when the statue of Junipero Serra, great evangelist of the indigenous peoples of California, was toppled and taken away from the Golden Gate Park in San Francisco. The same year, Amazon’s facial recognition platform, Rekognition, was banned after activists contested against this type of surveillance for fear of seeing it sold to governments.

**In the UK**

The culture war there is different. British politics, apart from Northern Ireland, isn’t marked by religious conservatism, which leaves a greater room to a social and political consensus in favor of homosexuals. And the right to abortion isn’t as fragile as in the US.

Yet, Brexit has revealed a fundamental rift between individualists and those in favor of a more communitarian model. Indeed, the British political culture remains conflictual, sometimes contradictory, and challenged by numerous cultural and identity conflicts which rehash past wounds like the Windrush generation, the Stolen generation, slavery…

Edward Colston’s statue (slave trader) was unbolted in London by demonstrators and replaced with that of a BLM activist. Other examples of culture wars in the UK are the microstorm about the Queen’s photo being taken down in the common room at Magdalen College, Oxford; the tiny tempest of Test cricketer Ollie Robinson being dropped for racist tweets dating from when he was a teenager; the squall over the England football team’s commitment to taking the knee; and the sudden shower of Oxford academics boycotting Oriel College over its decision to retain its reviled Cecil Rhodes statue.

Divisions on cultural matters (immigration, multiculturalism, integration, terrorism, national security) keep shaping the post-Brexit political debate.

**In Canada**

A statue of John MacDonalde, the Canadian Prime Mnister who unified the country, was toppled in August 2020 following BLM demonstrations. He is now criticized for his policy that targeted indigenous children (organization of a famine to get Indians out of their lands and gather them in reservations).

**Culture wars and cancel culture**

Numerous acts that were committed in the name of culture wars were assimilated to cancel culture, which refers to the popular practice of withdrawing support to public figures and companies that have done something objectionable or offending.

During the summer 2020, in parallel with the BLM movement, a debate rose around this type of activism as feminism and people fighting against racism often use this technique to boycott or blame public figures. This practice is opposed by the defenders of free speech.

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Une image contenant texte, nuage, ciel, capture d’écran

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