

by Dan Friesen

Part 1 of a multi-part series

In the past 48 hours, volumes have already been said, written, and recorded in video on the life of Queen Elizabeth II, not to mention countless biopics, articles, books, and reports spanning her epic life of 96 years and reign of 70 years, longest of any English monarch.

Certainly, no English king or queen witnessed a greater breadth and depth of change in the world... from Churchill through the 14 prime ministers to follow, from the conflagration of World War II to the nuclear age, from nationalism and empire to globalism, from the telephone to the computer to artificial intelligence, from the advent of air travel to moon landings by multiple nations, Mars rovers, and Hubble images showing us the edges of an infinite universe. The range of change over her 70-year reign is endless; the pace of change only accelerates.

The queen passed suddenly on Thursday, September 8, ironically just two days after her last official act of appointing Liz Truss as the UK's new prime minister. The passing of this British monarch seems particularly poignant; it feels like the end of an era. She seemed the epitome of old school English values—integrity, duty, and stability.



New World paradigms are an ocean away from Old World mindsets

As I pondered the passing of the Queen—how and why it impacts the UK, and the world, I was drawn to a cultural lesson with which I've been imprinted during my years of travel.

In cultural awareness presentations, I've labeled this lesson: *New World thinking is an ocean away from Old World thinking.*

The power of monarchies has been much diluted over the past 200 years, the breakaway of our own American 13 colonies—the American Revolution—being a leading cause. Over the course of the 19th century, most Old World monarchies were softened into “constitutional monarchies” in which parliaments held the true reins of power.

Broader even than the difference between monarchies and republics or democracies is the fundamental difference between the mindset of those who emigrated from the Old World and those who stayed behind.

The Old World paradigm is aligned with tradition and continuity and connection to the past. The New World mindset is geared more towards openness to change, learning a new language, and sacrificing stability for the potential of a better life.

Our ancestors left everything to start over in the New World. By necessity, and perhaps by nature, New World thinkers became pragmatic problem solvers, working together to survive and hopefully thrive. In the process, they tended to sacrifice the traditions and customs that root a culture.

New World mindset is freed from the rutted thinking and long negative memories of the Old World mindset. Yet, Old World paradigms offer the stability and security of identity.

Travel introduced me to many fascinating examples of these differences.

- On early trips to Europe, I admired the solid and attractive construction of hotels and chalets in which we stayed; they were built to last generations. New World construction, by contrast, builds cookie cutter homes in massive tracts that cater to consumers who plan to sell in a few years. A study in 2021 showed that over half of American residents have lived in their homes less than 10 years, 97% less than 15 years!
- Old World thinking tends to produce ethnic memory and cultural identity for which people are willing, or sometimes forced, to fight to the death. Ethnic cleansing and wars in the Balkans in the 1990s and throughout Africa and Asia are examples. By contrast, New World populations are a “melting pot” of immigration. Initial ethnic differences and conflicts tend to blur with succeeding generations.
- Traditional Old World identity often links one to a family lineage. People often identify themselves as the son of or niece of so and so. New World thinkers tend to identify themselves according to their occupation.
- In Old World cultures, relationship and social connections tend to be a priority. New World cultures tend to value performance and productivity over socializing.
- Old World mindsets tend to see change as outside their control. Accepting status quo and the inevitability of problems is common. People tend to take an indirect approach to conflict resolution. New World thinkers tend to be proactive and optimistic. We tend to be direct in our belief we can affect change, a directness that can be offensive to Old World counterparts.

An experience I had on a 2003 tour to England illustrates this last example of accepting

status quo versus direct intervention.

We were in Stratford-Upon-Avon suffering a heat wave. Temperatures were hitting record highs—it was the first time a temperature of 100°F had been recorded at Heathrow Airport.

Like most English hotels at the time, our hotel had no air conditioning. The rooms were sweltering, and hotel management made no attempt to mitigate the situation. In typical American, direct conflict-resolution style, I approached the hotel manager.

I appealed to reason. I acknowledged that the situation was unusual—England very seldom had weather this warm. But I suggested that the price of a simple portable fan for each room was a cost-effective investment in the comfort of hotel guests when it does get warm. (American over reliance on climate control is a different cultural topic to consider in a different blog).

I'll never forget the scene. The manager was approachable and polite (Brits are expert at "polite", often wielding it as a shield). In his formal attire complete with jacket and bow tie, and with sweat dripping down his face, he repeated that this weather was unusual, so the hotel saw no need to take precautions, even minor ones, to address infrequent eventualities.

New World American directness and proactivity (perhaps seen as rudeness) was blocked by Old World British resistance to change.

The Old World/New World cultural lesson is that travel helps us to see the benefits of both points of view.

To be continued