

GLOBALIZATION—GOOD OR BAD?

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For centuries, people, culture, trade goods, and ideas have traveled across borders and throughout the world. Today, with advancing technology, this movement has increased tremendously. The word *globalization* refers to the trend that the world is getting smaller—and that trade and other activities like government and banking are becoming much more international in scope. This trend towards globalization is controversial—it has both defenders and critics. Defenders say that the worldwide exchange of trade goods, information, and culture will benefit everyone. Critics say that the poorer, less technologically developed nations will be dominated economically and culturally by the rich nations. The following selection is a transcript of a TV program called "In Search of Common Ground," a weekly talk show on NCM TV in California. In this particular program a panel of guests discuss the pros and cons of globalization.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY: Analyzing issues

What is good and bad about globalization? Summarize the arguments for and against it that are expressed in this talk show. Which view do you favor?

PANEL MEMBERS

HOST: **Emil Guillermo**, columnist, author, and host of the New California Media (NCM) TV show "In Search of Common Ground."

GUESTS: **Sarita Sarvate**, nuclear physicist, policy specialist for California Public Utilities Commission, and writer; **Hisham Kassem**, publisher of *Cairo Times*; **Mary Jo McConahay**, journalist, Latin America specialist, and editor with *New*

California Media On-line; **Cobie Kwasi Harris**, professor of African-American Studies at Cal State San Jose; **Andrew Lam**, editor with *Pacific News Service*.

Emil: Sarita, what about this trend of globalization? What are your concerns?

Sarita: Globalization—a mixed bag—has created a lot of high-tech industry jobs for people from my country, India, a lot of mobility and prosperity. But I'm concerned about Brain Drain [the loss of people with specialized skills who emigrate in search of better opportunities], from India to the United States, for instance. With what's called the Brain Act proposed in Congress, the idea is to import even more high-tech workers into the United States. We in India have a long history of providing brains around the world, but in the past people went abroad to Britain, for instance, learned the social ideology, then went back to India and changed the country, rebuilt it. Now it's a one-way street. The people are coming from India with education funded by Indian taxpayers to feed the Silicon Valley [a region in California considered to be the technology capital of the U.S.] industry, and I think India is getting very little out of it.

Hisham: My concern is that part of the world has high illiteracy rates and state controlled information systems, so you have nations out there who are not truly aware that globalization is coming. In addition, you have economies that are run by military regimes or monarchies and others based on cronyism [favoritism shown to old friends without regard for their qualifications], graft [unscrupulous use of one's position for profit], and corruption, and they will not be able to last in a globalized world. So very soon you're going to have people out there who will be hit by globalization by surprise. Economically, globalization as it is being set up is not in their favor. This could create what you might call a "global ghetto."

Emil: So you really see it as a sense of creating haves and have-nots in a new world with a global economy.

Hisham: Yes, definitely. In a way I feel it is already too late to remedy this situation fully, but if more information about globalization gets to people so they can understand it better, the detrimental impact could be less.

Cobie: I think, on the one hand, it's very good that we can perhaps transcend the boundaries of the nation-states with globalization. Over 100 million people died in this bloody century in wars of various types. If we can begin to go beyond the nation-state, I think that will be better for the world, and particularly for peace. You can think about African Americans as perhaps the first global commodity, because of the slave trade. African-American musicians in turn have always left America, to be even better received in Europe. Michael Jackson is one of the most recognized individuals in the world. The *Financial Times* said that Michael Jordan has contributed \$10 billion to the world economy. African music has been translated and shifted all over the world. So I don't believe that culture will necessarily go the way that commercial transactions go. I don't think that having an international economic integration model will necessarily mean that people will lose their culture. I would suggest that what is important is the nature of globalization, whether people who are at the bottom become more empowered, and whether or not there can be a social justice component to the new development of international capitalism.

Mary Jo: I think the question of whether or not globalization is a good trend or bad is beside the point. It's here, and we have to deal with it one way or another. As Cobie said, globalism may enable people to get away from the nation-state idea, and I think it is already happening. Take one of the important issues in Latin America today, which is paying off the huge national debts. You've got \$127 billion in national debts owed by the 33 poorest countries in the world, many of them in Latin America. You've got tiny countries like Honduras that owe \$4 billion in national debt, an amount which is equivalent to their gross national product, and on top of that they're still suffering from \$5 billion in

damage from Hurricane Mitch in late 1998. Now what non-government groups and churches in many countries of the world have done in the movement called Jubilee 2000, is to organize a plea that the debt be eliminated. They've got a big grassroots movement going internationally: this is a different kind of WTO [World Trade Organization]! What's the aim? To get rid of this debt, start the millennium with a new, clean slate, and it's possible because people can reach across borders and do this movement together. In the hands of ordinary people I think this kind of globalization has real possibilities.

Andrew: This is a tremendous transition period we are going through. But when you introduce the topic of globalization as "one world, one culture," I have questions. From where I've been it seems that we're moving towards complexity, not simplification. The more we become aware of each other does not mean the more we become each other. The more we become aware of each other means that some of us, at least, search for identity that is deeper and more particular. Does culture become more generic by definition if it's global? No. There is a difference between cosmopolitanism [having elements from many different parts of the world] and universality [relating to or affecting the entire world]. You accept the fact that people speak three languages now in order to survive, gain five skills and exist within three or four different social strata. This is not having one culture, but a process of becoming more complex, with multiple personalities.

Emil: Hisham, when you see McDonald's open up in Egypt, when you see an image of Mickey Mouse there, do you get this sense of "Boy, we're just becoming one culture and maybe this is a bad thing?"

Hisham: I guess my concern is that we're getting the consumer side of globalization without the productive side, or without the creation of more jobs.

Emil: Do you think that something is suffering in other countries because of this sudden import of American ideas? I think here we have a very America-centric view of the benefits of globalization.

Cobie: That may be an American pitfall, being unable to transcend itself. Even within this country, however, you can see that different immigrant communities preserve their ties with tradition. That suggests one does not have to become something else to exist in an environment such as America. You may eat McDonald's one night, but then you may go and worship in your own church, in your own way, in your own language.

Emil: Speaking of worship . . . Hisham, do you see a move towards fundamentalism [a point of view characterized by rigid adherence to basic principles] as a kind of backlash against globalization?

Hisham: Well, if eventually we do find ourselves in a situation where we have a weaker economy in Egypt because of globalization, with a population unaware of what happened to them, I definitely would see a backlash coming out of that.

Sarita: And I think that's what's happening in India too. The Hindu Nationalist Movement has gained a lot of momentum politically in recent years. India is considered the home of spiritualism—that's where Americans go to abandon their materialistic ideas and to embrace something more spiritual and something more mellow. Yet when I go back to India, I see materialism rules. I see incredible competitive pressure, not only on adults but on children and on all the working population, out there trying to compete.

Mary Jo: But it's not as if globalization is going to mean one global culture, and that culture is going to be American. At the beginning of this millennium, culture is no longer—if it ever was—like a river that comes from just one place, and floods a flood plain and destroys everything that was there to begin with.

Emil: Well, even if it comes from somewhere else, we Americanize it. As an example, we have Pokemon, one of the greatest exports from Japan in the last few years, with animation that is very Japanese. But people here don't understand it, so we dub it. Then it's American! American culture!

Andrew: Just because we dubbed it, it becomes American?

Emil: It's ours!

Andrew: How would you explain then John Wayne speaking Japanese in Japan? Does he become part of Japanese culture?

Emil: He's a cowboy though.

Andrew: Oh please! The fact is that people have to accept this kind of paradox that yes, the global culture is happening but at the same time peoples are holding onto identities even more fiercely, because who wants to be lost to Pokemon or John Wayne? If globalization is anything, it's about having choices and more choices.

Mary Jo: And it gives tools to people to be themselves, to emphasize their own culture. Look at the indigenous of Central America. At the beginning of this century many people predicted that the Indians were going to disappear, that by the year 2000 their cultures wouldn't exist, their languages would have disappeared. In fact, their cultures are becoming stronger in many places, and using modern tools to help do so. Indian groups are getting together on the Internet, for instance, exchanging information, getting stronger together that way. Ever since events leading to the 1992 anniversary of Columbus's arrival in America, electronic communication among the indigenous groups has grown up alongside the growth of the Internet. It was a fortuitous coincidence, that they grew at the same time. It is one element that has facilitated solidarity among the

indigenous groups, and facilitated getting their issues out to a wider world. That is a real positive part of globalism.

Cobie: Yeah, I think that we can't assume the world is either-or, that two different things cannot exist simultaneously. I think we see that with the renaissance of the indigenous culture in modern Latin America. Even here we can see that people respond to globalism, and translate it into their particular situations, which means enriching our world. The nation-state had this faulty premise that if you were a citizen, you would be defined by whatever system you were in, by whatever group was dominant. With globalism there's no demand to become one single product, because there is no center in globalism. For example, Pokemon again. The fact that the Japanese could create something that could penetrate America suggests counter-penetration. Here you have the Japanese, considered to be one of the homogeneous populations in the world, yet they have the sensibility to be able to seduce America—without losing their Japanese-ness. I believe that we shouldn't think of the world as either-or, but believe that two different things can exist simultaneously, and celebrate the fact that Japanese products can make America's children happy.

Hisham: Well, again I might disagree with you. Okay, you point out that Japan counter-penetrates America. But what could you get from a place like, say, Yemen? See, the traffic there is only one-way, toward them. You may have McDonald's going out there to Yemen, but there is no counter-penetration.

Emil: And what happens to a place like Yemen in that kind of transaction?

Hisham: Eventually all this one-way traffic is not working in their favor, and there's going to be a total rejection of it. It's the backlash you mentioned. You're going to reject something if you're in that situation, because you don't understand it, and it's not working in your favor. There's no interaction.

Sarita: Emil, I just want to interject here because I'm a little troubled by talking about Pokemon and Disney as somehow representative of culture. If Americanization means transferring some of the ideas of equality and liberty and freedom and equal opportunity and all of that, then I'm all for it, but very little of that is being transferred to other countries.

Emil: Well, that's one of the problems.

Sarita: Some other cultures believe that what's good about America is materialism, but when it comes to embracing cultural ideas—for example, equality of women—they shy away from that.

Cobie: Wait, let's not exaggerate our values of liberalism and equality. Women were not allowed to vote until this century. African Americans were technically not given the vote until 1965. America itself does not always practice its own values of liberalism and equality. I think people will adapt to globalism just as they have been adapting to the world economy since Christopher Columbus expanded Europe beyond its borders, and they will adjust. The question becomes whether or not we can get rid of the ethnocentrism that has defined the world for the past 500 years.

Emil: All right, let's try and solve the world problems in the remaining two minutes. Where do you see us going in the next century as globalism occurs? Crystal ball time . . .

Hisham: I quite agree with much of what has been said. What I'm pessimistic about is that globalism has been initiated in the West, and the pace is being dictated in the West, without a say for other people who will be involved in this. For them, the pace might be too fast.

Sarita: My prediction is that with the high tech industry growing so rapidly and America needing so many workers from overseas, we're going to see an

interracial majority, that colored people are going to dominate. We're going to see a lot of brown people, and maybe we'll have less racism, because everybody will start to look alike.

Mary Jo: I'm feeling pretty good about the new century. Insofar as globalization meaning more sharing ideas and more breaking down borders, and more—even almost chaotic—interchange of culture, globalization can only be a good thing.

Andrew: Well, I'm optimistic too, because I think for a long time visions tended to come down from the top, but I think with the availability of technology coming from globalization, visions can come bubbling up from individuals at the bottom. You can make a movie now on your own for 500 bucks, you know. There will be more voices and more complexity coming up.

Emil: So not an increasingly generic world, but a more complex world. Cobie, you get the last word on globalization.

Cobie: I think that because the Third World is at lower stages of industrial development, the new technology will enable them to leapfrog over some of the old nations that were some of the first to industrialize. I'm optimistic that the world has a lot to enjoy, a lot to taste of different cultures.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY: ANSWER

One benefit of globalization is that increased trade between countries creates more jobs for people and strengthens national economies. Conversely, as the demand and opportunities for people with technical skills increase, countries may lose workers to other countries that offer better wages and living conditions. Another effect of globalization is that successful trade products, like McDonald's or Pokemon, can become popular around the world. However, this effect is negative for some countries if the cultural exchange is a one-way street.

Globalism is good in that it offers people more choices; but it can be bad when it further complicates people's lives.

Answers will vary on which view of globalization students find more convincing.