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Globalization

The future effects of globalization are widely debated. Will globalization end economic, political and cultural differences throughout the world? Or will it only serve to widen and exacerbate these differences? Or are both too hasty a conclusion? I believe that globalization does have the potential to end longstanding national differences, but I believe it is happening at a slower pace than it may appear on the surface. I also believe that for globalization to be ultimately successful in this endeavor, there are many challenges that must be overcome. By examining both sides of this issue, I will illustrate what globalization has seemed to accomplish and what problems are being faced.

In his book “The World Is Flat”, Thomas Friedman paints a very rosy picture of the effects and extent of globalization in the world. While visiting Bangalore, India, he sees Indians taking on jobs that would traditionally have been held by people in western nations. He notes that Bangalore looks and feels like a western city and is a Silicon Valley within India. Due to advances in technology and communications, Friedman asserts that anything that can be done on a computer or over the phone, can be done just as well from Bangalore as it can from somewhere in America.

He notes that the economic changes that had taken place in that Indian city were not the only alterations being made. As part of their efforts to succeed in the global market place, many Indians took on American sounding nicknames and many took lessons to learn to neutralize their Indian accent. Friedman sees these things as the result of the wide reaching arm of globalization.

It is difficult to deny that significant changes are occurring throughout the world. Globalization is seen in the export of economics, politics and culture. The increasing ability to communicate quickly with people around the world has helped to drive these changes. Globalization can be seen everywhere - with American music, TV, and fast food appearing all over the world, and the increasing number of high tech products manufactured in factories across the globe being sold and purchased in the west.

It seems reasonable to assume that this new sharing of information and culture would help people in the world to understand each other better, which would encourage peace and help nations to work more successfully together. By sharing these aspects of our lives we are creating a global community. It seems possible that one day there will be a global culture and one global economy. Friedman believes that we are headed in this direction, but also believes that America can maintain its ability to drive the world economy and can stay at the forefront of innovation. In his model, it seems that everyone wins.

This cheerful picture of globalization does seem to make sense when you observe all the changes mentioned previously, when you consider the rapid improvements occurring in communication technology, and the availability of a particular national culture from anywhere in the world.

However, not everyone agrees that globalization is bound to continue smoothly with positive results for everyone. In fact, not everyone agrees that the current effects of globalization are positive. Many argue that there are a number of dangers in the direction globalization is heading. Others don't believe that globalization is causing everyone to converge to one system, as some suggest.

In “World On Fire”, Amy Chua discusses the dangers of exporting political and economic views to other countries. When free market democracies are adapted in countries where this is not the norm, very dangerous situations can result. As history shows us, it is likely that a rich minority will be formed, and often in the cases of developing countries, this wealthy minority is also an ethnic minority. This may cause the poorer majority to feel rage at the richer, ethnic minority. The perceived differences seem great and lead the majority to believe that it is not possible to climb the social and economic ladder. This group feels repressed and violence can often erupt. Also, because democracy has also been introduced, this unhappy majority may use that power to revolt against the free market system rather than to supplement and support it. Chua warns that exporting free market democracies to nations without understanding the repercussions it may have or the situations already present in the country can be very dangerous. In this way, she points out that the effects of globalization can be very negative, causing unnatural change to occur in countries, which encourages division and violence rather than acceptance and understanding.

Niel Ferguson paints a similarly dark picture for the future of globalization. Ferguson does not necessarily believe that globalization is causing problems in the present, but is concerned that globalization may not continue in the future. He sites the example of the progression of globalization in the pre-World War era, when communication was increasing and international trade was becoming more and more popular. Technological advances were occurring rapidly and the entire world seemed to be getting smaller. And then there was World War I. The economies of the western nations plummeted. Money and intellectual focus shifted to the war needs. Ferguson suggests that nations did not have enough autonomy, and were pulled into the war and were wrecked by global markets. He believes that globalization was set back significantly because of these events, and further believes that the symptoms are recurring. He believes that it is likely that instead of continuing on the path of increasing globalization, we are

near a significant setback. Ferguson illustrates a number of parallels of the pre-world war era and the situation we are in at the moment, and says that unless these issues are recognized and addressed, the future of globalization is uncertain.

Another interesting article pointing out remaining differences in societies is Paul Krugman's "French Family Values". In the article he talks about the less intensive work week that most French people experience as compared to Americans. It seems that though Americans value family and promote family values in speech, the French actually show it in their economic system. I think this is an interesting example of how two societies that are after the same thing still go about it in very different ways. Though they may be aware of the method of the other, neither is particularly interested in changing.

This same idea was presented in "How We Compete" by Suzanne Berger. In her book she refuted the convergence model. By studying the methods of many different companies in all parts of the world, her team of researchers found that there was more than one possible path for success. Companies competed in the same business areas utilizing completely different models and both can be proven successful. This shows that there is no easy answer to the direction that we can expect globalization to head, and even poses the question of whether or not globalization necessarily means convergence at all.

I believe that globalization has the potential to cause many positive changes in our world, but it is not happening as quickly or smoothly as one might hope. By drawing on my own experiences and the examples previously mentioned, I have found that there are a number of problems with globalization. The extent that globalization takes place is not equal everywhere, and cannot continue indefinitely without significant changes in attitude. Though there are many people working to create a more global community, there are others who are working against it. I think

that for globalization to continue in a positive way, there will have to be more sensitivity to different cultures and a deeper understanding of different people and systems.

Even with the challenges I've mentioned above, I think that with the necessary sensitivity and understanding, globalization does have the possibility of creating a global society where people all identify with each other and peace is achieved. The economy could work for the betterment of all rather than a competition with winners and losers. People in all locations could have similar opportunities.

I have traveled pretty extensively in the past few years, throughout Europe, but also in Northern Africa and Southeast Asia. I have lived in communities as different as Cambridge, England, home to one of the most prestigious universities in the world, and Pabal, India, a rural village five hours outside Mumbai. This has given me the opportunity to see for myself how different the world is in various locations and how people in different communities experience globalization. The fact that I have had these opportunities shows that the many parts of the world have become increasingly accessible, even to students on a budget. On the other hand, while in India I saw that the same opportunities are not available to all people. Traveling around the world is much more impractical for a student from Pabal than one from Cambridge.

Friedman says that the world is becoming flat, that globalization is helping people in India have the same opportunities as people elsewhere. I think this is possible, but it has a long way to go, and it isn't reaching all locations equally. An English teacher in Pabal once told me that he wished there was one world language and all others would disappear. He argued that this would allow everyone to have the same opportunities - students who grow up in areas where English is not taught would not be at a disadvantage if they wanted to compete in a global economy. It is true that language is a recognized barrier to globalization. In the alliance between Renault and

Nissan, it was decided that the language spoken at meetings would be English, even though it wasn't the first language of either group. This was done to prevent either side from having the advantage in speaking ability, but may have caused communication to be a bit more difficult.

Though the English teacher in Pabal wanted to see the evolution of a world language, many people would disagree with this hope. Some believe that the movement towards globalization is not positive - they believe it is causing the loss of important cultural knowledge and traditions. An elderly Hungarian man once expressed to me his frustration with how the youth in Hungary were adapting new technologies and American popular culture. They were no longer interested in hearing from grandparents about stories of Hungary's past and did not have the strong sense of national pride their ancestors had.

Some look at globalization and see the disappearance of national borders, and the gradual changes of traditions and cultural knowledge, and they believe this is leading us on a path to peace, equality and a more successful world community. Others see it as a tragic loss of traditional knowledge and valuable cultural experience. I think both points are valid. I think knowledge and understanding of other cultures is important, and that the loss of nationalism could lead to a rise in peace and a successful global community. However, I have also had the opportunity to experience first hand the diversity of cultures around the world and believe it would be terrible to lose all the beautiful traditions that are currently practiced throughout the world. When traveling to different countries, already the difference can be seen between big cities which are often westernized and rural areas which tend to retain more remnants of a country's tradition and culture.

I believe that globalization can continue with culture remaining intact. This would occur through understanding of cultures outside our own, allowing people to have different celebrations and

traditions, but still identify themselves as a member of the same global community as all others in the world. This would be similar to the way people in America celebrate many different holidays and have many different traditions or ways of life, but still identify themselves as American.

However, this process must be given enough time to happen naturally. When globalization, particularly the introduction of new cultures to a community is a forced activity, it is much more likely to be rejected. People want to have the choice to practice what they want. One example is that of the Middle East where in some locations western culture was supported by the government and not led by the people. This led some to revolt against it. People don't want to feel that they are being forced to lose their culture.

To continue with globalization and have positive results, there are a number of precautions that must be taken. When encouraging change in countries around the world, leaders must be sensitive to what the people want and what is appropriate and useful for the society.

Globalization must be something that is adopted by choice, not something that people are forced into.

The greatest challenge will be getting people to have a deeper understanding of how people and cultures differ throughout the world. It is easy for a business person to travel to Japan to work with a company, but more difficult for him or her to understand how business is transacted there and what cultural practices are important to successful business partnerships. As we saw in Suzanne Berger's "How We Compete", there are many different models for success, and this must be understood by those planning to work in a global economy.

The ability of globalization to end political, economic and cultural differences is not clear, and proponents of both viewpoints have valuable information to convey. I believe that globalization has the potential to have a very positive effect on the world. However, it must be realized that it may not happen automatically - while we should value the insight of those who see the positive path globalization could follow, we must also heed the warning of those who identify problems. To achieve a global society, communication and deep understanding must be in the forefront. If handled with care, globalization could one day greatly reduce differences in political, economic and cultural systems, while preserving what is unique and special in various countries.