

Political Science 631A
Neo-liberal Globalization and United States Imperialism
Spring, 2006

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Introduction

Globalization is the buzzword of our time. It began to appear in the early 1990s to describe the presumed transformation of the international economy. It has snowballed in both academic and popular discourse to such an extent that every subject is framed by it—from economics, to music and film, to politics, to sports.

The common perception about “globalization” is that a new international order has arrived. Markets and investors are spreading across the globe. Consumers for an endless array of products made in poor countries and sold by companies from rich countries can be found in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East, as well as in Europe and North America. Trade, investment, financial speculation, the globalization of production, it is said, have been significantly shaped by new technologies—the internet, high speed transportation, and telecommunications.

For many observers of the new world order, globalization is bringing hope for a better life to the peoples of the planet. And, furthermore, the new world order is becoming a stateless world. Markets replace states as the regulators of human affairs.

But are the various elements of this vision of the Post-Cold War world accurate? Is the global economy qualitatively different from the economies of prior eras? If the answer to the question is “yes and no,” then what has changed and what has not? Does globalization bring benefits to humankind, as its most hyperbolic supporters claim or are benefits mixed; distributed to some but not others? What does globalization mean for the distribution of wealth and income in the world, for example? for access to basic nutrition? housing? education? and health care?

As to politics has globalization empowered masses of people? Does the spread of markets and investments bring with them democratization as some claim? Or is there an unclear or inverse relationship between marketization and democratization? What about “the state.” Is it on the way out? Are international relations being qualitatively transformed from a state system (borne of the Treaty of Westphalia in the 17th century) to a stateless system? Would victims of assault in Iraq agree that the state is less salient today than in earlier times, at least powerful states?

In addition, theorists of globalization usually claim that the new order is a creation of technological advance yet these same theorists are advocates for particular economic

policies to support the globalizing process. If the policies matter, then globalization is not some predetermined automatic byproduct of technology. In fact, the policies, often referred to as neo-liberal, seem basic to the promotion of globalization. What are these policies? Who supports them? What do they require? Are they good or bad? For whom?

Finally, theorizing about a stateless world has emerged at the same time as the international system is driven by “the last remaining superpower.” What are the connections between U.S. power, globalization, and neo-liberalism? To paraphrase questions raised not too long ago should scholars and activists “bring imperialism back in?”

The Course

The questions above will frame this course. We will discuss theories of globalization, analyses of the character and impacts of neo-liberal economic policies, and the particular role of the United States in this presumed new world order. Special attention will be given to the literature of globalization critics *and the significant points of difference among them*. At the same time, discussion and some video materials will present the views of neo-liberal globalization as well. Central to the discussion, reading, and seminar papers that students will be preparing will be efforts to understand what is really going on in the world. AND attention will be paid to discussions of how to change the world, if need be, to one that better meets the needs of its citizens.

We will meet for ten weeks to discuss the reading and video materials described below. Then students will spend four weeks completing preparation of a seminar research paper on some aspect of neo-liberal globalization and/or U.S. imperialism. We will reassemble during week fifteen. Students will briefly present their papers to the class as a whole. (During the fourth class period each student should be prepared to describe the research project they will be embarking on).

During each class period (weeks two through ten) at least one student will assume responsibility for making a brief presentation and for initiating discussion on the week’s readings. Presentations should include written and oral elements. Distribute a paper, not exceeding five pages, addressing the assigned text. Presentations should include a *brief* description of the central themes in the reading followed by a systematic evaluation of the work. Students should include in their presentations questions for the seminar to address.

About two-thirds of class time will be spent on discussion. One-third of several periods will include presentation of videos that are relevant to our discussion. In week one, we will view *Life and Debt*, a graphic portrait of how globalization and neo-liberalism have impacted on Jamaica. During subsequent periods the seminar will view parts of an interesting six-hour video series on globalization called *Commanding Heights*. *Commanding Heights* presents a history of the twentieth century as a struggle between two visions of preferred economic policies: those of John Maynard Keynes vs. Frederick Hayek. The series is supplemented by a comprehensive web-site, that includes country profiles, data, and interviews. The series represents views contrary to our texts. It should

provide an excellent counterpoint to our readings and the emerging critique of globalization from the left. Additional videos to be shown include *Thirst*, which analyses three struggles against the privatization of water: Bolivia, India, and Stockton, California, a recent PBS documentary on Wal Mart, and a 1998 PBS video called “Globalization and Human Rights.”

READINGS: (Books will be available at Von’s Bookstore in the “Village”)

Ronald H. Chilcote, ed. *Imperialism: Theoretical Directions*, Humanity Books, 2000.

David Harvey, *The New Imperialism*, Oxford, 2003.

Duncan Green, *Silent Revolution, The Rise and Crisis of Market Economies in Latin America*, Monthly Review, 2003.

William I. Robinson, *A Theory of Global Capitalism: Production, Class, and State in a Transnational World*, Johns Hopkins Press, 2004.

William K. Tabb, *Economic Governance in the Age of Globalization*, Columbia University Press, 2004.

Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic*, Henry Holt, 2004..

Jose’ Bell Lara, *Globalization and the Cuban Revolution*, Jose Marti Press, 2002 (copies of this text will be on reserve in the department).

An occasional handout.

SCHEDULE:

1. January 12: Introduction *Life and Debt* video
2. January 19: On the Theory of Imperialism: Chilcote pp.11-211, video
3. January 26 On the Theory of Imperialism: Chilcote pp. 215-321, video
4. February 2 On the new Imperialism: Harvey video
5. February 9 Neo-liberalism in Latin America: Green, video
6. February 16 Theory of Global Capitalism: Robinson, video
7. February 23 Globalization and Governance: Tabb pp.1-219, video
8. March 2 Globalization and Governance: Tabb pp.220-430, video

9. March 9 The United States and the World: Chalmers Johnson

10. March 23 Cuba and Resistance to Globalization: Bell Lara

March 30-April 20 no classes

Week of April 24 and/or May 2 two classes: seminar paper presentations