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Justin Jennings
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Modernity's Greatest Theft

Globalization seems quintessentially modern. Up until very recently, the images that sprang to my mind when I heard the word were a jumble of post–World War II vignettes – someone sharing files over the Internet with a friend across the ocean, a woman hunkered down at her sewing machine in a vast third-world sweatshop, the flags flapping outside of the United Nations. These mental snapshots evoked a feeling that I lived in a rapidly shrinking, ever-changing, and perhaps out-of-control world. I no longer see just these images. These recent pictures are now joined by images from antiquity when I think of globalization. A thousand-year-old megalith in Mexico is as vivid as an MTV broadcast in India; a luxury hotel in Dubai is juxtaposed to a colony of the Indus Valley civilization (Figure 1.1).

For most readers, these new pairings may seem silly. You might understandably argue that globalization is a modern phenomenon that is categorically different from anything in the past. After all, ancient civilizations did not have a truly "global" impact, and enormous leaps in technology, transformed socioeconomic systems, and new ways of thinking all separate us from the deep past. In short, you could argue that globalization is a new process, and you could find dozens of well-regarded books in the library to bolster your argument. Nonetheless, I will try to show that globalization has occurred many times in history and that these earlier globalizations can help us better understand the future of the world that we live in today.

Despite the use of the word "global" in "globalization," many definitions of modern globalization stress *only* that interactions are occurring increasingly over long distances, and even those who stress worldwide connections in their definitions of globalization acknowledge that vast regions of the world today lack many of these connections (el-Ojeili and Hayden 2006: 12–13; Scholte 2000: 41–61). Definitions of modern globalization tend to describe it as a process of widespread social change that is related to the establishment of extensive, dense networks (e.g., el-Ojeili and Hayden 2006: 13; Eriksen 2007: 14; Held and McGrew 2000: 3; Inda and Rosaldo 2008: 4; Ritzer 2007: 1; Tilly 1995: 1–2). For these authors, the emphasis is placed on the transformative nature of expanding networks today rather than their geographic extent.

One of the more influential definitions of globalization is by John Tomlinson. In his book *Globalization and Culture*, Tomlinson defines globalization succinctly as "complex connectivity" (1999: 2): a dense network of intense interaction and interdependencies between people in different parts of the world that is created by a significant increase in the flow of information, goods, and people across cultural and geographic boundaries. For Tomlinson, a network reaches the stage of complex connectivity when it triggers the array of social changes that are associated with the formation of global culture (don't think McWorld when you read the term "global culture," but

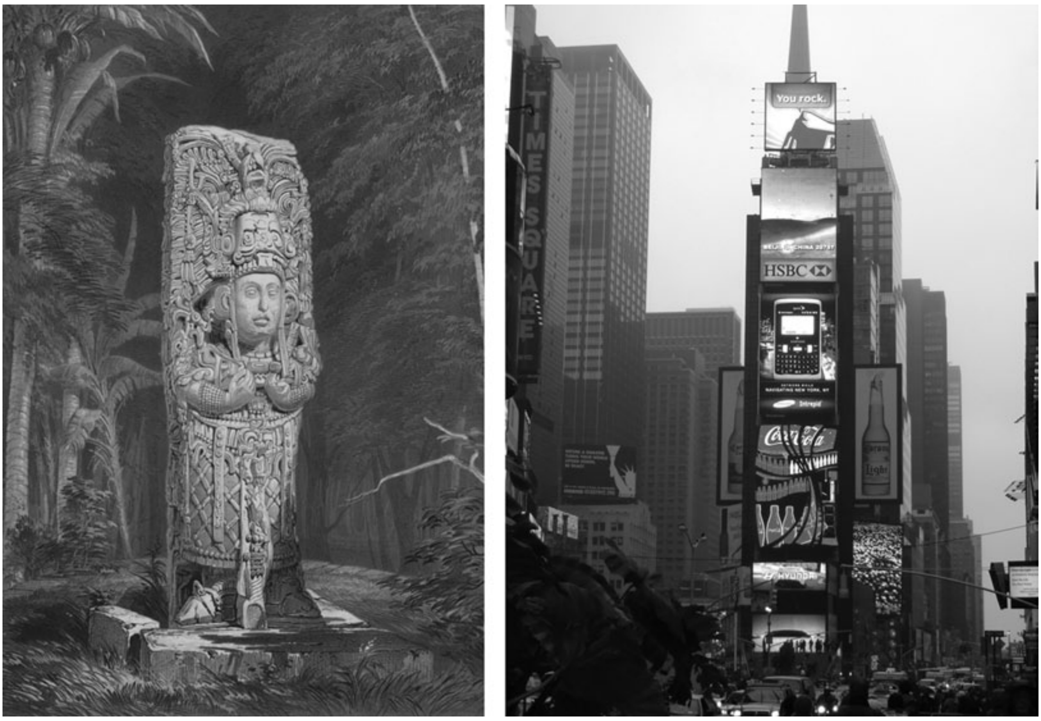

Figure 1.1 Although we think of a Maya stela and the billboards at Times Square as fundamentally different, both can be seen as advertising (stela lithograph by Frederick Catherwood [1844] and photo by Kay Jennings).

rather imagine a fractured, hybrid, and often contentious amalgamation of people who know that they are stuck together whether they like it or not).

Although Tomlinson and many other scholars argue that globalization is unique to the modern era, their definition of globalization paradoxically provides us with a straightforward criterion that we can use to identify earlier periods of globalization. I suggest that if the same social changes identified with the creation of our modern global culture can also be found during an earlier period of intense interregional interaction, then we should consider the definitional demands of globalization met and accept the earlier period as an era of globalization. If these changes fail to occur as a result of earlier interactions, then we should recognize that the period fails to measure up to the definition of globalization even though some social changes and systematic connections likely occurred.

This book uses their widely held definitional criteria to determine if globalization occurred after the sudden growth of early cities like Cahokia, Teotihuacan, Tiwanaku, and Harappa. We know that the exchange networks created by these cities led to the long-distance flows of ideas, people, and goods. People outside of these cities reacted to these flows by creating their own networks, and a chain reaction of interactions ensued that transformed broad regions. Although these networks did not span the globe, they radically changed the known "world" of these people. In this book, I present a general model of the changes associated with early urbanization and demonstrate how the social changes associated with the spread of the Uruk, Mississippian, and Wari civilizations relate to those that are occurring in today's global culture.

THE GREAT WALL

Although looking for past globalizations may sound easy in theory, the reality is that putting an "s" at the end of globalization won't feel right to most readers. Our knee-jerk reaction to the juxtaposition of images in Figure 1.1 might be to exclaim that there was nothing comparable to the Internet in ancient Egypt or there was nothing like McDonald's two thousand years ago. At the most basic level, we all find it difficult to compare a megalith to a McNugget because we think of them as categorically different. Why do we think this way? There are a variety of reasons (you can't eat a megalith), but one is that we consider them as belonging to two categorically different eras. One of the largest problems that we face in thinking about globalizations in the plural is our preconception about modernity as a distinct period – this bias influences both the first images that pop into our head when we say the word as well as those ideas that are so deeply entrenched in our minds that they subconsciously shape our worldview.

A Great Wall divides the ancient from the modern in our minds (after Restall 2005: xi). The greatest strength of the wall is its unobtrusiveness – it's so deeply embedded that we forget that it is there. Before we can really talk about potential ancient globalizations, we need to tear this wall down. In *The Theft of History*, Jack Goody argues that the Western world had unfairly claimed the invention of democracy, capitalism, romantic love, universities, and other institutions of modernity (2006). In denying the existence of these ideas in other periods and regions, he argues that the modern world is seen, and skewed, through a Western lens. Goody does not consider globalization in his book, but globalization just might be the greatest theft of history. By defining globalization (and let's not forget love) as a Western creation of the last five hundred years, we needlessly divorce the modern from the premodern and warp our understanding of the world that we live in today.

In Goody's book, he shows how various academics over the years have reinforced the divide between modernity and antiquity. This shouldn't come as much of a surprise. All humans have a concern about their place in history. There seems to be a cross-cultural desire to contrast ourselves to those who have come before us, and this desire leads to a tendency to break up time in terms of distinct earlier eras. The Incas of the Andes, for example, believed in a period when gods walked the earth and humans were still yet indistinguishable from animals (Zuidema 2002: 240), and the legends of the southern Andaman Islanders of the Pacific describe an earlier age of the *Tomo-la* when ancestral spirits formed the land that the islanders now inhabit (Radcliffe-Brown 1964: 191). In the West, we have achieved this divide between our era and the past by the construction of the Great Wall.

Towering, yet somehow transparent, the Great Wall that separates modernity and antiquity is reinforced by the disciplinary boundaries that determine to a great extent what side of the wall a scholar sets up her intellectual tent. We go to our own conferences,

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read our own journals, and use jargon that can sometimes be difficult for the uninitiated to penetrate. These disciplinary divides limit the conversations between disciplines (and even within them – I've visited many anthropology departments where the archaeologists and cultural anthropologists barely talk to each other because they think they have nothing to share). An occasional salvo is sent over the wall from either side but usually quickly forgotten as people returned to the "serious" scholarship that defines their discipline. This divide, of course, is not confined to academia. Bookstores and libraries reinforce the Great Wall in how books are organized, websites tend to cleave to this division, and our casual conversations maintain this separation.

As I did, most people reading this book grew up in a society steeped in Western tradition. "Ancient" and "modern" are core concepts in this tradition and are so deeply entrenched in our way of thinking that they have become part of our subconscious (Bourdieu 1977: 164; Sahlins 1996: 395). Similar to the way that you don't think about breathing or walking, core concepts like the "ancient" seem to implicitly guide us during the course of daily activities (Giddens 1979: 59). These concepts are often remarkably durable, surviving political, economic, and social upheavals over hundreds of years (Geertz 1980: 134; Sahlins 1981: 17, 1996: 421). The Great Wall was first erected almost a thousand years ago when people started to think of a modern era. Before we can take this wall apart, we need to understand how this wall was constructed over time and how globalization came to fall on one side of it.

"Ancient" and "modern" come from the Latin words, *antiquus* and *modernus*, and were first used to describe distinct periods in the Middle Ages. Writing during the fourteenth century, for example, Petrarch described three eras in world history – antiquity, the dark ages, and modernity. He felt that antiquity was a golden age and that he was writing on the cusp of the new age of modernity that would bring the world into a second age of enlightenment. The boundaries of the modern period and their relationship to antiquity would change through the next centuries as the concepts were integrated into romanticism, rationalism, and other intellectual movements. In most cases, authors sought to link modern developments with ancient precedents. This changed, however, during the eighteenth century when philosophers believed that they were breaking completely from the past to form a true Age of Enlightenment, a new era

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of freedom, democracy, and reason. By the middle of the nineteenth century, modernity was commonly conceived in Europe as a split from earlier stages of Western history (Calinescu 1987).

The mid-nineteenth century was a period of incredible social, political, and economic change in Europe. Far-flung colonies allowed unprecedented wealth to flow into much of Europe, and millions of Europeans sought their fortunes overseas. Capitalism became the dominant economic system and its imposition was transforming lives in both the cities and the countryside. There was still widespread faith in science and progress during this period, although frustrations were beginning to grow among a burgeoning working class that felt increasingly disenfranchised.

Most Europeans believed that they had entered a new modern era, and they desired an "imperial synthesis" to explain their newfound prosperity relative to other parts of the world (Trigger 1989: 110). This synthesis was supported by scientists through their research program in social evolution during this period. Following schemes that were already popular within Europe a century earlier, social scientists in the late nineteenth century attempted to organize cultures across space and time into a universal scheme of distinct stages of development.

One of the most influential books from this period was Lewis Henry Morgan's *Ancient Society* (1963 [1877]). Morgan thought that humanity progressed over time from a state of savagery to one of enlightenment. By gaining intelligence through new inventions and discoveries, people moved to higher stages of development that were marked by better subsistence patterns, religious beliefs, family structure, and political organization. He thought that all cultures moved through these stages, with some cultures being stuck in savagery and others having moved up the ladder of progress. The topmost rung of that ladder was modern Western society.

The grand evolutionary schemes of Morgan and his colleagues were being called into question by the dawn of the twentieth century as faith in the progressive nature of capitalism began to wane in many circles. Increased fieldwork around the world revealed an incredible degree of cultural variability through time that could not be pigeonholed into clearly defined stages; and researchers found that the people dismissed as savages by Morgan were just as intelligent as the researchers were (e.g., Boas 1989). In response to this cultural diversity, the study of culture broke into subdisciplines in

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order to better understand groups within their own cultural contexts. Archaeologists got the past and sociology and anthropology split the present. Although this division of labor effectively broke up the idea of a ladder of progress, it also ended up reinforcing the separation between the ancient and the modern.

The two decades after World War II brought a brief return to the ideas of social progress. Based in large part on how stimulus packages were helping economic recoveries of Europe and Japan, a modernization theory developed that argued that the adoption of Western economic, political, and social structures by recently decolonized countries would lead to their eventual prosperity. There was a renewed confidence in technological progress as a panacea and this was reflected by the return of evolutionary models in the social sciences (Trigger 1989: 289–90).

A new generation of scholars was radicalized in the political and social turmoil of the 1960s and 1970s. They rejected evolutionary theories, viewed modernization instead as a destructive wave of Westernization, and perceived the changes that were occurring in the non-Western world as the result of people's resistance to the spread of Western modernity (D'Andrade 2000). Although these scholars trumpeted the cultural diversity of the non-Western world, the nuances of Westernization remained largely unexplored.

By the 1990s, Westernization was beginning to be reconceptualized as a far more complicated process now called globalization (e.g., Appadurai 1990; Giddens 1990). Globalization scholars argued that many of the changes occurring in the world were a result of increasing interregional interactions. They traced back some of the connections to the European voyages of discovery in the fifteenth century and showed how a series of social transformations, driven by capitalism, massive urbanization, colonialism, and new communication technologies, provided the critical push that led to the globalized world of today (e.g., Castells 1996; Sklair 2002; Wallerstein 1979).

For the last 1,000 years in the Western world, time has been divided into the modern and the ancient. Over the last few decades, there has been a rush to understand our changing modern world and we now talk about such things as "modernity," "Westernization," and "globalization." Recent scholarship has undeniably provided us with a clearer sense of our world today. Yet, the unintended consequence has been to further reinforce the Great Wall by maintaining the tacit assumption that the world today is categorically different from what came before.

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In this book, I argue that the divide between ancient and modern is an artificial one and suggest that we would be richly rewarded if we took down the Great Wall that separates ancient civilizations from modern globalization. If the processes could be linked, archaeologists and other researchers who study the past would be able to mine the rich globalization literature to better understand the dynamics of these pivotal periods of widespread cultural change in world history. Conversely, an understanding of ancient globalization would help us parse out those aspects of the world today that are unique to modern globalization from those that are more general features of a phenomenon that has occurred earlier in our history.

ASSAULTING THE GREAT WALL

Some readers might suspect that I am late to the game since the "intellectual assault of the Great Wall," after all, is well underway (Restall 2005: xi). Inspired by work like Fernand Braudel's three volume *Civilization and Capitalism* (1979) and Eric Wolf's *Europe and the People without History* (1982), scholars over the last two decades have unleashed a barrage of scholarship that has made the Great Wall increasingly visible by linking globalization to ancient civilizations (e.g., Ekholm and Friedman 1979, 1985; Hall and Chase-Dunn 2006; LaBianca and Scham 2006; Nederveen Pieterse 2004).

Scanning the titles of these books, like *The World System: Five Hundred Years or Five Thousand?* (Frank 1993) or *A Splendid Exchange: How Trade Shaped the World* (Bernstein 2008), one might certainly argue that the call for ancient globalization is almost old hat. I disagree. Although I am heartened by this upswelling of scholarship, I feel that most of the work being done on ancient globalization ultimately fails to really address ancient globalizations because this scholarship does not tend to allow for multiple periods of globalization to have emerged within unique cultural, environmental, and historical settings.

My concern might seem counterintuitive. Don't all of these approaches deal with globalization in antiquity? Yes they do, but they don't really get at ancient globalizations in the plural. Instead, these approaches tend to either trace the roots of modern globalization further back in time or project selected aspects of modern globalization on to the past. To make my point clearer, I have depicted how these conceptualizations of premodern globalization map on to heuristic line graphs of increasing interregional interaction over

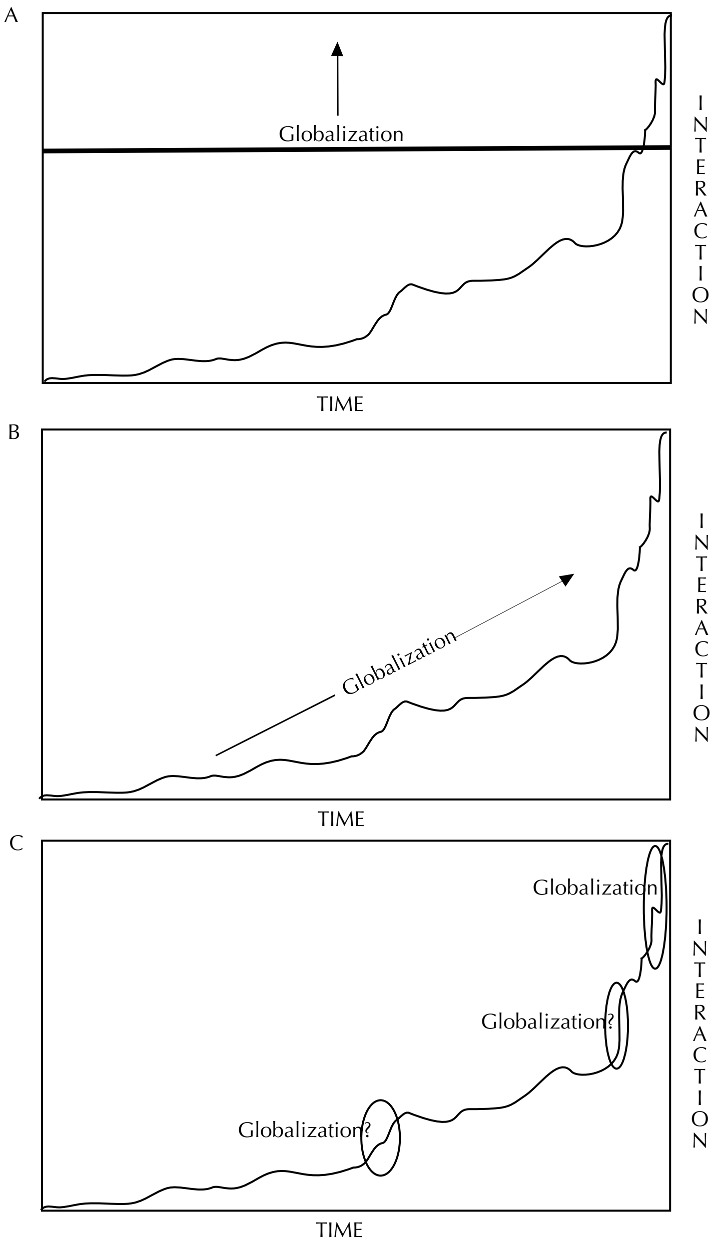
A
Globalization
TIME
INTERACTION
B
Globalization
TIME
INTERACTION
C
Globalization
Globalization?
Globalization?
TIME
INTERACTION

Figure 1.2 Different conceptions of globalization: (A) globalization as a uniquely modern phenomenon, (B) globalization as a long-term historical trend, (C) multiple globalizations.

time (Figure 1.2). Graph A shows the standard conception of globalization as a modern phenomenon. The bold line that cuts straight across the graph is the moment at which globalization begins – the Great Wall that forms when interactions increased dramatically during the last five hundred years. Where exactly this line sits depends on when the scholar feels the break between the globalized present and the unglobalized past begins.

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The remaining two graphs acknowledge ancient globalization but in two very different manners. Graph B represents globalization as a gradual process that increases over the entire span of the graph, while Graph C shows globalization as discrete bursts in interaction and therefore identifies multiple periods of globalization that have occurred over time. These latter two major approaches that accommodate early globalization are what I call the globalization as long-term process approach and the world systems approach. Those who think of globalization as a long-term process tend to conceive of globalization along the lines of Graph B, while world systems scholars, of course, often think more in terms of Graph C.

The globalization as long-term process approach (Graph B) was developed over the last ten to fifteen years by historians who felt that ancient interactions were short shrifted in globalization studies. The historian William H. McNeil perhaps best captured this approach in his recent argument: "the world is indeed one interacting whole and always has been" (2008: 9). By looking at history from a long-term global perspective, scholars like McNeil see a trend toward increasing interaction over time.

Another of the more influential voices in this approach belongs to Jan Nederveen Pieterse. In his book *Globalization and Culture*, Nederveen Pieterse views globalization as the end result of increasing integration and hybridization that dates back at least to the origins of agriculture (2004). Other authors following the globalization as long-term process approach disagree with Nederveen Pieterse on when globalization first began – Robert Clark (1997) and Nayan Chanda (2007), for example, argue that it began with the dispersal of the first humans out of Africa, while McNeil (2008) traces globalization back to the control of fire – but they all suggest that globalization today is part of an acceleration of earlier trends. In the globalization as long-term process approach, history unfolds as a unified story, an "age-old process expanding the human niche in earth's ecosystem" (McNeil 2008: 8).

The world systems approach (Graph C) emerged in the 1960s out of work within sociology that modeled global capitalism as a system that locked poor nations into exploitative relationship with Western nations (Frank 1966, 1967). Immanuel Wallerstein's world systems model argued that the world could be divided into three major zones, a core, semiperiphery, and periphery, which are tied together by a world market of bulk commodities necessary for everyday life